Johannes Quack · Cora Schuh *Editors*

Religious Indifference

New Perspectives from Studies on Secularization and Nonreligion

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Preface

This volume is the output of a very fruitful international and interdisciplinary collaboration. It started with an international workshop on religious indifference organized by Pascal Siegers, Linda Hennig, and Bruno Michon at Strasbourg in spring 2013. This workshop has been an overall inspiration – thanks to the methodical and empirical variety of contributions. The Emmy Noether Project, 'The Diversity of Nonreligion', held a second workshop entitled 'Religious Indifference: Secularization and Modes of Nonreligion' in November 2014 in Frankfurt am Main, this time in an even larger group of scholars. Prior to the workshop, a 'concept paper' written by Johannes Quack and Cora Schuh was circulated amongst the participants to sketch out some of the conceptual dimensions which could be worth further engagement. This 'concept paper' later got revised on the basis of the workshop and constitutes now the introduction to this volume. We owe much thanks to the sharp criticism as well as the variety of the papers themselves which helped us clear and widen our perspective on indifference.

We have taken great care in making clear where we integrate ideas of participants. Yet, probably, there are still cases where this slipped our attention. This goes to say that to a great extent the thoughts presented in the introduction are the outcome of collective work. Flaws and lack of clarity naturally are our own.

Special thanks are particularly due to the discussants at the second workshop, Monika Wohlrab-Sahr and David Voas. They helped to further develop the individual papers as well as the overall enterprise of this volume. Throughout the workshop and the editing of the volume, we received great help from a number of student assistants. We want to particularly acknowledge the support by Cornelia Aufmuth, Julianne Lehmann, and Tabea Grob. Moreover, we would like to cordially thank our teammates Alexander Blechschmidt and Susanne Schenk for constant and friendly companionship, practical support, and intellectual criticism. Many thanks also to Janine Murphy for her rigorous and efficient proofreading. Last but certainly not

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Conceptualising Religious Indifferences in Relation to Religion and Nonreligion

Johannes Quack and Cora Schuh

Abstract This introduction first, sketches the genesis of the notion 'religious indifference' from different theological debates. Second, we illustrate its use in the social scientific debate on secularisation and modernity, highlighting some of the difficulties with defining and identifying indifferent populations. On the base of a *relational approach to nonreligion* we further conceptualise religious indifference as lacking direct relationships with religion, but as positioned in relation to religious or more explicit nonreligious positions by relevant agents who render the lack of direct relationships to religion remarkable. This perspective underscores the concepts' entanglement with the scientific study of non/religion. All this adds to conceptualising indifference as a symbolically powerful and contested concept. We discuss ways of distinguishing between different forms of indifference and conclude this introduction by summarising the contributions to this volume.

Keywords Indifference • Non-religion • Secular • secularisation • Sociology of religion • Religious studies • Anthropology of religion • Theology • Bourdieu • Field

Introduction: Dramatic Indifference?[1]

We could not have wished for a better introduction to the theme of this volume than the two paintings depicting the fall of Icarus that David Voas showed during his opening talk at a workshop in Frankfurt am Main that predated this publication.

[1] A significantly shorter version of this introduction has been published in German (Quack and Schuh 2016).

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Fig. 1 "Pieter Bruegel de Oude – De val van Icarus". About 1558 (From: Commons Wikipedia)

The first painting focuses on the dramatic scene. The other (reproduced Fig. 1 above), by Pieter Bruegel the Elder, shows ordinary peasant life in the foreground. Only a concentrated observer spots Icarus' legs disappearing into the sea. In his 1938-poem, '*Musée des Beaux Arts*', WH Auden suggests that the ploughman was indifferent to Icarus' fate (see also: Kilinski II 2004; McClinton 2010; and Wyss 1988).[2] Both the painting and the poem underscore the relativity of what is considered important.

The most recent study on church membership published by the German Protestant Church observes an increasing religious indifference among its members, especially the younger Protestants. Those who consider leaving the church express that they no longer feel a need for religion in their lives and that they do not relate to faith (EKD 2014, 11–13). This kind of individual indifference resonates with an overall social acceptance and normality of indifference to religion (EKD 2014, 10, 20). The role of religion in 'modern' societies – its decline, transformation, resilience, or resurgence – has been extensively discussed in social sciences, including

[2] As we will also show below with indifference in general, there is no definite evaluation of the indifference displayed in this picture. While Kilinski II e.g. sees it as indicating a deplorable apathy towards human suffering the humanists argue 'the myth is being stripped of its importance in favour of the lives and work of ordinary people. They are doing practical, renewing activities, whereas Icarus sought to alter nature for his own glory. Just as the three other characters are physically above Icarus, so Bruegel is elevating them morally above the mythical hero. And we think back to Jesus, Mary and Joseph in the [Bruegel's] other two paintings (Census and Massacre). Surely, he is deliberately demythologising them as well' (McClinton 2010, 14). Wyss by contrast comes up with very different interpretations.

whether such decline as indicated above constitutes a dramatic event. Rather than restarting the discussion about secularisation, we aim to conceptualise indifference as something contested, scrutinised and co-constituted from both religious as well as more explicit nonreligious positions. We do so by referring to a relational approach to nonreligion.

The structure of this introduction is as follows: First, we will sketch out the conceptual roots of religious indifference. This introduces two different notions of indifferences as well as elaborating the symbolic powerful function of declaring certain phenomena and people as indifferent. Second, we summarise how, in research on secularisation, indifference is used to label populations in distance to certain notions of religion. We further sketch how indifference is used in different normative evaluations of modernity. Third, we introduce two concepts: 'nonreligion' understood as a label for phenomena distinct from but related to religion in significant ways and a 'religion-related field' that comprises a heterogeneous set of nonreligious positions, ranging from atheism through humanism to other more 'fuzzy' modes of nonreligion, including the secular study of religion (Quack 2013, 2014). We outline how indifference stands in a dual tension between both religion and more pronounced modes of nonreligiosity. Accordingly, looking at indifference as something contested offers a new perspective on the interrelation of religion, secularity, and modes of non/religion.

In the fourth chapter we draw on the preceding discussion and illustrate distinct ways of differentiating indifference on that basis. Two distinctions are central here: First, the difference between indifference towards religious beliefs, practices, or belongings (indifference to religiosity) in contrast to a lacking disposition or opinion regarding the manifestation and the adequate place of religion in society (indifference to religion); second the distinction between 'fuzzy' or pragmatic modes of religiosity for which orthodox and theological coherence is not relevant (relative indifference), and its more narrow use for those populations who are not interested in religious matters at all (absolute indifference).

While this structure suggests that the introduction is an antecedent to the single chapters that follow, the thought processes associated with this publications' development have been far more circular. We therefore encourage the reader to keep in mind the collective production process: This introduction was written in close reference to the different contributions to two workshops on 'religious indifference' that antedated this publication.[3] An earlier version of the text had been circulated prior to the second workshop in Frankfurt am Main. In its current state, it is based on a thorough reworking in the light of earlier drafts, the different contributions, and three days of inspiring and helpfully critical debates. The current version is in many ways indebted to the workshop as well as to the individual chapters. In parts traces of this form of working can be found in the recurrent references to earlier versions of this text, which is indicated respectively.

[3] The first, organised by Pascal Siegers, Linda Hennig, and Bruno Michon in Strasbourg in 2013, and the second organised by the editors in Frankfurt am Main in 2014.

Indifference: Its Conceptual Genesis, Symbolic Power, and Contestedness

This section sketches a genealogical line of the concept of indifference in its relation to Christianity. It first discusses the concept of adiaphora, and then focuses on indifferentism, both of which feed into the meaning of religious indifference.

The Latin etymology of 'indifference' has its roots in the stoic philosophical tradition and its use in Ancient Greek as *adiaphora*. The word adiaphora denotes that something is neither good nor bad, that it is a middle thing of a (morally) neutral nature, something that makes no difference and to which one can therefore be indifferent (Herms 1998). This can be exemplified with Seneca's view on death, which he regarded as one of those phenomena that are neither malum nor bonum (adiaphoron); that is, something to which people ought to be indifferent (Moral letters to Lucilius/Letter 82).

Indifference thus entails an aspect of evaluation and disinterestedness. Later receptions also adapted the notion of adiaphora to classify acts as morally neutral or equivalent. Within Christian theology, questions about whether things could be 'adiaphora' was differently assessed and linked to competing concepts of faith and man's liberty in relation to that of God (Herms 1998). Christian theology further distinguished more clearly between the moral quality of phenomena or objects on the one hand and the moral quality of acts on the other (Koch 1998).

In any case, the concept of adiaphora was central to negotiating freedom and the Christians' appropriate relations with to the world around them. This shows in the two 'adiaphora struggles' in the history of Reformed Christianity (Herms 1998; Koch 1998; see also Nash 2017 – this volume). In the first adiaphora struggle of 1548, the question at stake was to what extent the reformed churches could perform Catholic rituals as something adiaphoron and peripheral to the inner faith and the truth of confession. The second adiaphora struggle in the 1680s concerned the stance towards earthly distractions of the modernizing world. In contrast to Lutheran Orthodoxy, Calvinists and Lutheran Pietists found that regardless of whether such distractions could be seen as adiaphora, the strive for them could only be seen as sinful and thus they rejected the notion of adiaphora (Gestrich 2003, 562–563).[4]

For the understanding of the contemporary category of religious indifference, another interrelated discourse is important. While the use of the notion adiaphora regulated the relation of believers with the world and its symbolic systems, the concept of indifferentism was used in pejorative way in Catholic and Protestant apologetic discourses. The *Catholic Encyclopedia* (Fox 1910) distinguishes different grades of indifferentism, depending on whether people show indifference towards religion as such, or towards the distinctions between different religious teachings or

[4] One matter of conflict was a theatre built in Hamburg and the question whether an 'adequately distanced' way dealing with such distractions was possible. Lutheran Orthodoxy saw no evil in relating to that which had not explicitly been forbidden by God. Representatives of Calvinist Pietism by contrast argued that such distractions could only signify sin. In this context, the use of adiaphora importantly marks a realm of moral neutrality and thus of freedom for choice.

different Christian sects. Atheistic, materialistic, pantheistic, and agnostic philosophies as well as liberal Christians were among those blamed for indifferentism. During the antimodernist era in 1864, indifferentism was included in the *syllabus errorum*, together with other modern era 'wrongs' (Haag 1912).[5] In the authoritative Catholic discourse, indifference remains until today generally associated with philosophical nihilism, moral and value relativism, pragmatism, cynic hedonism, subjectivism, egoism, narcissism, and consumerism (Tiefensee 2011, 95–96). Moreover, the indifferent also constitute a population the church wants to reach. In 1965, Pope Paul VI created the 'Secretariat for Non-believers' that was later merged with the 'Pontifical Council for Culture' to continue its work in 'Responding to the Challenge of Unbelief and Religious Indifference' (Poupard 2004, 9; for similar debates within Protestantism see Gierl 1997).

All this goes to show that indifference towards a particular phenomenon or symbolic-religious system undermines its authority. Indifferentism as a combat term responds to the threat of indifference (careless disinterestedness) towards the religious field. This echoes in the following quote from Max Weber, which at the same time accelerates the point, seeing the articulation of doctrines as a response to indifference in the first place:

But the struggles of priests against indifference, which they profoundly hate, and against the danger that the zeal of the membership would stagnate generally played the greatest role in pushing distinctive criteria and differential doctrines to the foreground (1978 *[1921–1922], 461).*

The genealogical sketch so far has shown two interrelated concepts and notions of indifference. (1) 'Adiaphoron' is used to mark that which is morally neutral and to which one can thus be indifferent. Theological references to adiaphora negotiated what is and what is not central to Christianity. Declaring something to be of a neutral nature opens a realm of choice as well as the option to simply ignore the matter. (2) Religious indifference implies the flipside of the concept of adiaphora in the sense that now Christianity is declared adiaphoron and peripheral. Indifferentism then constitutes the pejorative combat term that responds to such apparent indifference. At the same time though, the question of what constitutes indifference, and what a competing theological vision remains contested. Thus, showing indifference towards something challenges its symbolic power. By contrast, denouncing a counter-position as indifferent means to 'write them out of' a meaningful discussion and to ignore the other's own relevance. Indifference is both contested and contesting. Our intention so far was to emphasise the symbolic power that is inherent to both, declaring something as indifferent, and to accuse someone of indifferentism. The normative-evaluative ambivalence with regard to indifference still echoes in its use within social scientific debates on modernity and secularisation.

[5] Indifferentism is distinguished from the neglect of religious practice on one hand and from state neutrality or indifference towards religion on the other.

Religious Indifference in the Social Sciences

As the last paragraph indicated, theological contestation of indifferentism are also linked to the observation (and attempted management) of those populations at the edge or beyond the influence of (orthodox) religious experts and institutions. Secularisation in the sense of the apparently declining relevance of religion, and thus the rise of religious indifference, has been a core theme of the social sciences. Furthermore, indifference has been seen as a general feature of 'modern' societies with ambivalent normative evaluations. In the following, we discuss such different usages of the notion indifference in the social sciences. The focus here is almost exclusively on the North-Atlantic World since questions of religion and indifference in other parts of the world often require an independent discussion (e.g. see Bailey 1996 and Quack 2017 – this volume).

Religious Indifference as an Indicator of secularisation

In the context of secularisation theory, the notion of religious indifference marks the apparently declining relevance of religion in the modern world. If adiaphora is used to give different religion-related gravity to different aspects of the world, indifference now marks the limited relevance of religion for the world. At least in parts, such declining relevance is marked as a 'natural' response to something that seemed without much meaning or function for 'modern' institutions. Luhmann describes indifference as the response of a functionally differentiated world towards the exaggerated need for admiration of religion (quoted in Pollack 2013).

Personal indifference to religion constitutes one of the reasons why people leave churches. Indifference is thereby distinct from hostility, latent belief, or reform-oriented Christianity (Pickel 2013, 14). Indifference indicates distance to (organised) religion, not hostility or rejection. Similarly, Bruce refers to the term in his prominent statement: the endpoint of secularisation would more likely be indifference than conscious irreligion or atheism (Bruce 2002, 42–44; for a similar argument see Mueller 2003, 192). On the base of qualitative research, Manuel Franzmann has also underscored religious indifference as an advanced product of secularisation processes (2014). Religious issues have no practical relevance in the ways in which people live their lives, which contrasts the (negative) identificatory role religion has for atheists.

Distance from religion, and thus indifference, is no clear-cut matter. Referring to the UK, Bagg and Voas (2010) distinguish three groups of people: those who are 'actively religious'; those who are 'irreligious' (each comprising 25 % of the British population); and those 50 % that make up the 'woolly middle', or what Voas termed 'fuzzy fidelity' (2009). According to Bagg and Voas, this group is not only descriptively but are also temporally 'between the religious and the irreligious'[6]

[6] Here, meant not as hostility to religion but as a consistent absence of any affiliation, practice, or belief.

(2010, 98). Overall, they assess a primary development towards indifference, and regard indifference as being 'far more sustainable' than hostility to religion (Bagg and Voas 2010, 99).

While indifference can be seen as an indicator of secularisation (see Bréchon 2017 and Siegers 2017 – both this volume), secularisation can also be understood as a pre-condition of indifference, in the sense that there must be, for example, no compulsion in religious matters and non-attendance must be socially accepted (Bagg and Voas 2010, 102–106; see also Quack 2017 – this volume). In the same way that Seneca declared death adiaphoron, cultural and institutionalised notions of the secular neutral state, or individual liberty and equality rights, as well as atheist critiques of religion might be seen as the enabling condition for indifference to religion. Again evoking a perspective of functional differentiation, this argument can be phrased in a more general way by linking indifference to functional differentiation (Schimank 2009). With the emergence of more or less functionally distinguished and mutually indifferent spheres, religion becomes indifferent to most social roles, which accordingly allows for religious indifference.

How to Define and Identify Indifferent Populations

In his book, *God is dead*, Bruce suggests a radical description of indifference: a state where 'religious ideas being no more common than would be the case if all minds were wiped blank and people began from scratch to think about the world and their place in it' (2002, 42). It was not Bruce's intention to write about indifference as such; his radical definition nonetheless delineates a pole in possible variations and grades of indifference. Franz-Xaver Kaufmann for instance distinguishes types of indifference depending on whether they refer to confessions and churches, Christianity, collective symbolic systems as such, or all forms of commitment (1987, 116f). In some way, this echoes the grades of indifference the authoritative Catholic discourse lists under indifferentism. Religious indifference borders and is partly associated with both atheism and agnosticism (Pickel 2014). Heiner Meulemann (2004), for example, contrasts 'unbelief', which negates religious answers to religious questions, with 'uncertainty', which combines a positive attitude to religious questions with ambivalence to the answers, and with indifference, which considers religious questions unimportant as such. Pollack et al. (2003, 12) distinguish along similar lines between 'cognitive' and 'existential' indifference to religion. For cognitive indifference, religious questions are left open or all answers are perceived to be equally valid or invalid. Existential indifference by contrast is a state during which religious questions as such have no relevance for people's life.[7]

[7] To our knowledge the respective book is the only that has specifically dealt with indifference prior to this volume, with a different focus and approach, however. The authors define indifference in relation to the question of God's existence. Furthermore, their focus is on histories of secularisation as well as different philosophical positions. In contrast, we opted for a wider definition of indifference, conceptualised as a contested category, and introduced a relational and field-theoretical approach.

By contrast, Pickel (2014) argues that the relation of indifference with atheism and agnosticism is more ambivalent, which also allows for an interpretation of the indifferent as potentially religious. He suggests that what sociologists of religion commonly describe as indifference should rather be labelled as areligiosity or religiously disinterested. In empirical populations though, disinterest might well be 'relative', as Bagg and Voas's study on secularisation in Britain argues. On one hand, Bagg and Voas seem to identify the fuzzy populations as already indifferent, while on the other, they, for example, compare these fuzzy populations to the late nineteenth-century British working class whose religion was 'dormant and uninfluential and peculiar in character' (2010, 100). 'So the situation of some segments of the Victorian working class – indifferent but still nominally attached – prefigures the situation of the entire population since' (2010, 100). One could see the fuzzy as still somewhat religious; yet, one could also see individual fuzziness as a consequence of a more general social un-importance of religion. 'In a society where religion is unimportant, the opinions of people about religion tend to be far less definite – this is the climate in which "fuzzy fidelity" has thrived' (Bagg and Voas 2010, 108). This also shows that at least when it comes to counting the indifferent, different definitions will lead to very different numbers of respective populations. While for some, the indifferent are quasi- or still religious, others see them at least in parts as not religious and at the border of atheism, with respective consequences for classifying national states of religiosity and secularisation (Lee 2013, 591). This goes to say that there are grades of indifference shifting between a more 'absolute' indifference where people are unconcerned with basically all matters associated with religion, as Bruce radically stated in the citation above, as well as in the more 'relative' sense of a fuzzy fidelity.

In any case, identifying religious indifference depends not the least on the respective definition and measurement of religion. If religion is understood in line with orthodox notions of it, factual religiosity might appear as fuzzy or as a manifestation of 'relative' indifference. If religion is construed as universal or anthropologically-rooted concept, there might only be functional equivalents to religion but no genuine indifference to it (see e.g. Oevermann 2003 and Oevermann and Franzmann 2006; also Taylor 2007, 7–8). Even if traditional religious answers lose plausibility, people seek solutions for universal problems such as the definiteness of life and the time thereafter (see Oevermann and Franzmann 2006). Another critique of the concept of indifference challenges the focus on the absence of certain beliefs and practices. Rather than being indifferent then, people are seen to hold quite substantive (positive or negative) views on religion, thus still giving importance to the phenomena as such (Lee 2017 – this volume; see also Bullivant 2012, 105).

The subsequent section discusses how religious indifference may be related to more general indifference as an aspect of 'modern' society as well as to the ambivalent normative assessments of such a state. While the indifference of large populations to religion has lost the pejorative connotation of apologetic discourses within secularisation theory, indifference as a more general characteristic of 'modern' society is assessed with more ambivalence.

Indifference and the Ambivalent Assessment of 'Modern' Society

Echoing Luhmann's use of indifference as tied to functional differentiation, similar arguments have been made with regard to the effect of differentiation on inter-personal relations. Here, indifference has been seen as a precondition of tolerance and reference is made to indifference as a general aspect of society. Religious indifference is interrelated to indifference as a more general characteristic of 'modern' society (Catto 2017 – this volume). Georg Simmel (1903) wrote that indifference as a characteristic of inter-personal relations is central to the organisation of modern society, which he distinguishes from kinship-based societies. This has been elaborated upon by Stichweh (1997a, b), who argues that in an ideal type, functionally-differentiated society, social integration is no longer based on membership but on presence and reachability.[8] This includes a generalised indifference towards particular identity markers of those who live around us – including the indifference towards one's religiosity.

This 'modern' indifference to the importance of dogma, as well as that to the other's religious belonging can create a 'space' for political tolerance and new forms of unity and bonding (compare Nash 2017 – this volume). This is why Weber regards pietism as 'one of the main forces behind the idea of toleration'. He writes: 'Predestination made it fundamentally impossible for the State really to promote religion by intolerance. It could not thereby save a single soul' (Weber 2005 [1904], 205 fn. 110). Conversely, contemporary debates in political philosophy focus on whether and how the state should give recognition, or remain indifferent to religion, for the sake of tolerance and social cohesion under the conditions of diversity (Song 2014; Bhargava 2008).

On the other hand, though, modernisation and the related processes of rationalisation, industrialisation, differentiation, and religious change or decline have also informed concerns over the state of morality and cohesion in society. 'Modern' societies are then considered to be marked by a certain coldness towards the other, respectively by a general lack of morality. Simmel already (1903) pointed to indifference as a source of liberty as well as loneliness. Stichweh takes a stronger approach, suggesting 'that the possibility of barbarity in the modern world has its origin less in hatred . . . but in structures of well-established indifference' (Stichweh 1997a, 180). Here, moral indifference is at the heart of a generalised understanding of indifference.

If religion is linked with morality and cohesion, its decline (or indifference) can raise concerns. This critique is also echoed in some discussions of religious indifference. Kaufmann has distinguished different types of indifference whereby religious indifference comprises a scale of different grades of giving up commitment, at the end of which stands indifference towards all forms of commitment (1987, 116–117). Obviously, if religion is defined broadly as a collective set of

[8] Thanks to Rebecca Cato for bringing this to our attention.

norms that are shared in a respective society, religious indifference may indeed border on widespread moral indifference or nihilism (Kaufmann 1987, 124–125). Durkheim's concern with morality in the modern world is also linked to a perception of religion as a historic carrier of morality; in contrast to critiques of modernity, however, he also saw modernity as being linked to new moralities, thereby introducing new aspects of the sacred (Terrier 2012, 501).

This section has sketched different normative evaluations of indifference to religion (as one aspect of general 'modern' indifference). While such indifference for religious identities, morality, and communal belonging can be perceived as a base for tolerance and liberty under the conditions of diversity, it can also be seen as a risk to overall social morality and cohesion.

Summary

Throughout the previous paragraphs we have moved from the theological debates on adiaphora to apologetics against alleged indifferentism, and finally to the debates on 'modern' religious indifference and the conceptualisations of the religiously-indifferent populations. All these different strands entail a somewhat different notion of indifference. The object of the theological debates was a morally-neutral realm, peripheral to Christianity. At the centre of the apologetic discourses were allegedly errant theological or philosophical positions, while the divide between orthodoxy and heterodoxy partly resulted from contestations about what should or should not be considered central to Christianity. The social scientific notion of religious indifference echoes the notion of adiaphora and it also bears witness to the contested notion and relevance of religion. Religious indifference labels populations for whom religion in various of its aspects have become unimportant and peripheral to their lives. In contrast to, e.g., anti-religious positions, this does not include a negative perception of religion. Rather, linking back to what we discussed above, it means that religion as such has taken the place of that which was labelled adiaphoron in Christian discourse, as something of moral neutral nature to which an individual does not have to relate. Indifference has been discussed as a result of, and enabled by, secularisation, and, as such, is related to a more encompassing indifference as a companion of functional differentiation.

In contrast to an absolute indifference as the endpoint of secularisation and the ultimate other to religion, different grades and expressions of religious indifference can been identified – something which results from the diversity and contestedness of empirical religions and their others. As this introduction indicates, different forms of indifference can be subjected to different normative evaluations.

Indifference in the Light of the Studies of 'Nonreligion'

So far, this introduction has focused on how religious indifference is understood as standing in a somewhat tense relation to religious orthodoxy. For this volume, we would like to introduce the field of nonreligious positions from which indifference can be understood as standing in equal tension with both religious as well as more pronounced nonreligious positions. We conceptualise indifference relationally, as lacking direct relationships with religion, but as positioned in relation to religious or more explicit nonreligious positions by relevant agents who render the lack of direct relationships to religion remarkable. This approach further allows us to address the entanglements between the secular study of religion with non/religious positions in general and indifference in particular.

Studies on Nonreligion

Recent research has promoted the concept of nonreligion as a label for phenomena, both distinct from as well as related to religion (Quack 2014; Lee 2015). Our own project, 'The Diversity of Nonreligion', stands in that tradition, and it is from this perspective that we came to think about indifference. Our 'field approach to nonreligion', was inspired by Bourdieu's notion of the religious field (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 94–114; Martin 2003), and – even more so – by his methodological relationalism (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 15–19; Vandenberghe 1999). Starting out from the observation that every field has a co-constitutive outside, Quack (2013, 2014) understands 'nonreligion' as denoting phenomena that are generally not considered religious but whose significance is more or less dependent on a relation with the religious field. The notion 'field' as it is used here should not be understood as a space with clear boundaries where something is either in or out. Rather, we use this metaphor – loosely following Bourdieu – to more or less highlight strong forces and relationships (viz. magnetic-field) where something is at stake and different agents compete with each other (viz. battle-field) according to a set of implicit 'rules' (viz. playing-field), where borders, positions and relations are constantly contested and renegotiated. Accordingly, 'nonreligion' is used to denote the various ways that relationships between a religious field and positions considered to be on its outside are established. Such a relational approach replaces substantialist questions on what is religion and nonreligion, and asks instead, e.g., how representatives of a religious field, those who oppose them, and commentators of such debates mutually constitute and shape each other's positions. It also shows that empirical engagement with indifference and detachment is not necessarily implicating conceptual limits to relational thinking (cf. Candea et al. 2015).

No matter how a religious field is constituted, it is always surrounded by a 'nonreligious' or 'religion-related field', which reaches as far as effects from and into the religious field are traceable. A religion-related field is highly heterogeneous, it

includes, for example, stances that aim to replace or abolish religion as well as those who seek to manage religion from the perspectives of law or politics, and those who study religion and nonreligion in academia and elsewhere. Given the heterogeneity of nonreligious positions, it will be difficult to claim the autonomy necessary to speak of a Bourdieuian 'field' in the stricter sense. These various nonreligious positions differ according to how they relate and are related to (different aspects of) a specific religious field. Furthermore, different modes of nonreligiosity can stand in more or less explicit tension with each other.

How can such a conception be fruitful for analysing religious indifference? First, one can distinguish forms of indifference according to the aspect of religion to which people are actually indifferent. Second, the idea of a religion-related field links to the question about the ways in which indifference might also be challenged from competing and more pronounced modes of nonreligiosity as well as the way in which it is co-constituted by the scientific study of religion.

Indifference as Indirect Relationship

At first glance, one might assume that indifference is not part of the study of nonreligion outlined above as it seems unrelated to religion. However, we argue that indifference is based on a particular indirect relationship with religion, as positioned in relation to religious or more explicit nonreligious positions by relevant agents who render the lack of direct relationships to religion remarkable. Explicit nonreligious phenomena have various direct relationships with respective religious field (criticism, competition, copy, cooperation, etc.). The indifferent are in no such relation with religion, yet they are indirectly related to the religious field, in the sense that their indifference might be contested from various sides. The absence of direct relationships may be rendered remarkable by others e.g. because of their prior existence, either because such relationships are expected from the perspective of relevant agents or this absence is expressed in a context in which religion constitutes a relevant social reality.

Those relevant agents who place the indifferent in relation to religious or more explicit nonreligious positions may include those religious and nonreligious groups and actors who criticise indifference, while reaching out to or claim to represent the indifferent. Researchers might also (involuntarily) play such role, by conducting research on religion and nonreligion, e. g. by engaging interviewees in discussions about religion and by thereby suggesting the topic to them. The relationships of the indifferent to religion that manifest in such encounters can therefore be considered to some degree constructed. Indifference might then be located at the periphery of both the religion-related field as well as the religious field (see also Blankholm 2017 and Cotter 2017 – both in this volume). The indirect link, however, might also merge into a more genuine position in relation to religion. Most empirical phenomena will be categorised as more or less indifferent to religion if their relationships to religion are considerably weaker and less direct than those of similar religious and nonreligious phenomena. The difference between an absolute and a relative religious

indifference (or fuzzy religiosity) illustrates the possibility of different degrees of indifference.

Given this ambiguity, indifference might also be an ascription – a *Kampfbegriff* (term of political struggle) rather than a representation of the respective actor's self-idea. In those instances, it suffices to recall the apologetic use of indifference. Also with regards to certain realms of social life or phenomena, their relation with religion might be contested, as the adiaphora-struggles highlight. Then and now, phenomena like cosmopolitan medicine, evolution theory, TV, or shopping and other leisure-time activities might be experienced in some context as standing in direct and open competition to offers within the religious field. In other contexts, this relationship might be much weaker and more indirect, to the degree that they appear completely unrelated to the constitution of the respective religious field. The demarcation between orthodoxy and genuine irreligion, and the characterisation of those spaces and positions in between remains contested in any case.

Indifference Between and Beyond Religion and Explicit Nonreligion

The field approach to nonreligion helps to conceptualise indifference by drawing attention to the double tension of religious indifference with religion, on the one hand and more pronounced nonreligion on the other. Explicitly nonreligious organisations in several countries position themselves as the representatives of those indifferent to religion (HPD 1998; see also Burchardt 2017 – this volume).[9] Religious representatives challenge this claim for representation and stress the fundamental difference between humanists' and atheists' negative engagements with religion as opposed to religious indifference (Tiefensee 2011).

It seems that both nonreligious and religious groups construe the indifferent as a potential constituency. But can – and on what grounds – avowed nonreligious organisations be considered representative of those indifferent to religion? A hypothesis from Quack's research on explicitly nonreligious and indifferent positions in Germany is that the respective modes of pronounced nonreligion do not seem to match those labelled indifferent and therefore, explicit nonreligious groups are hardly accepted as spokespersons by the majority of the nones or unaffiliated. The decline in church membership has not resulted in the equivalent growth of organised nonreligion. Be this as it may, for both religion and nonreligion alike, membership numbers are not the only approach. Representation can also be based on other criteria than membership. A recent poll on behalf of the Dutch humanist broadcast found that about 39 % of Dutch population holds a humanist worldview, while 17 % feel affiliated with the humanist movement (Lammerts et al. 2004, 7). Even higher numbers were gathered in Germany with respect to agreement with a

[9] For example, the humanists in Germany explicitly state that they want to give a voice to the 33% 'unaffiliated' Germans out of which 75% have, according to the humanists, a humanistic view of life.

'humanistic view of life' (Allensbach 2004).[10] These rather large numbers derive from operationalising a 'humanistic outlook' via general formulas in concurrence with central ideas of progressive modernity (Lammerts et al. 2004, 6). On the other hand, the reference to values can also be used to challenge membership-based claims for representation. Secular activists at the European parliament, for example, question the representational claims of churches by, for example, questioning whether the church's views on reproductive ethics would match those of their nominal members (EHF 2011).[11]

Finally, moving away from matters of representation, indifference – or better, the strategic portrayal or feigning of indifference – can also be a strategic instrument in the struggles of religious and nonreligious organisations or a specific way of expressing a nonreligious worldview (Bullivant 2012; Lee 2015). Based on the idea that indifference signifies the ultimate other to religion, one also finds affirmative position towards indifference within nonreligious groups. In a discussion of Bruce's *God is dead* (2002) in an issue of the magazine published by the US Skeptics Society, indifference is portrayed as the truest form of atheism: 'It is also the religiously indifferent person, rather than the explicit atheist, who provides the strongest and least ambiguous evidence against the inevitability of the centrality of religious belief' (Cheyne 2010, 2). Similarly, in a web-article from 2009, Terry Sanderson (2009), the president of the National Secular Society, declared himself a 'confirmed Indifferent', not only deliberately denying any interesting quality to religion-related questions, but also construing a consciously posed indifference as the best means to demoralise religious missionaries.

Thus, while religious traditions often feel more threatened by indifference than by anti-religious positions (e.g. EKD report cited above), and while such staged indifference might be part of a nonreligious organisation's aim to position itself as something completely different and independent from religion, this must be distinct from the simultaneous struggle against an indifference towards questions of ethics and truth. In that regard, both nonreligious and religious groups compete with as well as try to reach out to the apparently indifferent. Indeed, both religious and explicitly nonreligious groups partly share a critical view on what they perceive as a largely morally- and epistemologically-indifferent society in which 'anything goes'. In that sense, the retired German pope and the most visible critics of the Catholic Church (and other religious groups, for that matter) in Germany, the Giordano Bruno-Stiftung (GBS),[12] share the association of indifference in religious matters with this disdained 'relativism'. Pope Benedict XVI strongly condemned the 'dictatorship of relativism' in many of his speeches and writings (Seewald and

[10] Roughly one half of the German population agreed with a 'humanistic view of life' in a study commissioned by the Humanist Association of Germany (HVD).

[11] This observation is based on a short field research in the European Parliament Platform for Secularism in Politics (EPPSP) by Cora Schuh and the related documentation of the European Humanist Federation.

[12] Some of their public activities are organised in alliance with German Humanist Association (HVD).

Benedict XVI 2010, ch. 5). His predecessor, Pope John Paul II (1999), also expressed his fervent hope that the above-mentioned 'Pontifical Council for Culture' would continue its efforts, research, programmes, particularly by supporting local churches and encouraging the discovery of the Lord of history by those who are immersed in relativism and indifference, the new faces of unbelief. The GBS, on the other hand, sees fundamentalism and relativism (*Beliebigkeit*) as the two main junctures where people are led astray on their way to humanism and enlightenment (*Aufklärung*). Similar references to 'moral and philosophical apathy and nihilism' can also be found e.g. within humanist publications (e.g. Dominiczak 2002, 125). Religious and humanist positions are here structured by similar field-logics. Both make claims on normativity and belonging, and thus perceive indifference as problematic.

The Researcher Within the Religion-Related Field

The approach towards nonreligion introduced above further facilitates the insight that academic studies of religion, nonreligion, and religious indifference are themselves part of a religion-related field as they are obviously related to religion by way of analysis as well as through their disciplinary self-understanding of not being religious and their common attempt to be recognised as 'neutral experts' on matters related to religion (see Quack 2014, 258–261). Moreover, their relationship is often not only based on strategies of distinction but also on the partial misrecognition of further relations. Representatives of the secularisation theory, for example, often failed to see that their position is itself a product of the processes they try to understand (Taylor 2007, 427–437). Critics of secularism, on the other hand, have been warned against involuntarily paving the way for (anti-secularist and) anti-democratic states by uncritically deconstructing and relativising the idea of secularity (Bhargava 2008, 644–647).

In other words, the relational field-perspective brings the researcher into the same analytic frame as those religious and nonreligious groups who try to represent or mobilise the indifferent. This raises the question of how a researcher of (non) religion is able to adequately represent indifferent positions, whether the tools and methods developed to study (non)religion are also suitable for the study of people more or less indifferent to it, and to what degree religion is imposed on the people in standard ways of data collection. To draw people into a (non)religious discourse or field means that they should pay the 'entrance fee, i.e. the acquisition of a specific code of conduct and expression' (Bourdieu 1996, 235), if they do not manage to resist and evade such impositions (Blankholm 2017 – this volume). In order to reflect on such relations and about the researcher's role in co-constructing the respective research objects, relationships, and fields, it is important to locate the research within the religion-related field. This does not necessarily result in less objectivity, as, conversely, reflections about the ways in which one belongs to the same field that encompasses one's object of inquiry assists – as Bourdieu outlined – the objectivation of the limits of objectivation; it is under the conditions of being

aware of the ways we relate to the field of our objects of inquiry that we can better control the effects of these relationships (see Bourdieu 2010, 5).

Summary: Nonreligion and Indifference

Complementing the existing academic approaches towards religious indifference discussed above, this section introduced a perspective based on the relational study of nonreligion. On this basis we conceptualised indifference as indirectly related with religion. While explicit nonreligious positions relate directly to the respective religious field, the absence of such relationships in the case of indifference is rendered problematic, or important, and thus *remarkable*, by more engaged actors. This approach allows us to further address relationships between indifference, pronounced modes of nonreligion, and religious positions. At times, the latter two compete with claims of representing the indifferent and they may also share disdain for relativistic connotations of indifferent positioning. Additionally, while indifference may seem to be an ideal type of nonreligion from certain nonreligious positions, it also appears to be an unstable category (Burchardt 2017 and Remmel 2017 – both this volume). Moreover, the nonreligion-approach enables us to address the entanglements between the secular study of religion with (non)religious positions in general and indifference in particular. The field-perspective brings the researcher into the same analytic frame as those religious and nonreligious groups that try to represent, mobilise, and/or criticise the indifferent. Finally, the relational perspective suggests distinguishing forms of indifference according to what aspect of religion people are actually indifferent to, as the following section of this introduction elaborates.

Differentiating Indifference

This introduction follows three interrelated lines of argument: (1) it analyses indifference as a 'contested category' with regard to the theological and philosophical discussions of adiaphora and indifferentism, which was taken up and conceptualised from a relational approach to nonreligion; (2) The genealogy of the concept of indifference can be related to secularisation processes, which had been previously a theological concept regarding the centrality of different aspects of the world for religion but now generally captures the apparent low relevance of religion for the world; (3) in this final section it differentiates distinctive forms of indifference.

In addition to the differentiations made above, two further distinctions can be introduced. First, the distinction between an elaborate position and assessments of religion being neither – or equally – good nor bad and thus indifferent (*considered indifference*) and a more implicit and habitualised stance e. g. characterised by an instantaneous, but not necessarily explicated presumption that the matters under considerations are irrelevant (*unconsidered indifference*), both of which are distinct

from ignorance of the underlying options and matters in the first place. The way in which implicit, habitualised and explicated, considered indifference influence and depend on each other might change depending on context. Moreover, they might be in different ways interrelated with another distinction briefly mentioned above, that between an *absolute* and a *relative* understanding indifference. An absolute conceptualisation of indifference refers to those who do not care about religion at all, that is, a label for absent (non)religiosity. A relative indifference means that people show indifference only in terms of certain aspects of orthodox religiosity. In the same way, such positions might appear fuzzy, undecided, or in between from the perspective of quantitative research, or an expectancy of secularisation. From their own perspective, this might not be relative but might instead be part of the consistent expression of their own religious or worldview stances (related distinctions are discussed by Lee 2017 and Siegers 2017 – both this volume).

With reference to Bullivant (2012), a distinction not yet discussed in this introduction, that between indifference to religiosity and indifference to religion, should be highlighted.[13] *Indifference to religiosity* stands for a mutual absence of religiosity as well as explicit nonreligiosity. It is an indifference towards religious beliefs, practices, or belongings. *Indifference to religion* by contrast comprises a lacking disposition or opinion regarding the manifestation and the adequate place of religion. It refers to religion as a social institution with different (public and private) manifestations. Indifference to religion can relate to manifestations or claims of representation of 'one's own cultural-ethnic religion' as well as to manifestations of foreign religions or to generalised notions of religion (see Cotter 2017 and Burchardt 2017 – both this volume). Such disposition can take the form of a 'secular habitus', a deeply rooted idea that religion is something that is of private interest if at all, and that one does not have to know anything about (Gutkowski 2012).[14]

The aim of all these analytical distinctions though is not only to construe distinct types of indifference, but also to show interrelations and trajectories between different types of indifference as well as more pronounced modes of nonreligion. Regarding the differentiation between indifference to religiosity and indifference to religion, the empirical relation between the social presence of religion and the manifestations or lack of stances towards religiosity or religion is of central concern. The notion of indifference to religion echoes debates on the role of the state in terms of religion.

Moreover, if indifference to various aspects of religion can be distinguished, they might not stand in random relation to each other. Referring to the situation in Britain, Bagg and Voas speak of a 'behavioural drift' in the sense that a reduction in practice precedes a decline in belief, and, in the majority cases, both will 'precede a decline in identification with a religion' (2010, 106). In general, a position of relative indifference in religious matters can particularly transform into a more 'absolute' lack of interest and lack of relevance for one's life (Pollack et al. 2003, 13) while others

[13] When we in the following speak of religious indifference, we mean to cover both these terms.

[14] This opposition may overlap but is not congruent with oppositions such as private and/or individual religiosity and public aspects of religiosity and/or religion in a society.

might be mobilised into more pronounced modes of (non)religiosity (see Klug 2017; Quack 2017; Remmel 2017 – all this volume).

Against this background, several papers in this volume deal with the methodological question of whether to identify indifference via substantial positions people hold, or via the attitudes underlying these positions (see Klug 2017; Lee 2017; and Quack 2017 – all this volume). In line with the distinction between considered and unconsidered indifference, one could understand indifference primarily as the lack of a substantial answer; that is, it may be viewed as a disinterested attitude. In this perspective, the content to an answer is less important when compared to the underlying stance of disinterestedness. Participant observation is probably best suited to gradually assess degrees of certainty and assertiveness as well as degrees of being involved with the question in the first place. An underlying attitude of disinterestedness, however, can also be seen in the analyses of interviews. Would the indifferent maybe shrug their shoulders and say something like 'hmpf'? Would they search for words and a position? Would they merely reproduce perfunctory platitudes, reflect about not having thought about this issues prior to the interview, or would they maybe say anything at random thereby signalling that affirming or dismissing answers to religion-related questions are not as decisive as the underlying attitude of disinterest?

All this goes to show that further discussion is required of the parameters by which different forms of indifference can be distinguished. Such discussions have a history in philosophical and theological concerns and, more recently, in the context of religious indifference within the social sciences. For the contributors to this volume as well as its editors, this discussion was intensified during the respective workshops in Strasbourg and Frankfurt am Main. We hope that the readers will continue these discussions by critically engaging with the chapters of this volume, which will be introduced briefly in the next chapter.

Chapters in This Book

David Nash looks at nineteenth-century (religious) radicals who advanced British secularism. He shows the mismatch between the desire to stimulate hostility to religion and to achieve a state of indifference with which these radicals were confronted as part of the challenge of organising antireligious movements. He analyses the lineages of indifferent positions dating back to these radicals, relating this to his research on religious and secular narratives – inquiring about the potential of indifference narratives. He further discusses whether such indifference narratives are to be seen as genuine positions rather than temporary, in between stances.

The chapter of **Christopher Cotter** starts out from a critique of the concept of religion, as well as from contributions on nonreligion and secularity. He argues that indifferent people 'have much to say' on the theoretisation and critique of religion and nonreligion. Against the notion of an ideal type notion of indifference as a form

of nonreligion, he suggests a discursive approach to the phenomena – discussing examples from his empirical research on religion in Edinburgh.

Rebecca Catto's chapter is based on a case study on interfaith dialogue in a small city in England. She discusses the group's difficulty in engaging the wider population against the backdrop of the growing number of religiously-indifferent populations. Not only is interfaith work largely unknown to many in the town, it also fails to offer any way for nonreligious or indifferent integration.

Insight into political discourses about religious diversity and secularism is provided by **Marian Burchardt's** contribution, which focuses on the Canadian province of Quebec. He shows how in a post-migration context native populations evoke different cultural memories in response to newcomers. He argues that these debates function as a context that shapes indifference, both in scope and meaning.

Lois Lee focuses on indifference on the basis of her previous work on nonreligious people in the UK. Her analysis concentrates on substantive nonreligious cultural forms, in contradistinction to a secular life merely void of religion. Drawing on her interviews, she argues that indifference among nonreligious populations is more rare than assumed.

Atko Remmel discusses religious indifference in Estonia, said to be one of the most secularised countries in Europe. The article looks at the complex ways in which notions and debates on religion, atheism, and indifference are interrelated with the history of Estonian nationalism, and two foreign religious-secular regimes: German Lutheran and Soviet Atheism. Conceptually, he links this with the debate among secularisation theorists about the outcome and indicators of secularisation.

Pierre Bréchon provides an analysis of the European Values Study (EVS) and International Social Survey Programme (ISSP) data on religiosity, mostly focusing on Europe and the US. Comparing data from 1990 to 2008, he depicts the gradually-accelerating secularisation, arguing that a declining interest in religion goes hand in hand with floating and blurred beliefs and a different set of values when compared to religious populations. Based on this analyses, he discusses the differences among different countries.

Pascal Siegers defines indifference as neither a religious position nor the denial of transcendental realities. Based on EVS survey data, his research focuses on factors that influence indifferent people to engage with religious rites of passage. In line with the concept of vicarious religion as well as secularisation theory, he argues that the inclination towards a situational turn to religion relates to people's positive attitude towards the church as well as their religious socialisation.

The possible shift between grades of indifference and more pronounced forms of indifference is also addressed in **Johannes Quack's** contribution. Based on a combination of ethnographic research and biographical interviews, he discusses the different understandings and implications of 'religion' in Germany and India as well as the ways in which religion is manifested in people's lives. This helps him to conceptualise religious indifference as a disinterested stance that chooses the way of least possible engagement but may eventually change into more positive or negative positions towards religion. The chapter concludes by addressing the limits of

comparison between Germany and India as well as those associated with the concept of religious indifference in general.

Petra Klug has worked on nonreligious people in Texas, United States. In her paper, she explores shifts from indifference towards modes of religious critiques. She argues that the way in which religious people treat the nonreligious, or in other ways impact upon them, is crucial for determining shifts away from indifference. Accordingly, she argues for a more situational evaluation of responses to religion.

The final contribution to this volume by **Joseph Blankholm** engages with indifferences as something which 'stands beyond the scope of social scientific knowledge production'. He focuses on a literary and an ethnographic character in two case studies that show what would remain invisible in a normal research situation. He further focuses on the role of social scientists in constructing religion and nonreligion, referring to other ethnographic work on entanglements. He claims that indifference requires the researcher to choose between either pursuing or leaving indifference alone.

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Genealogies of Indifference? New Theoretical Thoughts on the History and Creation of Narratives Surrounding Christianity, Secularism and Indifference

David Nash

Abstract This chapter investigates some of the antecedents of religious indifference through the prism of the religious radicals who initiated the creation of Secularism in Britain. Looking at the difference between the theoretical positions of some individuals, and the practicality of organising antireligious movements, we are enabled to see a mismatch between the desire to stimulate hostility to religion, or to achieve a state of indifference. Both situations, and their implications, made such radicals aware of the important choices at their disposal. The lineage of indifferent positions created by this choice is then investigated in relation to the author's recent theoretical suggestions about the importance of religious narratives. If we can readily identify religious and secular narratives, is it now possible to identify indifference narratives. If it is possible to do so what precisely are these indifference narratives, and how should they be viewed on a continuum between the religious and the secular? Are they a legitimate third alternative, or merely a space occupied in a snapshot moment between choosing the religious or the secular?

Keywords Secularism • Indifference • Holyoake • Britain • Secular Movement • Popular History of Ideas • Atheism • Agnosticism

Origins of Modern Indifference in Britain

George Jacob Holyoake in one of his manifestoes for his newly created secular movement in the Britain of the 1850s declared:

> Three parties are known for implied or positive opposition to Christianity –
>
> 1. The dissolute
> 2. The indifferent
> 3. The intellectually independent

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> The dissolute speak against it because they regard it as the foe to sensualism. The indifferent, a more numerous class, reject Christianity through being simply ignorant of it – or not having time to attend to it – or not caring to attend to it – or not being able to attend to it, through constitutional insensibility to its peculiar appeals. The intellectually independent are those who oppose Christianity because they regard it as the foe of freedom, of morals, and of progress; and who intelligently reject Christianity for reasons which to them seem conclusive, and of which they are able to give an account. (Holyoake 1852, 2)

Sociological analysts who examine critiques of Christianity that have existed in British society have done their best to move these dissenters from religion into two models. The first of these is a model which seeks to remove and destroy religion and religion's place in modernising developing societies, which has been termed eliminationism. However the second model originates from other critiques which have sought to remove religion and Christianity from society by changing the terms of the religious and the status of religious seeking. These endeavour to put something more rewarding and meaningful in its place and this critique has been termed substitutionism (Paz 1995, 180–183).

When we look at the above interestingly visionary quote from George Jacob Holyoake something we should bear in mind is that, upon close scrutiny, this appears a remarkably modern view of religious belief for a statement made in 1852. In many respects its categorisation of the landscape of religious adherence, albeit with a few qualifiers, would adequately function as a critique of modern religiosity. We might have perhaps lost sight of the 'dissolute' and the hints of the sensualist epicurean, evident in this 1852 statement, but equally it is possible that this tendency is submerged within modern day secularism and western societies because more forms of behaviour are acceptable and are not therefore criticised or proscribed.

Ultimately, Holyoake wanted to bring liberation for the 'intellectually independent' and a great number of his statements within *The Organisation of Freethinkers*, and elsewhere, allude to this position (Taylor 2011, 37).[1] We might describe Holyoake's position as ambivalent since he hoped that his work would aid the 'intellectually independent' – those who he envisaged had successfully eliminated religion and Christianity from their minds. However, ultimately his creation here of 'the indifferent', and of strategies that pandered to this position, meant that English society would never become secular in the way secularist campaigners of the nineteenth century envisaged or hoped for. Such campaigners would instead have contemplated what were eventually abortive, and incomplete, attempts to create a variation on French revolutionary models. These came to deify reason and actively thereafter seek to de-christianise the rest of society.

In this Holyoake's desire to change society and capture the indifferent was very much in tune with the other leading figures of nineteenth century secularism in England. However, the manner of propounding this and the tactics he adopted in so many respects seemed at odds with his desire for change. Those less substitutionist

[1] It is interesting that the laity's quest for independence has been cited as something Christianity has been struggling against since the medieval period.

than Holyoake were individuals who believed 'indifference' to religion and its influence was simply not, and should never be, an option. This, more than any other historical example, demonstrates how the religious defined the irreligious. This position, which actively sought to confront Christianity, instinctively saw this belief system as the enemy and these ideologues – Richard Carlile, Robert Owen, and Charles Bradlaugh – offered attractive and compelling visions for a society they hoped would be actively secular, arguably beyond simply pleasing the 'intellectually independent' (Calhoun et al. 2011, 7).

Richard Carlile and the campaigns for freedom of knowledge he conducted, for nearly three decades, was a series of battles to show that Christianity was strangling the human quest for knowledge. Through its pretensions, its hierarchies of good and bad knowledge, and its draconian application of the law over which it had exercised stringent control meant Christianity seemingly demonstrated itself to be intolerant, evil and socially useless. This again was militant eliminationism and it is a salutary point of analysis that Carlile's critique was more focused, incisive, coherent and effective than his attempts, or indeed those of his compatriots, to establish an alternative social or belief system. Again this points to a Manichaean universe where individuals were either strong supporters of religion bent upon converting or marginalising unbelievers, or they earnestly craved religion's destruction with an equal level of vehemence and conviction. This line of thinking considered schemes which sought to retain elements of religious practice as thoroughly unnecessary obstacles to the creation of rational secularism as society's mainstream belief.

Robert Owen was behind more obviously enlightenment inspired initiatives to undermine established Christian religion in the early nineteenth century. In some respects these critiques and assaults resemble those we might find amongst St Simonians and Fourierists. They were not as obviously iconoclastic as Carlile's, but nonetheless contained an eliminationist outlook. Although Owen's was an all embracing utopian vision, radical adherents in England so readily and easily dismantled it into its component parts. One of these components was a vehement denunciation of religion as corrosive of human development. This led Owen to seek the removal of religious influences from any of his communitarian experiments. One group of individuals sought to extend the influence of Owen's rationalism through a Missionary Society which had a lecture circuit throughout the country, ironically borrowing from religious idioms to extend its message. George Jacob Holyoake himself played an important part in this expansive initiative (McCabe 1908, 47–58). Owen and his compatriots saw religious belief and observance as part of an 'Old Immoral World' which would be transcended by the removal of religion from his 'New Moral World.' (*New Moral World* 11 July 1839). Unsurprisingly, because it was utopian, this philosophical position and the practices based upon it were also seeking peaceful transcendent change into this new condition. Unfortunately, the Owenite movement and communitarian experiments ran out of resources, effort and goodwill (McCabe 1908, 100–106). In a sense evaluating this whole movement does give a clue to one of the central themes associated with any history of the development of indifference. It is fundamentally important to all participants to be clear about precisely how this change is supposed to come about.

Likewise there are vital considerations about what happens during this end time of religion for the image and ultimate success of what follows. Indeed, the mindset of moving forwards is also an ideological stop onwards from the contemplation of a return to an envisaged state of nature.

In many respects Charles Bradlaugh, president of the National Secular Society from 1866 until 1890, continued the line espoused by Richard Carlile. Bradlaugh's work began in earnest from the 1860s onwards and involved translating secular sentiment into a strong national movement, which was nonetheless predominantly metropolitan in character. The essence of Bradlaugh's approach was a strenuous campaign to remove disabilities against secularists becoming full citizens of society, and likewise to move privilege and what he argued were spurious vested interests from the path of the country's citizens. In practice this meant seeking to denounce the power structures that upheld Christianity within Britain. Bradlaugh's own approach was, like Carlile's, militantly eliminationist and took a profoundly and relentlessly combative stance when confronted with religion. One campaigning tactic especially sharpened by Bradlaugh was the disputation of Christianity's claims with Christian opponents. These events effectively debated publicly the truth, or otherwise, of the revealed gospels and it is also perhaps worth considering how far such disputes were deliberately acting upon the condition of indifference, with a view to combatting and marginalising it. Both the secularist and Christian opponents and their arguments were either right or wrong, whilst audiences were emphatically encouraged to choose between these. Such events, sometimes over three nights, would often play to packed houses in mid-Victorian provincial England (Grant 1853).[2] The essence behind these was a struggle between religion and its alternative, which in this case often appeared to be not unbelief or atheism but the destruction of religion. In this case, again like Carlile, whilst the critique could be sharp and extremely incisive the language and disposition to discover the alternative remained significantly undeveloped.

Certainly many of the organisations which have survived into modern Britain have carried echoes of these themes, strategies and tactics. Organisations like the National Secular Society and the British Humanist Association are on their guard to control, limit and restrict the growth of religion's power (broadly defined). As such, they argue particularly against some of religion's modern conceptions that it is an inherently free choice in an informed and tolerant society. Instead religion continues to be defined by secular critiques as restrictive, power hungry and looking for opportunities to once again become a strongly vested interest, through the latent power of numbers. This last idea is often discussed through various narratives of fidelity and the spectrum of what this means.

However, it is worth noting that there are also other strands of secular thinking which argued they were aimed at producing a rather different result for society. One consequence of secularism's survival in the twentieth century has been its

[2] During the course of a considerable career Rev. Brewin Grant debated with both Holyoake and Bradlaugh in both London and the provinces.

marginalisation of this substitutionist history. Likewise, this strategy has suffered a frequent downgrading of its wider role in secularist history, seeing it either as a branch which withered on the vine or as an interlude characterised by pragmatic forms of especially mid-Victorian thinking. This takes us back to George Jacob Holyoake and his formulation of the religious landscape quoted at the top of this chapter. In this, his desire to change society was starkly contradicted by the tactics and practical approach to the idea of secularism that he developed and espoused.

Holyoake, a veteran of a significant number of failed initiatives, argued that mechanisms of organisation that stressed ideas of protection and self-defence were those that were more likely to succeed. The definition of this success was the workable provision of realistic and supportive spaces, where his ideal of the 'intellectually independent' could establish themselves and then flourish. The idea was that such individuals should be permitted forms of freedom and remain unmolested by the claims of revealed religion and its promoters. He went so far as to claim 'The moment fair play is permitted, all excuse for invective or outrage ends.' (Holyoake 1874a, b, 5). Evidence of this approach can also be gleaned from looking at an organisation in which he was the prime mover in the years after he had been involved in the collapse of Owenism – the Anti-Persecution Union. This movement aimed to offer advice and protection to those who found themselves prosecuted, or in the organisation's parlance 'persecuted', by religious authorities seeking to limit and proscribe their opinions. This organisation maintained vigilance and actively sought out news of religious persecution, eager to bring this to public attention. Indeed its first foray into journalism reported widely on the imprisonment of Thomas Paterson for blasphemy in Scotland. It would later go on to offer support to other individuals imprisoned in Scotland and as far away as Madeira (*The Movement and Anti-Persecution Gazette* Volume I Number 1, 16 December 1843, 1; Volume I Number 2, 23 December 1843, 15; Volume I Number 4, 6 January 1844, 27). This latter individual, a Dr. Kaley, was a Christian who had fallen foul of the local Catholic authorities and Holyoake regularly corresponded with him upon issues around religious tolerance and theological matters, whilst also offering him material comfort and support (*The Movement and Anti-Persecution Gazette* Volume I Number 11, 24 February 1844, 83–4).

It is easy here to suggest that Holyoake was simply being even handed. However, in offering protection for both the secular 'intellectually independent' and the Christian advocate of belief he was seeking to demarcate separate, delineated spaces in which believers and unbelievers should be left alone. Whether it was planned or not the effect of this intention was to create a vast void which he had only referred to in passing as 'the indifferent'. This argued that the religious and the sceptical were somehow divorced from society, and arguably entitled to forge and defend rights on the back of their individual commitment. Many of these ideas had close relations with the philosophical liberalism of the mid-nineteenth century. A belief in a free unfettered platform and the social utility of discussion, free from persecution, were central to the ideas of individuals like John Stuart Mill (Nash 1992). Likewise G.W. Foote a later leader of the National Secular Society would also claim

'Happiness is to secularists the sole end of action' (Foote 1874, 8). Indeed, we might here enquire just how much philosophies of free expression and tolerance were (probably unwittingly) a specific blueprint for the creation of religious indifference. In effect these arguments said that attacking the beliefs of others, enquiring into their nature and, most importantly of all, censuring opinion believed to be in error were not conducive to the liberal spirit of the age – nor did they foster further societal development. Really it was the process of absorbing this philosophy, which in 1852 led Holyoake to create his prolific and successful ideology which he termed Secularism. Again this was linked with substitutionism since Holyoake declared

> It is delusive to pull down the altar of superstition and not erect an altar of science in its place. To pack up the household gods of superstition and leave the fireside bare will hardly do. Affirmative Atheism must teach that nature is the Bible of truth, work is worship, that duty is dignity, and the unselfish service of others consolation. (Holyoake 1874a, b, 10)

This could be quite strong in arguing against religious authority but, importantly, it deliberately avoided being assertive about the (non-) existence of God. Holyoake was also conscious that secularists could, and perhaps should, foster and maintain good relations with sympathetic Christians and was prepared to use the word 'courtesy' in this particular regard (Holyoake 1874a, 16). Holyoake was anxious to provide a new solution to the problems facing secularists at the grass roots level, often away from the metropolitan stage. In this he sought a pragmatic approach which protected those opposed to religion from the sniping and opprobrium of their local community. Certainly there is evidence that this was achieved with acknowledgement of the secularist position in the ideas of Leigh Hunt, W.R Gregg and James Martineau (Nash 1992, 19; McCabe 1908, 202–3). Although he was asked to define Secularism on many occasions, the most cogent argument he offered was to suggest that it was as ridiculous to deny Christianity as it was to categorically state its existence.

Holyoake's Secularism, unlike atheism which was an eliminationist belief system designed to replace another, was emphatically a narrative that spoke of religion's place or non-place – so that this phenomenon might be considered and debated (Foote 1874, 9).[3] As such Holyoake's closer relations with religion, closer than many secularists before or since, were a statement that religion should equally emphatically have a place in this debate as well. One particular link with indifference was the recurrent suggestion that Secularism naturally replaced religion as a situation that individuals very naturally fell into after their Christianity had lapsed.

> Secularism is, in fact, the religion of doubt. It does not necessarily clash with other religions; it does not deny the existence of a God or even the truth of Christianity, but it does not profess to believe in either the one nor the other. Nay, most of its advocates have often

[3] Foote asserted: 'Its rules and maxims all have reference to the human and mundane, not to the superhuman and supermundane'. This also bears out the suggestion that 'Such irreligious positions are not just functionally differentiated from religion but constituted by a distinct set of relations towards it', as has been argued in the introduction to this volume. This set of relations can be forged by ideological pressures and responses to other behavioural modes such as religious tolerance.

> and strongly assailed both….The success which attended the attempts made to propagate it was due partly to the fact that great masses of the working classes, especially in the large manufacturing towns, were already lost to Christianity, and had, in many cases, almost unconsciously adopted the ideas which Mr Holyoake fixed and shaped into distinct doctrines, but which are in fact the views which naturally replace Christianity in the minds of those who have practically renounced it… (McCabe 1908, 209-10)[4]

Analysis of this particular stance has focused upon the protection it offered secularists from the predatory nature of some Christian authorities and individual enthusiasts who actively wanted war to break out. At first sight it also appears as a somewhat different statement of the ideological position associated with agnosticism. However, it is now possible to see that this was potentially a longer term goal to create a norm of indifference. Whilst the intellectually independent might form a better, more realised, version of John Stuart Mill's 'clericy' the bulk of society, those without such aspirations, would be likely to display many of the characteristics of indifference. Secularism helped to create the narrative of indifference by polarising images of the committed leaving an 'indifferent space' that could be credibly colonised.

Indifference, Secularisation and Disappointment

So why have Christians and secularists, especially in Britain, both seemed so disappointed with the respective religious belief outcomes for modern society. On the secular side there is profound dissatisfaction with the secularisation thesis, and likewise the questioning of previous certainties about Christianity coming to an end and being transcended by an unstoppable process of liberation (Nash 2013, 1–28). Equally, religion in Britain and Europe, notably where there are established churches, has produced and nurtured long sustained narratives of disappointment and retrenchment. As has been frequently pointed out this is often based upon an assumption that Christianity had a duty to expect (what to later observers seem) unrealistically high levels of adherence and definitions of success (Stepan 2011, 121–123; Casanova 2001). Another way of reading this is to think that both sides of this argument, what we might call the absolutist camps, were disappointed because they have not developed, until recently, methods of explaining indifference beyond the concept of secularisation. Again this narrative offers nothing other than disappointment to the side that is religious, whilst offering a sustained narrative of hope to the secular side which can believe that indifference is growing – even if this were never to become affirmative atheism. This really explained the apparent destination for most versions of secularisation. Likewise this does, however, indicate that the latter secularist side of this argument has a somewhat complex and uncomfortable relationship with the idea of indifference.

[4] Rev. W.N. Molesworth's observations on Secularism quoted in McCabe.

What makes this proposition particularly interesting for our purposes is that, unlike the Christian committed or the intellectually independent, the notion of indifference is a space. Many versions of the secularisation thesis have been very good at describing, historically, how certain developments and aspects of religious practice can be seen to have been victims of a secularising process. In this it is possible to supposedly chart the decline of one position and the gradual ascendancy of another. What is interesting, within this paradigm, is the use of some assertive phrases to suggest secularisation is an unequivocal fact. One that is demonstrated through the assertive quality of empirical material conveying appropriate numbers on both sides and the apparent decline of older attitudes.

My own work has challenged this paradigm by instead considering not that there are linear demonstrable periods of belief, inexorably followed by secularisation – but instead a continuum of narratives about the religious and the secular within Western societies. In my monograph (Nash 2013) I argued that secularisation processes and narratives were problematized by the evidence of twentieth century Christian religious 'observance', shaped by a number of centrally important 'Christian Stories'. These moulded and influenced the actions of individuals throughout the twentieth century and beyond in Britain. These involved ideas such as 'pilgrimage', 'conversion', 'remembrance', 'the just war', 'the samaritan' and 'sickness and death'. These stories were sufficiently strong to provide occasions when twentieth century Britons were able to make use of these, and shape them in various directions. Such stories could be made strongly religious, shaped to secular ends or indeed find themselves 'remade' into the religious again. This work has investigated how these stories came to be of 'use' to individuals and institutions during both personal and national history during the twentieth century. This process was not necessarily governed by wider or longer trajectories of secularisation, indeed my findings have further problematized the chronology and precise nature of this phenomenon. Work has now begun on the way that 'Secular Stories' have been made religious and Secular again – this will feature in my next contracted monograph which will complete the other half of this thesis.

However if religious and secular narratives exist within society conterminously, and similarly they are not considered to have enduring prominence, or to be suffering from sustained decline at any particular historical moment – then this perhaps problematises the whole nature of religious indifference. By investigating the flaws of old distorted paradigms we can begin to try and assess the meaning, function and growth of indifference. In his investigation of the late nineteenth century phenomenon of the so-called 'Crisis of belief', the historian Timothy Larsen counted a significant number of atheists who eventually reconverted back to a form of Christianity (Larsen 2007). In doing this Larsen created an alternative paradigm of a' Crisis of Doubt' which, so he argued, should rightfully eclipse the 'Crisis of Faith'. Interestingly these were two paradigms that asserted forms of absolutist position in terms of belief and unbelief, thus assisting in the creation of an 'indifferent space'. In crucial respects this clearly forgot the fluidity of the religious atmosphere during this period of the nineteenth century, But also the dynamics of moving between beliefs and part beliefs with intermediate stages (Nash 2011). This was an

atmosphere which encouraged debate, deep consideration of religious issues and belief expressions alongside the act of 'seeking' these.

Thus the respective secular and religious ideas and positions were not traversed in a comfortable and readily observable manner. Rather individuals engaged with the narratives these told, importantly to create religious positions or secular positions that were not orthodox or recognisable to other adherents. Larsen had tried to reverse the picture of dominance sketched by the 'Crisis of Faith' narrative paradigm, but failed to realise he had missed the atmosphere of seeking that had been fundamental to the society lived in by those he described. Perhaps in this light George Jacob Holyoake did not realise his power and persuasiveness in creating an atmosphere. At this point it pays us to remember that an atmosphere and culture of seeking in Victorian England equally contributed to what we might term adiaphora feelings. Individuals such as Strauss, Darwin, Herbert Spencer, Bishop Collenso, George Eliot and Matthew Arnold – all have bit parts to play as trailblazers in the established secularisation narrative, indeed we might blame them for attempts to make this into an all too obvious teleology. However, they could equally be seen as creators of adiaphora positions in an alternative narrative. This looked at the building blocks of this alternative to both atheist secularisation and Christian versions of the promised land.

Again this served to suggest how religious and secular narratives were the building blocks of views about the universe. As such they were picked over and moulded by those who had a specific use for them at specific periods. At the end of the day, where individuals ended up in absolute religious terms before their deaths may actually be a species of accident, or indeed may be better viewed as a journey of seeking cut prematurely short. Thus, if we start to problematise the idea of religious positions being absolutes then our analysis starts to go in a somewhat different direction. We might consider two possible ways in which the analysis of both religious and secular narratives creates a new place for the consideration of religious indifference. The first of these we might describe as investigating narratives of indifference. That is, asking questions about what were the life experiences, the impulses, desires and wishes of individuals in the close historical past, and indeed the contemporary world that made them embrace narratives of indifference to religion. When investigating this we must also be extremely careful to note that these impulses did not actively make people embrace atheist narratives, nor explicitly anti-Christian narratives (see also: Quack and Schuh 2017, 17–18–this volume).

The second of these would be an investigation of how far we might find the logic of some analytical positions eroding the idea of religious indifference almost to extinction. If we consider both secular and religious narratives to have had lasting value to western populations over the last 500 years, then we are sketching a history which suggests they are regularly reached for at times and in places not explained by the linear and teleological versions of secularisation. We might thus come to consider 'indifference' as the snapshot phase between adopting and using a secular or religious narrative. As such, it retains its status as only a space and is thus potentially unlikely to be a position that should be considered an absolute, alongside religious belief and unbelief respectively. Indeed, we might go so far as to ask

whether indifference exists at all if individuals frequently seek to use Christian belief (or secular unbelief) in specific and personal circumstances. Thus the search for committed absolutist believers also becomes even more illusory. Within this the role of 'indifference' becomes of especially enhanced interest. Actually if 'indifference' has any lasting viability as an actual position, then we need to know much more about the narratives it creates, develops and sustains. Thus, we should perhaps seek to sketch some of these indifference narratives and to trace their impact. Obviously this particular piece can only postulate what these are and potentially to suggest where investigation of these might take analysis.

Restructuring Indifference

Perhaps our first port of call in seeking to structure narratives of indifference would be to consider the impact of aspects of religious tolerance. Indeed there are episodes in the creation of adiaphora positions that strongly emphasise this. For example, the creation of the Elizabethan settlement in England perhaps enshrined this, and the 1552 edition of the Book of Common Prayer carefully constructed to ensure the possibility of conformity for a range of religious attitudes to the Eucharist and the real presence within it. Indeed, the use in England of the actual phrase adiaphora (things indifferent or of little importance) dates also from this period and was used in the context of the vestiarian controversy of the 1560s. In this episode Marian exiles returning to England found themselves disappointed by the new Protestant Queen's apparent acquiescence in retaining what they saw as Romish trappings. This came to focus, specifically, upon the issue of vestments which Elizabeth asked her Archbishop of Canterbury (Matthew Parker) to enforce. Several of the returning exiles and advanced Protestant thinkers saw this as a rubicon they would not cross, duly petitioning for the right to ignore the requirement to wear vestments. They were told that the externals of religious services were a matter that was adiaphora and therefore they should wear the vestments prescribed. Their reply was that if such things were genuinely adiaphora, then ecclesiastical authority and government had no right imposing them. Eventually several puritan bishops found themselves deprived of office for the failure to conform (Verkamp 1977; Jones 1984). Considering this episode offers an interesting way to think of the triangular nexus between tolerance (ironically here the goal of government-sponsored authority), conformity and indifference. Issues around vestments, and the prescription of these for serving clergy, would also resurface as a part the religious history of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Huband Gregg 1877; Hobson 1877). Several aspects of this triangle had been passed down through later Anglican religious history – particularly in the concept of the Broad Church. This enshrined issues of tolerance, essentially holding the church together, allowing it to play host to a range of sometimes contradictory religious narratives and beliefs. Thus it is more than possible speculation to think about how far the growth of plurality, and the practice of tolerant adiaphora within established churches, may have fostered indifference

narratives. Likewise, the unwieldy nature of established churches and established church structures has long been cited as a reason for the spiritual neglect of new communities, alongside the spectacular urban growth that appeared in Britain from 1750 onwards. All these served to make the rigidity of religious doctrines simultaneously less prescribed and less available than they might otherwise have been, had they been rigidly enforced in the manner that occurred in European city states of the late Renaissance. We might also think here of numerous instances where missionary churches have actively chosen to adopt an adiaphora stance, one that allowed the Christian message to blend with local customs and beliefs in the name of wider and deeper spiritual redemption.

An offshoot of narratives of religious tolerance, one that is a product of the twentieth century, has been the phenomenon of multiculturalism. This has set a range of liberal social democratic values as a gold standard of tolerance (Calhoun 2011, 77). This has meant that individual identities are given social, cultural and (in the case of hate crime) legal protection from predators of various kinds. One offshoot of multiculturalism has been a multicultural educational project which aims to create a default and extremely wide ranging tolerance amongst western citizens. A central part of this has been seeking to engage populations at large with greater knowledge, and apparent understanding, of the religious faiths present in their country. In all aspects of spreading this knowledge, the message of tolerance is uppermost whilst the information is delivered in a deliberately neutral tone.

We might justifiably here consider how indifference to religion may be spread by the adoption of this species of relativism. Perhaps the zenith of this particular outlook was conveyed by the exhibition in the Millennium Dome entitled *The Faith Zone*. This had displays outlining the respective contributions (interestingly given equal space) of different religious 'traditions', and their influence upon the development of British society during the previous thousand years. The final explanatory panel in *The Faith Zone* did its best to further equalise these respective contributions by essentially say that, at their base, all religions were the same and quite obviously benign. For a historian, especially a historian of religion, such an account of the thousand years of religious history appears something of a constructed travesty. An argument that religion has, throughout the last millennium, been exclusively a force for good and has always had successful accommodation with its dissidents and rivals was a clear piece of nonsense. However, once the historian has stopped reacting to this, and takes a wider perspective, it becomes possible to see how the relativism of multicultural approaches has been leading to this particular destination. This was a matter that, as we have discovered, preoccupied the Catholic Church as early as the mid nineteenth century (Quack and Schuh 2017, 5–6 – this volume).

Producing bland identikit images of religious positions is likely to have had a significant influence upon promoting narratives of indifference. For here was an apparent proof that religions were essentially 'the same', promoted a broadly similar message, and the discerning believer should have to make an active choice to adopt one of these – if indeed they had the ability and persistence to do so. To sharpen this picture still further it is worth reminding ourselves of 300–500 years of religious history and religious strife. Observers utterly unaware of this would be

very likely to get the impression that religion had simply been blandly 'there' or 'around' for the same period of time or longer. Moreover, there is a further, potentially unforeseen, dynamic at work as a consequence of bringing relativism to bear upon the popular portrayal of religious positions. Unwittingly, this whole process may well have produced a revolt against the very relativism it describes. Certainly there is evidence that individuals, when confronted with relativistic views of religious traditions, became confused and perplexed if they indulged in any search for the truth. As one such commentator declared, surely it becomes impossible for each and every one of these religions to be 'right' (Whale 1988, 12–13). Making such judgements about choices also involves articulating that others may be mistaken or wrong. For some this even negates the whole sense that religion is about providing so called truthful explanation of the universe, and of mankind's place within it.

A similar narrative that also stems from the urge to relativise is the assertion that religions are 'as bad as each other' (Casanova 2001, 68–9). This is a species of indifference actively promoted by focusing upon the apparently negative aspects of religious groupings, alongside their respective images and their patterns of observance. In many respects this reaction is the logical corollary extending from both multiculturalism and the suggestion that all religions have a universal form of truth at their core. This has sometimes been encouraged by religion's own practitioners and popularisers and even by sections of the media. One such practitioner, Jenny Taylor, argues against '…a cultural shift encouraged by thought leaders recognizing that the population has been befuddled with propaganda about the 'decline of religion', and 'all religions are the same', which was ideological and simply untrue' (Taylor 2015, 31–51). Likewise it is also a response to some popular understandings of history, where rationalist perceptions of persecution, heresy, witch trials and blasphemy provoke assertive and proudly stated modernist sentiments. Thus dissension, strife, conflict and any attempts by religious practitioners to suggest their primacy over other groups or belief systems potentially provokes the accusation that these individuals are breaking some sort of tacit modern social democratic compact. If, in a social democratic society, we are all tolerant and respectful then some of the actions such as preaching, proselytising, criticising opponents and assertions of their own claim to truth (actions which many religious groups would see as a necessity) appeared to disturb a social status quo.

We might also think how another narrative of indifference also grows from the desire to actively remove religion from public spaces – another part of a popularly revered historic legacy in the United States of America. Certainly this has caused significant problems where the separation of church and state in America has led entrepreneurial evangelical groups to assert that the secular state is not neutral, but is instead actively hostile to religion. However such exclusion also exists on a much more informal basis. One narrative regularly used in British society is the wish to avoid, on social occasions, the discussion of 'religion or politics'. Where such exclusion is in any way successful it actively creates an indifferent space, in fact providing the conditions in which forms of indifference are not simply the norm but are actively encouraged as desirable.

Indifference could also be seen as evident in forms of anticlericalism which seek to indict the institutions, hierarchies and representatives of organised religion. Very often a great number of these quarrels have emerged from the issue of authority, amidst attempts to control the spiritual lives (and sometimes the social lives) of religious adherents. As we are well aware it would be a mistake to suggest that anticlericalism, by definition, shades into atheist secularism. It was of course one of the mainstays of the deist position, which became especially common in the eighteenth century, to assert a clear bifurcation between religious organisations/hierarchies and pure forms of religion – this was the essence of Thomas Paine's thought (Taylor 2011, 33, 34–5). This looked actively beyond the worldly manifestations of religion, instead to make a much closer connection between a creator and their role in the universe. Sometimes such versions of deism scarcely went beyond the argument by design, whilst others adopted a more directly personal God. In the modern world such species of deism may well manifest themselves in a distrust and dislike of formal religious structures, prescribed prayers, orders of service or priests. However, when asked such individuals may well display a closer connection with forms of religious belief than might be expected.

The desire of individuals in this particular position to live what they often describe as moral and Christian lives also focuses attention upon what was, for most of the twentieth century, a fairly unique situation for religious education in the United Kingdom. Religious education was prescribed by law but not generally enforced to any significant degree, certainly in the years after the Second World War. Although an established church persisted, at least in England, its doctrines were extremely descriptive and undogmatic. Thus, in many respects religious education so very often shaded into a species of moral education. As such another potential indifference narrative is the consideration of Christianity and morality to be superficially interchangeable. The suggestion here covers instances where individuals believe the simple maintenance of morality constitutes enough to be associated however loosely with the wider term Christian. This also connects us back with the original idea of Secularism, which individuals beyond Holyoake described as the process of developing morality divorced from the supposed will of God (Holyoake 1896, 111). There is also ample evidence that individuals saw such simple morality in action in the practices and lives of caring professions and those holding responsible offices of various kinds (Nash 2013, chapters 2, 3, 5 and 7). This was indifference to religion caused by its subconscious merging with simpler, and more obviously personal, outlooks upon the moral landscape of twentieth century Britain – outlooks divorced from institutional adherence or intervention of any kind.

Perhaps our last and, arguably in Britain, most powerful narrative of indifference is the idea that religion is inextricably linked to the past, or may indeed be regarded simply as an artefact of the past. More so than in most other European countries, the architectural fabric of the established church in England has endured since mediaeval times. Isolated from the continent of Europe it has more or less been spared the ravages of wars of religion in the seventeenth century and likewise largely survived the iconoclasm of the same period. Unlike many countries of Western Europe, it also survived the depredations of two World Wars and, for most of the twentieth century,

offered degrees of simple continuity. Despite this it still remains possible to notice congregations dwindling and churches closing, or being converted to other forms of use. It is an oft quoted aphorism that in Britain each week six churches close but six open (Davie 1994). Feeding the sense that Christianity in England belongs to the past is the fact that those more likely to close are our highly visible architectural remnants of the mediaeval, early modern or eighteenth/nineteenth century. Those six churches opening are likely to be invisible house churches that do not make a visual impact upon the religious landscape, further influencing the image of English Christianity as something located firmly in the historical past.

However, there have been many cultural forces at work that further contrived to make the Church of England's brand of Christianity feel profoundly associated with the historical past. Certainly I have noted elsewhere that one significant story of belief in the twentieth century has been Anglicanism's forensic investigation of its own eclipse and eventual destruction (Nash 2013, chapter 8). This narrative of decline always posited an infinitely better past and a worryingly deficient future. As an institution with considerable longevity, and what we might also describe as 'staying power', the Anglican church – through the attitudes of its adherents and those who view it from afar looks locked into the historical past. One of the most important recent cultural references to it in the mainstream – one which linked it with nostalgic views with old England – has been the borrowing of George Orwell's remark from *England Your England*. (Orwell 1942, 1). This noted that the spirit of England could be summed up in warm beer and suet puddings, but most evocatively in the description of 'Old maids hiking to Holy Communion through the mists of the autumn morning.' This phrase was reused by the British Prime Minister John Major to revoke his vision of England. Not surprisingly this has regularly been dusted down since (Morton 2010, 15–22 and 319–324).[5]

But there is clearly a nostalgia which clings to it since spinsterdom is scarcely referred to anymore, likewise the service of matins is mostly a thing of the past. Given all of these things it is scarcely surprising that, to a significant portion of the population, Anglicanism in England appears utterly associated with the past. Sometimes this also further provokes an appreciation of religion as pageant. Once we realise this we can think how narratives of utility, anachronism and fitness for purpose may well enter people's psychological calculations about this particular institution. In effect, individuals can feel indifferent about this institution because its relevance is so regularly questioned by cultural trends, images and the discourses about its own past offered by the institution and its own members. Likewise the failure of religious institutions to keep pace with the acceptance of all sexualities and the vocation of women has led many to psychologically bypass their claims to significance. This would equate with Steve Bruce's assertions about waning relevance, if they are considered alongside narratives of anachronism (Quack and Schuh 2017, 8 – this volume). However, our second set of paradigms in which narratives

[5] Interestingly in an attempt to posit a new Christian England, Cole Morton revisited this area, partly by quoting Jeremy Paxman's evocation of '…bells tolling from the ivy-clad tower to summon the labourers to Harvest Festival' as being a part of ingrained 'folk memory'.

seek to explain the phenomenon of indifference operates within a slightly related scenario. Given that narrative approaches sidestep problems associated with the cruder (and sometimes not so crude) versions of secularisation theory, this suggests a very different way of thinking about the issue of indifference. If religious and secular narratives respectively are reached for when they are needed or necessary, either through encountering difficulties around rites of passage or in responding to national and supranational events, then indifference is the space and snapshot moment during which such choices are made. Such choices can equally exist as a related explanation of the phenomenon of the 'fuzzy faithful'. If this is the case then indifference is not a position to be examined alongside fervent religious belief or fervent unbelief. Instead it becomes the space occupied before such narratives are adopted internalised and used. Likewise, it may well be the space inhabited, once again, by individuals who then step away from the narrative that they are no longer making use of. In this situation they may again react badly to sectarian, dogmatic and overly pious ideas and situations. It is also possible to conceive of situations where the 'moment' of indifference arrives as a result of the necessity of drawing boundaries between the religious and the secular.

Challenging the Indifferent Space

In some respects both atheism and religion have recognised that one task in their imagined present and future is to entice individuals from the indifferent space, into spending more time embracing and following the religious or the secular narratives on offer. Here we can clearly see that the role of the religious and the secular is to do something with religious indifference, and to find some manner fitting their renewed senses of mission. At this point we might ask how have both committed Christian and secular sides of the argument tried to manipulate secular and Christian stories to address this mutual enemy of 'indifference'? Morton outlines a narrative of the actively disenchanted from religion realising that they still have affinities with 'the old ways', so that this is capable of creating a 'second innocence' or 'second naivety' that can lead them back to religious belief and practice (Morton 2010, 347–355).

Certainly, Christianity owes much to the approaches inspired by Dietrich Bonhoeffer and his statement that Christianity was not central to the world of man. Indeed this suggestion here persuaded all that actively capturing individuals for Christianity for all time was based on a false and mistaken premise. Thus, individuals were no longer to be evangelised and captured – they were more subtly to be cajoled encouraged and lured.

Offshoots of this line of thinking have involved new types of mission that target the aspects of life that mean most to those currently occupying the indifferent space. In Britain missions of Street Pastors interact with, and often actively help, those celebrating the streets of Britain's cities on any given weekend. Church services that included Rave music, or offered individuals the chance to give thanks for

skateboarding, again offered to accommodate individuals on their own terms. Similarly attempts to blend personal and religious narratives of discovery also offer potent material for reflection on the religious position, or place of the individual on the commitment/indifference spectrum (Morton 2010). Likewise, other attempts by Christianity to lure individuals out of the indifferent space have included targeting audiences with Hollywood films (such as the *Shawshank Redemption* and *Field of Dreams*) in search of the transcendent experience, which can then be related to potentially encouraging the onset of deeper religious feelings.

As such this is a method of drawing in people from the indifferent space to the active sampling of religious narratives. Other narratives seek to target the anti-materialist critique of capitalism by suggesting Christianity is the best reflection of these values (Pepinster 2013). A variation on this has been the assertion that properly formulated and presented forms of religiosity can gain much respect, through becoming the essential brokers of pluralism as an engine of social cohesion (Billings 2009). Once again we might also look at another English phenomenon the Alpha course. This uses the narrative of the self-improvement course to encourage individuals into a rejection of the indifferent space, by showing commitment to what remain secular goals, to be an improving experience beyond indifference. This should perhaps be investigated alongside the idea of the 'sacralisation of everyday life' (Billings 2009, 6).

The religious also believe they should convert and struggle with adaptation to be like the secular. This creates the potential to address such people in their own language, through their own concerns informing their own idioms at pressure points in their lives and those of their communities. The secular believe such initiatives and claims should be ridiculed and stopped (Casanova 2001, 59). Nonetheless secular tactics are themselves calculated to address the idea that the indifferent must be addressed. Whilst the New Atheism targets what it perceives to be the insidiousness of Christianity's attempts to be conciliatory and entrepreneurial through its accommodation with the world, there is evidence the opposite approach is also being adopted and followed.

In modern Britain several secularist groups have deliberately avoided the use of the label 'atheist' or the assault upon received morality that other parts of the secular programme seemed to threaten. This is deemed to potentially scare those in the indifferent space. As such this offers to bring down upon secular narratives the opprobrium associated with religious dogmatism and entrenched positions. Opprobrium which, as we have seen, potentially drove Christian adherents into the indifferent space in the recent historical past.

Thus, we have seen how British society and the respective histories of the religious and secular portions of society served to create an 'indifferent space'. However, as I hope I have also suggested, challenges to orthodox ideas of secularisation see this replaced by intermingling and renewing forms of narrative (Casanova 2001, 59). This does not follow the assertion in the introduction that sees indifference as central to secularisation, however it does point to the tensions also alluded to in footnote three (Casanova 2001, 2). This suggests a model that moves away from seeing religion, secularism and indeed the indifferent as absolute positions that

individuals adopt – they are not as such 'cast off' nor do they follow the 'vicarious religion model' (Casanova 2001, 3, 14). Likewise this is perhaps another method of sidestepping the idea of secularisation as Charles Taylor's subtraction story, nonetheless it does not accept that the immanent frame is normal and natural (Calhoun et al. 2011, 10). Narratives drive religious and secular feeling, whilst the indifferent space constitutes the pause between the adoption of many of these narratives. However the potential existence of actual narratives of indifference suggests that the time which this indifferent space is occupied may be extremely unpredictable. At the very least this space may be stretched and elongated by the relative coherence of some narratives of indifference.

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A Discursive Approach to 'Religious Indifference': Critical Reflections from Edinburgh's Southside

Christopher R. Cotter

Abstract This chapter takes as its starting point the sustained and rigorous critique to which the category of 'religion' has been subjected in recent decades, in combination with contributions from contemporary studies of 'non-religion' and 'secularity'. Whether understood at an individual, institutional or societal level, constituencies that have remarkably little investment in the concept of 'religion', or who explicitly articulate stances of 'indifference', clearly have much to say to the theorisation and critique of both 'religion' and 'non-religion'. In this chapter I discuss prevalent academic understandings of 'indifference', and outline my reservations surrounding conceptualising it in an ideal-typical manner, and as a form of 'non-religion'. I then introduce a discursive approach as a possible alternative before providing empirical examples from my ongoing research examining discourses on religion in the Southside of Edinburgh, which both address my critique and conceptualise instances of 'indifference' as contextually meaningful discursive acts.

Keywords Category formation • De Certeau • Discourse analysis • Edinburgh • Locality • Non-religion • Types

> Frontier skirmishes and border patrols have been constant features of the social process of constructing, defending, attacking, reforming and replacing ideas and institutions that claim to represent 'real' religion. . . . indifference and hostility to both the particular and the generic meanings attributed to religion are no less interesting from a social scientific point of view. (Beckford 2003, 197–198)

This opening quotation from the eminent sociologist James Beckford emphasises that what counts as 'religion' is a site of heated debate and social significance.

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Discourse on the concept–both academic and 'popular'–has been subjected to a sustained and rigorous critique for many years (cf. Smith 1978, 1998; McCutcheon 1997; Fitzgerald 2000; Masuzawa 2005) and charged with repeating and reinforcing a model based on the presumptions of missionaries, centred on the primacy of belief and evinced by texts and institutions (Owen 2011). Naïve usage of the concept has been shown to privilege the accounts of elites (King 1999, 66), to de-emphasise variation and 'syncretism', to marginalise constructions which do not fit into the major categories (Owen 2011, 258), and to demarcate a 'semantically parasitic' (Fitzgerald 2007, 52) secular sphere over which constructed private 'beliefs' should apparently have no bearing.[1]

A related area of scholarship which has contributed to this critique is that which focuses upon the similarly parasitic and constructed categories of 'non-religion'[2] and 'secularity' (cf. Quack 2014; Cotter 2015; Lee 2015).[3] The more theoretically 'critical' of such studies work within a framework which avoids understanding 'non-religion' through a lens of normative religiosity, and utilise the notion as 'a descriptive term for a certain group of understudied phenomena and relationships and not as a term that seeks to draw clear boundaries between religion and nonreligion' (Quack 2014, 441). Non-religion, in this understanding, is not everything which is not religious. Neither does utilising the term mean that one is defending 'any universal distinction between religion and nonreligion' (2014, 441). Merely for analytical purposes these are understood as mutually exclusive categories, and they do not cover the full range of extant phenomena.

Returning to the Beckford quotation above, a concept that is of clear relevance for both areas of scholarship is that of 'indifference'. Whether understood at an individual, institutional or societal level, constituencies that have remarkably little investment in the concept of 'religion', or who explicitly articulate stances of 'indifference', clearly have much to say to the theorisation and critique of both 'religion' and 'non-religion'. In this chapter I shall discuss prevalent academic understandings of 'indifference', and outline my reservations surrounding conceptualising it in an ideal-typical manner, and as a form of 'non-religion'. I then introduce a discursive approach as a possible alternative before providing empirical examples from my ongoing research examining discourses on religion in the Southside of Edinburgh, which both address my critique and conceptualise instances of 'indifference' as contextually meaningful discursive acts.

[1] For more on this critique, see Cotter and Robertson (2016).

[2] Although in the past I have utilised the non-hyphenated 'nonreligion', my current preference is to utilise 'non-religion' in order to orthographically emphasise the relational nature of this category, and to emphasise that I do not wish to reify 'nonreligion' as a substantive phenomenon. Where I cite the work of others I shall preserve their preferred (non-)hyphenation.

[3] For more on the recent academic study of non-religion, see Bullivant and Lee (2012), Pasquale (2012), or Cotter (2011a).

Indifference: Two Problems

The concept of 'indifference to religion', 'religious indifference', or other such formulations–from here on referred to simply as 'indifference'–appears in academic literature in reference to the manner in which particular (subsets of) individuals, societies, or societal institutions–such as the law or politics–are understood to relate to particular contextual constructions of 'religion'. Such manifestations can be loosely placed into two distinct but interrelated camps, which can, for our purposes, be dubbed 'evaluative indifference' and 'disinterested indifference', with both camps suggesting a kind of ideal-typical 'state of being' or position related to 'religion' (e.g. Bagg and Voas 2010, 99; Bruce 1996, 58; 2002, 42; Dalferth 2010, 324; Lee 2014, 474–476; Voas 2009, 161–162; Zuckerman 2010, 104–109). It is also common for works which explicitly deal with indifference to cast it as a type of 'non-religion' or 'non-religiosity' (e.g. Bagg and Voas 2010, 99; Habgood 2000, 6; Lee 2012b, 131; Lee 2012a; Meulemann 2004, 48). As I shall now discuss, both of these understandings of indifference are conceptually problematic, and raise questions concerning the concept's usefulness as an analytic category. However, I shall then demonstrate that reframing these understandings in terms of discourse on 'religion,' in a manner consonant with the field approach advocated by Quack and Schuh (2017 – this volume), offers one potential solution to these problems.

Indifference as Ideal Type

Other chapters in this volume feature extended and worthwhile discussions on types of indifference, and on the generally negative–but potentially positive–connotations associated with the term in the English language.[4] My concern here is to demonstrate that whether we speak of 'evaluative' or 'disinterested' indifference at the level of the individual, the group, or society, problems occur when such indifferences are–intentionally or unintentionally–raised to the status of 'ideal type' with attendant notions of fixity and continuity.[5]

One particularly obvious means by which social actors might be assigned to a category of indifference is through explicit claims to or identifications with indifference. A key conceptual problem concerning explicit declarations of indifference is that the very fact of such declarations demonstrates an investment in whatever is perceived as 'religion'–as Lois Lee states, '[s]imply put, people who identify as

[4] See particularly Rebecca Catto (2017 – this volume) and the editors' introduction (Quack and Schuh 2017 – this volume).

[5] By pointing out the problematic nature of these particular ideal types, I do not wish to cast aspersions on the construction of ideal types in general. I merely wish to highlight the problems I can discern at this early stage in the theorisation of indifference, and offer a solution which can sidestep such problems. Indeed there are chapters in this volume–particularly those that take a quantitative approach (Bréchon 2017 and Siegers 2017 – both this volume) that productively proceed along ideal typical lines.

"indifferent to religion" are *not* indifferent to religion' (2012a, 160). In a previous publication (2015, 188 fn. 20) I highlight a statement of physician and science writer Ben Goldacre, who opines:

> I just don't have any interest either way, but I wouldn't want to understate how uninterested I am [in religion]. There still hasn't been a word invented for people like me, whose main experience when presented with this issue is an overwhelming, mind-blowing, intergalactic sense of having more interesting things to think about. (in Williams 2011)

In this piece, I ironically labelled this stance as 'truly indifferent', hinting at the tension between the substance of this statement, and the combination of emotion, rhetoric and probable motivation involved in its construction. Lee dubs this form of indifference 'engaged indifferentism', whereby 'disinterest in religion [... is presented as] the core aspect of an individual's "religious" identity and is something they are invested in and committed to' (2014, 474), and utilises her own examples to support her case. It is also clear, however, that Goldacre was responding to a direct question, making the description of an ideal-typical state of indifference even more problematic. What we can say is that when confronted with 'religion' in this context, Goldacre utilised an emotional discursive repertoire to place himself in a (seemingly desirable) position of indifference, with the specifics of said repertoire making it problematic to describe this statement *as* indifferent.

This example helps to emphasise that one cannot assume that declarations of indifference reflect an actual state that could be labelled as such. Such declarations might be taken to indicate 'that a person is struggling to articulate their outlook, rather than that they don't care' (Lee 2010). Similarly, due to an apparent tendency for people, when asked, to 'express opinions about almost anything, whether or not they have any knowledge of or interest in the topic' (Voas 2009, 161), declarations which appear to demonstrate opinions on 'religious' matters might arguably be more appropriately situated as articulations of indifference.[6] Furthermore, even if perceived manifestations of indifference can be considered contextually 'accurate', such manifestations 'can be significantly context dependent, changing either according to the way in which (non-)religion is being discussed or the purposes of an interaction' (Lee 2012a, 167). Indeed, due to the different aspects of 'religion' to which actors can relate, '[d]istance from religion, and thus indifference, is no clear-cut matter' (Quack and Schuh 2017 – this volume). Kim Knott has argued that the boundary between the 'religious' and the 'secular' can 'lie dormant and, as such, invisible' much of the time (2013, 214), only coming into focus at times of controversy (2005, 218).[7] This argument rings true in my own work examining the narratives of 'non-religious' students, whereby although the majority of narratives

[6] In a recorded roundtable discussion, Steven Sutcliffe made a similar point, stating that 'people have opinions about all kinds of things and contexts, and I think there's a danger that if you . . . take that as a cue for the introduction of the "nonreligious" . . . concern there's the risk of continuing to find "religion" wherever we can, . . . uncovering "religion" where really there isn't anything [there]' (in Connelly et al. 2012).

[7] See also Schuh, Burchardt and Wohlrab-Sahr on 'settled periods' where 'cultural understandings of secularity . . . remain latent' (2012, 359).

appeared largely indifferent to '(non-)religion', the students were keenly aware of where they stood when (non-)religion interacted with what mattered to them (Cotter 2015, 188). These observations combine to present a model of 'evaluative indifference' which is profoundly contextual, and which does not scan with labelling individuals, states or societies as 'indifferent' per se.

Given the paragraphs above, it might be tempting to imagine a form of relationship to the religious field that is marked (or *unmarked*) by an absence; a position of 'indifference' that is so called due to its position outside the field effects of 'religion' (cf. Quack 2014, 450–451). However, such a position is remarkably difficult for researchers to locate and, being outside the 'religion-related' field, seemingly of minimal relevance to academic discussions of this field. Lee defines indifference as 'a stance which requires at least some awareness of religion and therefore taking some position' (2012b, 131) and goes on to suggest that a 'disinterested indifference' might be a 'misnomer' with little chance of empirical substantiation. At an individual level it is, after all, 'hard to find people who know of religion and do not take some stance (or several stances) towards it' (2012b, 137 n. 5), and even if one could locate such subjects, the very research process might negate any 'indifference' through provoking a non-indifferent response (cf. Cotter 2011b, 11). In order to be considered 'indifferent' in this manner, it appears to be 'necessary to have engaged with and reacted to religion . . . in some way' (Wallis 2014, 83).

Taking a relational approach, Quack and Schuh avoid this problem of locating indifference by effectively arguing in their introduction that 'indifference' is only made meaningful in cases where religious and non-religious positions are at stake. I agree with them when they argue that in cases where there is an absence of (direct) relationship to religion, this:

> may be rendered remarkable by others e.g. because of their prior existence, either because such relationships are expected from the perspective of relevant agents or this absence is expressed in a context in which religion constitutes a relevant social reality. (2017, 12 – this volume)

The contextuality entailed in this relational approach further problematises ideal-typical approaches to 'indifference'.

Of course, in my opposition to a firmly-bounded conceptualisation of what 'indifference' is, I do not wish to preclude the possibility of something more stable, where social actors might adopt positions of indifference as part of a sustained reluctance to, for example, be mobilised into membership, public action, or identification. Such a notion of a more consistent indifference does not preclude potential shifts into more engaged positions of relating to religion. Neither does it preclude criticism from actors in other positions that it is not indifferent after all (think here of the self-presentation of certain forms of liberal secularism as neutral and indifferent, in contrast with its hegemonic and arguably oppressive construction of 'religion' as something benign and/or private).[8] My argument is that given the inherent relationality of the concept of indifference, and the variety of nuanced relationships

[8] Thanks to the editors for their helpful comments on this point. See also Nash (2017 – in this volume), on indifference as a space that is occupied, rather than a particular state.

that can be encapsulated by this single term, scholars should avoid reifying the concept into an ideal-type–as, indeed, they should avoid when considering the category of 'religion' in general–and instead embrace this relationality, and the contextuality that comes with it. Quack and Schuh's model sits well with this agenda and, as I shall outline below, facilitates a productive discursive approach to 'indifference.'[9] But before proceeding to that we must first discuss the conceptualisation of indifference as a form of 'non-religion'.

Indifference as a Form of Non-religion

To get this section started, it is now necessary to provide a working understanding of what I mean by 'non-religion'. Most discussions tend to begin with Lois Lee's definition of non-religion as 'anything which is *primarily* defined by a relationship of difference to religion' (2012b, 131 emphasis in original). Whilst this definition is very useful in creating a space for substantive study, it excludes phenomena such as humanism, naturalism, and rationalism because they are seen as ontologically autonomous from religion (see Quack 2014).[10] In order to open up the discussion, Johannes Quack has proposed locating non-religion in a 'religion-related' field comprising

> all phenomena that are considered to be not religious (according to the constitution of a concrete object of inquiry, a larger discourse on "religion," or according to a certain definition of "religion"), while at the same time they stand in a determinable and relevant relationship to a religious field. (2014, 450)

This 'determinable and relevant relationship' can take the form of criticism, competition, copy, cooperation and so on (Quack and Schuh 2017, 11 – this volume). Within this model it is not difficult to understand why scholars might wish to position indifference as outside the 'religious field' but within a non-religious sphere of influence. Indeed, understanding indifference to be a form of non-religiosity is relatively common with, for example, 'indifference to religion' being dubbed 'profound cases of nonreligious attachment and normativity' (Lee 2012a, 114; cf. Bagg and Voas 2010, 99; Habgood 2000, 6; Lee 2012b, 131; Meulemann 2004, 48). However, as I shall now argue, the attribution of indifference to social actors who might otherwise be dubbed 'religious', and the potential to conceptualise indifference as

[9] It is also worth noting that a discursive approach is not the only way in which difficulties surrounding 'locating' indifference could be addressed. As the metaphor implies, another significant avenue for 'locating indifference' would be to examine the variety of ways in which indifference is made manifest in bodily and spatial practices, such as Lee's analysis of 'banal nonreligion' (2012a, 90 ff.; 2015, 70–105).

[10] Lee has since refined her definition further, in acknowledgement of this critique: 'Non-religion is therefore any phenomenon-position, perspective, or practice - that is primarily understood in relation to religion but which is not itself considered to be religious' (2015, 32).

indifference to the entire 'religion-related field', create problems for viewing indifference as a form of non-religion.

Concerning the 'religious indifference' of the 'religious', it is important to acknowledge that in many contemporary contexts it is common for social actors to display indifference towards 'other' religions. Beckford lists 'indifference' alongside 'curiosity', 'amusement, derision, scorn and hatred' as a common attitude among 'religious majorities and minorities' when confronted with 'other' religions, 'even in situations of mutual tolerance and harmony' (2003, 84). And in his qualitative longitudinal study of 'discourses on religious diversity' in the city of Birmingham, UK, Martin Stringer has observed that, for many, religious diversity is 'known and assumed', and although their personal religiosity might be of 'utmost importance', 'the presence of other religions and their overt expression . . . is seen to be irrelevant, or we could say, accepted and normal' (2013, 69–70).[11] Going further, however, it is seemingly possible for 'religious' people to express 'indifference' to aspects, or almost the entirety,[12] of *their own* 'religion'. People who show indifference towards certain aspects of religion might well positively relate to others, or make use of specific religious goods in the sense of Davie's 'vicarious religion' (2007; 2008),[13] and although Voas might wish to claim that 'nominal adherents' to a religion are not 'actually religious', he makes a valid point when he claims that '[m]any nominal adherents are lapsed agnostics […a]rguably most are secular'–*or does he mean indifferent?* –'for all practical purposes' (2009, 162).[14] If, as these observations seem to suggest, 'indifference' can be coherently attributed to those who can otherwise be considered 'religious', then in what way does it make sense to speak of 'indifference' as a form of 'non-religion'? As I shall outline below, unless scholars wish to become embroiled in making decisions as to whether an individual who claims to be 'religious' is 'really non-religious' due to the fact that they exhibit 'indifference' to aspects of (other) religion(s), it makes more sense to speak of contextual discourses of indifference. This is, again, compatible with the field of relations approach as outlined in the introduction.

Finally, 'indifference' is frequently conceptualised not only as a stance relating to 'religion', but also as indifference to the entire 'religion-related field', and hence to 'non-religion'. Scholars attest to encountering a 'view which involves a rejection

[11] It is also worth noting that this understanding of indifference to religion as arising out of a situation of perceived pervasiveness of religion flies somewhat in the face of those who might assert that such indifference is an attribute primarily of thoroughly secularised societies (cf. Bruce 2002, 42).

[12] Presumably an individual cannot show indifference to the 'entirety' of their own religion, otherwise acts of identification would not occur by which they could be associated with a religion. That being said, this act of association–an act of positioning–need not be on the part of the individual in question. As demonstrated in the introduction, social actors can be designated as 'indifferent' by others.

[13] For more on differentiating indifference according to what aspect of 'religion' people are actually indifferent to, see section 4 of the editors' introduction.

[14] See also Hervieu-Léger (2000, 168), who describes a 'mounting indifference' to religious institutions exemplified by 'believers', and Lee and Klug (2017 – both this volume) on the contextuality and dimensionality of indifference.

of abstract thinking in general, be it religious or nonreligious in content' (Lee 2012a, 164), and argue that 'a society that is indifferent to manifestations of religion . . . ought, therefore, to be just as indifferent to manifestations of "nonreligion"' (Bullivant 2012, 100; cf. Bagg and Voas 2010, 107–108). More philosophically, Ivan Strenski makes that point that 'atheists and theists have far more in common–sharing the same discourse, although being at opposite ends of the exchange–than either have with those who are utterly indifferent to the issue of divine existence, goodness, and such' (2003, 7), while Pierre Bourdieu articulated something similar–in the negative–when he asked 'who can say they do not belong to [the religious field], at least negatively through non-indifference?' (Bourdieu 2010, 5; cf. Wood and Altglas 2010, 15). If 'religious indifference' comprises 'indifference to non-religion', then this presents problems for conceptualising it as a form of 'non-religion'. Indeed, doing so potentially reifies the category of 'religion' by placing perspectives that are 'indifferent' to the whole 'religion-related' conversation into an oppositional stance towards just the 'religious' parts of it. However, the quotation from Strenski hints at a potential way forward–taking a discursive approach to 'religion', 'non-religion' and 'indifference'–and it is to this approach that I now turn.

A Discursive Solution?

In order to avoid the conceptual problems I have outlined above, I propose viewing 'indifference' as a particular type of discourse on 'religion'. Although my discussion here shall be necessarily brief, it is worth stating that a discourse can be understood as a relatively coherent 'set of meanings, metaphors, representations, images, stories, statements, and so on', which are related to a macro-topic (here 'religion') and 'produce a particular version of events' (Burr 2003, 32; cf. Moberg 2013; Taira 2013, 28; Reisigl and Wodak 2009, 89; Garling 2013, 16). Discourses are 'socially constituted and socially constitutive' (Reisigl and Wodak 2009, 89), can be employed in situations involving multiple social actors (individuals, institutions etc.) with differing points of view, and 'are never static […but] constantly mutate and cross-fertilise in various ways' (Moberg 2013, 10), having meaning only through their invocation and deployment, just as a 'text has meaning only through its readers' and changes meaning along with them (de Certeau 1984, 170).

A discursive study allows scholars to remain fully reflexive about the fact that their studies are entirely contextual, turns our attention to 'the processes that *make* certain things . . . recognisably religious' (Bender 2012, 275), and sees 'each individual is a locus in which an incoherent (and often contradictory) plurality of . . . relational determinations interact' (de Certeau 1984, xi). Quack (and Schuh's) field approach outlined above and in the introduction can be understood discursively, and within such a model 'non-religion' becomes dissolved within a field of discourse on 'religion' comprising all discourses that stand in a 'determinable and relevant

relationship' to contextual constructions of religion.[15] Plenty of examples can be found to support this line of argument, from Grace Davie's assertions that 'belief' and 'unbelief' can be considered as two sides of the same coin (2012)–implicitly, as parts of the same discourse–to Stephen Bullivant's observations on how 'irreligious experiences' such as 'de-conversion' are articulated with explicit parallels to and sharing a vocabulary with 'religious' conversion experiences (2008).

If 'indifference' is conceptualised as a type of discourse on 'religion', it can also be incorporated into this model without any need to label it as 'religious' or 'non-religious'. Such discourses could manifest themselves in a number of ways. For example, it is possible to conceive of discourses which are not related to 'religion' and where the absence of such a relationship is

> rendered remarkable by others e.g. because of their prior existence, either because such relationships are expected from the perspective of relevant agents or this absence is expressed in a context in which religion constitutes a relevant social reality. (Quack and Schuh, 2017, 12 – this volume)

Such discourses might be termed 'indifferent discourses' in that there is no discursive reference to religion-related themes, and this absence is deemed relevant by particular agents–in this case, most likely the researcher. More explicitly, 'discourses of indifference' can be located where one encounters explicit claims to indifference, or evaluations, equivocations etc. that are demonstrably 'religion-related' but which suggest no significant investment or strong opinions on the part of the social actors in question. Discussion now turns to some empirical examples, in order to demonstrate the utility of such a discursive approach, and provide some tentative insights for development in future study.

Indifferent Discourses and Discourses of Indifference[16]

The empirical data that I draw upon in the remainder of this chapter has emerged from an ongoing research agenda to a) empirically substantiate the argument that 'non-religion' is best conceptualised as a contextual discourse on religion, b) map and analise the discourses in a particular micro-level context, focusing upon their entanglements and power relationships, c) and provide theoretical and methodological insights relevant to Religious Studies and beyond. In addition to general archival work and ethnographic observation in the Southside of Edinburgh,[17] I have

[15] Where 'field' should be understood as a contested space within which discourse relevant to a particular theme occurs.

[16] See the analogous distinction between 'considered' and 'unconsidered' indifference (Quack and Schuh 2017, 16 – this volume).

[17] Although not particularly relevant for this chapter, the organising rubric of my ongoing study is 'locality', i.e. spaces, whether material or discursive, that are 'meaningful for those [actors] within it, […are] important for individual and group identity, and […are] practical working environment[s]', which are also amenable to academic study due to their size and relative internal coherence (Knott

engaged in a discursive analysis of three discrete sets of interview data. The first of these is a collection of 37 transcripts of individual and group interviews conducted in 1995/1996 for the *Peoples of Edinburgh Project* (PEP).[18] Secondly, I am re-analysing 11 interview transcripts, and 62 questionnaire responses generated in 2011 as part of my MSc by Research project among 'non-religious' students at the University of Edinburgh (2011b; cf. 2015). Finally, I have conducted a further 21 individual interviews, and 2 interviews with married couples, all of whom (had) lived and/or (had) worked within 'the Southside'. These lasted between 45 and 100 minutes, involved elements of mapping, photo elicitation (Banks 2001, 87–98) and free-listing (Stausberg 2011), and focused particularly upon the Southside, the individual's life history and relationship to this locality, and points of connection between these narratives and the concept of 'religion'. These interviewees (had) worked primarily in a range of industries from (higher) education and IT consultancy, to secretarial and catering work, although it would be fair to say that all were reasonably comfortable financially. The majority claimed to have, or have had, some personal connection with various forms of Christianity, or to have never identified as 'religious'. For concision, my focus below is mainly upon three interviews conducted in 2014, with Aoife, Fiona, and Richard.[19] I shall now briefly introduce each interviewee, before using their narratives as lenses through which to examine indifference.

Aoife, Fiona, and Richard

Aoife is in her late twenties and works in university administration. Originally from England, she has lived in the Southside of Edinburgh for the past 6 years, and comes from a mixed Anglican-Presbyterian background, describing her family as 'actively Christian–we went to church a lot.' When discussing her 'religious journey' she described how she did 'identify myself as Christian for a long time, and I definitely saw a lot of positivity in Christian belief.' In her own words, 'it took me many years to actually identify that what I liked about Christianity, what I identified with, was basically positive social values that didn't necessitate Christian belief' but despite this realisation 'I still felt that there was an all-powerful being, . . . that there was a God, or there is a God, and it was something I couldn't shake.' She continued that 'it was only really over the last . . . three or four years that the feeling's kind of gone

1998, 283–284). This allows me to avoid extracting discourses 'from their historical context and eliminat[ing...] the operations of speakers in particular situations of time, place, and competition.'(de Certeau 1984, 20), and simultaneously to 'challenge . . . the conception of 'World Religions' as unities focused on discrete, systematic sets of traditions, and normative beliefs and practices'(Knott 2009, 159).

[18] A joint project between the City of Edinburgh Council's Museums and Galleries Division and the Workers' Educational Association (cf. City of Edinburgh Council 1996; Clark et al. 1996).

[19] All names are pseudonyms.

away. And I . . . don't feel negatively about it going away, it's just that it's not there anymore.' At the time of the interview she felt most comfortable with label 'agnostic', and described how, when completing the UK 2011 Census, she had wrestled with whether to answer the 'religion question'[20] with 'Church of England', 'Christian', or 'Agnostic': 'I had some trouble with it, for whatever reason, previously... although if I were given it now I'm much more comfortable with the idea of just putting "None". I wouldn't at that point give it a second thought...'

Fiona is in her early sixties and works as a primary school teacher. Originally from the west of Scotland, she moved to Edinburgh when she left school to attend university, and apart from a brief four-year period living in the north of the city, she has 'really always been in the Southside' for past 40 years. When discussing her 'religious journey' she described how she was 'taken to Sunday school' as a child by her parents who were members of the Church of Scotland, although her father 'kind of [grew] out of going to church as he became a wee bit older'. As a teenager Fiona began attending a friend's church 'and completely and utterly madly I got involved in being baptised as a seventeen year-old'. However, she has 'never gone to church since really', except for the occasional wedding, funeral or christening. If pressured into identifying in terms of 'religion' she would identify as an 'agnostic verging on atheist possibly', reacted positively to terms such as 'humanist' and 'non-religious', and recalled answering 'none' to the religion question on the census, but adding '"living my life with Christian principles" or something like that' to the census form.

Richard is in his late seventies and a retired technical writer. He was born in the Edinburgh district of Morningside, and spent his teenage years in the Southside before living for much of his life in England and other parts of Scotland, and moving back to Edinburgh 25 years ago. He is very interested in the local history of the Southside, and agreed to be interviewed for my project even though he repeatedly emphasised that he had very little to say about religion.[21] Richard comes from an Italian background on both sides of his family, describing being 'brought up the son of an Italian' and 'being Catholic in a predominantly Protestant country.' At the beginning of our conversation, when asked whether he would identify with any religious group he answered 'probably not, but if forced into one I would say the Quakers' (his wife identifies as Quaker). Later in the interview when we discussed various identifiers he placed himself as an agnostic, an atheist, and 'I suppose, if I was honest, Roman Catholic. There's a tiny, tiny bit . . . which has stuck.' Later, when we discussed the religion question on the census, Richard described 'only vaguely' remembering it, but quickly interjected 'I think I put "none" by the way.'

Each of these individuals cannot be unproblematically labelled as 'indifferent to religion' due to the fact that they have each identified with traditionally 'religious' signifiers in the past, and that they currently identify–in the context of one particular interview–in primarily 'non-religious' terms. Throughout these interviews, Aoife,

[20] 'What religion, religious denomination or body do you belong to?'

[21] A number of other interviewees did the same, as did many others who I could not convince to speak with me.

Fiona and Richard expressed demonstrably considered, and at points remarkably impassioned, positions related to particular aspects of 'religion'–both positive and negative–while at other times they discursively positioned themselves as 'indifferent' to different aspects of 'religion'. I shall now discuss three particular examples in order to illustrate the importance of disaggregating 'religion' into contextually relevant discourses for our understanding of 'indifference.'[22]

Different Discourses, Different Levels of Engagement

Due to an interviewer-initiated photo elicitation exercise, all interviewees discussed a particular material instantiation of religion-related discourse in the Southside, an image of an advert for the 'trypraying' initiative on the side of a local bus.[23] Richard opined that these kinds of adverts make him laugh, because 'it's such a waste of money and time and, well you can try if you like but it doesn't actually do any good'. However, he also didn't think that such public displays should offend anybody, and vocalised the sound of rushing wind as he stated 'it sort of <whoosh> goes over my head'. Fiona reacted particularly positively to the image, seeing it as 'brilliant' and 'very clever . . . from an advertising perspective,' while acknowledging that 'it wouldn't probably influence me but . . . I don't think it's a bad thing.' Other interviewees including Aoife reacted more negatively, seeing the campaign as 'devalu[ing] what humanity can do for itself,' and being 'very dismissive' of the scale of the problems some people face.

Even in these brief comments a number of entangled discourses surrounding this image can be seen to emerge. First of all, all three individuals engaged with it as a 'religious' image, containing a message of theological and ritual import, positioning themselves outside a presumed constituency who would find the performance of prayer to a supernatural force to have any relevance.[24] In this respect, each positioned themselves as somewhat indifferent to the perceived message. However, Richard and Aoife each also evaluated the potential social impact of this image, with Aoife considering it a particularly harmful message and Richard, although acknowledging a social cost in terms of time and money, viewing it as more of an amusing and harmless curiosity. Richard's attitude in this particular instance exemplifies a prevalent discourse on religion whereby, for example, the 'left-wing' press tend to cast Britain 'as secular and plural, with an accompanying discourse of

[22] And, indeed, for understanding 'religion.'

[23] This is a non-denominational Christian initiative, describing itself as 'for those who are not religious and don't do church.' One of the major outputs of this initiative is advertising on public buses around the UK with the simple slogan 'try praying.' Support for this initiative is voluntary and on a church-by-church basis. Many of the churches in Edinburgh have supported this initiative financially, and by placing banners similar to the bus adverts outside their buildings. See http://www.trypraying.co.uk/ and http://www.thereishope.co.uk/ for more information. (Accessed 16/05/2015).

[24] I cannot escape acknowledging that the context of the interviews will have likely contributed to this reaction.

Christian decline and irrelevance' (Knott et al. 2013, 174).[25] This 'discourse of indifference' explicitly engages with 'religion'–here 'Christianity'–and places it outwith the realm of phenomena that must be given serious attention, into a category that can be viewed as a matter of benign–if mildly amusing–indifference. Much of Fiona's commentary focused purely on the aesthetics of the image, in a manner which seemed entirely disconnected from her view on 'religion': 'I think it's very clever. I think from, eh, an advertising perspective, I mean, it's brilliant copy. It's a great strapline, I think it's fantastic.' These comments are clearly engaged with the discursive field of advertising and marketing. However, the discourses surrounding what makes 'brilliant copy' or the utility of 'great strapline[s]' are indifferent discourses with respect to 'religion', but clearly intersect with the 'religious' field in this instance.

Furthermore, both Richard and Aoife expressed views which invoked a broader multiculturalist discourse. Richard described how the image 'doesn't offend me, . . . it's not getting at people, . . . it's not one of these "We're right, you're wrong" type of statements' while Aoife placed it alongside similar 'religion-related' campaigns, stating 'I don't necessarily think it's any worse than certain bus adverts that atheists have put up as well,' but emphasising that 'it is good that people of any faith are interested in outreach of some kind.' Here, Richard invokes a particular discourse of indifference, whereby moderate expressions of 'religion' that do not make demands or impose upon the generalised user of that public space can be viewed with indifference. Conversely, public expressions of 'strong' or 'abnormal'–when judged against a hegemonic moderate Christian-secular hegemony–religion are problematic. Aoife's extolling of 'religious outreach' invokes this discourse through an almost inversion–there is a presumption of indifference on the part of 'people of any faith' towards the public arena, and this presumption is challenged by the advert in a manner that Aoife deems of relevance and benefit to the general (secular) populace.

Although it is difficult to tell what other discourses might have been invoked had these interviewees been pressed on the issue, it is clear that even this single image is implicated in a broad range of discourses on 'religion,' which can be invoked by the same individual in differing ways, including those which could described as 'indifferent discourses', and others as 'discourses of indifference.'

[25] Similar discourses are evident in the world of (stand-up) comedy, which can be seen as a useful barometer for a dominant 'left-leaning' constituency in contemporary Britain (cf. McKearney 2011; Cotter et al. 2012).

Indifference at the Centre and the Periphery

In the same photo elicitation exercise, each interviewee was presented with a photograph of the Southside Community Centre, which now occupies the former building of Nicolson Street Church,[26] and their comments represent a number of entangled discourses on the place of 'religion' (here, Christianity). Both Fiona and Aoife struggled to recognise where the Centre was located, despite the building being directly opposite a popular supermarket on the Southside's busiest thoroughfare, a place that is very familiar to Southside residents. Upon being told where it was, both acknowledged that they did recognise it, although they had walked past it for many years without paying much attention. Their statements implicitly construct the presence of churches as unremarkable, as part of a typical Scottish background. Fiona continued, suggesting that because Nicolson Street is such a 'shopping parade, you wouldn't really expect a big church to be there' but then immediately began to correct herself, acknowledging that 'there's actually quite a lot of churches up there reused. . . . Yeah, there's a heck of a lot of churches there.' Not only do these comments echo the background and normative character of an unobtrusive Christianity, they also place Christianity outside the hustle and bustle of the vibrant modern city, relegating it to a rural, traditional past.

The spatial metaphor of centre/periphery can help to conceptualise the discursive dynamics at play here, and provide an intriguing way for us to think about indifference. The discursive fragments above place 'Christianity' as an historically central component of the built environment of the Southside. However, it is perceptions of this historical centrality that lead Fiona and Aoife to place this very Christianity on the periphery of the Southside, as a matter of indifference. According to their own accounts, this physical manifestation of Christianity does not intrude upon their everyday experience of the Southside. However, when prompted in the context of the interview to consider this building, and to consider it in terms of 'religion', when it was brought from the peripheral status to which it been assigned back to the centre of Fiona's construction of the Southside, its presence–and with it, the presence of other such (former) churches–stimulated expressions of surprise at this 'matter out of place' (cf. Douglas 1966) in her constructed version of Nicolson Street as a busy and important local site of secular capitalism. Here we see a paradox of indifference, whereby 'Christianity' occupies a peripheral position in Fiona and Aoife's mental model of the Southside, whilst simultaneously retaining a central position in the physical environment and historical imaginary (in other words, it is simultaneously *not* 'matter out of place'). This very centrality is what allows Christianity to be assigned to the periphery–to a category of phenomena that can be viewed (locally) with indifference. It is perhaps little coincidence, then, that the Edinburgh Central Mosque just around the corner was not treated with such indifference

[26] The congregation that met in the church merged with two other congregations in 1969 (Pinkerton 2012, 32) and the Community Centre opened in 1986 (Palmer 2007). In the interim the building served as a saleroom.

throughout my interviews. Those objects and phenomena surrounded by discourses of indifference might in practice be those that are paradoxically invested with the most hegemonic power: perhaps indifference 'mask[s] hegemony' (cf. Martin 2010).

Returning to my interviewees' reactions to the image of the Community Centre, when reflecting on the visibility of church buildings in general, despite not being able to place this particular image Aoife stated that she definitely 'notices the [church] buildings [... in the Southside], especially because some of them are really stunning buildings . . . but I don't necessarily think about them . . . in any active way'. Once again, this alludes to an indifferent discourse of aesthetic appreciation which is quite distinct from any particular 'religious' connotations, but in this case indifference to religion is explicitly articulated, meaning that the statement straddles a boundary and can also be read as expressing something about the perceived place of Christianity. All three individuals–and indeed all of my interviewees–expressed positive views towards the fact that this particular (former) church, and many others like it, were being used by the community, and were being preserved as part of Edinburgh's architectural heritage.[27] Such notions conceptualise Christianity as an integral part of the history of the Southside, and reflect broader discourses on churches as resources which are, and *should be* resources for the whole community, and on 'proper' Christianity (and 'religion' in general) as something which is oriented towards 'good works' in the *whole community.* Indeed, Richard even wryly stated that 'it's better used as it is now than as a church,' but added that 'if people wanted to go in there and have a . . . service of some sort, [that's] fine,' which invokes a discourse (alluded to above) on certain 'religious' practices as benign, harmless curiosities.

Strategic and Tactical Indifference

In *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984), Michel de Certeau distinguishes between 'strategies' and 'tactics' in a manner that helps us understand my final example from the Southside. For de Certeau, a 'strategy' is the 'calculation (or manipulation) of power relationships that becomes possible as soon as a subject with will and power . . . can be isolated (de Certeau 1984, 35–36). It is a 'prerogative of the powerful', and demands both time and space, with panoptical vision (Woodhead 2012, 7). By contrast, 'a tactic is a calculated action determined by the absence of a proper locus' that must be utilised in the space of the 'other,' as demarcated by the contextually relevant hegemonic power (de Certeau 1984, 36–37). It does not have the option of general strategising or taking stock of the adversary, but 'operates in isolated actions, blow by blow' (de Certeau 1984, 37). Strategies are utilised by the powerful, with the benefit of foresight and planning, while tactics tend to be more

[27] See Burchardt (2017, 95–97 – this volume), on the transformation of 'religion' into 'secular cultural heritage.'

improvised and reactive, occurring on the 'battlefield' as opposed to in the war room.

Returning to the Southside, each of my interviewees reflected on the points at which 'religion' impacted upon their lives in a manner indicative of tactical and strategic discourses of indifference. Although Fiona was quite able and willing to discuss her own perspectives on 'religion' in our interview, she claimed that she 'wouldn't be articulating' these things in her everyday life. She claimed 'I'm not involved in conversations like that', and although she thought that among her friends 'I might know the odd person who is religious', she continued 'we don't have too much of a conversation about it'. She also couldn't recall any particular 'encounters with religion', or with particular people, where her perspective on it would have come to the fore. Similarly Aoife commented that although 'religion' does come up in conversations, the topic 'isn't necessarily any more prominent than conversations about existential philosophers and conversations about politics . . . and whatever else. So it . . . isn't a huge part of what I've done while I've been in Southside'. Although we cannot read too much into the factuality of such statements, I contend that given their demonstrable and sometimes notably strong opinions on certain matters such as 'faith schooling' (Fiona), L. Ron Hubbard's 'nonsense' (Richard), or David Cameron's comments concerning the UK as a 'Christian country' (Aoife),[28] such *tactical* statements of 'practical indifference' are entangled with a dominant,[29] *strategic* discourse that has been evident throughout all of my interviewees narratives (and alluded to above), a form of liberal secularist discourse that extols 'moderation' (or, equivocally, indifference) concerning questions of 'religion' in interpersonal interaction, and demonises 'militancy' or 'extremism' (effectively holding to a 'non-moderate' position and not keeping it to oneself). This scans well with Stephen Bullivant's observations concerning the Papal visit to the UK in 2010, where he suggested that 'people had . . . "internalised" the *perceived* indifference not only of the nation as a whole, but of people like themselves' (2012, 104), or Bagg and Voas's comments concerning how 'unusual' declarations of faith are among the British who 'pride themselves on their self-proclaimed "moderation" (2010, 94; cf. Beckford 1999, 34).[30] This pervasive, strategic indifference is perhaps best illustrated by the articulated neutrality of an ideal-typical 'secular state', which 'is not merely tolerant but defines itself as neutral with respect to the option between religious and non-religious ways of life', restricting itself and its citizens in their interactions with 'religion', and 'systematically distinguish[ing] the self-description of religious groups and traditions in their own imagery, conceptuality, or semantics' (Dalferth 2010, 334). Can a powerful 'indifference' which effectively snuffs out public expressions of difference be understood to be *merely* indifferent?

[28] See BBC News Online (2014).

[29] See Baumann (1996) for more on 'dominant' versus 'demotic' discourses.

[30] Similar points are made by Remmel on Estona, Catto and Nash on the UK, and Burchardt on Quebec (2017 – all this volume) – concerning the cultural hegemony of indifference and the attendant pressure to be indifferent (or to perform indifference).

To complicate matters further, Aoife acknowledges presenting a facade of 'indifference' or toeing the line when she is with her family:

> ...it's somewhat difficult, I haven't necessarily... I actually haven't told my family that I no longer see myself as Christian, and I probably wouldn't ever tell my grandparents, but I think being Christian was a huge part of what shaped me, . . . [and] I still see huge value in it for other people and for where I came from, but it's just not who I am.

This tactical presentation of 'indifference' to her family appears to be largely due to the importance she perceives them placing upon 'Christianity', and the perceived effects that her taking an alternative more actively 'non-religious' stance would have. Such negotiations implicate 'religion' in broader discourses on the family, and echo findings from my previous work where, in many cases, an 'emphasis on the family takes precedence over (non)religious identification, and is associated with an image of 'religion'–positive or negative–which is closely linked to intimate relationships' (2015, 186).

Conclusion

The point of this discussion has been to emphasise that when instances of indifference are conceived of in terms of discursive acts, rather than as the social actor *being indifferent* to religion, we see that from moment to moment these individuals are not necessarily operating with a coherent or set understanding of what 'religion' is, nor are they necessarily invoking a discursive repertoire related to 'religion' at all. Rather, a more appropriate model might be that they assign specific phenomena or encounters to particular fields of discourse (where 'religion' is one potential but not necessary field),[31] and engage with them by negotiating a repertoire of contextually relevant entangled discourses. Thus, for example, an individual such as Fiona might explicitly or implicitly exemplify a contextual 'indifference' towards 'Roman Catholicism' as a 'religion', yet take an oppositional stance towards 'Catholic schools' on 'educational' or 'community cohesion' grounds. By focusing upon the particular discourses at work in a particular field (in a manner conversant with the field approach taken by the editors to this volume), and viewing this field through lenses such as the centre/periphery metaphor or de Certeau's strategies and tactics, we can avoid 'inaccurately' labelling an individual as 'indifferent', and develop a greater appreciation of the entangled discourses that might be at work in a particular context, whilst simultaneously avoiding reifying 'religion' as the only lens through which to interpret such interactions.

[31] Due to the nature of the particular interviews involved in my study, where interviewees were knowingly participating in a study related to 'religion', it was somewhat inevitable that the repertoire of discourses invoked would be 'religion-related'. However, this brief discussion has illustrated that this need not have been the case.

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Interfaith Dialogue and the Challenge of Indifference: Reflections from Fieldwork in the City of Peace and Reconciliation

Rebecca Catto

Abstract From recent qualitative research investigating interfaith dialogue in the English city of Coventry, it becomes apparent that committed individuals work hard running interfaith activities and organizations and the local authority is taking a leading role in supporting these. However, the reach of such work is unclear.

Practitioners speak about pursuing social cohesion through dialogue and the commonalities across religions. Yet, such discourse excludes the growing numbers nationally and locally who appear to be religiously indifferent and uninterested, as well as the actively nonreligious minority. Focus group participants from across the city, both religious and nonreligious, expressed little awareness of interfaith work, or concern with it. This chapter explores this tension against the backdrop of wider sociological research on indifference and social change and youth and religion in Britain. Religious indifference is ambivalent in the religiously ambivalent context of contemporary Britain, with power, relevance, and peaceful coexistence at stake.

Keywords Coventry • Britain • Cohesion • Youth • Religious literacy

Introduction

Reflecting upon the "Interfaith Dialogue in Coventry" project presented in the following chapter and wider research to date (Catto 2013, 2014; Catto and Eccles 2013), it seems to me that one of the most significant challenges for religious engagement with wider society in twenty-first century Britain is sheer indifference and lack of interest. This chapter focuses on a particular way religiously indifferent individuals are interpellated by members of a particular part of the religious field, namely interfaith practitioners, in the specific context of the English city of Coventry,

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with reference to Great Britain more broadly.[1] I aim to link the issues of interfaith dialogue, cohesion, and indifference, connecting religious indifference to broader sociological conceptions of it. I focus on indifference in the Western European, urban context as it is in such a context that fieldwork was conducted and upon which much of the relevant literature concentrates.

What indifference to religion is depends upon what religion is in context. In their introduction to this volume Quack and Schuh (2017 – this volume) quite correctly highlight the diversity of the religious field, at a basic level drawing the distinction between belief, behaviour and belonging. Here religious indifference is linked to wider understandings of indifference as lack of engagement and awareness (passivity/irrelevance), rather than the philosophical principle of indifference (evaluative indifference) or lack of bias (Novack 2010). The emphasis is upon feeling, attitude, and experience more than cognitive stance – everyday indifference, as it were, in relation to institutional religion, and mostly upon how such religious indifference is constructed and construed by and of consequence for those who are engaged in the institutional religious field.[2]

Attention is paid to the question of youth engagement in particular, because, as is developed below, this is a growing area of concern for members of the religious field and scholars of religion alike, with parallels in youth studies literature. Religious practitioners and scholars associate indifference with ignorance and apathy and thus problematize it. Indifference then in turn becomes linked to the question of where society is going. Narratives of social decline with individualization and secularization compete with those rather of change and relocation of beliefs and values.

I then move on to consider a specific aspect of the religious field: interfaith dialogue, which seeks to improve relationships across religious differences. It involves crossing boundaries and engagement with the Other, and is associated with peace building and cohesion. Indifference as lack of knowledge, awareness, and understanding is part of what interfaith work seeks to change.

The challenge indifference presents to interfaith dialogue is explored in the final section of the chapter, drawing upon research conducted in Coventry. In the religiously ambivalent context of contemporary Britain religious indifference is also ambivalent, but it is nonetheless a dimension of growing account.

[1] Great Britain is defined as the nations of England, Scotland and Wales and it is used interchangeably in this chapter with the term Britain.

[2] This approach is related to and yet distinct from Burchardt's (2017 – this volume) where he examines how the indifferent are constructed by the actively nonreligious and religious in Quebec.

Approaching Indifference

There is no need here to rehearse the full background to the study of religious indifference as this is well presented and analyzed by Quack and Schuh (2017 – this volume) in the introduction to and elsewhere in this volume.[3] Hence, this section only highlights specific sociological approaches to indifference pertinent to the discussion and unaddressed elsewhere.[4]

As the editors point out, indifference, religious or otherwise, tends to have negative connotations. It tends to be associated with apathy and relativism. Yet, it has also been more positively evaluated.

In 1997 Stichweh sketched a sociology of indifference, building upon work on the sociology of the stranger, in particular that by Simmel (Stichweh 1997). In the article Stichweh argues that in modern society the binary between kin and stranger, friend and enemy, no longer pertains. There is a third category: the numerous, anonymous others one is surrounded by on a daily basis in modern urban contexts. With the functional differentiation of social relations in such a setting, uncertainty is reduced and there is no need either to accommodate or exclude the stranger – they can simply be given no further attention: "That means that hospitality as an institution revalorized in symbolical and religious terms and legitimized by this cultural interpretation is superseded by the new attitudinal complex of indifference which describes our everyday attitude towards nearly all other persons in modern society." (Stichweh 1997). Stichweh (1997) compares his conception of indifference to Goffman's of "civil inattention" and Allan Silver's of "routine benevolence".

Tonkiss (2003, 2010) goes further in positively evaluating such indifference in the big city, standing up for it as an ethical approach. One makes room for others in public space through the very act of ignoring them. He argues that indifference is therefore itself a social relation, accommodating others. It can be liberating to those who may be most likely to attract unwanted attention or harassment such as women, those with disabilities or racial, ethnic or religious minorities. Tonkiss (2010) refers to routine coexistence, echoing Stichweh's references to civil inattention and routine benevolence. He also draws upon Simmel: "for Simmel relations of indifference or even aversion are the only feasible way of being together in a crowded city." (Tonkiss 2003). Tonkisss' argument relates as well to recent geographical research on everyday multicultures, which places emphasis upon how people live together on a daily basis in diverse contexts rather than top-down policy interventions (Neal et al. 2013).

Yet, Tonkiss (2003, 2010) also recognizes the ambivalence of indifference – that ignoring social problems and others' needs could intensify inequalities and exclusions. This point picks up a different, more critical sociological discourse in relation

[3] See, in particular, Lee (2017 – this volume).

[4] It was only after Rebecca's presentation that we realized the importance of this other notion of indifference, and its link with secularity. We are very thankful for this inspiration. Johannes Quack and Cora Schuh.

to indifference. In an article on human rights and morality in late modernity Smith writes:

> Ontological security and the (uneasy) comfort of relative certainty are bought at a cost. In the interests of order, the state assumes responsibility for shaping social relations, law governs the dangerous moral proclivities of individuals and socialization ensures the assimilation of ethical codes . . . . In relinquishing responsibility to the state (and the market . . .) and exchanging moral struggle for the seductive sureness of ethical codes, humankind allows itself to become morally indifferent. Modernity blunts moral sensibility, eschews moral agency and undermines a capacity for autonomous choice . . . . A nagging sense of meaninglessness reflects the containment of moral issues – madness, sexuality, death, nature, responsibility and so on – that challenge us to find an existential anchor and a sense of human relatedness to inform our being in the world . . . . (Smith 2002, 45)

Here there is a dark side to indifference associated with late capitalist consumerism and the abdication of personal responsibility. As will be seen below, this ambivalence in broader, sociological understandings of lived indifference and social change in modernity relates to religious indifference and interfaith dialogue.

Within the Sociology of Religion

Wohlrab-Sahr and Kaden (2014, 111) distinguish three nonreligious positions: one is anti-religious, "then a position that is basically *a-religious* (although *not indifferent*) and pluralistic in its basic approach, where religion is partly and selectively relevant, for example, where strong religious validity claims attempt to constrain the liberal functioning of society; and finally an *indifferent* attitude that no longer positions itself either positively or negatively in relation to religion." This differs somewhat from Quack and Schuh's characterization (2017 – this volume). For Wohlrab-Sahr and Kaden's (2014) analysis, indifference towards religion is less relevant as, according to them, it does not explicitly determine a relationship to religion, whereas, for Quack and Schuh, with religious indifference there is still an indirect relationship to religion. This illustrates that, as is the case more generally, differing understandings of indifference are operating in the sociology of religion.

Here I follow Quack and Schuh rather than Wohlrab-Sahr and Kaden's definition of indifference towards religion and their further distinction between indifference towards religiosity (that is an absence of what could plausibly be one's religion in one's life) and indifference towards religion (towards religion's position in society). As they observe, there are degrees and contextual variations to such indifference. Hence, as raised above in the introduction, this chapter focuses upon what I term 'lived' or 'everyday indifference', which is in keeping with Franzmann's understanding of religious indifference as religion having no practical significance for one's daily life (cited in Quack and Schuh 2017, 6 – this volume). This goes hand in hand with a lack of interest in, a lack of reflexivity regarding, a lack of engagement, and inattention to religion – indifference as a social relation as Stichweh and Tonkiss apply it.

Indifference is not a new area of interest within the sociology of religion. In 1969 students at the London School of Economics conducted an enquiry into superstition and belief in the London borough of Islington. Their lecturer at the time Martin reported:

> One student located a man who appeared totally indifferent to religious practice and belief until asked whether he believed in God. He paused, then said that he had once been on a jury and had taken the oath, hence he must believe in God since if he did not he ought to have admitted it at the time. (Martin 1969, 13)

This anecdote speaks to the important differentiation in the social scientific study of religion between belief, belonging, and behaviour. Martin (1969) continues to reflect upon the difficulty of measurement, and of relating empirical questions to general ethos and both to historical events, taking World War I as his example:

> The War set off moods, attitudes, indifferences, commitments of all kinds, dislocations, which must have had an impact on religious practice. But it is almost impossible to locate and verify the broad tendencies set in being by such an 'event' as the War for the institutional practice of the Church, especially its statistical health. (Martin 1969, 13)

In the 1960s and 1970s Budd (1977) conducted innovative research into nonreligious cultures in England. She challenges nineteenth century evolutionary accounts of religion by pointing out that anthropological data indicate "the indifference and disinterest which many members of simple cultures display towards metaphysical ideas" (Budd 1973, 26). Thus, the evolutionists' assertion that "primitive societies" are more religious is more an assertion of what they wish to be the case than the reality. Budd continues: "Lukewarm commitment, reluctance to attend church, and resort to superstitious explanations have, if priests and parsons are to be believed, long been true of the English… Each generation thinks itself uniquely irreligious…" (Budd 1973, 124). These observations from Budd raise the question of social change or continuity in terms of indifference and the wider field of nonreligiosity, and in relation to the British context specifically – the context I now move on to consider.

Religious Indifference in Contemporary Britain

Religion is a contested part of simultaneously Christian, secular, and religiously plural contemporary British society (Weller 2005). Christianity remains the majority religion and, overall, more people identify as religious than nonreligious, though the latter group is growing rapidly (OFN 2013). Thus in this context religious indifference can be remarkable for religious, political and legal agents, and scholars of religion alike.

As Davie (2015) discusses, there is a mismatch between the growing evidence of nonreligious populations in British society and growing public interest in religious matters, Islam most prominently but not exclusively (Knott et al. 2013). The Prime Minister David Cameron's 2014 public Easter address that included the statement

that Britain is a Christian country and the controversy provoked by it are indicative of this seemingly contradictory situation.[5] In his public response the Anglican Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, commented: "Christian faith is much more vulnerable to comfortable indifference than to hatred and opposition."[6] The British Humanist Association (BHA) organized a letter to the national newspaper *The Telegraph* signed by 55 public figures including members of the BHA repudiating Cameron's address.[7] The range of responses illustrates the observation by Smith and Holmwood (2013) that opposing poles need each other to sustain themselves and thus moderation is a threat to both, a point made in relation to religious-nonreligious tensions in particular by many others (Bullivant 2012; Wohlrab-Sahr and Kaden 2014; Quack and Schuh 2017 – this volume). There is power at stake in claims to societal hegemony, or at the very least relevance, which those who are uninterested challenge.

Smith and Holmwood (2013) call for a sociology of moderation: study of the middle ground as well as the extremes which tend to be sociology's preoccupation. Research into indifference already cited in this chapter, presented in this volume, and previously published in relation to British society specifically may be viewed as fulfilling such a call (Bagg and Voas 2010; Davie 2010; Day 2012; Lee 2014). Such work underlines the distinction between indifference towards religiosity and towards religion, contextual variation, and generational difference. In the British context, Christianity is the religion that could most commonly, plausibly be one's own, hence the religion that religious indifference is generally studied in relation to. Quack and Schuh (2017, 17 – this volume) highlight the variability of indifference, that one may not necessarily be indifferent to all religion at all times. Davie (2010, 2015) and Day's (2012) research in particular draws out how one may be part of the British Christian religious field in some aspects (in terms of identification, ritual, endorsement), yet indifferent to others (regular participation, orthodoxy, salience in daily life).

Religious Education and acts of worship in public schools in England and Wales are primarily focused upon Christianity, unless otherwise designated (which rarely occurs). Hence, Christianity remains the most plausible religious possibility for most younger as well as older people in Britain. Yet, indifference towards Christianity appears to be increasing with younger generations, suggesting a societal trend (Bagg and Voas 2010). Thus, young people become an important site for the study of indifference.

[5] https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/easter-reception-at-downing-street-2014 (accessed 05.11.14).

[6] http://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/blog.php/20/a-christian-country (accessed 05.11.14 and cited in Collins-Mayo 2015).

[7] http://www.telegraph.co.uk/comment/letters/10777417/David-Cameron-fosters-division-by-calling-Britain-a-Christian-country.html (accessed 05.11.14).

Youth and Indifference in Britain

Budd's criticism of the evolutionists above reminds us of the question of social development. For Franzmann religious indifference is a product of secularization (Quack and Schuh 2017, 6 – this volume). Similarly, for Stichweh (1997), indifference is related to functional differentiation in modernity. Trends amongst young people[8] in particular are frequently taken to indicate where society is going. From a project investigating religious education across Europe, Willaime (2008, 25) concludes that: "religion is of no concern to a large number of the adolescents surveyed… This indifference and this tendency to see the situation in relative terms are as important as, if not more important than, the ability to exchange opinions and the knowledge acquired of other people's religions in accounting for the generally relaxed approach students take towards religion. We can thus speak of a type of passive tolerance."

Overall in Britain it appears that younger generations are less religious than older ones, though the pattern does not necessarily hold across all religious groups. The question of what more traditional forms of religiosity are giving way to (rejection, more networked forms, spiritual beliefs, indifference) is moot (Catto 2014). Analyzing data gathered with young people participating in Christian youth work activities in Britain, Collins-Mayo (2015) adopts the term "benign indifference." that anthropologist Kate Fox (2004) uses to capture English people's attitude towards God:

> benign indifference also provides an apt description of our young infrequent churchgoers' attitude towards God, the Church and religion in general. On the whole they did not think much about any of them. For day–to–day living, meaning, hope and purpose were located in the more immanent entities of family and friends and one's self. Yet our young people were not hostile to God, the Church or religion either . . . (Collins-Mayo 2015, 185)

Collins-Mayo (2015, 185–186) goes on to describe how for these infrequent churchgoers "religion did not appear to feature in the reflexive construction of personal identity…", yet they described themselves as Christian, again highlighting variable relations to the religious, in this context Christian, field.

Madge et al. (2014) conducted mixed-methods research about their religious identities with high school students in three, contrasting multi-faith communities in England. They categorized respondents as 'Strict Adherents', 'Flexible Adherents', 'Pragmatists' and 'Bystanders'. Just under a quarter of the sample (10,376 pupils aged between 12 and 18 completed the project survey) comprised 'Bystanders' who thought little about religion and for whom it was of little importance: could be classified as indifferent. Also, 'Pragmatists' (20 per cent of the sample) religious views were not clear-cut or a priority for them. Madge et al. discuss the difficulty of recruiting people to participate in interviews about a subject they rarely think about.

[8] For the purposes of this chapter, young people are roughly defined as those aged between 13 and 25 years old, whilst acknowledging that constructions of youth are context dependent.

Hence a smaller proportion of participants in the face-to-face part of the project constituted 'Bystanders'. Nonetheless, one interviewee put it thusly: "I don't think - nobody in my family is religious…. So I've just sort of like developed into not believing in God, if you know what I mean. Because it's never been something that I've had to think about" (Madge et al. 2014, 143). The team conclude that strong beliefs, including nonreligious ones, are more consistently passed on from parents to children than equivocal religious positions. They found Christianity facing the most noticeable decline relative to other religious groups.

These data reinforce the impression of growing indifference amongst young people in Britain growing up against a Christian backdrop. Both Collins-Mayo and Madge et al. adopt frameworks from Davie in order to interpret their data – vicarious religion and a shift from obligation to consumption in terms of religion respectively (Davie 2006). Collins-Mayo (2015, 183) is also keen to emphasize that this vicariousness is potentially transitory as "the roots of cultural Christianity do not run deep" for her infrequently churchgoing young people.

Changing interactions of youth and religion tend to be interpreted either as a sign of loss and decline in our neoliberal age or, less negatively, as a move to more networked forms of participation and a relocation of beliefs and values. This discourse runs parallel (and sometimes intersects with) concerns regarding young people's disengagement from formal politics and other traditional institutions such as trade unions (O'Toole and Gale 2010). Stichweh (1997, 12) concludes that in modern democratic politics the biggest challenge is "how to motivate the undecided, normally indifferent elector" – thus tying his broader interpretation of indifference to (lack of) political participation in particular. Indeed, there is concern in Britain that young people's relatively low turnout at national elections means that politicians neglect their needs and interests.[9]

Religious indifference becomes part of wider narratives of increasing social and institutional indifference amongst younger people indicating the differential impacts of processes of modernization and secularization and neoliberalism and consumerism upon Western societies. Such indifference may be viewed as problematic or benign depending on one's position. For those seeking to sustain institutions: politicians, religious practitioners, it is problematic. How do you encourage people who are indifferent to engage, as Collins-Mayo's mission-oriented Christian youth workers are attempting to do? Interfaith dialogue is a particular dimension of the religious field in which practitioners seek to engage wider society and from which young people are generally conspicuous by their absence.

[9] http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/labour-mp-sadiq-khan-admits-young-people-are-neglected-by-politicians-9956943.html (accessed 05.06.16).

Interfaith

Interfaith dialogue may be broadly conceived as interaction across religious boundaries aimed at improving understanding and relationships. As in contact theory, there is a concern to create the right conditions for intergroup contact that stimulates a positive change in attitude towards the out group. Such contact consequently demands some depth of engagement (Pettigrew et al. 2011). Though it is difficult to evaluate the impact and outcomes of interfaith dialogue (Garfinkel 2004; McCallum 2013), there is a belief in its benefits. Internationally a strong connection is drawn between interfaith work and peace building (Halafoff 2013).

Numerous national and local governments support and invest in interfaith activities given their faith in interfaith's capacity to contribute to social cohesion in areas of religious diversity in an era of fear and concern about groups living in "silos" and "parallel lives" (Community Cohesion Unit 2004; del Mar Griera and Forteza 2011; Martikainen 2013). In an article critiquing the claim of a public return of religion, Beckford (2010) analyzes the British government's strategic approach towards the "faith sector" between 1997 and 2010, including policy concerning interfaith dialogue in particular. For him, signs of religious activity in the British public sphere are "evidence of government policies designed to make use of faith communities and inter-faith co-operation for the purpose of promoting social cohesion and public security" rather than religious resurgence (Beckford 2010, 133).[10]

This instrumental approach to interfaith dialogue as a tool for integration and welfare has been continued since 2010 by the Coalition Government, as demonstrated by the Department for Community and Local Government's 2012 report "Creating the Conditions for Integration" (DCLG 2012), which outlines its support for a variety of initiatives including multifaith ones such as the Inter Faith Network for the UK and the Near Neighbours programme run by the Church of England's Church Urban Fund.[11] Hence, though there have been cuts to national and local government support for community work, including faith-based initiatives, there remain consequences in terms of funding and national recognition and influence at stake in the question of the social relevance and importance of religion. The Government continues to struggle with how to deal with violent extremism and there is a related wish and willingness to recognize and support what are regarded as positive religious contributions to society.

Beckford's (2010) conclusion speaks to the tension between public interest in religion and overall decline across various measures of religiosity in Britain already highlighted. There is a trend towards emphasizing religious literacy rather than interfaith dialogue in British academic and policy circles in acknowledgment and a problematizing of current levels of illiteracy/ignorance, especially amongst young people (Dinham and Francis 2015). Though Religious Education (RE) is compulsory

[10] Beckford (2010) emphasizes the specificity of the British context in this regard relative to other Western contexts considered in Casanova's (1994) deprivatization of religion thesis.

[11] https://www.cuf.org.uk/how-we-help/near-neighbours (accessed 10.11.14).

in state-funded schools, there are concerns regarding its quality. A recent large-scale study found that in RE classes in the UK: "On occasion – as with some schools in the study operating in areas of secularism, indifference, and hostility to religion – the tapestry can be almost blank, offering no points of reference from which to begin an exploration of the processes of meaning making within a given religious culture" (Conroy et al. 2012, 322).

At the national level there is interest in engaging with the actively non-religious in interfaith dialogue. The theme for the 2009 national Inter Faith Week was "religious/non-religious dialogue" and the Inter Faith Network, who organize inter faith week, ran a joint event with the British Humanist Association (BHA) as part of the week (IFNUK 2009). The national interfaith charity 3FF along with partners including the BHA organized an event entitled "Including the Non-Religious in Interfaith" in London in 2013 featuring American humanist interfaith activist Chris Stedman.[12] Yet how can interfaith practitioners engage the indifferent?

Interfaith approaches offer a different route to coexistence than Tonkiss' routine coexistence or the everyday multicultures literature. Interfaith dialogue aims for face-to-face interaction as well as living side-by-side (DCLG 2008). There is emphasis upon building a relationship with the Other which depends upon a mutual willingness to engage (Barnes 2009). Hence the religiously indifferent are a challenge to interfaith dialogue. What happens when the stranger is uninterested in one's hospitality rather than a potential guest or enemy (Stichweh 1997)? This "group" is not a coherent minority to engage with. It has no leaders, no organization, no sacred text to discuss, food or rituals to share in. Nonetheless, in the context of contemporary Britain, if, as an interfaith practitioner, one is seeking engagement with wider society towards social integration (as advocated extensively in interfaith literature and by government), then the religiously indifferent are an important constituency to consider. 3FF's annual Urban Dialogues showcasing religion-related art and music in East London can be seen as a successful effort to engage those, especially young people, who may have no direct interest in religion.[13]

In the City of Coventry

How do interfaith practitioners tackle the challenge of the indifferent in a local context? In this section I investigate this question drawing upon fieldwork conducted in Coventry. Between September 2013 and January 2014, with funding from Coventry University, I set about conducting a small study comprising nine interviews with key stakeholders, participant observation at 14 events, and four focus groups with Christians, a mixed group of people of different faiths and none, 16–18 year olds at a local school, and Muslims, all from a mix of backgrounds and not involved directly

[12] https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/including-the-non-religious-in-interfaith-with-chris-stedman-tickets-8828390955 (accessed 10.11.14).

[13] http://www.3ff.org.uk/arts/ (accessed 10.11.14).

in organizing interfaith activities.[14] Thus I tried to begin to access the question of how formal interfaith dialogue in the city relates to the wider community: the project was not originally designed to address the topic of religious indifference specifically.

In June 2013 I had attended "Interfaith and Communities Conference, A Dialogue with Faith Communities" at the City Council House in Coventry, convened partly in response to the murder of soldier Lee Rigby in London the previous month and subsequent anti-Muslim attacks in the West Midlands (the English region within which Coventry is located). Again, the association of interfaith dialogue with social cohesion and good relations was extant, and piqued my interest.

Coventry is a small city with a history of periods of industrial growth and recession since the late nineteenth century and related settlements of people from across the world. This has led to the growth of various religious communities and places of worship in the city. Coventry is more religiously and ethnically diverse than the national average. The broad-level 2011 Census results are as follows:

- Proportion of population declaring no religion in 2011: 23% – slightly below the figure for England (25%).
- 53.7% Christian, compared to 59.3% for England and Wales as a whole.
- Muslims constitute 7.5% of the population (for England and Wales the figure is 4.8%).
- Sikhs make up 5% (England and Wales 0.8%).
- Hindus 3.5% (England and Wales 1.5%).
- Other faiths represented in Coventry include: 32 Baha'i, 17 Druid, 98 Jain, 359 Pagan, 46 Rastafarian, 436 Ravidassia, 13 Satanist, 196 Spiritualist, 22 Taoist, 60 Wicca, and 38 Zoroastrian.

(Sources: "Census Briefing – Religion in Coventry", Corporate Research, and "What does the Census tell us about religion in 2011?", Office for National Statistics).

Coventry is known as the City of Peace and Reconciliation following the city's response of forgiveness and engagement, led by Coventry Cathedral's Provost Dick Howard, to the 1940 Blitz which damaged the city, including the Anglican cathedral, extensively. The cathedral continues to play an active role in international peace building networks. It also plays a key role locally, including in interfaith initiatives, with its central location, symbolism of the bomb-damaged ruins of the old cathedral juxtaposed with the modern one, and strong ties to the city council and Coventry's universities (Coventry University and the University of Warwick). World War II and the Holocaust are used as a touchstone in interfaith dialogue in general: a reminder of the terrible, ultimate consequences that being a bystander (indifferent) can have and consequent obligation to do something rather than nothing, even though the impact of the work is difficult to observe and evaluate.[15]

[14] I am very grateful to all participants for taking the time and effort to be part of the research.

[15] The Prime Minister's 2014 Commission on the Holocaust is an example of the association made between interfaith, the Holocaust, and the ongoing need for intervention (education in particular):

At the June 2013 City Council event and others I attended, Coventry was promoted as a relatively peaceful and harmonious city, especially given that it had not experienced social disturbances in 2001 or 2011 as other English post-industrial towns and cities had. Again, a strong link was publically drawn between interfaith relations and social cohesion. Hence, I asked focus group participants about this reputation. There were reports of experiences of racial and anti-Muslim abuse. The young people were overall the most negative about social relations in Coventry and spoke about encountering anti-immigrant attitudes locally. One interviewee drew attention to race-related attacks in the 1980s and a recent disturbance at a Sikh-run community centre by young male Sikh "extremists," others to recent tensions between groups of young Sikh and Muslim men (notably none of them themselves either Muslim or Sikh, and the local police also played down such tensions). Concerns that people in the city did live "parallel lives" were expressed in earlier research about the cathedral and peace and reconciliation in Coventry (Williams 2011). Nevertheless, the general consensus in focus groups and interviews was agreement that Coventry is relatively safe and peaceful.

I discovered in the city an enduring, diverse interfaith scene, which has developed from the 1980s onwards. The Coventry Multi-Faith Forum and Coventry Inter Faith Network and numerous other groups participate. Every November the Multi-Faith Forum organizes the Coventry Peace Walk, which starts with multifaith prayers in front of the Forum's visitors' centre housed within the cathedral precinct. The 50–80 participants then walk through the city visiting various places of worship. The Walk again demonstrates the connection made locally between interfaith work and peace building. It also indicates the small-scale impact of interfaith activities in the city relative to the population as a whole, which is approximately 330,000: the reach in terms of proportion of population is small.

Yet, if there is, in general, the everyday cohesion in Coventry described, then is there a need for organized interfaith activities? Key stakeholders interviewed felt that interfaith work over the decades in Coventry – along with other initiatives such as anti-racist movements – had contributed to good relations in city. They asserted that work behind the scenes and communication between different religious and community leaders does make a difference. The belief was expressed, including by a member of the police's regional Counter Terrorism Unit, that maintaining routes of communication is important, even if people do not engage. Yet there was also agreement amongst practitioners that such impact is difficult to gauge. Challenges commonly identified with interfaith dialogue were played out and discussed locally: the lack of younger people participating, poor representation of women in decision-making, and the same old faces participating at events: little wider reach, despite this being a stated aim (though sheer numbers engaged is by no means the only, or necessarily main, indicator of success for interfaith practitioners). When the nonreligious constitute almost a quarter of the population, they become a significant group to consider outreach to.

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https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/the-holocaust-commission-keeping-the-memory-alive (accessed 04.11.14).

Engagement with the Nonreligious and Religiously Indifferent

In a recent chapter, Phan and Tan (2013) consider how majority-minority status affects interreligious dialogue in the United States, Sri Lanka, India, Malaysia, and Pakistan. They conclude that: "Authentic dialogue can only arise from genuine relations of mutuality and solidarity…" (Phan and Tan 2013, 239). Only one non-conformist Christian respondent in Coventry expressed concern with the Church of England's leading role in local dialogue, but, nonetheless, as Phan and Tan (2013) highlight, power relations pertain in such majority-minority situations.

As the Census data above indicate, alongside the Christian majority, those declaring "No religion" constitute the next largest group in both Coventry and England as a whole. However, in interviews and at interfaith events in Coventry, practitioners spoke very little about engagement with the nonreligious and I did not encounter any atheists, humanists, or secularists at interfaith events. Rather, a rhetoric of what religious people tend to share emerged: belief in God and an afterlife, prayer, values. As Elsdon-Baker (2013) has pointed out, there is a danger in dialogue of, by establishing common ground, creating another out group. In such interfaith rhetoric there is a risk that the nonreligious become the excluded Other.

At a feedback workshop on interim project findings in March 2014,[16] participants, who included research respondents and interfaith practitioners (overlapping categories), did respond by identifying how to engage with the unreligious as an area for further research and work, though this had not been raised as an issue by practitioners during fieldwork. The recommendation to engage more creatively with young people also resonated strongly. There is a committed cohort of interfaith activists who have built and sustained interfaith relationships over time, but it is unclear where the next generation will come from. This issue intersects with that of engaging the nonreligious, because, as established, young people in Britain tend to be less religious. Some interviewees discussed the difficulties of engaging young people within their own religious groups, let alone in interfaith dialogue. Yet, the reference to young Muslims and Sikhs in Coventry above serves as a reminder that the nature of generational religious change in Britain is certainly not uniformly towards indifference.

The focus group conducted with young people comprised eight students aged between 16 and 18 years old from a local high school, five identified themselves as Muslims, one as a Christian (7th Day Adventist), one as Hindu, and one as an atheist. Therefore the group cannot be considered completely religiously indifferent. Yet, they demonstrated "benign indifference" towards the specific aspect of the religious field under consideration: interfaith dialogue. None showed any previous awareness of the concept (though they did recall learning about Coventry's heritage as the City of Peace and Reconciliation in school). When I explained what interfaith dialogue was, using examples of activities taking place locally in Coventry, they were generally open to the idea, and there was a suggestion that information about

[16] https://sites.google.com/site/rebeccaacatto/interfaithdialogueincoventry (accessed 10.11.14).

events should be distributed via their school. However, it still appeared unlikely that they would personally participate.

The focus groups were advertized as about interfaith dialogue. Hence I faced a similar methodological challenge to Madge et al. (see subsection above on Youth and Indifference in Britain above): recruiting "ordinary" members of the public with no specific stake or interest in interfaith work and then priming them to think about an issue generally unimportant or nonexistent for them. Unsurprisingly, all participants in the focus group for Christians identified themselves as such (from various denominations) and all in the focus group for Muslims identified themselves simply as Muslim. The mixed group included two Christians, two Muslims, a Messianic Jew, one Hindu, one Sikh, an atheist, and one person who left the religion field on the consent form blank. Hence participants did not proportionally represent the Coventry population in terms of religiosity: the nonreligious were seriously underrepresented. The mixed group was the only one to debate if and how atheists could be included in interfaith dialogue.

Unlike the 16–18 year olds, the other focus groups demonstrated some knowledge and awareness of interfaith dialogue. Some participants knew of local interfaith organizations and had attended local interfaith events. Yet, a similar "benign indifference" dominated: interfaith dialogue was, overall, accepted as a worthy thing, but there was little enthusiasm for engaging personally with it. Lack of time was the most common reason cited for not participating, resonating with Stichweh's (1997) analysis of indifference in modernity.

For one or two participants, reluctance to attend was due to a fear of potential evangelism at interfaith events. The concern was also expressed that interfaith dialogue could be counterproductive. Generally, focus group participants wished to separate out questions of social relations and cohesion from religion. There was a sense that it can often be better to avoid conversations about religion altogether. Thus the preference was for events with a particular social action focus and purpose rather than religion. These comments indicate the ambivalent position of religion in British society already referenced. The majority of participants identified with a religion, yet many said that they preferred not to discuss religion with colleagues, friends, or strangers. Religion was part of their lives, but, generally, not a dominant one. Adult focus group participants tended to display indifference towards religiosity and interfaith dialogue, but the stated wish to avoid tension and conflict in social interactions by avoiding discussion of religion implies anxiety rather than indifference regarding religion's position in society. This again speaks to the ambivalence and variability of religious indifference (see also Klug 2017 – this volume).

In sum, these data illustrate that interfaith practitioners in Coventry have a challenge on their hands in terms of engaging with those indifferent to interfaith dialogue within and outside of religious groups and achieving the depth of relationships believed to be necessary for successful dialogue, which they have not resolved as of yet how to address effectively.

Conclusion

Indifference is sociologically conceived as a lack of concern and engagement, which is ethically ambivalent: it can have social benefits as well as costs. As religiosity is variably lived, conceived and measured, so is religious indifference. This chapter has focused upon religious indifference as a lack of interest, reflexivity, and participation. People claiming to belong to a particular religious group may still be indifferent to various aspects of the religious field. In the British context, religious indifference is most commonly shaped against the backdrop of the majority religion: Christianity. Earlier sociology of religion references in the second section of this chapter and Nash (2017 – this volume) highlight that religious indifference as conceived here is not necessarily new in and beyond Britain. Nevertheless, the religiously and politically indifferent are a growing constituency in Britain, particularly amongst the young. Explanations for and interpretations of this observed shift vary, but it tends to be associated with modernity and secularization. This chapter focused on one specific case study cannot resolve the question of the relationship between modernity and indifference, though the literature suggests that there is one, whether positively or negatively assessed.

The indifferent present a challenge and potential threat to the engaged, including interfaith practitioners. Successful dialogue requires in depth engagement across difference, which, as the case study of Coventry shows, is difficult to achieve in contemporary Britain. Indifference constitutes a significant part of the difficulty. The organized nonreligious may at least be identifiable, contactable, and willing to participate, but their participation does require recognition from the religiously engaged, rather than the othering which can occur, and they do only constitute a minority of those in contemporary Britain identifying with "No religion".

For many who would categorize themselves on surveys as having no religion or within a particular religious group, especially young people, in contemporary Britain, it appears that religion has little practical salience in their daily lives (indifference towards religiosity). There is a common attitude of unconcern and unawareness. Yet, this does not necessarily mean indifference towards religion's position in society. Focus group responses reported in this chapter suggest that people can and do care about avoiding conflict with others and religious difference is considered a potential source of tension.

In general interfaith dialogue is associated with peace building and social cohesion. This relates to the potential cost of indifference conceived as a lack of voluntary participation and the importance of context. Benign indifference may be socially beneficial, or at least neutral, in a relatively economically and socially stable context such as Coventry. However, perhaps those advocating dialogue, religious literacy, and improved religious education have a point about the dangers of ignorance, indifference, and loss of solidarity in an era of global uncertainties and religion-related conflicts (Wolffe and Moorhead 2014), as sociological discourse about indifference is ambivalent. Indeed, having recently co-authored a chapter on

the topic, I may be considered among advocates of religious literacy (Catto and Perfect 2015). Indifference can also have costs for individuals in terms of well being as Lee (2017 - this volume) highlights and neglect by social institutions, as well as for social relations.

In the contemporary British context of increasing nonreligiosity, religious diversity, tensions, Islamophobia, and acts of violence by people claiming Islamist motivations, dialogue may well be preferable to indifference, as practitioners, politicians, and policy-makers advocate. Peace and reconciliation are difficult to achieve without engagement. Nonetheless, for accuracy, equality, and fairness, it does seem important to ensure that politicians, policy-makers, charities, educators, journalists, opinion-formers, funders, etc., are more aware of the existence of the religiously indifferent, rather than just the vocal opposing poles, within as well as outside of religious groups.

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Is Religious Indifference Bad for Secularism? Lessons from Canada

Marian Burchardt

Abstract This chapter is focused on political discourses about religious diversity and secularism in the Canadian province of Quebec. Asking questions about how experiences of modernity bear on constructions of national identity, it demonstrates that secularization has itself turned into a powerful myth centered on the notion of modernity as liberation from religious bondage. The chapter shows how in the post-migration context native populations evoke different cultural memories of modernity against newcomers. It argues that these debates function as a context which shapes indifference, both in scope and meaning.

Keywords Religious diversity • Modernity • Secularism • Religious indifference • Quebec • Collective memory • Catholicism • Migration

Introduction

This chapter explores how collective memories shape the possibilities of religious indifference in contemporary immigration societies and looks at the meanings of religious indifference from the perspective of the impact of migration and migration-driven religious diversity. In particular, I draw on the case of Quebec, the only majority francophone province of Canada and widely considered one of the "founding nations", to examine how in contestations around collective, or national, identity, native majority populations mobilize memories of their religious, cultural and political past in order to assert, or demand, particular arrangements of political secularism *as historical achievements* vis-à-vis religious newcomers. By doing so, however, they inevitably breathe new life into the otherwise empty churches and cathedrals. I argue that political discourses about religious diversity and secularism shape and sharply circumscribe the possible scope and meanings of indifference

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towards religion. The chapter emerges from a broader project on collective memories and cultural diversity in multicultural societies and is based on ethnographic and interview-based research carried out in Quebec in 2012 and 2013 (Burchardt 2017).

Current sociological and anthropological research into religious-secular dynamics has acknowledged the importance of migration-driven religious diversity for the changing role of religion in the public sphere, driven home in Casanova's idea of deprivatization (1994), and for concerns over minority recognition and accommodation feeding into it (Koenig 2005; Wohlrab-Sahr and Burchardt 2012; Giordan and Pace 2014). At the same time, researchers have hardly explored the ways in which the shifting, and often weakening, forms of religious commitment amongst natives in Western societies affect contestations over secularism and the ways natives grapple with them. In this regard, religious indifference is the one of most important issues: One the one hand, it is extremely widespread but offers no self-evident answer for people as to how to view shifting regimes of religious diversity; on the other hand, while in some ways culturally "robust" the impossibility to *legally* recognize religious indifference, itself a consequence of its ambiguous epistemological status, renders the religiously indifferent vulnerable to unfriendly cooptation in politics (into the fold, or into secular humanism). In other words: religious indifference is constructed as a problem.

In this chapter, I explore how in the context of current controversies over secularism, religious indifference on the part of (post-) Catholic native Quebeckers is contested and rendered fragile from two sides: On the one hand, I look at radical secular activism as a social space and discursive practice that partakes in the construction of the vulnerability of religious indifference through its attempts to define the indifferent as atheists for purposes of representation. On the other hand, I examine secular renegotiations of Catholicism as *culture* and *heritage* that run up against religious indifference, chiefly, by redefining religion as a mode of affective belonging and aesthetic commitment. Both movements are responses to new forms of religious diversity.

As Western pluralist societies are increasingly caught in discussions about social and political inclusion through religion, the normative stakes for religious indifference are especially high. As a phenomenon that is, as Quack and Schuh (2017 – this volume) argue, essentially an absence, religious indifference escapes any form of representation. It thwarts the logics of membership (as the failures of many humanist groups to become mass organizations testify); it thwarts the logic of belonging (as the broadening of definitions of religion by concerned Christians shows); and it even thwarts the logic of identity in the widest possible sense. What then does it mean for democracy and especially for inherited understandings of freedom of religion, equality and non-discrimination if a historical form of consciousness, with its worldview and criteria of social inclusion, drifts into a negativity that cannot be represented anymore?

Modernity and the Myth of Secularization in Quebec

Ever since the settlement of French farmers from the late seventeenth century onwards, French Canada that later turned into the province of Quebec, was a majority Catholic nation. Catholic clergy as well as its orders and monasteries had a huge influence on Quebec's formative history. This influence, which is also illustrated in numerous villages carrying the names of Catholic saints, was even enhanced with the defeat of France by Great Britain in the North American colonial scramble in 1759. Following the handing over of the province, the Catholic Church became crucial for enforcing social discipline and implementing British rule and, in the absence of a sovereign nation-state, also became the main carrier of ideas of nationhood and incipient nationalist ambitions.

By the mid-twentieth century, Quebec was still one of the most religious nations of the Western world, and the most religious people in North America, in terms of belief and participation of collective religious rituals. The combination of colonial domination, nationalist ambitions and high religiosity makes Quebec a textbook case of religious vitality as cultural defense (Martin 1978). Only later the French language became the dominant element around which nationalism was organized and slowly transformed from ethnic to civic expressions (Breton 1988). Quebec also boasted the North America's highest birthrate as a direct consequence of Catholic procreationism and its indelible articulations with Quebecois bio-political nationalism, also referred to as the "revenge of the cradle".

This situation changed dramatically with the end of the semi-authoritarian regime of Maurice Duplessis and its late McCarthian and US-inspired anticommunism in 1959. Quebec embarked upon a process of modernization, later dubbed the "Quiet Revolution", that implied, among other things, the building of a modern developmental welfare state, the nationalization of natural resources, and the complete revamping of collective identities. The collective identity of the Francophone was no longer to be based on the idea of "ethno-linguistic survival" at the merciful hands of the British masters, as Zubrzycki (2016) argues, but on development, "catching up" and progress within the broader framework of the modern bureaucratic nation-state.

At the same time, the role of Catholicism within the notion of modern Quebecois identity was fundamentally challenged and changed. In institutional terms, within two decades the Catholic Church lost its hegemonic role in the spheres of welfare provision, health and education through the nationalization of these tasks. More dramatically still, within just one decade, many Quebeckers turned their backs on their Church, stopped believing in God, participating in Sunday worship and motivating their children to enter convents and monasteries and the ranks of clergy in great numbers. The number of those who declare themselves Catholic but also practice at least one per week is shrinking from generation to generation, e.g. 8.8 percent amongst the babyboomers of the Quiet Revolution to 4.1 of the youngest generation (Meunier et al. 2010). In an important sense, the "Quiet Revolution" is therefore publicly recalled as, and associated with, Quebec's secularization and the diminish-

ment of the Church's role in society (Baum 1991, Christiano 2007). Because of the comparatively backward and deprived social position of the Francophone (as opposed to Quebeckers of British descent), the processes of unchurching and secularization were, more than elsewhere in the West, experienced as collective cultural emancipation and individual liberation. One of my respondents, a former Catholic and now evangelical missionary, put this succinctly:

> The Catholic Church was so strong here and we were a very unsecular society that we did not know we could be anything else, but the French in Quebec and Catholic, and so the 1960s basically everything just flipped over night. . . . Over a ten year process of 1960 to 1970 we became totally secular, in 1960 we were a religious community, we had large families, we were rural, we are uneducated. In 1970 we were urban, we had small families and we were much better educated, and we were totally out of the Church.

As I will demonstrate, today the memory of these experiences plays a major role in rendering religion a contested issue in public life where its significance may otherwise have declined much more sharply as a result of religious indifference.

In developing this argument, I draw on the analytical distinction, made by Quack and Schuh in the introductory chapter (2017, 17 – this volume), between indifference to religiosity as subjective worldview and practice on the one hand and indifference to religion as a social institution that operates within political hierarchies and sustains power relations, on the other. This distinction is fundamental for understanding the extreme disparities in tone and intensity of debates about religion one finds in contemporary Quebec. While many Quebeckers do not practice any religion, have no personal religiosity, and – especially members of the younger generation – are in this sense indifferent to *religiosity*, public controversies around the Catholic Church as a social institution render indifference to *religion* more difficult. In other words, indifference to religiosity and indifference to institutionalized religion are empirically separated but they also mutually shape each other. Conceptually, this distinction is also closely mapped on the public-private dichotomy. Being indifferent to religiosity in private life is very different from being indifferent to the role of religion in the public sphere, or in public spaces. And in Quebec, both perspectives are to a great extent severed.

As a settler society, Quebec has of course always been an immigrant society. Starting from the late nineteenth century, however, especially the metropolitan area of Montreal has received new and massive successive waves of immigration from Ireland, Portugal, Italy, Eastern European and many other countries. As Quebec modernized and required more labor force for its expanding industries, it also attracted immigrants from France, Haiti, Northern African and sub-Saharan African countries, i.e. countries of the francophone world whose migrants were supposed to safeguard the French-speaking majority as the main declared goals of Quebec's immigration policy and thereby strengthen linguistic nationalism. But also Indians, Pakistanis and South East Asians settled in increasing numbers. With the administrative and political focus centered on linguistic power relations, Quebec's elites were initially rarely aware of religion as an aspect of migration.

During the 1990s, however, the contours of migration-driven religious diversity became increasingly visible, with Hindus, Sikhs, Muslims, African Christians and

Buddhists wishing to be integrated as members of their religious communities and asserting their rights to freedom of religion and equality. Yet, the political debates during this decade were still dominated by the deconfessionalization of the public school system, which was divided between the Catholic Francophone and Protestant Anglophone confessional schools as a result of the British North America Act of 1867. This system only came to an end in 2000 and a compulsory non-confessional course called "Ethics and Religious Culture" became part of the curriculum. By the mid-2000s, however, discussions had turned more and more on the integration of religious minorities. Many of these debates centered on controversial and highly mediatized cases of the "reasonable accommodation" of religious needs, i.e. exemptions from otherwise general rules that are warranted by the commitment to non-discrimination and religious freedom. When in 2007 then premier minister Jean Charest called on sociologist Gerard Bouchard and philosopher Charles Taylor to head a commission that was tasked with investigating and publically debating these practices, religious diversity finally turned into a national spectacle. One of the upshots of the commission's work was a law project called "Bill 94", promoted by Charest's Liberal Party that attempted to impose upon all citizens the obligation to uncover their face when soliciting public social services (Fournier and See 2014).

During the year 2013 then, Quebec's public sphere turned into the stage of one of the fiercest conflicts around secularism the Western world has experienced in the post-Cold-War era. The minority government of Pauline Marois from the nationalist *Parti Quebecois* was about to make good on one of her central electoral promises by presenting a draft version of her Charter of Quebec Values, which was formerly called *Charte de la laïcité* (the Charter of Secularism). The charter had three central goals: first, to introduce the notion of secularism into Quebec's Charter of Rights and Freedoms; second, to prohibit the use of "ostentatious religious symbols" for all employees of state institutions from nurses in state-owned hospitals to court judges; and third, to specify the conditions under which "reasonable accommodations" should be granted.

The publication of these ideas immediately sparked another round intense debates in mass media and political circles. However, it also spawned new controversies among intellectuals, different sectors of civil society and social movements of all sorts. Trade unions took positions, migrant associations and religious communities formulated responses, and feminist advocacy groups made their voices heard. These discussions came to a halt with the defeat of the PQ in the provincial elections in March 2014.

In the wake of the same debates, however, Catholicism suddenly acquired a new public profile. After the former leader of the Parti Québécois, André Boisclair had drawn attention to the fact that there was a crucifix over the seat of the speaker at the National Assembly in Québec City, for which according to him was no justification, this religious object was also debated during the hearings of the Bouchard-Taylor Commission. In their final report, Bouchard and Taylor (2008, 152–153) advocated the removal of the crucifix, stating "that the very site where elected representatives deliberate and legislate not be identified with a specific religion" and this was "in keeping with the notion of the separation of Church and State". On the same day,

Fig. 1 Secular activist demanding the removal of the crucifix from the National Assembly at a demonstration in favor of the Charter of Secularism in September 2013 (Photo by author)

then Prime Minister Charest, however, declared that the crucifix was symbolic of Quebec's religious heritage and culture and pushed the following motion, which the assembly adopted unanimously:

> The National Assembly reiterates its desire to promote the language, history, culture and values of the *nation québécoise*, foster the integration of each person into our nation in the spirit of openness and reciprocity, and express its attachment to our religious and historic patrimony represented, among others, by the crucifix in the Blue Room and our coat of arms that adorn our institutions.[1]

Radical secularists from the humanist and atheist associations felt offended by, and vigorously opposed this view and demanded a coherent and equal treatment of all religious symbols but ran up against massive public support for this decision during this period (Fig. 1).

Bouchard and Taylor also spoke out against the practice of opening prayers at municipal council meetings, another remnant of Catholicism's formerly hegemonic place in Quebec's public domain. While most Quebeckers were rarely aware of this practice, it had made headlines in the same period as Jean Tremblay, mayor of the small town of Saguenay in the Northeast of the country insisted he had the right to so after being challenged on it in lower court. The challenge, however, came not from concerned migrants but from an isolated individual atheist. After taking notice

[1] National Assembly of Québec. (2008) Parliamentary proceedings. 38th legislature, first session (May 8, 2007 to November 5, 2008). *Votes and Proceedings of the Assembly.* Thursday, May 22, 2008. Vol. 40, No. 87.

of the case, Quebec's humanists eagerly established contact with him and got involved in the case when it went to the court of appeals, which eventually upheld the mayor's right to the prayer.

Religious Indifference as a Problem: Radical Secularism

As illustrated through its involvement in the case, one of the most active groups during these years were secularist activists from the cultural world of humanist, rationalist and atheist associations. In the years 2012 and 2013, I worked with these groups, visited their meeting, visited members in their homes, and interviewed them. I label as secular activists people who are either members or inhabit the cultural vicinity of associations such as *Coalition Laïcité Québec,* the *Mouvement laïque québécois, Association humaniste du Québec, Les Intellectuels pour la laïcité, Libres penseurs athées* but also feminist groups such as *Éditions Sisyphe*. All of the activists I interviewed are linked through either direct experiences of, or constructions of intimate connections to, the Quiet Revolution.

The members of the movement were mostly born between 1940 and 1960, which means that either spend their own childhood and youth under the regime of Duplessis before the Quiet Revolution, or else experienced the fading power of Catholicism during their youth in the 1960s and 1970s. They all have in common the notion of experiencing the Quiet Revolution in terms of a clash between belief and unbelief, and between acquiescence to church power and rebellion, which for them rendered religious indifference problematic at the time already. More importantly, they also mobilize these experiences in collective memories on which they stake their claims to radical secularism as the following vignettes illustrate.

In July 2013, I had a meeting with Claire in a coffee shop in the Mile End, a middle class neighborhood in Montreal where I resided. Claire was member of *Éditions Sisyphe*, a platform and publishing venue of a feminist collective that I came across while investigating civil society groups who were active in the business of memoir writing, agitating and giving testimonies in the Bouchard-Taylor Commission and the "Bill 94" hearings. After arriving she took some printed manuscripts out of her handbag and after a few moments I realized with surprise that they were actually papers I had written. Later this turned out to be a usual situation and people would often not only ask me detailed questions about the purpose of my research project. They would also check my publications online in order figure out where I stood.

One of the manuscripts she had read was on the idea of "multiple secularities", which appeared to have struck her as strange. After listening to her for a while I understood why. In a variety of ways, she made it clear that secularism was a universal principle and should therefore look the same everywhere. Claire was a 58 years old middle class woman and worked in a PR agency that offers services to public institutions but told me that she originated from a working class family. With five siblings it seemed not self-evident and rather a privilege to her that she had the

chance to attend a private Catholic school where she soon realized that there was one Protestant girl in the class from French Huguenot background. She recalled that she never prayed with them but instead, guided by the nuns, they would pray *for her*. In the midst of the ongoing Quiet Revolution she experienced Catholicism as a religion that insisted on its superiority, and more generally religion as divisive as this passage shows, which is worth quoting at length:

> Religion – it was in the sixties what we believed and before that too, long before that. So the Quebec society is very much shaped at by this until the sixties and when this – when there came the – the sixties came, it was a big liberation for Quebec, the French-Canadian mostly because they were the Catholics, but eh it was big – big freedom, we had the *Refuge* which was an artistic movement in the end of the forties,[2] very important in our district. And when we started the liberation movement it was for the women, it was from the church, it was from Canada. It was in the sixties and the seventies, all was a mix together. And when we had *la Commission des droits de la personne* eh which is new, you know probably the organization, eh the Charta was meant to replace religious rules and religious values and to have universal values, and equality between men and women. And we knew at the time, we knew that these – many of these principals were against what was taught in the religions, so we knew that there was an opposition between them.

The idea of religion as particular and secularity as universal thus turned into the bottom-line of her ensuing activism. She became a member of the school commission in the 1990s and of several feminist and other civil society groups, submitted and presented a memoir to the Bouchard-Taylor Commission and so forth. For her, the debates around secularism were problematic because they linked the "secularism issue" with the "migration issue", which she felt was one of the big mistakes Bouchard and Taylor made. "It was not at all about immigration, it was about us!" she remarked. She was clearly conjuring up, once again, the Quebec of the Quiet Revolution thus proposing as a starting point of reflection a society that was entirely different from the one of today. Drawing on this particular case, one could say that at issue is not so much the question of whether secularists are *against* migrants, or their presumed racism of which Canadians from outside Quebec are very quick to accuse them, but the fact that they *ignore* immigrants and religious diversity as that allows them to uphold their inherited vision of liberation, progress, and modernity.

However, in addition to standing up against what they see as unwarranted and undemocratic religious privileges, secular activists also continuously politicize anything having to do with religion. They thereby create an agonistic political space (in the sense of Mouffe and Laclau), in which the quiet and eventless abstinence of religious indifference is rendered progressively difficult. In a positive sense, migrants figure in these constructions as *victims of religious persecution* in their countries of origin, as people in search of liberty *qua* secular modernity and thus as people whose political and cultural subjectivity is essentially construed in homology with Quebecois' historical experiences. Quebec's humanist movement has several members of Algerian origin who act as expert witnesses of the dangers of extreme and exaggerated religion and religious fundamentalism. Djemila Benhabib,

[2] She refers to the movement *Global Refusal*, which published an influential manifesto in 1946 and is considered an important intellectual forerunner of the Quiet Revolution.

a female politician of Algerian origin became especially prominent during the debates of the Charter of Secularism and was invited to all kinds of conferences and political meetings in which the Charter was promoted. There was clearly an attribution of competence to speak on the dangers of politicized religion and its negative implications for women but also the understanding that expert witnesses are important so as to show that the secularist project was not against immigrants. In these meetings, secularist activists and politicians routinely warned against the *dangers* of religious indifference and the silent encroachment of religion on the public sphere. Hüttermann (2015) cogently analyzed this discourse on migrants' "salami tactics" in the German context.

Feminism

More importantly, however, we find evidence of the construction of the Quiet Revolution as emancipation in diverse feminist mobilizations, which are not only socially powerful. They also draw on the Quiet Revolution with a particular emphasis on its nature as a process of enlightenment, more than for instance in Western Europe where very similar process took place during the same period. These feminisms and gender politics have a deep influence on debates about religious diversity and accommodations and *laïcité*.

The co-implications of feminism with the politics of secularism and the construction of religious indifference as a problem develop particular cultural dynamics in Catholic and post-Catholic settings. This is a result of the Catholic politics and regulations of the female body expressed in procreationism, the prohibition of contraception, but also the specific conceptualization of women as selfless carers. This last aspect is manifest in the regime and practice of female monasticism, the idea of being a nun as a high realization of ideals of femininity etc. I did fieldwork with a former nun who became a very active and committed member of the secularist movement and tried to understand her trajectory in terms of one pattern of meaning of secularist activism: one which has indeed very little, or nothing, to do with issues of nationalism, migration and religious diversity but with emancipation from Catholicism understood as authoritarian, inauthentic and contrary to autonomy and individual self-determination. In the conversations I had with her, it became very clear that she also felt this lack of autonomy in the religious dimension, that is, the idea that organized religion, which is the Catholic Church in this instance, offered prefabricated answers to the questions asked by believers, here broadly conceptualized by her as "seekers". So for her, the gradual process of leaving first the monastery, and later the church, really comes down to "I wanted to find it out for myself" and is consequently conceptualized in the preference for the language of spirituality, which is often used to index such shifts in orientation towards self-realization (Heelas et al. 2005; Knoblauch 2008).

More important, however, is very concretely the collective memory of church-driven procreationism. In many interviews with female members of the secularist

movement, activists recount personal stories of mothers and grandmothers having been pressed to bear high numbers of children. These description are often accompanied by the mentioning of the detrimental effects of this on the health of both mothers and children; there is a sense in which in Québec it was women who were sacrificed for the nation by men; a notion which in some sense inhabits the discursive space of nationalist mythical heroism usually occupied by the figure of male soldiers or freedom fighters. People recall, and rehearse in the interviews, the slogan "Get out of our vaginas!", nowadays more commonly used in the US in mobilizations against anti-abortion or procreation campaigns.

Crucial for understanding feminist mobilizations for secularism is the coincidence of the mobilization of cultural memories of female emancipation from nationalist Catholic regimes and oppression with the gender implications of religion-related accommodations. Feminists highlight that many accommodations have in fact a powerful gender dimension and when they do, they often treat women as something that should be shielded from the public eye, or at the very least, be revealed only under special safety conditions. It seems to me that the role of feminism in the secularist movement cannot be understood without conceptualizing this double horizon of emancipation from Catholicism and the gender-related "messages" of religion-related accommodations.

Intellectual Offence

During the same period, several times I also visited a group of people from the small town of Trois Rivieres. One of them was Bernard, a teacher in special needs pedagogy from the local university. Just as with most others, the observance of Catholic standard rituals such as baptism, confirmation and religious wedding ceremony, as well as regular participation in the Sunday mass, was part of his upbringing and had a central place in his discourse. He recalled:

> When I was small we would go to church with all the family, I was helping in the mass, I was playing the organ in the church. I continue to be implicated and involved in the parish, I helped the priests and nuns in the city and I had a lot of friends who were priests. And that's because I liked the message, the love, the sharing, helping poor people. And when I was a young teacher with primary school students, my director was a woman who was very faithful who impressed me. But when I was 27 years old I became uncomfortable with religion, for me it wasn't true.

Bernard later actively participated in the Bouchard-Taylor commission where he presented a brief and discussions about religious rights in public life became also central for him. But the initial distancing from religion had a very different rationality and was linked to his rejection of miracles. In the greater Montreal region one finds many statues of the Virgin Mary and in many of them the statue would have a tear in the corner of the right eye of the Virgin. Traditionally, there was an idea that the tear would be real, or rendered real through an act of transubstantiation and considered to be a miracle. Moreover, it was thought that people who deeply and

authentically believed in the truth of the miracle would be able to smell the scent of roses when passing the statue. It was this kind of story that offended Bernard and made it impossible for him to remain attached to the church. And he was especially offended by the fact that the director of the school in which he began his career as a young teacher would promote this kind of story amongst the students.

In order to appreciate the exceptionality of Bernard's story, one needs to recall that stories of miracles, as well as the concept of the miracle itself, are of course not only central to Catholicism but also very widespread in the Catholic world. Yet for the large majority of Quebeckers, the intellectual questioning of such concepts rarely causes and explains the loss of religious belief and subjective secularization.[3] Typically, people would use such stories when expressly asked to intellectually *assert* and justify their disinterest in religion *after the fact*. Bernard, by contrast, told me that story in order explain why he did *not* became religiously indifferent but an atheist.

In fact, he described his experience of becoming an atheist explicitly through the ritual genre of the "coming out" and recounted several instances of public atheist testimony, priding himself on having been one of the first in Trois Rivieres to having done so:

Bernard: About thirty years from now I decided to declare myself an atheist.
Author: So to whom did you declare your atheism, to the people or your family?
Bernard: In the city hall, to all the city and all the people!

The particular occasion in the city hall was the local public hearing of the Bouchard-Taylor Commission in 2008 for which Bernard prepared and delivered a statement. Around the same period, a weekly Catholic prayer offered by the mayor of the town of Saguenay had stirred controversy amongst politicians and wide sections of the population, as already mentioned above. Bernard and other local secularist activist as well became embroiled in the case, and he decided to write several opinion pieces in the local newspaper. As a consequence, according to Bernard, Saguenay's mayor called the rector of his university and demanded him to stop Bernard from criticizing him lest he faced disciplinary action. After this way of stopping him proved to fail, there were even rumors that students were asked to question his qualities as a teacher: "All this because they thought I would have a subversive influence on the students." Later, he received personally insulting letters; on the street people told him that he will go to hell; others wished that somebody killed him. He explained: "So you see why it is so important for me to explain to the people, to the community, and to the whole world why we need *laïcité* for the promotion of inclusion of our people, and also of people with other religions. The only ways possible is that the university is a secular place. And after three or four months, I received a letter from the director in which he apologized and confirmed that I had the right to go to the public place with my speech."

[3] I am thankful to Barbara Theriault for this observation.

Many members of the humanist movement told me similar stories about religion as a social problem and share their enthusiasm about the emancipatory experience of the Quiet Revolution. The social import of this kind of framing, however, is not that it is per se widespread but that member create or make visible its culturally resonance through their the mobilization of collective memories of the Quiet Revolution in public activism, in conjunction with other social movements and political parties, as happened during the Bouchard-Taylor Commission and the Charter debates. For them, the Charter debates were centrally about *completing* the Quiet Revolution and its promises of ultimate human liberation. Until this goal was achieved, religious indifference was deceptive at best, and dangerous at worst.

Selling an Identity

In a very broad sense, however, humanists see Quebec as a success story in secularization. And in recounting this story amongst themselves and for others they are well versed with available statistics. In fact, humanists use statistics whenever possible as evidence of the declining importance of religion in Quebec society but more importantly so as to buttress and warrant their normative claims about the importance of secularism and the liberation of the public sphere from religion. While they argue that secularism is key for making possible social harmony in any culturally diverse immigrant society, they also make claims on numerical representation insisting that the nonreligious part of population is constantly growing. In one meeting I attended, for instance, one member self-confidently remarked: "I mean, *we* are fine but *they* should worry. From 1975 to 2004, which is about 30 years, they lost 85 percent of their people in the seminaries, they are really moving out of the clergy."

While the category of religious indifference does not figure in the statistics they cited, humanists were clearly aware of it and understood it as a major challenge for their activism. More precisely, they construed religious indifference as demonstrating the need for more educational activities. "We still have difficulties to reach the popular level," one remarked. "But we need to do more to make them decide and say, okay, I am going to pay 20 dollars to become a member, and to have an identity." In this context, religious indifference was seen as fragile because it was really seen, as Quack and Schuh note in the introduction to this book, as an *absence*. As such, religious indifference was construed as an empty space that the former religious identities had left behind and that needed to be filled. While Quack and Schuh (2017, 14 – this volume) cite proponents of irreligiosity who see religious indifference (as opposed to atheism) as the highest realization of life without God, Quebec's humanists reproduce the social and cultural form of Catholicism in very moment they struggle against it. "We are selling an identity. That's our main product", as one of the main activists, and former president of the humanist association, stated.

Religious Indifference as a Vacant Space

When I asked him whether he felt that there was a need for a new identity he further elaborated: "Yes, since they have lost their religious identity, you need something to replace it. And this is what we give them, that is quite clear." Thus, Quebec's humanists do not imagine religion just to fade, through the force of modernization and intellectual enlightenment, but to have created an identitarian desire that needed to be nurtured lest it be appropriated by competitors. When I asked members why they deemed it necessary to struggle for secularism if Quebec was already so secularized they argued that "the Catholic Church is already partially compensated by the rise of evangelical churches and it is those ministries who are going to occupy the vacant space." In keeping with this perception, the whole project of the humanist association is in fact viewed as a campaign that promulgates secularist identities as anchors for people's worldviews and epistemological anxieties that secularization has created. Despite its decline, religion is seen as a lure and a temptation, something that is constantly threatening to break into the presumably safe grounds of reason and therefore one constantly needed to pay attention to the its advances. "In Ontario, for example, we already have the Sharia! So you see what happens if you do not pay attention", one member warned.

The fragility of religious indifference was seen as particularly pronounced in the countryside, a space imagined as vast (an important trope in Canadian spatial imaginary) and inimical to rational and emancipatory thinking. "In the countryside, they will be alone, completely alone in their area. There, everybody thinks that little Jesus was a real man, and there is a terrible pressure." Members reported to sometimes receive phone calls from the countryside from atheists who needed intellectual support and complained about their atheist solitude. There is thus also an important *social* aspect of the fragility of religious indifference: Since as a result of inimical pressures it cannot survive alone, all sorts of distance from or criticism of religion, or enlightenment from religion, are in need to be protected through the social bond of likeminded people and a new community that replaces the old community of coreligionists.

Catholicism as Culture and Heritage: Secular Resurrections

There are obviously two opposing dynamics at work with consequences for the meanings of religious indifference. On the one hand, Catholicism is redefined, not just casually as in media debates or everyday discourse, but also officially as heritage and culture. This tendency is illustrated *politically* in the motion to keep the crucifix in the National Assembly and *legally* in the appeal court's verdict that protects the right of Saguenay's mayor to perform his prayer at the city council meetings. It is also reflected in civil society activism in which many citizens mobilize funds and effort for the protection of local parish churches as well as governmental

Fig. 2 Church renovated with money from the Quebec Cultural Heritage Fund (Photo by author)

efforts to protect religious patrimony as *cultural heritage*. However, to claim as Zubrzycki (2016, 168) does that it is through cultural patrimony that "many secular and even atheist Québécois remain 'Catholic'" seems to ignore the deep historical ruptures and transformations that have enabled such views in the first place (Fig. 2).

In other words, religion as practice and participation that had already lost its private and in large measure also its public and institutional significance, now gives way, and is transformed into secular cultural heritage. If post-religious cultural heritage is thus rendered fundamental to national identity, however, it makes indifference to religion of course very difficult as such indifference would also imply one's distancing from the national community. While generally there is some consensus on the value of secularism as a principle of statecraft for organizing and managing relationships between religion and the state in Quebec, these issues profiled the cleavages between open and strict, or radical secularism, and also especially between different understandings of open secularism. Whereas both Bouchard and Taylor fashioned the notion of open secularism as a means for the inclusion of religious minorities into the public domain, and themselves as its promoters, the National Assembly appeared to pursue new openings for Catholicism. After decades of its weakening as a religion, they sought new avenues to affirm Catholicism's significance as a historical fact that would forever impregnate collective identities through the keeping alive of its memory. Through such official recognition of the public value of religion, religious indifference could only be pushed into the private sphere as open secularism took it upon itself to publicly resurrect Catholicism.

Humanists were also acutely aware of the links between religion and national identity and the urge to grapple with it, albeit rather in response to the identitarian pressures. In contrast to the National Assembly, they insisted on the public value of strict secularism and variously engaged in narrative constructions of its genealogy and role in Quebec history (Burchardt 2014). However, they also felt uneasy about identitarian notions of secularism. Secularism as identity seemed to borrow from multicultural discourse, define them as one group amongst others, and run up against their philosophical understandings of it. Importantly, it was opposed to their understanding of secularism as universal value. And still they felt the identitarian pull. Commenting on the issue of the crucifix, Claire noted:

> Of course it was very strange. When you look at the report, Bouchard and Taylor were in favor of granting the minorities each and every of their accommodations. And people felt the only thing that was supposed to be removed was ours, and that was a Catholic thing!

The more collective memories are mobilized with a view towards responding to minorities' claims to inclusion through "reasonable accommodation", the more the defense and affirmation of the inherited universe of Catholic symbols that punctuates Quebec's landscape becomes a matter of national identity. And the more religion is in this way mobilized as a *national memory* the more it circumscribes religious indifference and limits its possible and defensible remit.

Rearticulating Separate Paradigms: Secularization and Religious Diversity

The story recounted in this chapter makes the case for rearticulating two intellectual paradigms in the sociology of religion that during the last two decades have been largely severed: secularization and religious diversity. Amongst other things, sociological research carried out within the secularization paradigm explored the variety of religious beliefs, practices and forms participation and conceptualized diverse combinations of them in categories of religiosity, irreligiosity, areligiosity, religious indifference, atheism and so forth. Within a resolutely uniform and high-modernist understanding of religion, this was the kind of religious diversity researchers were able to see, and sometimes explain. Parallel to secularization theory, and chiefly as a fundamental critique of it, new religious movements and new spiritualities emerged on the sociological agenda. As the criticism of the secularization paradigm became more forceful and the religious dimension of transnational migration in the Western world became more salient, researchers became more and more interested in institutional questions regarding the new challenges to existing church-state regimes, changing expressions of political secularism, postnational religious citizenship and the accommodation of religious diversity within broader agendas of integration and nationalism.

I suggest to view these three paradigms – secularization; new religious movements and emergent spiritualities; migration-driven religious diversity – as adding

up to a particular formation of religious super-diversity in which all three levels are interrelated in complex ways. In this chapter, I have explored one of these interdependencies: the impact of collective memories of secularization and of the experience of migration-driven religious diversity on perceptions and meanings of religious indifference. Drawing on the Quebec case material, it appears that the meanings and possible expressions of religious indifference differ in each of the domains that the different sociological paradigms look at. At the same time, this framing offers a fresh perspective at the dichotomy between "public religion" and private devotion or piety and the ways in which both are either severed or reconfigured within new social arenas of contestation.

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Religion, Difference, and Indifference

Lois Lee

Abstract In earlier studies of indifference to religion, I have been largely critical – of (i) conceptual imprecision, (ii) the exaggeration of indifference to religion as an empirical reality, especially in so-called secular societies, and (iii) the claims to power that self-identification as 'indifferent' can be bound up with – an critique that has some similarities to critical religion and critical secular approaches to the 'secular'. This chapter shifts attention to the more constructive ways that social researchers might work with indifference to religion – as an undeniably significant feature in many contemporary societies, as a crucial component to theories about religion and modernity, as a methodological challenge, and even as an ethical imperative. This chapter proceeds on the understanding that each of these has a bearing on the other, whilst explorations of each and all contribute to the ongoing task of refining conceptual understandings of 'indifference to religion'.

Keywords Indifference to religion • Nonreligion • Nonaffiliation • Secularisation • Secularity • Critical secular studies • Research methods • Qualitative methodology • Quantitative methodology

This chapter seeks to integrate and enhance the different, empirically informed accounts of indifference that appear at several places in my previous research into the nonreligious, and to situate this work in relation to the emerging interest in indifference that this volume is evidence of. Because this earlier research has been particularly concerned to highlight the role of concretely nonreligious cultural forms

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within so-called secular life,[1] it has tended to discuss indifference to show that, relative to secularisationist accounts (to use Bruce's [2011] term), the role that this phenomenon plays in contemporary societies is comparatively limited (see Lee 2014, 2015a, b). Focusing instead on the need to recognise actively and avowedly nonreligious constituents in these societies, this work has shelved questions of indifference as a subject in its own right.

At the same time, however, these previous discussions do not propose that indifference is actually irrelevant for understanding contemporary societies, only that secularisationist and rationalist accounts overstate how relevant it is. Indeed, several of the data and arguments presented in this work explore the nature, texture and meaning of this under-studied and under-theorised phenomenon. The occasion of this volume (and the workshop that preceded it) provides, then, a welcome opportunity to put these critiques of engagements with indifference to one side and refocus on how the concept might be constructively used to understand society and to do so empirically. (And, as this landmark volume attests, I am far from the only scholar poised to make this kind of engagement.)

This chapter draws on research examples from UK-based fieldwork to show some of the ways in which indifference can be identified in qualitative studies, and to place this work in broader context. In so doing, the intention is to share ways of approaching indifference in research and theory, and to open up new and concrete questions about indifference as an empirical, historical phenomenon.

The chapter proceeds in five sections. The first sets out the role of indifference in relation to the studies of secularity, irreligion and nonreligion. The second section outlines the methods of data collection and analysis used to capture indifference in my own research, and the third section discusses an interview arising from this methodology in which the individual's primary and more or less coherent orientation towards religion can be described as indifferent. The fourth section highlights more localised instances of indifference, in which indifference is not so much the individual's general, overarching 'religious' attitude but is rather something that can be disaggregated into more specific instances of indifference. I focus particularly on the several objects of indifference that might be implicated in the general notion of

[1] I differentiate between 'nonreligion' and 'secularity' according to the model developed in Lee (2012a, 2014 and 2015b). In this, nonreligion indicates phenomena that are identified in contradistinction to religion – New Atheism, for example, Secular Humanism or more informal practices such as declining to participate in religious traditions – whilst secularity indicates the primacy of 'this-worldly' concerns and the subordination of religious, spiritual and nonreligious concerns to those (though religious, spiritual and nonreligious concerns may still be present as secondary concerns in secular contexts). According to this model, we can contrast a secular school curriculum, the typical curriculum provided by liberal states, with a nonreligious curriculum, examples of which can be found in State Atheist regimes. 'Areligiosity' is used to denote the absence of any connection with religion (or nonreligion) (ibid.); and 'religion' and 'spirituality' are differentiated in this chapter according to the model suggested in Heelas and Woodhead (2005), in which traditional theist religion is distinguished from subjectivist modes of spirituality in which the existential is channeled through the individual rather than experienced as an external force.

'indifference to religion', and point in particular to the possibility of individuals being indifferent to some or other religious practice whilst at the same time being attached to others. What do these kinds of complexity mean for how we study and interpret 'indifference to religion' in societies? The final section of this chapter discusses some statistical data that might enrich the portrait of indifference already presented, and points to some puzzles in those data.

Throughout, this chapter will reflect upon the question posed by Voas (during our workshop in Frankfurt) about why, if humans are indifferent to any number of things, indifference to religion should be interesting – or, to put it in Quack and Schuh's helpful terms, what is it that makes the absence of direct or forceful relations with religion a *remarkable* absence (Quack and Schuh 2017, 11–12 – this volume)? The conclusion of this chapter proposes one answer to this question.

Secularity, Irreligion, Nonreligion, and Indifference

Until very recently, nontheistic and nonreligious people and phenomena had not received sustained attention from academic researchers.[2] The twenty-first century has, however, witnessed a sea-change, with an increasingly large number of scholars contributing to the study of the 'not religious', variously described as nonreligious, nontheist, atheist, irreligious, secular and/or secularist. Notwithstanding notable exceptions like Phil Zuckerman's (2008) pioneering study of 'negative atheism'[3] – of, that is, life 'without' god – the first studies of 'positive atheism' and of concrete nonreligious cultures have tended to focus on nonreligious organisations and cultural movements. They look at, for example, nonreligious meet-up groups and New Atheist discourses, (e.g. Hunsberger and Altemeyer 2006; Amarasingam 2010; Quack 2012) – rather than attending to the more banal and everyday forms of nonreligion that are woven through society more diffusely (Lee 2015b). The former, more centralised modes of nonreligion are particularly visible in wider cultural contexts and most readily accessible to researchers, and work with these groups and cultures has generated a number of important insights into the concerns, identities, vulnerabilities and cultural resources of nonreligious people (Lee 2015a). By contrast, study of more decentralised, amorphous and ambiguous nonreligious cultures and social groupings is, in many respects, much more challenging – and much less common. The rarity of deep analyses of 'indifference to religion' – an outlook that, by its nature, has no institutional expression or overt symbolic representation – is a significant case in point.

[2] See Pasquale (2007), Zuckerman (2010) and Bullivant and Lee (2012) for short reviews of this literature.

[3] On the distinction between 'negative' and 'positive' atheism, see Bullivant (2013). On secularity as the irrelevance of religion, see Bruce (2002); discussed in Lee (2015a, b, 53).

If it is not quite true to say that indifference has been entirely ignored by social researchers, this is because of its central role in secularisation theory and in research working with or within that paradigm. Indifference is central to secularisation theory: it sees the irrelevance of religion as the defining characteristic of secularity and indifference to religion as a key indication that secularisation has occurred (Bruce 2002; Bagg and Voas 2010; Bullivant 2012; Lee 2015b). Instances of indifference are, for example, central to Phil Zuckerman's methodology in his study of two Scandinavian societies: it is signs of indifference that lead him to the view that 'certain segments of Scandinavian society are about as secular as is sociologically possible' (2008, 97). Similarly, Callum Brown's (2000) oral historical research into declining Christianity in the UK focuses on the decreasing salience of religious concepts, narratives and feeling in British life over the twentieth century, rather than, say, the displacement of these things by new experiences and/or symbolic forms. In his quantitative work, Pascal Siegers (2010) has sought to differentiate indifference from active forms of both religion and nonreligion ('atheism', in his terminology), while David Voas (2009) echoes this distinction in his differentiation between, on the one hand, clear forms of religion and, on the other, unreligion and a set of 'fuzzier' positions, though he has also argued that fuzzy positions emerge temporarily, in the transition from religious to secular life.

Also concerned with secularisation theory, my own, qualitative research approaches 'indifference to religion' from a somewhat different angle. Like Zuckerman's, this research works with mainstream so-called secular populations. It draws on qualitative data from the southeast England in order to deepen understandings of these populations and to interrogate the different concepts – secular, secularist, irreligious, atheist, nonreligious and others – that are used to describe them. The central empirical question of this research is whether non-affiliate populations are characterised and identifiable by their lack of engagement with religion (as secularisation theorists anticipate) or whether they are either in some sense latently religious or shaped by sensing and performing their difference from religious others – and are, in this sense, substantively nonreligious (see Lee 2015b, 65–69). Building on the work of Zuckerman, Brown and others, it demonstrates the need to recognise nonreligious cultural forms and commitments in so-called secular life, and to rebalance our interest in postreligious indifference with attention to the different nonreligious attachments that sometimes shape lives and social formations just as religious ones do.[4]

By taking a cultural approach to the nonreligious, this work critiques the concept of 'indifference to religion' along several lines. By showing that many cases of reported indifference are associated with different kinds of attachments to nonreligious positioning, it suggests that indifference is over-stated as an empirical reality, at least within 'not religious' populations – something that Quack and Schuh's (2017, 13–16 – this volume) discussion of the symbolic power surrounding

[4]This argument is particularly developed in *Recognizing the Non-religious: Reimagining the Secular* (Lee 2015b).

indifference explores critically (see also Lee 2015a). In concretising notions of nonreligious culture, this work also draws attention to how under-developed theoretical debates are when it comes to rival conceptions of secularity. These accounts differ, usually implicitly, in whether they see secularity as primarily involving (i) indifference to religion (as in secularisationist approaches), (ii) explicit nonreligious cultures such as avowed nontheism (or 'positive atheism') or existential humanism, (iii) religious pluralism (which may or may not include nonreligious orientations), or (iv) these three things in any number of combinations, even regardless of the points at which they are in fact mutually exclusive.

In seeking to identify indifference as an empirical reality, and, moreover, doing so in light of the relational epistemologies that have come to prominence in social science, this work also draws attention to the intrinsic ambiguities of a concept that demarcates a relationship of difference ('in difference') whilst at the same time dismissing that relationship ('indifference') (Day and Lee 2014; see also Quack and Schuh 2017 – this volume). To take up a term that has become central to the sociology of religious change through David Voas's (2009) work, this draws attention to the inherent *fuzziness* of 'indifference' as a category, given that it occupies an unclear position between ignorance of religion (in which the individual, institution or other actor has no contact with religion) and nonreligion (in which these actors are in contact with religion but perceive it as 'other').[5] What is more, indifference might indicate some mode of irreligious rejection ('I know about religion, but I don't care about it') or it might be a step removed from rejection ('I don't even care whether I care').

In general, it is perhaps possible to salvage indifference as a coherent concept (albeit it an under-theorised and contested one, as this volume shows) according to the following conceptualisation: indifference to religion indicates not the absence of contact or engagement with religion but the absence of *meaningful* contact or engagement. The concept therefore stands in relation not only to religion but to nonreligion too, because the irrelevance of positioning oneself as religious must necessarily extend to positioning oneself as religion's other; therefore understanding indifference as a form of nonreligion is, in my view, problematic.[6] As such, indifference to religion is a subtle – perhaps too subtle – category for social research.

[5] But see Blankholm (2017 – this volume) on complications with the concept of 'ignorance'.

[6] My approach may be seen as consistent with different approaches, such as Catto's (2017 – this volume) distinction between indifference and nonreligion in her work and Quack and Schuh's (2017 – S 12f) view of indifference as a special form of nonreligion. Highlighting the ambiguity of the notion of indifference is about recognising that these apparently contradictory proposals may both be true, whilst different conceptual approaches to the nonreligious (see cf. Lee 2012, 2015b and Quack 2014) are also impactful. Indifference to religion is a position set apart from religion, making it nonreligious (in both Lee and Quack's senses), but it may also be a position set apart from the 'religion-related' (Quack 2014) too, making it neither religious nor nonreligious (in Lee's sense) but veering instead towards the 'areligious' (Lee 2015a, b; Wallis 2014 also takes this approach). Even in this model though, indifference occupies a grey area between the nonreligious and the areligious.

Given its centrality in thinking and theorising about secularity and secularisation, it is clear, however, that these conceptual issues and the empirical study of indifference in general warrant attention – a project to which this volume makes a significant contribution.

Researching Indifference

This section builds on the last by thinking about indifference to religion as an operationalisable category for social research. It reflects on one methodology for studying the indifferent, considering its theoretical as well as practical implications for designing research samples, recruiting participants and analysing data in this area.

Sampling Indifferent People

This chapter largely draws on ethnographic fieldwork conducted in the UK, and particularly on data gathered in qualitative interviews with people who said that they would prefer to identify themselves as 'not religious' or 'nonreligious' than 'religious'. In-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted in Cambridge in 2006 (*n*: 12) and Greater London between 2009 and 2011 (*n*: 30) and explored participants' understandings and experience of religious cultures and 'religious-like' things (life-cycle ceremonies, for example). Working with this population was an attempt to understand the 'nones' (as they have come to be known, especially in US discourses) more deeply, given that this population occupies large shares of many European and other national populations and now accounts for roughly half of Britons (British Social Attitudes survey, www.britsocat.com). Using nonreligious *identification* as the sampling criterion for this research meant that the project worked with people with diverse practices, attitudes and socio-cultural positions, several of which could be described as religious or spiritual in some or several regards, as well as with people who appeared to be or said they were largely indifferent to the matters at hand.

In my view, this sampling approach does not capture 'indifferent' populations comprehensively, because it does not include those who may be indifferent but identify with a religion. The existence of such people follows the logical supposition that, given that Western cultural trajectories are shifting from the religious to the nonreligious, areligious and alternatively spiritual, people who are indifferent to religion are more likely to identify with an inherited *religious* tradition than a new nonreligious or spiritual one. For most people in the UK, identifying with a religion is to follow the path of least resistance (Lee 2014). Thus, in this context at least, it may even be that the majority of indifferent people identify themselves as religious and, by the same logic, uphold the tenets of the religions of their backgrounds.

On the other hand, nonreligious cultures have established normative positions in discrete areas of British socio-cultural life, and the UK is as often identified as a 'secular society' in popular discourses as it is a 'Christian' one (Lee 2016) – indeed, the UK's unusually even balance of religious and nonreligious identification may be one reason why it has played a central role in generating debates about religion and nonreligious cultures and the 'god wars' that have been taken up, if not globally, at least in cosmopolitan contexts around the world (ibid.). Within these contexts, identifying as nonreligious may in fact be the readier, less controversial option, meaning we can also anticipate indifference to religion within nonaffiliate populations. In addition, the negative formulation of 'not religious' descriptions may appeal to those who are seeking to identify themselves as distant from the topic at hand, as much as it does to those who are seeking to identify themselves in contradistinction to religious cultures more avowedly. In short, working with nonaffiliate and other nonreligious populations is likely to include people who are 'indifferent to religion' but, at the same time, will not *only* include people who are indifferent to religion and will not account for that population as a whole.

Though the methodology of my work captured many lines of potential indifference toward particular religious practices and cultures, as well as bringing me into contact with several people who conceived of themselves as indifferent, I met with very few people who appeared to be roundly or comprehensively indifferent to religion; perhaps only one. This may be partly attributable to the demographics of the sample. In order to explore the potential variety of positions and meanings that underlie the basic and generic nonreligious identification that roughly half of Britons make, the sample was designed to maximise variation in all other regards, working with people exhibiting an array of religion-relevant demographic characteristics (e.g. ages, genders, ethnicities, religious backgrounds). Recruitment methods meant, however, that the final sample was biased towards those with tertiary level education. The broad demographic approach was appropriate for investigating such a large population, which necessarily includes people from across the different demographic spectra, even if it is weighted towards certain positions.[7] It is worth noting, however, that some negative correlations between religious indifference or religious illiteracy (and it is not always easy or possible to differentiate these) and education levels (Voas and McAndrew 2012) might mean that a sample biased towards more highly educated people would have included fewer examples of indifferent people.

Recruiting Indifferent People

Zuckerman (2008) describes the difficulties he had in persuading people who understood themselves to be indifferent to religion to participate in his interviews. This is a central issue for researchers in this area: people who understand themselves as

[7] See, for example, Keysar and Navarro-Rivera (2013); and Woodhead (2014).

uninterested in the topic researchers wish to discuss may not be inclined to participate in research. It was in the interests of maximum variation to recruit some people who felt that the interview themes were important to them and some who did not, and including the latter was certainly the more challenging prospect.

This project addressed this issue in a number of ways, largely at the recruitment stage. Working with people from outside of organised nonreligious settings was one way of widening the net to indifferent people. In view of the maximum variation sampling strategy, several methods of recruitment were used and three participants were typically recruited at each of these 'nodes'. Recruitment methods included approaching people at nonreligious events (participants in nonreligious culture were not excluded from my sample, but were the minority) and in everyday social settings. Secular organisations were also used to recruit people: recruitment adverts were circulated around occupational networks; for example, one advert was emailed around a large non-governmental organisation in the UK, whilst another was circulated around an online network for creative workers in London.

Secondly, in some cases the topic of research was not specified in the initial phase of recruitment but was introduced in a later phase of discussion. Participants recruited in this way were told that research dealt with the experience of living in contemporary societies, a broad topic designed to be salient to most people and, at the same time, involving no (ethically suspect) subterfuge. Secondly, as well as circulating adverts, approaching people in person brought people into the project who might not have actively responded to advertisements. As research proceeded, interviewees also suggested other people for interview – their friends, partners, children. This 'snowballing' effect brought people into research who were sceptical themselves of how useful their contribution might be, and I took up these invitations for that reason amongst others.

Via these recruitment methods, I worked with several people who, when the focus on religion was discussed, raised doubts about whether they were going to be able to help me in my work – doubts which indicated that the recruitment methods had captured exactly those people with self-understandings as 'indifferent' that I was interested in. At this point and throughout the interview itself, it also seemed to be helpful to emphasise how valuable it was to the research to know about the things that participants found uninteresting as well as those they found interesting; about the things they found to be personally or generally irrelevant as well as the things that they felt were salient to them; and about the things they did not know or felt uncertain of as well as the things they felt they could speak more knowledgeably about. These encouragements appeared to be effective since several respondents said, for example, that they did not know the religious position of one or more person in their personal network.

Data and Analysis

Typical discussions asked interviewees to think about how they would identify themselves in a census or social science survey, before opening up into broader discussion about self-classification and, in turn, issues and topics relating to religion: the use and experience of participating in religious, nonreligious and civil rituals and ceremonies, secularist politics (through a discussion of the British phenomenon of 'faith schools'), belief questions relating to typical 'religious' questions (about origins of life, afterlife, Gods, morality, fate and so on). The interview also included a qualitative social network exercise, in which participants discussed the religious or nonreligious outlooks and identities of their close family and friends.[8]

As degree as well as mode of engagement with religion, spiritual and nonreligious cultures was a central issue of this research, the analysis considered points of connection and disconnection and different areas of knowledge and lack of knowledge. The social network exercise proved to be very helpful in this regard, as it gave access to knowledge that had become tacit, as people searched their minds to think how it was that they talk with any degree of confidence about a friend or family member's religious perspective or identity. As much as stated responses, emotional reactions were also crucial to the analysis: enthusiasm, excitement, sadness, surprise – all of these responses and more helped identify commitments that matter. As Wallis (2014) notes, researchers interested in indifference need to attend to indications that an interviewee has not thought about the subject matter before, and, by the same token, muted emotional responses also help identify contacts and engagements that do not really matter to people, at least not in any direct way.

The distinct topic areas of the interview discussion also made it possible to triangulate data gathered within single interviews. So, for example, self-understanding as indifferent presented in the discussion of survey identification might contrast with in-depth knowledge of friends and family members' religious views and cultural attachments; on the other hand, a participant might have answered questions about their subjective, abstract beliefs enthusiastically and claimed to be deeply interested in the topic at hand, but also consistently present a lack of knowledge about religiosity, spirituality and nonreligiosity in discussion of relationships and situations in their everyday lived lives. This method of internal triangulation was also useful for offsetting social desirability biases that interview methods are susceptible to. Finally, whilst my analysis tried to be respectful of hybridity, complexity, internal contractions and situational variation in terms of informants' views and comments, nevertheless a high degree of inconsistency within an interview – in which participants' changed their story frequently – was also taken to be a possible

[8] More detail of these methods can be found in Lee (2015a, b) and a full review is provided in Lee (2012b, Ch. 4).

indication of a lack of meaningful connection with the topics and cultural forms under discussion, especially if that impression was corroborated by other data.[9]

These methods produced ample data for analysis and, given the subtlety of the idea of indifference, this analysis necessarily required an interpretative approach. Consequently, a final point on analysis is that our understanding of indifference would benefit greatly and in the long-term from meta-analyses of several studies, thus offsetting the cultural contingencies and researcher subjectivity that will shape the analysis in an individual project of this nature. Collecting and encouraging such studies is another valuable contribution of this volume.

Indifferent People

The evidence of this research is that, though less common than is claimed by analysts and by people themselves in their self-understandings (Lee 2014, 2015a, b), it is certainly possible to be generally indifferent to religion, spirituality and nonreligion – to take little interest in ideas about and media discourses surrounding these cultures; to have no strong concern about the use of particular lifecycle ceremonies, other than an interest, perhaps, in the wishes of the other people involved; and to conduct relationships with other people without regard to their religious, spiritual or nonreligious lives. James, a 24-year-old magazine journalist, was one such person,[10] and in this section I give a portrait of James in order to explore what someone we might primarily characterise as indifferent to religion might look like.

I had arranged to meet James's girlfriend, Annabel, for an interview in the Cambridge study in 2006 and Annabel suggested I interviewed James after herself. James agreed and I interviewed them in turn in a university meeting room whilst the other sat outside. James described himself as White British and, when asked how he would identify his religious position on a survey said, briefly, 'no religion'. Though James said he was 'moderately' interested in religion – something I will come back to – he consistently displayed signs suggestive of indifference throughout the interview. He answered questions calmly and briefly, and softened his answers with phrases like 'I suppose', 'not particularly', 'not really' and so on – though this may have also reflected a general manner of communication as much as his stance towards religion in particular.[11] This interview was the shortest of any I conducted: whilst most interviews lasted around an hour to an hour and a half (and some went

[9] For an extended discussion of complexity and hybridity in nonreligious populations, see af Burén (2015).

[10] Pseudonyms are used to preserve participants' anonymity, and some details of participants' work and cultural lives are changed for this reason.

[11] One interesting methodological prospect would be to investigate engagement with religion alongside engagement with other things. This would help ascertain the extent to which indifference to religion is a particular characteristic, rather than an expression of a generally indifferent attitude; or maybe part of a wider category of subjects provoking indifference.

on for much longer), James and I worked our way through all of the topics in just 20 min.

The following exchange illustrates the tone of the conversations; the interviewer's words are in italics:

If you were given a survey, and it said to describe your religious position, what would you put?

No religion.

. . .

Would it concern you that that might suggest that religion wasn't important to you in any way?

Would it concern me? Nah, not really.

. . . I'm going to ask you about what your beliefs are – or aren't.

Okay.

Do you believe in god, or any kind of higher power?

Not really, no.

'Not really, no'?

No. No. That's a 'no'.

What do you believe happens to you after you die?

Simple – um, I mean, simple, just as in life ended, that sort of thing.

Okay, and what happens to your body, for example?

Well, I mean, it will either get buried or cremated – one of two ways.

And do you believe in the concept of a soul?

Not really, no.

What happens to your mind or your, you know, what made you unique: is it just part of your body and decomposes, or…?

Pretty much, yeah, that's it. Just whatever's there – life forms – whether it be humans, whether it be animals, just buried, dead, buried.

Fair enough. Is that something you feel quite comfortable with –

Yeah.

- or is it something that keeps you awake every now and then, or …?

No, that's something I'm quite happy with.

This discussion is typical of the interview in general. James deals with questions briefly, stating his views clearly but also casually, and appears to be calm and comfortable in his views. He understands the questions – he is not ignorant of these issues – but does not appear to care very deeply about them. In this way, he is a picture of the secularisation theorist's notion of the secular person.

James's casualness persisted in considering more direct relationships with religious cultures: he is neither worried about being identified as not caring about religion, nor is he concerned about taking up religious concepts to describe the world, when that is presented to him as a possibility:

Do you believe in the concept of 'sin'?

Um. [Pause] Well, I mean, I guess a sin is something that you – I mean, cause there's a list of sins, isn't there, but that's in the Bible. I guess I'd consider a sin to be something that's bad.

Okay, 'something that's bad' – for example? Murder?

I guess a sin could be a sin without it being, without it being – you don't have to attach the word 'sin' to the religious . . . context of it, I suppose. Like, for example, murder is a sin, I suppose.

Or, later on, we discussed participation in lifecycle ceremonies: would James use religious or civil ceremonies in his own life? Did he imagine that he and his girlfriend would get married in a church? 'Uh yeah,' he said, 'I guess we'll get married in a church':

> *Do you have a problem with the fact that you would be required to –*
> Give vows and things like that?
> *Give vows, you know, to the god in which you don't believe?*
> No, I wouldn't have a problem with that, no. . . . I'm quite happy to sort of take part in something like that without necessarily putting my whole weight behind it. I can accept that everyone else is – that's what they believe, that's how they want to do it, so I go along with it.

Whereas other participants objected to the grounding of words, meanings or practices in religious traditions, in these examples James is relaxed. By contrast, for example, Emily, a student, also in her mid-20s and describing herself as 'nonreligious' (amongst other things), spoke passionately about not wishing to get married in a church and was critical of nonreligious people making use of religious services (Lee 2015b, 117):

> I don't think I could get married in a church – I think that would be awful . . . I hate the fact that when [a friend of mine got married], she got married in a church: she never bloody goes to church! I find something icky about it.

James willingness to, in his words, 'go along' with both religious and nonreligious practices and public roles is quite distinct from these kinds of views. In fact, this attitude of 'going along' might be seen as a chief characteristic of indifference to religion and to its perceived alternatives. It is clear that James's life is shaped by his own largely nonreligious beliefs and by the religious beliefs and practices of other, and his case illustrates how perfect indifference to religion can only be an ideal typical state. Nevertheless, his discussion also illustrates how these engagements may also be very lightly felt, and may be part of a general orientation reasonably described as 'indifferent' overall.

Indifferent Practices

Whilst most participants apart from James engaged with religion, spirituality and nonreligion in a number of ways, they did not do so uniformly: most participants expressed at least some engagement with religious, spiritual and nonreligious cultures in relation to a particular topic or situation, as well as demonstrating forms of non-engagement too. This study therefore highlights the need to provide more specific accounts about what aspects of religion it is that people are indifferent to, rather than only using 'indifference to religion' as a blanket category. In addition, it emphasises the need to include relationships of indifference and engagement with related spiritual and nonreligious cultures, too, and to account for whether indifference is associated with specific religious, spiritual and nonreligious practices or

traditions rather than religious, spiritual and/or nonreligious practices or traditions in general.

The topics and situations that failed to incite engagement varied between interviews: as we have seen, some participants were particularly relaxed about participating in religious ceremonies while others had more acute responses to participation in rituals. Some participants also found particular ceremonies more affective – be they enjoyable or troubling – compared to others. For example, some people found participation in less familiar, exotic religious rituals unproblematic and felt more casually about them in general while at the same time experiencing strong reactions – positive and negative – to more familiar religious rituals. Emily's sense of hypocrisy in participating in Christian ceremonies without being a believer did not extend to other ceremonies, for example: she differentiated this from her cousin's participating in a Sikh ceremony as a non-Sikh, and the pleasure and fascination she thought she would feel in the same scenario (ibid.). This distinction was partly related to the different levels of commitment she felt that participating in familiar and exotic religions implied: in the Christian setting that she had been brought up in, she felt that she and others were involved in a sober, quasi-contractual process that she could only participate in dishonestly; in other settings, she was a tourist and voyeur, and there was integrity and honesty in this role – there was no confusion, nothing misleading about the nature of her participation.

In previous work, I have also discussed the different ways that people respond to religious others, contrasting this with the view that 'secularists' are necessarily anti-religious – a view that has become commonplace in critical approaches to (specific kinds of) secularism (Lee 2011, 2015b). Instead, I show how the same religious practices may be unproblematic and uninteresting to some, whilst being challenging and provocative to others. For example, nonreligious rationalist interpretations of religion can play out quite differently, despite their common rationalism: Hermione, a writer from London in her mid-30s, said that she could understand and respect friends who had thought through and could defend their religious positions whereas she found unthinking acquiescence to religion problematic; by contrast, for Emily, it was understandable that friends who participated in an otherwise unintelligible religious tradition might do so because it was part of their family background while any attempt to provide a rational defence of a religious belief was, for her, bound to fail and was provocative (Lee 2011):

> Emily: I think the difference is that I don't know, for example, any Born-Again Christians: I'd find that alarming. Whereas someone who's been born into that, it's like the way your mum used to a cook a Sunday roast, it's kind of who you are, … therefore you'd be doing something fairly major to say, 'I don't believe in it'. Especially because [my friend's father] was a 'man of the cloth'. That's very different to not having [a religion in your background] and then choosing it. Because, if you *choose* it, you really have to have a real reason to choose all these mad things.
>
> Hermione: [The religion of my friends is a source of] interest much more than tension. I think... all of my friends who have any kind of religious bent, I think do so from a really sort of open-minded, intellectual, spiritual, searching kind of a standpoint. So they're thinking about god and the world from within the context of, say, the Catholic Church, but …

> they're not sitting there and accepting, repeating dogma or doctrine. So, as a result, I can sort of respect that, to an extent.

Both accounts combine anti-religious sentiments with pro-religious ones; both accounts identify types of religious practice that they feel accepting of, and others that offend them. They draw attention to the need to be clear about the specific object of indifference (or any other relation) to religion: indifferent to what *type* of religious observance, practice, experience or cultural form precisely? It seems unlikely that many people are indifferent to the dramatic acts of religious violence that are reported and further dramatised in extensive media coverage, for example. If this is true, it means that when we chart 'indifference to religion' we do not have indifference to religious *violence* – and maybe to other particular religious phenomena – in mind. What, then, is it that we *do* have in mind? This is something that we need to be precise about in order to produce deeper conceptual and theoretical arguments as well as draw out the nuances in indifference as an empirical phenomenon. Making these distinctions is helpful, too, in order to combat generalised and stereotyped ideas of religiosity that may indeed, as critics contend, be held by at least some nonreligious people.

It is also possible – and interesting – that particular topics are more likely to provoke indifference than others. As interviews proceeded, I was conscious that participants typically responded to some questions more coolly than to others. For example, the question about origins of life was one that frequently provoked short answers and a tone of disinterest. It may be, perhaps, that humans are much more concerned with the afterlife as an issue of practical concern and coming experience than they are with questions of origins, which are purely philosophical, as Pascal Boyer (2001) argues in his cognitive study of religion. Certainly, this lack of engagement stood in contrast to other areas of discussion. Many people answered questions about the existence of God or a higher power promptly and articulately, with concise, familiar statements, in a manner that suggested that discourses on theism were particularly readily available in this cultural context.[12] But they discussed religious ideas in relation to bereavement at much more length, with many fewer indications of indifference.

As a qualitative study, these impressions are only that, but they are sufficient to show how blanket notions of 'indifference to religion' may well obscure important distinctions.[13] In addition, blanket notions of indifference are in danger of replicating taken-for-granted notions of what constitutes religion itself. Wallis (2014, 82) finds that, for young people in the UK, 'religion was understood as largely being concerned with propositional belief (whether metaphysical, existential or ethical)'. To some extent, notions of indifference take up these popular understandings uncritically, and offer simplified understandings of indifference as a consequence. Instead, research like this points to the possibility of generating typologies of different complexes of engagement and indifference – complicated and nuanced models that

[12] Cf. Simeon Wallis's 2014 study of indifference of young people in UK.

[13] See also Cotter (2017 – this volume).

might then be developed even further through cross-cultural analysis to understand patterns of indifference – or 'secularity' – much more deeply.[14]

Indifferent Populations

Though they typically engage with people (like James perhaps) rather than practices and do not therefore capture the nuance that the above discussion suggests is necessary, there are nevertheless statistical indications that indifference to at least some aspects of religion is widespread in several parts of the world, the UK included. In terms of scale, 41 per cent of Britons identify their commitment to religion or nonreligion as 'moderate' (British Social Attitudes survey 2008, in Voas and Ling 2010, 69), possibly indicating a light degree of attachment that is incidental to rare moments of contact with religious and nonreligious cultures – including the participation in such survey research. Working with data from 1999, Pascal Siegers (2010) has developed a method of identifying people who are generally 'indifferent to religion' and this work suggests that a third of the British population fall into this category: 35 per cent. Siegers analysis also suggests that indifference is the modal condition across Europe, with most of the countries analysed having larger indifferent populations than they have any other 'religious' group, and all having substantial indifferent populations: of the countries analysed, the 'religious indifference' group is the largest of any 'religious' position in Belgium, Denmark, Finland, the UK, Hungary, Norway, Portugal and Sweden, whilst Italy, Netherlands and Portugal had larger religious or nonreligious populations.

It is intriguing that the indifferent populations that Siegers documents seem to be largest in countries that also have large nonreligious populations, in line with the secularisationist view, yet are also consistently large in other places too – suggesting something else entirely. Comparing the US and the UK, whilst only 15 per cent of Americans said they were moderately or extremely nonreligious (compared to 37 per cent in the UK), half of the population (51 per cent) said they were moderately religious (Voas and Ling 2010, 69). Of the nonreligious population, 6 per cent were moderately attached to this description, meaning that 57 per cent of Americans' relationship with religion is moderate, compared to 41 per cent of Britons. This presents us with a paradox: whilst in Siegers analysis, indifferent populations seem to be larger when explicitly nonreligious populations are also large, this comparison the UK and the US suggests the opposite effect: the more nonreligious population is the less indifferent one.[15] At the same time, the indifferent category appears to be large in both cases, despite other differences, and, indeed, the 'fuzzy' religious cat-

[14] Atko Remmel's (2017 – this volume) attempt to apply the question schedule used in my UK-based research to an Estonian sample – and the challenges he encountered in that attempt – is a fascinating and powerful demonstration of how a cross-cultural exploration of indifference is needed, as is the retuning of methodological instruments in response to such differences.

[15] Cf. Lee (2013) on pervasiveness of indifference, and its stability over time.

egory is the most similar in scale between the UK and the US (36 and 24 per cent respectively); the real differences are seen in relation to clear religiosity (26 and 70 per cent) and clear 'unreligiosity' (31 and 4 per cent) (ibid., 71). Ultimately, then, the relationship between indifference and avowed nonreligion is equivocal – and is a crucial question for researchers studying and seeking to theorise religious change.

Another methodological and analytical puzzle for researchers is the extent to which moderate levels of attachment should really be understood as indifference. If, as my work shows, meaningful engagements with religion are frequently combined with self-reported disengagement, this raises questions about the extent to which it is correct to interpret 'moderate' positions as indifference at all. Rather than indifference, there may be a number of other things going on. One is engagement with banal religious and nonreligious cultures, which surround people in their daily lives and do not appear to be exceptional or noteworthy to those who engage with them (Lee 2015a, b). In a similar vein, David Nash (2017, 35–36 – this volume) discusses the impact of 'bland' religious cultures in the formation of indifferent attitudes – and, we might add, bland nonreligious cultures might be significant too. Such engagements may go unnoticed, but be significant still. Similarly, numerous scholars identify a pre-modern period in which religion was permeated throughout life and society, so that it was not visible in the way that it is now; on the other hand, today, scholars argue, secularity has become 'the water that we swim in' (Hirschkind 2011, 634). In his study of the sacred, Gordon Lynch (2012) has proposed that deeply embedded cultures only become visible when they are disrupted, an idea that Lorna Mumford is exploring in relation to anti-religious narratives in contemporary Britain. Similarly, Samuel Bagg and David Voas (2010) speculate that apparent indifference might be bound up with committed positions that have simply been unchallenged and become taken for granted. In these ways, it may be that the embeddedness of nonreligious and religious positions might look a lot like indifference, and make it very difficult for people and researchers to recognise the existence let alone the meaningfulness of these positionings.

Elsewhere, some statistics support the suggestion given above that indifferent people are more likely to identify as religious than they are as nonreligious. In the British Social Attitudes survey, for example, people were more likely to describe their religiosity as moderate than they were nonreligiosity. The majority of people describing themselves as nonreligious say that they are 'very or extremely non-religious' rather than 'somewhat non-religious': 26 and 11 per cent respectively (British Social Attitudes survey 2008; in Voas and Ling 2010, 69). By comparison, religious people are far more likely to say that they are somewhat religious (30 per cent) rather than 'very or extremely' religious (7 per cent). In the US, the vast majority – 51 out of 57 per cent – of moderates are religious rather than nonreligious, and the nonreligious are more likely to be 'very or extremely' nonreligious than moderately so (9 per cent and 6 per cent respectively) (ibid.) These data do need to be considered in context – relative to national, religious and secularist socio-cultural norms in which strong religious piety is considered to be suspect, whilst nonreligious commitments are under-acknowledged and are therefore not subjected to the

same constraints. And they must also be treated cautiously, given profound ambiguities around what precisely people might mean by being 'somewhat nonreligious' versus 'extremely nonreligious' and which of these would entail the greatest indifference.[16] They do, nevertheless, provide some tentative support for the view that indifference accounts for a larger share of populations identifying as religious than of those identifying as nonreligious.

Another set of data concerning indifference demonstrates its possible significance in rather more pressing terms. These data suggest that explicitly religious and nonreligious populations have much more in common with one another than either do with an indifferent or fuzzy population, and that the latter group may be more likely to experience a number of deprivations. In her work in Germany, Tatjana Schnell (2010) has compared 'existential indifference' with having clear existential conceptions – religious, nonreligious and others besides. Whilst she shows – in confirmation of the findings presented here – that nonreligious people are as likely as religious people to have developed, active meaning systems, her statistical work also identifies a sizeable group who experience high levels of 'meaninglessness' and who likewise experience poorer levels of well-being and health. Similarly, people with religious and nonreligious convictions compare favourably in terms of mental health to those who are doubtful of their views.

In engaging with indifference as an object of concern, however, researchers also need to give serious consideration to a rival ethical demand, namely whether we should allow people to maintain their self-understandings as indifferent or, indeed, any other form of indifference. Burchardt (2017, 89–90 – this volume), for example, demonstrates the ways in which secularist and anti-religious activists can, like religious ones, make it difficult for people to be indifferent and the way in which this may be seen as intrusive; Klug (2017, 231 – this volume) identifies indifference as a positive goal by some people, and therefore one that might be treated respectfully; and Wallis (2014) considers how researchers' approaches to religion and nonreligion may force areligious research participants into one of these two positionalities. It is possible that we as researchers might make the same kinds of intrusion. To some extent, these issues are offset by the ways in which some claims of indifference are demonstrably claims to power and should therefore provoke critical engagement (Lee 2014, 2015a), and it is helpful to differentiate between indifference as a analytic category and indifference as a value (ibid.). Certainly, studies like Schnell's raise the possibility that indifference might be bound up with precariousness and demand researchers' attention not only because it is a widespread and under-researched condition but because it may be a vulnerable one.

[16] I am grateful to David Voas for discussion on this point.

Conclusion

This chapter has sought to build on previous work interrogating and critiquing indifference as a way of understanding secular populations (Lee 2014; 2015a, b). Though critical, that work also contributes to the study of indifference in a number of ways. It draws attention to the fuzzy nature of indifference as a concept and the subtle distinctions being made between having no engagement with religion (ignorance) and having no *meaningful* engagement with religion (indifference).[17] It highlights also slippery empirical situations in which many people who *understand* themselves to be indifferent to religion in fact engage with religious, nonreligious and spiritual cultures in diverse ways – in everyday social and cultural interactions, and in making public identifications that are banal and go without notice. Taking a relational approach, this work also problematises the notion of 'indifference' to the extent that it prioritises some experiences of religious culture above others, so that engagements with some types of religious thought and practice are viewed as more meaningful than others a priori. It also draws attention to how notions of indifference are bound up with theologically informed and religious-centric secularisation theory,[18] in which religious cultures are treated as singular and without equivalent.

Theoretically, that work has also called attention to rival conceptions of how indifference and substantive nonreligious cultures – irreligion, anti-theism, nonreligious humanism, materialism and so on – are related to one another in different theories of religion and modern life (see also Bullivant 2012). So, for several secularisation theorists, indifference is the endpoint of secularisation processes (Bruce 2002), whilst other scholars see explicit non-theist (or 'positive atheist') stances and atheist identities as evidence of secularity and imply that indifference is therefore a weak or imperfect secularity, rather than its fullest form. On the other hand, indifference plays little role at all in critical accounts of (modernist anti-religious) secularist cultures, increasingly known as critical secular studies, nor is it central to pluralist notions of secularity like Charles Taylor's (2007).

Questions about indifference are not only empirical, but are ones whose answers will mediate some of the central theoretical debates in the study of religion, secularity and modernity. The emerging study of nonreligion also gives rise to new questions about how and why indifference to religion should be treated differently from indifference to nonreligious and alternatively spiritual cultures, too. It is clear that indifference to religion requires much more attention, not only because it is

[17] See also Lee (2015a, b) on the distinction between secularity (as the subordination of religious matters) and nonreligion (as difference from religion); and Wallis (2014) on my distinction between nonreligion and areligion (that is, the total absence of engagement with religion). Wallis argues that what many researchers identify as 'indifference' are really occasions of areligion rather than nonreligion, and that my suggestion that indifference is a form of difference from religion, albeit a minimal or mild one, may be confusing.

[18] In this, my thought is informed by work from critical religion scholars – Timothy Fitzgerald (2000, 2007) and Russell McCutcheon (2007) – though I resolve this critique in a different way.

widespread and under-researched, but because it is of marked theoretical, empirical and perhaps even ethical significance.

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Religion, Interrupted? Observations on Religious Indifference in Estonia

Atko Remmel

Abstract The question whether secularization is indicated by forcefully expressed nonreligious positions or rather by an indifference toward religion has been a subject of academic debate. Therefore, studying religious situation of a country with assumed high secularization level would provide valuable insight into the nature of religious indifference. Based on historical and contemporary data, the article takes a look onto indifference toward religion in Estonia, which is often considered one of the most secularized countries in Europe.

Keywords Secularization • Religious indifference • Estonia • Religious illiteracy • Secularization of language • Alternative spirituality

The discussion over the outcome of secularization has pointed out two possibilities. Some scholars (Casanova 1994) see strongly expressed secular positions (atheism, humanism) as an indicator of secularization whereas the others (Bruce 2002; Bagg and Voas 2010) point out that logical result would be indifference toward religion due to the irrelevance of religion to daily life. From this point of view, Estonia, the northernmost and smallest of the Baltic states, provides an interesting possibility for a case study. Many studies dealing with secularization and contemporary religiosity, often based on some particular answers of quantitative surveys (Eurobarometer 2005; Gallup 2009), categorize Estonia to the group of countries with very high level of secularization. Indeed, Estonia has recent experience with the Soviet "forced" secularization project and according to the usual criteria for secularization—religion lodged deep into the private sphere, it's low importance to daily life, low level of belonging etc.—Estonia can be seen as a perfectly fit to the group.

Regardless of the reputation, studies on secularization of Estonian society are almost missing. This phenomenon is studied mainly in terms of declining church attendance and the changing nature of religiosity. Nonreligion, with a few exceptions, has remained out of scholarly focus. There are no studies on religious indifference (understood as in Catto 2017, 68—this volume: religion having no practical

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significance for one's daily life). Therefore, this chapter sets out to gather available information on religious indifference in Estonian society, past and present, and tries to find the answers to the following questions:

1. What is the meaning of religious indifference in Estonian context, what are its characteristics?
2. Is there enough evidence to support the description of Estonia as a very secularized country?
3. Does something indicate that indifference could be the final outcome of secularization?

Notes on Religious Indifference in Estonian History

Estonians' low religiosity is usually associated with Soviet-era "forced secularization," yet in rooting out religion Soviet ideological workers skillfully relied on the themes already present in Estonian national consciousness. Most important of them are elements of Estonian national narrative, an artificial legend in the manner of Romanticism that was formed during the national awakening in the second half of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century, and has been described as the most powerful story that influences Estonians' understanding of the past (Tamm 2008). Its main concept is Estonians' fight for freedom throughout history and for own culture—a central element of an Estonian identity (Karjahärm and Sirk 2001, 229). Since Estonians had for centuries belonged to the lower class, ruled mostly by the Baltic-German aristocracy, the narrative was formed along the lines of Marxist class struggle.

Due to the dominating Baltic-German Lutheran "high church's" hostility towards the national awakening and the consequent church criticism of the nascent Estonian intelligentsia, Estonian national identity never joined forces with any religion (Statistics Estonia 2011).[1] Therefore Estonan national narrative includes themes like "Christianity is inherently alien to Estonians," but there is also the notion that Estonians are a tepid toward religion: "The evidence that the Estonian character lacks the warmth and depth of religious feelings floats in the air" (Reiman [1910] 2008, 383). This motif originates from tense relationships between Estonians and Baltic-German "high church" and is based on clergy's accusations of due to the diminishing numbers of Estonian churchgoers. Although this idea had supporters even among Estonians, for most of them these accusations were unsound and even offensive (Remmel 2016).

After the fall of the Russian Empire, during the Era of Independence (1918–1940), the church's position in society was still quite strong. It was perceived as the

[1] According to the 2011 census of Estonia's 1.3 million inhabitants, 69 % are ethnic Estonians; the biggest minority, 25 %, are Russians, whose national identity is strongly connected with Orthodoxy. Regarding this considerable difference, I am hereafter concentrating on ethnic Estonians, in cultural and statistical references.

moral backbone of society and the main provider of rites of passage. Estonians gained majority among clergy and the motif of national religious tepidity seems to be not present. At least formal belonging to church was seen as *bon ton*, although being not religious was not a problem in daily life: a report about an ordinary school pointed out that of 240 pupils only two are "heathens," but "nobody blames them for not being christened" (Välbe 1938). According to the 1934 census, only 0.7 % were "without faith"—double the number in the previous census in 1922. Still, despite the fact that about 99 % of Estonians associated themselves with churches, it was "already known that these lists include lots of people who are actually drawn away from the church": supposedly only 25 % of the population was actively committed. Furthermore, a decline in church ceremonies was detected, which academics interpreted not as opposition to church but as "indifferent people leaving" (Reiman 1935).

Once Estonia was annexed by the Soviet Union in 1940, it was subjected to the Soviets' antireligious policy. Yet it is clear that before the antireligious campaign in 1958–1964, religion and church were at least somewhat culturally important. After Stalin's death in 1953, a "religious renaissance" took place across the Soviet Union, expressed especially by a demand for religious rites (Chumachenko 2002, 131). At the peak of the "renaissance," in 1957, 56 % of the children born in Estonia were christened, 30 % of marriages took place in churches, and 65 % of the dead were buried according to church customs (Vimmsaare 1981, 45).[2]

Thus, turning one's back on church did not happen just by changing the state's attitude towards religion: "It is evident that beside true believers we have a contingent of 'semi-believers' or those who just practice church rituals . . . Usually they fall under the influence of the church through the celebrations of miscellaneous family-related events, trying to find some kind of festiveness," which was almost absent in state-provided life-cycle rituals in the 1950s. "And the church has a detailed arsenal for celebrating family events, polished throughout the centuries" (Eller 1958). Nevertheless, critical articles indicated that the "problem of religion" was not acknowledged by the majority of populace and the attitude towards "religious behavior" was quite mild even among communists: "The Young Communist is an atheist. This means not only denial of God, but an active militant attitude towards religious prejudices. . . . But an opinion has taken root: it is all right if a Young Communist simply does not believe in God and does not participate in church ceremonies" (n.p. 1958), referring to actual indifference toward religious matters.

The situation alarmed state ideologists, and soon an antireligious campaign (1958–1964) was launched. Methods used to battle religion varied from propaganda of atheism to secret legislation, from economic restrictions to the development of secular rituals. The last method became typical of Estonian anti-religious policy—in breaking church traditions, substitution rather than opposition was used. Confirmation was replaced by Youth Summer Days in 1957. Cemetery holidays for

[2] The reliability of Soviet official statistics is low, but ERA 1 indicates that these figures are at least approximate.

Table 1 Participation in secular rituals in Estonia

Year	Namegiving (%)	Secular marriage (%)	Secular burial (%)
1957	41	70	35
1968	87	97	54
1978	89	98	67

Vimmsaare (1981, 12)

commemorating the dead under the aegis of the church were substituted by their secular equivalents, and the first festive secular marriage ceremonies were held in 1958. Christening was substituted by namegiving in 1959, and the development of secular funeral traditions began in 1960. Although the Party saw these ceremonies in the context of atheist upbringing, their ideological content was hardly perceived. Nevertheless, due to the antireligious campaign and other changes in society, the continuity of church traditions was broken, and religion was marginalized by the second half of the 1960s (Remmel 2015), creating a "detachment" or interruption of religious tradition that lasted until the second half of the 1980s. The churches lay low, and their membership and participation in ceremonies continuously declined (see Table 1).

However, the fruits of this victory were somewhat bitter. While new rituals did a good job of creating the interruption, atheist propaganda, due to its low quality and inability to address actual issues of life, failed to create "militant atheists," that is, those with a conscious atheist worldview. Still, by emphasizing the elements of national narrative, atheist propaganda managed to revive the meme of Estonians' religious tepidity: e.g. "The criticism of the church by the Herrnhut brothers was just a tactical move to 'awaken' the religiously apathetic nation" (Kabur and Tarand 1961, 11). Nevertheless, since religion was not part of everyday life, official atheism was soon perceived as an anachronism: "Over the course of the last two Soviet decades, Soviet atheists made a series of troubling and painful discoveries. Not only were the people on whom they focused their attention largely indifferent to their work, but this indifference extended to the political elite, and even to the atheist camp itself" (Smolkin-Rothrock 2010, 12). In short, religion and church were out of the picture, but instead of atheism, indifference towards both religion and state-supported atheism was achieved.

Up to this point, all nonbelievers in the USSR had been counted as atheists, but soon it became evident that this was not accurate. One of the first surveys to include the category of "indifferent" was conducted in 1968 in Sverdlovsk district (in Russia's Ural Mountains); as a result, almost 50 % of respondents identified as "indifferent" instead of "atheists." The result was so unbelievable that the whole survey's accuracy was questioned. Subsequent surveys soon confirmed the diversity of nonreligion, and new categories were developed (Vimmsaare 1981, 6, 15, 16). However, the enthusiasm about sociology that started in the Soviet Union in the 1960s did not carry over to the 1970s, and sociology was even denounced, because the results were not in accordance with official ideology (Osipov 2009). For that

reason the surveys either broke off or were accessible only for "official use." Even in the 1980s, researchers had to use old data that had been made public in the 1960s.

The same goes with Vimmsaare's[3] book *Indifference: Is It Good or Bad?* (1981), the only Soviet-era study on religious indifference in Estonia. The book was published during the last Soviet atheist campaign that started in 1981. While the goals of the previous campaign in the 1960s were bringing down churches and turning believers into atheists, the second campaign tried to deal with the actual outcome of the first campaign—indifference. This effort could be described mainly as a PR campaign that emphasized "life-affirming attitude" of Soviet atheism and its relevance to everyday life. Compared to the previous one, the campaign was quite weak and ceased in Estonia in 1984/1985 without any noteworthy results.

Vimmsaare's semi-academic/semi-propagandistic work relies mostly on the data gathered during the survey "Clubs in Our Time" (1968, n = 1661). Among other questions, the participants were asked their opinions on three statements: "religion is harmful"; "religion is useful"; "religion is neither useful nor harmful." According to this survey, 41 % of respondents (ethnic Estonians) thought of religion as "harmful" (considered as "atheists"), 4 % as "useful" (considered as "believers"), and 54 % as "neither harmful nor useful" (considered as "indifferent").

For being "indifferent" the most influential factors were age and education. Indifference increased with age: aged 16–19, 42 % were "indifferent"; aged 56 and over, 59 % were "indifferent." Like religiosity, indifference decreased with the level of education: "most of the believers were illiterate or had education up to the fourth grade," and 70 % with the same education level were "indifferent." Among respondents with a higher education, only 34 % were "indifferent" and 4 % were believers. Another important factor was nationality—the indifferent group among Estonians was almost 20 % bigger than among Russians (Vimmsaare 1981, 27).

Soviet scholars understood indifference in two ways: as drifting away from a religious worldview, which was considered "positive," whereas the other form described those who have never been "under the influence of religion" and were indifferent toward both religion and atheism—this was considered a "negative" phenomenon. According to Vimmsaare, "they don't believe in God (the supernatural) and immortality of human soul; they have neither a positive nor a negative attitude toward religion and atheism; they may participate in religious ceremonies, but out of nonreligious motives." Vimmsaare does not consider them an outside category (like some Soviet researchers did); he sees indifference as one form of nonbelief—"their consciousness just doesn't have the elements of religiosity, they have a materialistic worldview, but not established opinion about atheism and religion" (Vimmsaare 1981, 29–37).

Main interest of Soviet studies on religious indifference was the "negative" type. It was ideologically important, because the regime saw an indifferent populace as a kind of reservoir from which opposing ideologies, religious and atheist, could draw

[3] Kuulo Vimmsaare (1921–2013), a central figure among Soviet propagandists of atheism in Estonia, was a longtime docent and lecturer on "scientific atheism" at the Estonian Technological Institute (ETI).

people toward their cause. Thus the main research question was: why had people in the "fertile conditions" of the Soviet state not yet turned into atheists? According to Vimmsaare, personal indifference was usually justified with the following statements: (a) believers are few and their impact is small; (b) science and technology are so powerful that religion is losing its influence in any case; (c) there is no need for atheist propaganda, because young people do not believe in God, the middle-aged can think for themselves, and old people can't be changed; (d) there is freedom of belief, and everyone should decide for himself what he believes (Vimmsaare 1981, 46–47). Therefore, Vimmsaare concludes, "indifference is insufficiency of knowledge," and the main way to battle it is disseminating knowledge about atheism. This task was very important, since (a) indifference is widespread; (b) the indifferent group has a strong effect on public opinion about religion and atheism; (c) some of them will turn toward religion in their old age (Vimmsaare 1969). To overcome indifference, he proposes a "complex approach" that includes aesthetic and atheistic upbringing, work education, and the propaganda of scientific knowledge (Vimmsaare 1981, 141).

A work by the same author, *The Attitude of Rural Youth toward Religion in 1967–1989* (2000), sheds some light on indifference in the later years of Soviet rule. The manuscript, written after Vimmsaare's retirement, is an analysis of data from questionnaires that students entering the ETI (n = 3543) completed before beginning their studies, emphasizing the anonymity of the answers and the importance of personal understanding instead of official opinions. The statements were the same as in the 1968 survey, although the option "religion is both useful and harmful," along with the possibility to explain one's position, was added to the questionnaire in 1979.

In general, this data confirmed the continuation of the attitude identified by the earlier survey, as well as the same opinions in the argumentation for indifference. In 1979–1984 (before Gorbachev's rise to power), the position "religion is both useful and harmful" was chosen by 63 % of respondents, while 20 % chose "religion is neither useful nor harmful" (both regarded as "indifferent" positions); religion was considered "harmful" by 13 % and "good" by 3 %. Not many indifferent people repeated official clichés, which "probably had no effect on young people"; the opinions were grounded in the same reasoning as mentioned above. The answers indicate that Vimmsaare was right to point out lack of knowledge as the main reason for indifference. When asked where they got information about religion, 75 % said it came from books by mostly Estonian authors, where religion was ridiculed or shown as the source of various problems (Vimmsaare 2000, 8, 22).

As a result of 40 years of antireligious policy, by the end of 1987—before the relaxation of the state's religious policy—less than 5 % of the entire population (~6 % of ethnic Estonians) belonged to some religious denomination (ERA 2). The beginning of the collapse of the USSR prompted a brief religious boom, with New Religious Movements (NRM) and alternative spirituality movements entering the scene and religion again becoming part of the public sphere. Thousands were baptized, but few of them actually joined religious groups. The period of religious fervor in Estonia lasted from 1987 to 1992. The effects of this phenomenon,

however, were controversial. Society reacquainted itself with religion, but the invasion of NRMs and their aggressive methods of recruitment reinforced the image of "brainwashing" cultivated in the Soviet era.

These radical changes are also reflected in Vimmsaare's data. In 1985 religion was considered "useful" by 5 %, in 1988 by 22 %, and 1989 by 30 %. Although "religion as harmful" dropped from 17 % to less than 1 %, in written comments the negative aspects of fanaticism were often underlined. A majority of respondents (69 %) in 1989 were still "indifferent" (Vimmsaare 2000, 9, 55, 69).

Religious Indifference in Contemporary Estonia

After the "religious boom," religion once again faded from Estonians' collective consciousness. Nowadays the general picture seems to confirm the persistence of the attitude described by Vimmsaare, shaped by the same societal detachment from religion that was formed in the 1960s. In 2011, only 19 % of Estonians embraced some religion (14 % had a Lutheran identity), whereas 65 % answered "no religion" and 13 % declined to answer (Statistics Estonia 2011). Concerning the position of religion in Estonian society, four interconnected topics stand out: radicalization of the national narrative, the unimportance of conventional religion, the secularization of language, and overall religious illiteracy.

Being a very secular nation became generally known after Eurobarometer 2005 results appeared in the Estonian media. The fact that only 16 % of Estonians believed in God (the lowest score in Europe) quickly inspired a popular meme about Estonia being "the world's most atheistic/least religious country"—a similar claim is also made by Czechs (Vaclavik 2014)—which can be seen as a radicalization of the motif of "religious tepidity". For the past 10 years, this reinvigorated motif has become rooted in the national consciousness (Remmel 2016). For example, in 2008, a special advertising award, the Golden Egg, was given to a team that presented Estonia as the least religious country in the world (Engelbrech 2008). Research on religion-themed internet commentaries also indicates that skepticism and/or indifference toward religion is associated with "being Estonian." It is sometimes even used as an argument: "Who the hell needs a Christian school? We are the least religious nation in the world!" (Remmel 2013, see also Taira 2012, 2015 for a related discussion on Finland[4]). Ironically, it seems that Soviet propagandists of atheism only prepared the ground and that the final shift in popular attitudes was triggered by "bourgeois" academics after the collapse of the Soviet system… Nevertheless, in my interviews with the nonreligious this kind of argumentation comes forward quite

[4] It is interesting to note that for Estonians' kinsfolk, Finnish, atheism is associated with communism and therefore anti-Finnishness whereas being Lutheran is still a significant part of being Finnish for many. In this regard Taira is absolutely right in pointing out the influence of national histories to the diversity of atheism and nonreligion in general.

rarely and general attitude is actually "benign" (Zuckerman 2012) or "tolerant indifference" (Ringvee 2012).

The detachment from religion means that Estonians are used to religion not being a part of everyday life. Religion is not remarkably absent (Quack and Schuh 2017, 12—this volume)—just as Siegers (2017, 174—this volume) points out, it is perceived as the "normal" case. Even the churches seem to accept that "opinions and messages from the church often do not break into the news" (Aan 2014). Priit Pullerits, senior editor of *Arter*, a supplement of the biggest Estonian newspaper, *Postimees*, explains: "[This is] because Estonians are religiously tepid. The topics in the media should concern people, but when we look how many go to church… we can talk instead about how few of them go. . . . This topic just does not concern most of the audience. . . . The media has to reflect the society. When religion in society is not topical, nobody writes about it. I cannot imagine that religion could be a theme one could write about in a captivating way. . . . Honestly, it makes everyone yawn" (Piir 2013).

The attitude of Estonian pupils reflects the same position quite well. During the study on religious education (RE), Estonian pupils were asked how often they spoke about religion. The most frequent response was "never," because of lack of interest. Some students even expressed astonishment that religion could be a topic of discussion. The contact with different worldviews was mostly seen as an unpleasant, boring, or even frightening experience (Schihalejev 2010). This is probably the result of a distorted image of religion created by media that covers mostly radical incidents—it is almost the norm that news about religion in the Estonian media appears under the rubric "Diverse World." Meanwhile, getting more balanced treatment is almost impossible. In contrast with the United Kingdom, where "in a semi-rural area of the southern Lake District all six primary schools are faith schools, as is the nearest secondary" (Eccles 2014), in Estonia, of a total of 559 schools in 2013, only 10 were faith schools (1.8 %), and RE was taught in 76 schools (13 %) (EHIS 2013), but it must be noted that the subject is an elective. Since there are no exact data, it is estimated that the number of pupils "affected" by RE is 1–2 % (Schihalejev 2010). Apart from visiting foreign countries, for many of them this is their first and only contact with religion; "the others have only a cartoonish image of religion" (Jürgenstein 2014). This was confirmed by my interviewees: Mona[5] (23, nonreligious) claimed she became interested in religion after spending some time abroad and "seeing that religion can actually make people happy." Not surprisingly, all the attempts to include RE in some form in Estonian schools' compulsory curriculum have met with overall reluctance (Schihalejev 2015). Thus the lack of religion in the public arena grows through a feedback loop—having surpassed a certain threshold, it starts to reinforce itself.

[5] All references to interviews are preliminary findings from my ongoing qualitative research about the nonreligiosity in Estonia. By using semi-structured interviews, the study explores the modes of nonreligiosity, nonreligious identities, and understanding of (non)religious matters. Both nonreligious and religious individuals are included in the sample, thus giving a view from inside and it's "others." All the interviewees appear under nicknames.

The most interesting manifestation of the detachment from religion is reflected in a process that can be called *secularization of language*. While in the United States, the terminology used to refer to the non-religious is often biased and derogatory, the situation in Estonia is the opposite. Due to Soviet-era atheist propaganda, the words related to religion have mostly negative connotations. The most loaded word is *usklik* (believer) (Jaanus 2012), which is associated with ignorance and stupidity (Remmel 2013), but above all, something *alien*, as vividly expressed by one of my informants in a description of his youth in the 1980s (and being still prevalent in contemporary Estonia): "A classmate showed me a house and told me that believers lived there. Thinking of *believers* filled me with confusion; it was something that had no connection with my reality. Believers were something weird, probably not evil, but… *alien*" (Hasso, 38). The word *usk* (belief, faith) is not much better. *Religioon* (religion, often used as a synonym for *usk*) is a bit more neutral but still brings up the connection with "brainwashing." Not surprisingly, the public reputation of religion is low and the attitude is described as bigoted (Valk 2007) or even anti-religious (Schihalejev 2010), supporting Bruce's (2014, 38) hypothesis, that "in a largely secular society, trouble created by people claiming religious justification is blamed, not on the specific religion in question, but on religion in general." Meanwhile, the associations with atheism are not entirely positive either due to the connection with Soviet ideology ("Soviet brainwashing") (Remmel 2016) and potentially militant attitude, especially for middle-aged and older people. So there is almost a societal pressure to avoid extreme positions, to be "indifferent."

Some scholars (Vaclavík 2014) warn not to overemphasize the impact of the Soviet-era in the secularization of Eastern Europe. However, concerning religious indifference in Estonia the impact is tremendous. The issue is not "atheization," which did not happen, but the fact that, after the church traditions were broken in the 1960s, both religion and atheist propaganda disappeared and were absent from public discourse for about 20–30 years. As a result, another interesting change in language can be observed. Since there are no realities that would correspond to them anymore, the meanings of words concerning (non) religion seem to have been lost, changed or turned ambiguous. For instance, according to my interviews and analysis of internet commentaries (Remmel 2013), the word *kirik* (church) refers mostly to the building. The meaning of "church" as an organization is completely secondary, and the idea that it could signify a set of people is entirely alien. Similarly, the expression "going to church" has acquired a mundane meaning: when the topic was discussed with Rene (21, an atheist), he mentioned a couple of times when he went there for a concert. Or, when Mart (22, an atheist) was asked about *püha* (sacred), he stated that for him it means only "day off"—the word also means "holiday."

The last and most typical feature of secularization of Estonian society is "religious illiteracy" (cf. af Buren 2015; Catto 2017, 73—this volume). When my interviewees talk about religion, what is most striking is their grasping for words—they often go silent or mumble while trying to describe feelings, thoughts, or opinions, compensating this with gesticulation. Furthermore, the study on RE finds that many students were even puzzled by the meaning of the word "religion," and their answers reflected their distance from the concept. As a result, they rarely appear to

acknowledge religion in their everyday life (Schihalejev 2010). For instance, when I asked Mona (23, nonreligious) about the cross she was wearing around her neck, she said for her it was not a religious symbol, "just a gift from a friend." Lack of contact with religion was one of the central findings during my interviews: many participants claimed to have met religious people only one or two times *in their entire life*. Along with secularization of language, religious illiteracy may explain a specific feature of Estonia, the preference of ambiguous labels and answers that Heelas (2013), analyzing the data of LFRL 2010,[6] has called "ratherism."

This brings us to the question—what is considered "religious" or "religion," which is directly connected to the understanding of being outside of it? According to Soviet understanding, "religion is constructed around the belief in supernatural powers." Therefore, religiosity was primarily associated with "religious beliefs," while practices and identity were subordinate to them (cf. Smolkin-Rothrock 2010, 130, 158). My interviews suggest this understanding has persisted: religiosity is perceived mostly as an intellectual or rational phenomenon in the context of Christianity—despite its detachment from society, it is still normative for religion and religiosity. The wide range of superstitions and beliefs that fall into the category of alternative spirituality are rarely acknowledged as religious; they are rather associated with lifestyle (Uibu 2016).

Comparing the religious landscape of the Great Britain and the United States, Bagg and Voas (2010) state that the main difference is in the social acceptability of nonreligion. Estonia has moved even further: the vignettes presented here show that nonreligion is clearly in a normative position, which in practice translates to indifference based on ignorance. As a result, just as in the Soviet era, religiosity remains lodged very deeply in the private sphere. Personal beliefs are hardly ever discussed, especially publicly. Several of my interviewees referred to religiosity and personal beliefs as "taboo," as the study on RE confirmed: "most of the students were not hostile toward religion but saw it a distant or very private matter, not to be shown openly in any way" (Schihalejev 2010). Keeping that in mind, I ask my interviewees at the end of the interview how they feel about talking about their personal beliefs. It is no problem for convinced atheists, who feel their opinions are "normal" and supported by science. Nor is it a problem for believers, who have grown up in religious families and who regard religion as a normal part of their everyday life. It is quite a strong problem, however, for nonbelievers with superstitions or supernatural beliefs; they fear that public attention could make them look ridiculous. It is interesting to note that in the Great Britain, the trends are somewhat similar: "while atheists in England are ready to stand up and talk about their nonbelief in God, most Christians are reluctant to proclaim their faith" (Grundy 2015).

As a result, only 17 % of Estonians consider religion important in their everyday life (LFRL 2010). One-third (see Table 2) claim to be believers or inclined toward believing, but religion is *very important* for only 55 % of avowed believers and only 2 % of those inclined toward belief. Of those belonging to some denomination (16 %), 27 % claimed to be atheists, inclined toward atheism, or indifferent toward

[6] Quantitative study "On Life, Faith, and Religious Life" (n = 1009, face-to-face survey).

Table 2 Self-assessed religiosity of respondents

Respondent describes himself/herself as…	CZ	DE (E)	EE	SE	DK	NO	GB	US
…very or extremely religious	4	3	7	4	4	7	7	26
…somewhat religious	15	13	25	15	18	29	30	51
…neither religious nor non-religious/indifferent	25	6	35	40	41	35	22	7
…somewhat non-religious	20	6	16	20	13	7	11	6
…very or extremely non-religious	36	71	12	22	22	21	26	9

Data for Great Britain and the United States are based on Voas and Ling (2010, 71); EE is based on LFRL 2010; the other countries are based on ISSP 2008

religion. Of the whole sample, over 90 % never talk about religion with their family or friends or do it once or twice a year; over 80 % never think about religion or do so only once or twice a year; 75 % never pray; 59 % never attend church, and another 30 % do so only once or twice a year, which means a traditional visit to church at Christmas and does not indicate any religious commitment.

Concerning the importance and position of religion in Estonian society, it is no wonder that, when the survey "Freedom of Religion in Estonia 2013" was conducted by the Estonian Institute of Human Rights and the results were summarized as "freedom of religion in Estonia is well guaranteed" (Einmann 2013), it prompted many ironic comments, since the word *usuvabadus* can also mean "freedom *from* religion."

…or is it?

At first glance, the data presented in the previous section seems to fully support the hypothesis that indifference is the final outcome of secularization and that Estonia fits the definition of a highly secularized country. Still, let us take a closer look at the traditional characteristics of religiosity: identities, beliefs, and practices.

In general, the description of Estonians' religiosity corresponds more or less to one given about Great Britain: "[N] either religion nor irreligion plays a large role in daily life. Most of the country is somewhere between active religiosity and total irreligion, but their ability to hold these fuzzy beliefs exists in large part because they are rarely used or challenged. Religion is simply not very often on the British mind" (Bagg and Voas 2010). Indeed, according to the figures in Table 2, Estonia does not differ drastically from Great Britain, and the percentage of nonreligious positions in Great Britain even exceeds that in Estonia by 9 %.

According to Lee's (2014) interpretation, the data suggests that the majority of religious people describe their attachment in moderate terms, whereas nonreligious people tend to describe their attachment more forcefully. This may be true for society, where religion is still tangible: "[D]espite the lack of daily interference, Christianity has not disappeared from the backdrop of society, with a majority of

Britons holding to belief in some sort of God and identification as some sort of Christian" (Bagg and Voas 2010). Thus, the high percentage of extremely nonreligious positions indicates the higher visibility of religion whereas having many people in the middle points that religion in society is out of the picture. Both characteristics stand true for Nordic countries, indicating that despite the secularization religion still plays some role whereas Estonia—small number of believers and atheists, majority indifferent—stands out as perfectly fitting into the concept of indifference being the ending point of secularization. There are even no atheist organizations in Estonia—what would their agenda be in an overwhelmingly nonreligious country, where Christianity has declined to become only a norm for religion and religiosity? As for Czech Republic, which is also widely accepted as one of the most secularized countries, one cannot but conclude that much higher percentage of atheists must indicate the stronger position and higher visibility of the churches or is dependent on the historical development (cf. Vido et al. 2016), probably related to a. different dominant religious tradition (Lutheranism in the Nordic countries and Estonia vs Catholicism in Czech Republic).

But how much this reasoning could be trusted? Labels are not very reliable in any case (Day 2011), but especially in Estonian context of "religious illiteracy," the comparison of self-proclaimed labels in different surveys shows that nonreligious labels are somewhat arbitrary: they are quite volatile, overlapping to a great extent, not mutually exclusive and thus do not come with a traditional set of "nonbeliefs," practices and attitudes (Remmel and Uibu 2015). Even in my qualitative research sample, Mary (26, nonreligious) describes herself as "spiritual but not religious" and concurrently "more like a proponent of atheism." This example also illustrates the fact that since atheism is the only known nonreligious tradition in Estonia (Remmel 2016), it does not mean a "forcefully expressed" nonreligious position. Instead, it often means that that religion (i.e. Christianity) has no relevance for one's daily life, thus it is synonymous with "not religious" or "indifferent." In that regard we can talk about "nominal nonreligiosity"—everything that is not explicitly Christian is perceived as not religious. My interviews show very clearly that in the context of very low visibility of religion there is no interest—and need—toward nonreligious self-identification. "Engaged indifference" (Lee 2014) as an emic category seems to be rare or completely absent—while they knew several atheists, none of my interviewees knew anyone identifying as "indifferent."

Lee (2012) suggests that indifference is a stance that "requires at least some awareness of religion and therefore taking some position," but in Estonia indifference seems to be unconscious, based on a lack of contact with religion. What, then, could be the perceived meaning of the label "indifferent" (e.g. in quantitative studies)? Most likely it is understood as being a "bystander in religious matters." Yet there is a certain incoherence in the religious-nonreligious scale offered by LFRL 2010 (believer-inclined toward believing-indifferent-inclined toward atheism-atheist). While "atheist" and "believer" are metaphysical positions, indifference is a stance. This scale represents the classical understanding of religiosity in the Soviet sociology of religion: since there can be no middle road between two competing worldviews, religious and materialistic, indifference is regarded as a position from

where it is possible to move to either side. Due to this black-and-white scheme, a position that should exist in the middle instead of indifference—agnosticism—is almost completely unknown in Estonia. This indicates that for some, "indifference" may stand for agnosticism. Perhaps this is the explanation for a quite puzzling answer I received from an analyst at Statistics Estonia to my question on why non-religious labels were not included in the Census 2011 question about religion: "The feedback from Census 2001 indicated that people had trouble choosing between 'indifferent' and 'atheist,' *they wanted to stay neutral* [emphasis added] and could not choose between existing options" (Tõnurist 2013).

For many, "indifferent" is also the easiest way "out." Several of my interviewees perceived this option as "'leave me alone,' because, actually, nobody really knows [about religion]." Due to the prevalence of nonreligiosity, the term may also stand for "no religion." Both aspects are reflected in the case of an (unspecified) survey about health that also included a question about religious identity: "Since none of the options seemed accurate, the pollster insisted I tick 'indifferent towards religion,' which is not true, because I'm the one with individualized religiosity" (Natasha, 35).

Nevertheless, "indifference" does not mean a lack of beliefs. Although explicitly Christian beliefs are not popular (21 % believed in personal God, 14 % believed in paradise, 12 % believed in hell, LFRL 2010), Estonians held the highest percentage (54 %) of belief in some sort of spirit or life force in Europe (Eurobarometer 2005), 54 % believed that the constellation of stars at the moment of birth influenced later life, 77 % believed in the curing powers of psychic healers, and 39 % believed in the existence of protective angels (LFRL 2010). This corresponds to the claims of Stark et al. (2005): "the premise that the 'nones' are irreligious is itself false" and "'nones' are not the vanguard of secularization, most of them pursue privatized religion." Moreover, it has been argued that "fuzzy spirituality" gains more and more influence in Estonia as a source of knowledge and the way to relate to the world (Uibu 2016). In that regard, very telling is the activity of the only "secularist organization" in Estonia, a group of Estonian skeptics (skeptik.ee, with eight official members), who promote their views via Facebook. Their main focus is on criticism of alternative spirituality, and they are actively engaged with boundary work and debunking. Still, the question remains: how influential are these beliefs or opinions in respondents' lives? "Studies on polling show that people are prepared to express opinions about almost anything, whether or not they have any knowledge of or interest in the topic, . . . but that is not the same as finding those issues particularly important." (Voas 2009, 151) Indeed, "This is a good opportunity to think about these topics…" is one the most frequently heard confessions during my interviews and often a trigger for acceptance.

As for religious practices, the overall participation level is very low—less than 3 % attend church every week, and 4 % pray every day, with another 4 % praying once a week (LFRL 2010). The number of religious rites of passage (Table 3) is higher, but corresponds more or less to the percentage of those belonging to religious denominations (19 %, Statistics Estonia 2011) or identification as believer (32 %, LFRL 2010), indicating that rituals are tied to socialization into religion,

Table 3 Relative importance of religious ceremonies in 2010

	Official statistics for 2010		EELC 2010	UFEBCE 2010	OCE 2010	Total # of religious ceremonies	% of religious ceremonies
Births	11866	Christening	2330	184	350	2864	24
Marriages	2591	Church weddings	348	70	45	463	18
Deaths	10165	Church funerals	3007	231	150	3388	33

The data is based on the database of the government agency Statistics Estonia (http://pub.stat.ee, accessed October 3, 2014) and statistics provided by three biggest religious denominations in Estonia (personal communication): public relations office of Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church (EELC), the Church Center of Orthodox Church of Estonia (OCE), and the front office of Union of Free Evangelical and Baptist Churches of Estonia (UFEBCE). The figures represent only ethnic Estonians, excluded is the data for Estonian Orthodox Church of Moscow Patriarchate (members mostly Russians)

religious identity and belonging. The lower percentage of religious marriages could be the result of secular partners, who prefer secular ceremonies whereas the higher percentage of church funerals can be explained by older generations' higher level of socialization into religion.

Participation is also low in alternative spirituality groups—5 %, however, contact with the spiritual milieu is more frequent: in the last five years, 22 % had practiced yoga, spiritual breathing techniques, Reiki, or other spiritual activities (18 % more than once) and 32 % have read books on spirituality (Remmel and Uibu 2015).

Considering identity and practices, but especially beliefs, the data seems to indicate religious change (Ringvee 2014; Jaanus 2012) instead of religious decline—both "indifference" and "atheism" mostly boil down to a lack of contact with Christianity. Bullivant (2012) suggests that the essence of the "indifference" is being indifferent towards *some* social representations of religion, which in the Estonian case is *what is considered religion*, i.e., conventional Christianity. For example, during the 2014 elections for EELC archbishop, the newspaper *Postimees* took a reader poll (to which more than 5000 responded), asking "Does the topic of elections of the archbishop concern you?" and offering rather interesting yet very telling options: "Yes, since I'm a believer" (7 %), "Yes, although I'm not a believer" (9 %), and "No" (83 %).

The other side of the coin is that people tend to overstate their indifference (Lee 2014). Before starting with my research among the nonreligious in Estonia, I expected to have great difficulties finding participants, since talking about religion is almost a taboo. I could not have been more wrong. When I asked my interviewees why they agreed to participate, many said that "at last there is a person who is willing to listen to my thoughts about religion/atheism." Quite telling is the case of a young lady who identified herself as "totally indifferent" and at first refused to participate on the grounds that she lacked knowledge about religion. After hearing that it was her personal opinions and beliefs or lack thereof that I was specifically interested in, her reluctance turned into intrigued enthusiasm. Bullivant (2012) captures

the essence of this seeming discordance: "a lack of actually *being* religious does not necessarily equate to indifference."

Overstatement of indifference becomes quite clear in connection with prejudices and a default unconscious negative attitude. One of my "nonreligious but favorable toward religion" interviewees was quite baffled when I pointed out the implications of her wording about religion "not disturbing her." In keeping with Cotter's (2014) notion about people being "keenly aware of where they stood when (non) religion interact[ed] with what matter[ed] to them," the usual indifference vanishes quickly and often transcends into a more extreme modes of nonreligion, when the topic of religion enters public space, for instance, in the mainstream media—which, aside from Christmas and Easter, usually happens a couple of times per year. Looking at some examples here, "what matters" seems to be associated with identity and history:

- In 2008 religion became an issue in the debate over the War of Independence Victory Column, raised in Tallinn, which features the Cross of Liberty, the highest award for service in the war, established in 1919. Associating Estonian independence with the cross created considerable opposition along the lines of the Estonian national narrative.
- In 2012 the publication of a popular textbook about the Middle Ages in Estonia, *Estonian History II*, sparked a fierce debate, which also concerned the place of religion in Estonian history. The book avoided the Esto-centric view, treating its subject as a part of European history, and ignored the truths of the national narrative. The main editor was called a "traitor," and some internet commenters even threatened him with violence.
- In 2013 the spokesperson of the Estonian skeptics' movement called on people to remain silent during the last verse of the national anthem, which includes a reference to God ("May God in Heaven thee defend/My own, my dearest land!"), resulting in a wide public dispute during which several alternative versions of the verse were proposed. The anthem remained as it was, and a web poll launched by the newspaper *Postimees* indicated that 70 % of approximately 7000 respondents (a relatively large number of respondents for this kind of poll) were going to ignore the suggestion (Vällik 2013).
- In April 2014 an Estonian singer, Lea Liitmaa, appeared on TV, talking about her life-changing experience with battling cancer and consequent spiritual development, which inspired her to change her name to Lea Dali Lion (a highly unusual name for an Estonian). Among the responses to the statement, "totally nuts" was one of the most common.
- In addition, there are number of incidents in recent years when different aspects of alternative spirituality, "alternative" medicine or anti-vaccination attitude (under the common denominator "pseudo-science") are debunked in (mainstream) media, generating considerable public discussion and sometimes resulting in official actions against the dangerous behavior.

These incidents show that it is easy to be indifferent towards religion as long as there is no sign of it, but once it becomes visible, many are concerned, and the

reactions, as in the Czech Republic (cf. Nešpor 2010, 82), are often negative. In Estonia, the reactions concerning "religion" derive mostly from national narrative; concerning "religiosity" they come from Soviet-era stereotypes. Thus, "indifference" is not uniform and should be treated separately for the public sphere versus private life or religion versus religiosity (Burchardt 2017, 86—this volume; Quack and Schuh 2017, 17—this volume).

Conclusions

Indifference toward religion as a cultural phenomenon is first mentioned in Estonian context in the early twentieth century. It became prevalent in the 1960s after the atheist campaign that marginalized both religion and (unintentionally) state-supported atheism. As a result, topics related to religion were absent from public discourse for almost 25 years. Despite the interim "religious boom," contemporary Estonian society is still characterized by the same detachment from religion and is largely nonreligious. Religion and believers are "othered" and the characteristics of the society seem to correspond to "late secularization": "the religious are now alien to most of us /…/ It is merely a description of the social gulf that now exists between the religious and non-religious." (Bruce 2014). Indeed, concerning religion, the most distinctive features of Estonian society are religious illiteracy (a lack of knowledge about religion and inability to recognize its appearances), and "secularization of language" (vagueness of words concerning (non)religion), both the outcomes of the interim "interruption." Even nonreligious identities are unimportant and their meanings are vague—in a society where the importance and visibility of religion is low, the need for the actualization of the (latent) nonreligious identities is scarce. Therefore, there's also no "demand" toward atheism (a forcefully expressed position), since religion is not a "problem." This seems to support the idea that indifference could be the final outcome of secularization, and in Estonia, this "benign" or "tolerant" indifference is based on the lack of contact and knowledge. Nevertheless, considering the concept of "multiple secularities" (Wohlrab-Sahr and Burchardt 2012), it is hard to tell how universal this example can be—first of all, indifference in Estonia is a product of national history.

Therefore, "religious indifference" is highly dependent on what is considered religion. Indifference described in the previous paragraph is a construct, both emic and etic, based on a "lack of engagement and awareness" (Catto 2017, 66—this volume) of *conventional* religiosity, which in Estonian example is Christianity—despite its detachment from society, it is still normative for religion and religiosity. Although there is very little demand for "spiritual goods" offered by traditional churches, this kind of "indifference" is far from a-religious—all kinds of magical beliefs, superstitions, and new-spirituality beliefs are very common among the populace at large, as well as among the indifferents. Most likely they are not very important in a person's life, but, still, they point to the individualization of religion

rather than its demise, indicating that Estonia is far from being as secularized as it is usually claimed to be. Thus, instead of turning people into atheists, the intermediate religious interruption resulted in switching people's religiosity from institutional to noninstitutional. Then, perhaps, indifference (or some aspects of it) is not the final outcome but some (temporary) side-effect of religious change?[7]

Moreover, the examples provided in this article support the idea that indifference is often overstated, both in public and personal sphere. Therefore it is justified to ask: is indifference toward religion possible at all? Especially in Estonian context some signs indicate that the more alternative spirituality gains visibility and establishes itself, the more it may be considered a "problem" and criticism of some facets of alternative spirituality may offer a possibility for polarization and legitimization of extreme nonreligious positions. Yet, just like religion, indifference is not something uniform and fixed. Just like *situative* or *on-off religiosity* (Remmel and Uibu 2015), depending on one's situation and needs, indifference depends on the context, and there's probably no reason to argue that its prevalence at one moment is less real than its lack in another.

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[7] The article was finished in the beginning of 2015. Meanwhile, due to same-sex union legislation (2014–2015), immigration crisis (2015), appointment of new archbishop of EELC (2015) and taking office of new president who decided not to attend church service in honor of her inauguration (2016), the public presence of religion has significantly increased. Negative connotations towards believers also seem to cease since several public figures have openly declared themselves believers. This indicates that the indifference may really be only a temporary outcome of religious change, yet it is too soon to say what direction the changes in Estonian religious landscape take.

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Measuring Religious Indifference in International Sociological Quantitative Surveys (EVS and ISSP)

Pierre Bréchon

Abstract After having provided a reminder of the diversity of definitions religious indifference and atheism may have, this chapter aims to measure irreligion in many countries thanks to the EVS and ISSP international quantitative surveys. From 1990 to 2008, secularization evolved slowly but steadily. This process does not lead to a disappearance of religions and to complete atheism and rejection of God, but rather to a loss of interest in religion, which, for many people, is no longer important in life. This low level of interest often goes hand in hand with uncertain, floating and blurred beliefs. But for strongly unreligious people, the value system is very different from that of religious people. Nevertheless, countries differ considerably: some European countries remain very religious while others are almost completely irreligious.

Keywords Irreligion • Religious indifference • Atheism • Unbeliever • Values • Secularization • Quantitative surveys • EVS • ISSP • Comparative sociology

Till now, religious indifference has not very often been studied by the social sciences and tends to be analyzed within the main institutionalized religions[1]. Religious leaders are often worried about the rise in religious indifference, explaining that it leads to a loss of true values, a rise of relativist perspectives, indifferentism and hedonist views. All these negative aspects of modernity are considered to be a consequence of the rejection of God in society today. For some Catholic theologians, religious indifference is typical of a post-atheist society, a society which does not need nor consider Him.

In fact, religious indifference is not an easy concept as the introductory chapter of this book very well explains (Quack and Schuh 2017 – this volume). It is possible to distinguish *evaluative indifference* (all religions have the same value and I favor

[1] A lot of thanks to Anna Jeannesson, an English teacher in the same Institute as me, who proofread my text.

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no particular religion) from *disinterested indifference,* which can be further separated into *cognitive indifference* (I do not know religions and their beliefs) and *indifference expressing* a *more personal choice* (I know what religions propose but I have no need and motivation for this kind of subject, I am not concerned nor worried about religious problems and by my future after death).

There are also complex relationships between religious indifference and atheism. Atheism is a characteristic of people who do not believe in any kind of Gods and are critical of religious beliefs and practices. The term can be used by an individual as an identity or sometimes quoted by others to stigmatize somebody. It is also possible to distinguish several types of atheism (Beaman and Steven 2015, 2)[2], particularly a *theoretical and a pragmatic atheism*. The former corresponds to a rational choice (I think that the idea of God is wrong) but the rejection will vary in strength with all the possible arguments that exist to criticize divinity as philosophers remind us (see for example Dworkin 2013)[3]; the second refers to a way of life without God and without religiosity. Gods are not rejected, they are pointless. This attitude is sometimes named *apatheism* (a practical apathy for god). In fact, pragmatic atheism, this apatheism is not very different from religious indifference defined as a total lack of interest in all that is religious.

In this chapter, we would like to analyze the results of some international surveys to compare the level of religious indifference and atheism in Europe over time and between countries. Obviously it would not be possible to operationalize each kind of religious indifference and atheism but we can try to approach or even identify some kinds with the empirical indicators of quantitative surveys. It is clear that in a world which remains strongly marked by religions, questions in surveys tend to be worded to measure religious opinions and behaviors rather than to distinguish between different kinds of religious indifference and atheism. Nevertheless, we will see that certain data contribute greatly to understanding these phenomena and to distinguishing two general attitudes, religious indifference and atheist assertion. Finally, we would like to answer the question: has Europe become indifferent to the religious dimension of existence? And what type of indifference seems to best sum up the current landscape?

In many theoretical discussions about secularization (for example Wilson 1966; Berger 1969; Bruce 1996; Demerath III 2007) the definition of the phenomenon has been debated: Though in many countries irreligion seems to be rising, where will the process lead? To an atheist world or a religiously indifferent universe? It is probably impossible for social sciences to answer this metaphysical question about what Marxists called the end of history, but they can consider the evolution of religious feelings and make assumptions by extrapolating trends. Thus, secularization only allegedly entails the main established religions losing their significance and being

[2] In the introduction of this recent collective book, Lori Beaman and Steven Tomlins speak of "explicit atheism, implicit atheism, negative atheism, positive atheism, practical atheism, pragmatic atheism, strong atheism, weak atheism and so on."

[3] According to the philosopher Ronald Dworkin, it is possible to reject the idea of God for rationalistic reasons and nevertheless be awed by the mystery of cosmos.

replaced by much more pluralistic religious groups and a deregulation of beliefs and faith. So the religious feelings become floating and blurred. Already today religions are no longer the central institutions of societies and the basis of the social cohesion, they have only become one dimension among others (Dobbelaere 2002)[4], separated from other areas of life. The same idea was developed by Yves Lambert (1985), who explained in a very lively monograph of a large Brittany village, that the catholic religion now boils down to a "stand at the charity fair."

At the same time, some sociologists refuse the idea of secularization, arguing that religious needs are universal and that they are simply less visible and dynamic in European societies due to the monopoly of just one religion, whereas in the United States, religious competition leads to a continuation of religiosity in a modern and developed society (Finke and Laurence 1993; Stark and Bainbridge 1985). Modernization does not mechanically lead to secularization, this process is not universal, and Europe is an exceptional case (Davie 2002), which is also discussed by Inglehart and Norris (2004). According to them, the more rich and secure countries are, the more secularized they are. Though religion is strong in the rich USA, the process of secularization is beginning in this country, confirmed by recent figures released by the Pew Research Center: the proportion of Americans who are not religiously affiliated rose quickly from 16 % in 2007 to 23 % in 2014 (Pew Research Center).

Though secularization is clearly a true phenomenon, what does it exactly mean when we say that the current situation is characterized by rising religious indifference? There are at least two ways of understanding this, one which does not go as far as the classical secularization thesis (predicting a quick end of religions), the other which goes further:

1. a development of religious indifference is observed but not an anti-religious opposition, or a disappearance of religions. Simply religion no longer interests many people, without appearing as condemned by the evolution of the modern world. And many people who are uninterested in religion might nevertheless sometimes refer to religions, or have an interest in spirituality or they might sanctify some human realities (Nature for example), or use religious ideas for psychological needs.
2. religious indifference means that religion is pointless and that it is no longer even a "stand at the fair" or a small dimension of existence, separated from other fields. It is possible to live perfectly well with absolutely no religious concern. It is not necessary and useful to be in opposition to religion, like the anti-religious. Religions have become insignificant, folk-like and out-of-date. We are in a post-secularized world.

The data from the *European Values Study* (EVS)[5] and the *International Social Survey Programme* (ISSP) allow us to better grasp religious indifference. In general,

[4] According to Dobbelaere, the secularization process works at three interrelated levels: societal, individual (weakening people's religiosity), organizational (churches are affected by a process of internal secularization).

[5] The EVS is carried out every nine years, with waves in 1981, 1990, 1999, 2008 the fifth one being planned for 2017. The aim is to analyze the change in value systems with a long questionnaire (one

sociologists of religion analyze data and especially the level and forms of religious indicators. They do not consider it to be important to thoroughly examine not religious and anti-religious people. Here, on the contrary, we focus our attention on them. We will present EVS results for 24 EU countries in 2008 and we will compare the results with the wave of 1990 when the survey was carried out in the same countries[6]. For ISSP data, we take into account the European countries where the survey is fielded[7]. But outside the EU of 2008, we also consider Croatia, Norway, Switzerland, Turkey and outside Europe the United States of America, an interesting case to compare with Europe, as there has been increasing discussion as to whether there is a European or US exception on religious evolution. And we will compare the 1998 and 2008 results to identify any change.

In the first part of this chapter, we will present the results for several kinds of indicators allowing us to partly measure religious indifference or atheism, and we will discuss the level of religiosity of these two categories. In the second part we will try to explain who irreligious people are and we will show that people's system of values varies according to their level of religiosity.

Different Empirical Approaches to Religious Indifference and Atheism

Institutional Religious Indifference

A first approach lies in the institutional aspect of religion, and involves measuring the number of people who declare they do not belong to a religious community. These people are indifferent or opposed to institutionalized religions to which they have no feelings of belonging, whatever the reasons for the declared lack of affiliation. This declaration of not belonging may mean that the respondent was not born and raised in a religious family, or that he no longer feels like he belongs to his family's religion (as it is possible to stop being a member of a voluntary organization, he no longer interested in belonging to his religion) or other possible explanations. It is clear that, with the secularization process, religious affiliation is less and less

hour of face to face interviewing) measuring attitudes in the main fields of life (sociability, family, work, religion, politics…). So it is possible to analyze if supporting particular values in one field entails particular values in another one.

[6] Only three small EU countries were missing in 1990: Cyprus, Luxembourg, Greece.

[7] The ISSP was created in 1985 with four countries at the beginning. One survey is fielded each year on a particular societal subject (the questionnaire lasts about 22 minutes when it is face to face but the administration mode differs according to country: post, drop-off given at the end of another questionnaire, face to face, internet…). The ISSP is not a purely European survey: the annual modules are now carried out in about 40 countries on the five continents. Religion was the subject chosen in 1991, 1998 and 2008 (which will be repeated in 2018). Here we only consider the religious modules of 1998 and 2008, the number of countries covered in 1991 being too low.

Table 8.1 Religious affiliation from 1990 to 2008 (EVS – EU 27)

	2008					1990				
Horizontal %	No religion	Catho.	Prot.	Ortho.	Other	No religion	Catho.	Prot.	Ortho.	Other
Czech Republic	**72**	24	2	0	2	**61**	**35**	4	0	0
Estonia	**69**	1	11	16	2	**87**	0	8	4	1
The Netherlands	**52**	23	21	0	4	**50**	29	17	**0**	4
France	**52**	41	2	0	6	**39**	**58**	1	0	2
Hungary	**46**	41	13	0	1	**42**	**43**	13	0	3
Great Britain	**45**	11	**36**	0	9	**43**	9	**47**	0	2
Belgium	**43**	**51**	1	1	4	**33**	**65**	1	0	2
Sweden	**37**	2	**59**	1	1	**18**	1	**76**	0	5
Latvia	**35**	20	22	23	1	**64**	15	10	8	2
Slovenia	**30**	**66**	0	2	3	**27**	**69**	1	0	4
Germany	**28**	35	**34**	1	2	**11**	**45**	**43**	0	1
Luxembourg	**27**	**66**	3	1	4	–	–	–	–	–
Bulgaria	**27**	0	0	**59**	13	**68**	0	1	24	7
Spain	**26**	**56**	0	1	17	**14**	**86**	0	0	1
Finland	**25**	0	**73**	1	1	**12**	0	**85**	1	2
Slovakia	**24**	**68**	7	0	1	**29**	**58**	9	3	0
Italy	**20**	**79**	0	0	1	**15**	**83**	1	0	0
Portugal	**19**	**76**	2	0	4	**28**	**71**	0	0	2
Austria	**17**	**73**	6	1	3	**17**	**77**	6	0	1
Lithuania	**16**	**79**	1	4	1	**38**	**57**	1	3	2
Ireland	**15**	**80**	3	0	1	**4**	**93**	2	0	1
Denmark	**12**	1	**85**	0	2	**8**	1	**89**	0	2
Poland	**7**	**91**	0	11	4	**4**	**94**	0	0	2
Greece	**4**	1	0	**93**	2	–	–	–	–	–
Romania	**3**	5	2	**86**	4	**6**	2	2	**88**	2
Malta	**3**	**96**	1	0	1	**3**	**97**	0	0	0
Cyprus	**0**	2	0	**96**	2	–	–	–	–	–
EU mean	**30**	**43**	**14**	**8**	**5**	**25**	**51**	**18**	**5**	**2**

Reading: In 2008, in the Czech Republic, 72 % of the population declared they do not belong to a religious community, 24 % said they are Catholics and 2 % Protestant

considered as an inheritance and increasingly as a free personal choice which is periodically reconsidered throughout life (Voas 2007)[8].

[8] In a French opinion poll (CSA) carried out in 2006, the declared Catholics were asked the main reason why they choose this affiliation. 55 % still answer "Simply because I was born into a Catholic family", 21 % "because I have faith", 14 % "because I am personally attached to certain values", 9 % "by attachment to the culture and history of the country".

In the EVS survey, interviewees are asked: "Do you belong to a religious denomination?" Those answering "no" are considered as not belonging to a religion. Those answering yes then have to specify "Which one?" (choosing from a list of the main religions for each country). Table 8.1 shows that in the EU, 30 % of the adult population declares they have no affiliation with a religious group. Thus it is clear that the majority of Europeans continue to belong to a religion, with a clear majority of Catholics compared to Protestants and Orthodox. This 30% are not completely indifferent, even if they are often not strongly connected to their religion. For some people, declaring a religion is only an objective reminder of their family origins, without any religious feeling or belief. If a feeling is linked to this statement, it may be a filial one, only revealing conformity with parents, or sometimes an emotional memory of religious experiences when they were children or an attachment to the morality or culture linked to this religion. So this question measures all kinds of different links to a religious institution. Not all members are believers in the whole credo of the chosen denomination. Conversely, not all the un-affiliated are complete non-believers as 11 % of them say they believe in god.

The distance expressed with the main religions is very different from one country to another[9]. On Table 8.1, countries are ranked from the most secular, the Czech Republic and Estonia, where more than two thirds of the population is without a declared religion, to the most religious: in Cyprus, all Cypriots declare that they belong to a religion and it is almost the same thing in Malta, Romania and Greece.

Compared with 1990, the rate of non-affiliation is growing, moving from 25 % in 1990 to 30 % in 2008. But the evolution really depends on national context. In the more developed Western countries, the percentages of people with no religion are growing: France, Belgium, Sweden, Germany, Ireland, Spain, Finland and even Italy. However, in many countries of Central and Eastern Europe[10], the rates are declining: Estonia, Latvia, Bulgaria, Lithuania. The explanation is probably not completely religious: in 1990, these countries were still partly under communist rule and the freedom to express religious identities was not complete. The possibility to express religious feelings is now guaranteed and more people are becoming church members, very often the Orthodox one. For these countries, Niko Tos (2013) speaks of a revival of their ethnic-religious identity interpreted as a rather superficial comeback, without a strong religious commitment.

A third group of countries is characterized by a rather stable level of non-religious people: the Netherlands, Great Britain, Hungary, Slovenia, Austria, Romania. But

[9] In many religions, belonging is theoretically defined by a ritual at birth or during the first years of life and normally religion is fixed for someone's whole life. But in some religions or countries, religious belonging has to be "renewed" more or less regularly, for example in countries where Church members have to pay an annual Church tax. In some countries, membership is strongly linked to national identity, particularly in Scandinavian countries with Lutheran churches (except for Sweden since 2000). These practical differences in the process and the meaning of religious belonging cannot completely explain the enormous differences between countries which depend on each country's religious feeling and level of secularization.

[10] The Czech Republic is the only Central European country where the number of non-religious people grew between the two dates. It is one of the most unreligious countries in the world.

Table 8.2 Distinction between "always" and "now" out of religion (EVS 2008 – EU 27)

Horizontal %	Total of no religion	Always no religion	Now but not before
Czech Republic	**72**	**68**	4
Estonia	**69**	**65**	4
The Netherlands	**52**	26	**26**
France	**52**	**30**	**21**
Hungary	**46**	**39**	7
Great Britain	**45**	**32**	13
Belgium	**43**	20	**23**
Sweden	**37**	17	**20**
Latvia	**35**	**32**	2
Slovenia	**30**	23	6
Germany	**28**	17	10
Luxembourg	**27**	13	14
Bulgaria	**27**	26	1
Spain	**26**	15	11
Finland	**25**	3	**21**
Slovakia	**24**	20	4
Italy	**20**	11	9
Portugal	**19**	13	6
Austria	**17**	5	12
Lithuania	**16**	12	2
Ireland	**15**	5	8
Denmark	**12**	5	**7**
Poland	**7**	4	3
Greece	**4**	3	1
Romania	**3**	2	1
Malta	**3**	1	2
Cyprus	**0**	0	0
EU mean	**30**	**19**	**11**

Reading: in the Czech Republic, 72 % of the population do not belong to a religious community, divided into 68 % who have never any and 4 % who were members in the past.

the level of non-religious people is high in the Netherlands, Great Britain and Hungary, and weaker in the three other countries.

Another way to measure the institutional religious evolution in the European Union is to consider if interviewees declare that they have always been a member of a religion or not. For 2008, 67 % have always been affiliated to the same religion and only 3 % have changed religion. So two thirds of Europeans have not changed religious affiliation since their birth. The religious landscape seems rather stable and the process of secularization rather slow. But among the 30 % who are non-affiliated (Table 8.2), 11 % state that they had been members of a church in the past. This last figure is important as it reveals the process of secularization, meaning a process of detachment from the main religions throughout life for a minority of the population

lacking a continuous religious identity. The religious permanency of each generation is incomplete.

Table 8.2 also shows that 19 % of Europeans say they have never had a religion. In this group, most people had parents who were themselves without religion, and thus did not provide their children with religious education, and raised them with secular values. So, about one European in five has always been out of the religious field. This figure is very important in understanding religious indifference, considered as an absence of knowledge and interest.

The details of these country-by-county figures are also useful (Table 8.2). In some countries, the long-standing process of secularization seems to have slowed down as a great number of people say that they have never belonged to a religious community and only a few have recently dropped their religious affiliation. It is the case for the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Great Britain, and Latvia. In other countries, it seems that is an old but continuing phenomenon as in the Netherlands, Belgium, Sweden, and France. For Finland, secularization seems completely new.

The ISSP surveys allow us to consider the same kind of data for almost the same countries in 1998 and 2008 (Table 8.3). Methodologically it is important to be able to check that at least two surveys, measuring the same things, give about the same results. It is an empirical guarantee that quantitative surveys are reliable and valid. Here, comparing Tables 8.1, 8.2 and 8.3, the data from the EVS and ISSP are in general close[11] and the ranking of countries is almost the same.

In this table, East and West Germany have different results, with huge discrepancies, East Germany being even more secularized than the Czech Republic. East Germany's high level of secularization can be explained by communist anti-clerical policy over 45 years (see also: Wohlrab-Sahr et al. 2008)[12]. But other explanations might come into play. Strong secularist movements built up in Thuringia and Saxony during the Weimar Republic. A third explanation may be the rapid fall in Protestantism after the reunification, though this religion had previously attracted a considerable proportion of those against the communist regime and who were Protestant more for political than for religious reasons.

[11] For the ISSP, religious affiliation is determined in the socio-demographic section. As a result there is incomplete homogeneity of the phrasing for the different countries, and in particular there is not always a filter question before asking about the individual's religion. It is one of the methodological weaknesses of the ISSP: several modes of administration are authorized (face to face, mail, drop off) and the socio-demographics are not identical in the national questionnaires, as the ISSP survey is paired with another survey in some countries and so the socio-demographics are those of the basic national surveys (for example in Germany, the ISSP is linked with *Allbus* every two years). So there are understandable differences between the ISSP and EVS results. But, comparing Tables 8.1, 8.2 and 8.3, only for Hungary is the difference very high for an unknown reason.

[12] Wohlrab-Sahr, Schmidt-Lux, Karstein explain that the RDA used to be in conflict with religions throughout society and repress religious people. Rationalist thought and disregard of religiosity was encouraged in education. The regime believed it was not possible to have "two masters", the Church and the Party. Rituals were created to substitute for religious ones, i.e. the « Jugendweihe » to replace the Lutheran confirmation and produce good communist citizens.

Table 8.3 Religious affiliation from 1998 to 2008 (ISSP)

	2008				1998			
Horizontal %	No religion	Catho.	Prot.	Other	No religion	Catho.	Prot.	Other
East Germany	**76**	4	19	2	**69**	5	26	1
Czech Republic	**65**	30	4	1	**45**	47	0	0
France	**49**	48	1	3	**44**	**52**	2	2
The Netherlands	**43**	27	21	10	**58**	17	17	5
Latvia	**39**	19	22	20	**36**	21	24	18
United Kingdom	**33**	18	**37**	11	**51**	9	**37**	4
Sweden	**30**	1	**67**	3	**29**	1	**69**	1
Switzerland	**26**	30	**36**	8	**10**	44	**42**	4
Belgium (Flanders)	**22**	**74**	1	3	–	–	–	–
Spain	**22**	**75**	1	3	**14**	**75**	0	0
Slovenia	**20**	**74**	1	5	**24**	**72**	1	3
Slovakia	**19**	**69**	11	1	**16**	**69**	14	1
Finland	**18**	0	**78**	4	–	–	–	–
Norway	**16**	**1**	**79**	5	**10**	**0**	**85**	4
Austria	**16**	**76**	4	4	**13**	**80**	5	3
West Germany	**16**	41	**36**	7	**15**	38	**44**	3
US of America	**16**	26	**49**	9	**18**	27	**51**	4
Hungary	**15**	**62**	21	1	**31**	**52**	16	1
Bulgaria	–	–	–	–	**13**	1	0	**86**
Denmark	**14**	1	**83**	2	**12**	0	**87**	2
Poland	**13**	**86**	1	1	**7**	**92**	0	1
Italy	**11**	**88**	1	0	**8**	**90**	0	2
Portugal	**10**	**86**	3	2	**7**	**90**	0	2
Ireland	**8**	**86**	3	3	**8**	**88**	4	0
Croatia	**7**	**88**	0	5	–	–	–	–
Cyprus	**0**	1	1	**99**	**1**	0	0	**99**
Turkey	**0**	0	0	**100**	–	–	–	–
Mean[a]	**24**	**43**	**23**	**11**	**23**	**43**	**24**	**10**

[a]Not weighted by the population of each country

We can also observe in Table 8.3 a rather low proportion of people without a religion in Scandinavian countries (in Finland, Norway, Denmark but not in Sweden) which are rather strongly secularized (see also: Zuckerman 2008[13]). In fact, religious belonging in these countries reveals a strong feeling of national identity.

[13] Phil Zuckerman explains, on the basis of qualitative interviews and participative observations, that Sweden and Denmark are among the most secularized countries in the world. Though this is true for Sweden, it is more debatable for Denmark. Though only 46 % of Swedish people say they believe in God, 63 % of the Danish claim to be believers.

Contrary to Davie's thesis (1990) describing Great Britain as a country of "believing without belonging," Scandinavians seem to "belong without believing". These two rather too absolute theses have led to considerable debate.

Table 8.3 also shows that the USA religious landscape is not as exceptional as is sometimes asserted. The percentage of people saying they belong to no religion is neither very high, nor very low and differs very little from many European countries. On this point, Croatia, Ireland, Portugal, Italy and Poland seem even more religious than the USA, which contradicts the common stereotype.

Feeling Non-religious

We can now try to measure religious indifference and atheism with more subjective indicators. In the EVS survey, interviewees are asked if they feel "religious, not religious or convinced atheist." Normally, the difference between non-religious and convinced atheist approximately corresponds to that between religious indifference and atheism. In another question, respondents have to say if religion is a "very important, quite important, not important, not at all important" part of their life (Table 8.4). In the ISSP survey, a close subjective indicator asks: "Would you describe yourself as extremely religious or extremely unreligious" with a 7 position scale (Table 8.5). We can hypothesize that extremely unreligious people are more atheist than religiously indifferent. It is tempting to consider the mean position ("neither religious nor non-religious") as an indifferent one, situated between the religious and the unreligious feeling. But in fact, this is not the case[14].

According to EVS data, overall religiosity tends to be dominant (Table 8.4). 60 % say they are religious (compared to 66 % in 1990). Only 40 % of Europeans asserted in 2008 that they were not religious or atheists (compared to 34 % in 1990). So it is wrong to say that we are in a post atheist era as religious sentiment is still declared by almost two-thirds of Europeans. There are however huge discrepancies between countries. The same geographical differences are visible for subjective religious feelings as for real denominational belonging. The absence of religious concern is frequent in some countries (Czech Republic, Sweden, France, Estonia, Great Britain…). Religious indifference is growing in many countries but shrinking in some others (in Central and Eastern Europe).

In terms of the importance of religion in interviewees' lives, the conclusions are rather similar. In 2008, 24 % said religion is not at all important in their life, 27 % not important but 29 % quite important and 20 % very important. As on the previous tables, we observe a decline in the importance of God in their life (in 1990, 20 %

[14] When we cross-tabulate this question with indicators of religious practices or beliefs, the relationship is very strong: the more religious people feel, the more they practice and believe. The "neither nor" position is not outside this ranking. We do not observe many people with opinions in the middle not answering on other religious indicators while this ought to be observed if the "neither nor" people are really religiously indifferent.

Table 8.4 Feeling of being religious, unreligious or a convinced atheist[a] and the importance of religion in one's life (1990–2008, EVS – EU 27)

	2008				1990			
In %	Atheist	Not religious	Religious	Religion not at all important	Atheist	Not religious	Religious	Religion not at all important
France	**20**	**39**	41	**31**	**11**	**38**	51	**29**
Czech Republic	**17**	**51**	32	**55**	**6**	**53**	42	**38**
Sweden	**15**	**53**	32	**42**	**7**	**62**	31	**34**
Slovenia	**12**	16	**72**	**23**	**8**	19	73	**23**
Spain	**12**	35	54	**32**	**4**	29	67	**20**
Belgium	**11**	**30**	60	**26**	**8**	24	68	**27**
Luxembourg	**10**	33	57	**27**	–	–	–	–
Germany	**9**	**42**	49	**34**	**3**	32	65	**24**
Great Britain	**8**	**47**	45	**31**	**4**	**39**	57	**19**
Finland	**8**	37	54	**37**	**3**	**39**	59	**22**
Estonia	**7**	**52**	41	**34**	**3**	**76**	21	**42**
The Netherlands	**7**	33	60	**24**	**6**	34	60	**29**
Denmark	**7**	21	**71**	**22**	**5**	23	73	**30**
Portugal	**6**	18	**76**	**12**	**5**	25	69	**17**
Bulgaria	**5**	35	61	**12**	**8**	**56**	36	**37**
Italy	**5**	9	**86**	**8**	**3**	11	**86**	**10**
Austria	**5**	31	64	**19**	**3**	17	**80**	**14**
Hungary	**4**	**41**	55	**25**	**4**	**39**	57	**21**
Latvia	**4**	20	**76**	**30**	**4**	**42**	54	**32**
Slovakia	**3**	16	**81**	**20**	**4**	18	**78**	**19**
Greece	**3**	11	**86**	**5**	–	–	–	–
Ireland	**2**	33	65	**13**	**1**	27	72	**4**
Poland	**2**	9	**88**	**5**	**1**	3	**96**	**2**
Lithuania	**1**	14	**85**	**12**	**3**	**42**	55	**20**
Romania	**1**	17	**82**	**3**	**1**	24	**75**	**7**
Malta	**1**	32	67	**4**	**1**	26	**74**	**1**
Cyprus	**1**	7	**92**	**1**	–	–	–	–
EU mean	**9**	**31**	**60**	**24**	**5**	**29**	**66**	**20**

[a]Results on expressed answers. In 2008, 3 % did not know and 1 % did not answer. In 1990, 7 % did not know.
Reading: in 2008 20 % of French people said that they were convinced atheists, 39 % not religious and 41 % religious.

found God not at all important). For 2008, the distribution of answers is very balanced. It is interesting to compare this result with that obtained about the importance of other domains of life. Family and work are – unsurprisingly – the most

Table 8.5 Feeling unreligious or religious from 1998 to 2008 (ISSP)[a]

	2008					1998				
Horizontal % for each date	Very non religious	Somewhat	Neither nor	Somewhat	Very religious	Very non religious	Somewhat	Neither nor	Somewhat	Very religious
Eastern Germany	**69**	6	6	13	3	**63**	7	8	14	4
Czech Republic	**38**	**19**	23	13	4	**23**	12	**33**	19	6
France	**27**	16	27	23	3	**23**	13	**29**	24	6
The Netherlands	**26**	6	17	29	17	**20**	6	18	36	16
Slovenia	**22**	10	**29**	28	10	**16**	**15**	12	**42**	14
Finland	**22**	10	28	30	7	–	–	–	–	–
Denmark	**22**	13	**40**	18	4	**16**	13	**42**	22	6
West Germany	**21**	12	15	36	12	**27**	9	20	29	12
United Kingdom	**21**	10	21	35	9	**14**	13	**30**	32	6
Sweden	**21**	**19**	**38**	14	4	**8**	**21**	**40**	12	4
Bulgaria	–	–	–	–	–	**21**	9	18	36	14
Switzerland	**20**	17	22	27	14	**26**	11	22	28	7
Norway	**20**	7	**34**	28	7	**13**	7	**38**	29	9
Austria	**20**	12	17	35	14	**15**	8	17	40	17

Belgium (Flandre)	**19**	8	22	36	13	–	–	–	–	–
Hungary	**17**	**21**	23	28	8	**15**	**18**	27	30	9
Italy	**16**	10	13	**47**	14	**11**	11	13	**50**	14
Latvia	**14**	17	**34**	26	7	**12**	17	**32**	32	6
Spain	**14**	18	24	34	9	**20**	10	29	28	9
Slovakia	**14**	10	16	38	**20**	**9**	16	21	34	**21**
Portugal	**12**	12	10	**43**	**22**	**6**	12	6	**48**	**28**
US of America	**9**	6	7	**51**	**26**	**8**	5	9	**47**	**25**
Ireland	**7**	7	20	**52**	13	**5**	7	23	**54**	10
Croatia	**7**	4	12	**47**	**30**	–	–	–	–	–
Poland	**5**	6	13	**59**	16	**2**	4	10	**65**	16
Cyprus	**2**	4	24	36	**31**	**1**	3	14	**47**	**33**
Turkey	**2**	4	6	32	**55**	–	–	–	–	–
Mean[b]	**18**	**12**	**22**	**34**	**15**	**17**	**11**	**22**	**35**	**13**

[a]Codes 6 and 7 have been added for the most non-religious positions. Idem for the other part of the scale (codes 1 and 2). The "don't know" and no answer, excluded from the table, are low (4 % in 2008, 3 % in 1998).

[b]Not weighted according to the population of each country.

Table 8.6 Religious membership and subjective religious feeling crossed with other religious indicators (EVS 2008, EU 27)

		Affiliation or not					Subjective religious feeling		
% per cell	Mean	Catho.	Prot.	Ortho.	Other	No religion	Religious	Unreligious	Convinced atheist
God in one's life: not at all important[a]	**20**	4	14	3	6	**53**	2	39	**83**
No life after death	**48**	33	46	36	31	**75**	28	72	**89**
Never meditate nor pray to God[b]	**31**	12	28	8	12	**66**	8	60	**83**
Never/ practically never attend services	**36**	17	30	6	26	**76**	15	65	**90**
No religiosity[c] (0 on a 0–10 scale)	**17**	4	11	3	4	**43**	0	35	**65**

[a]On a scale of 1 to 10, answer 1"not at all important".
[b]Index built with two questions: "to occasionally pray, meditate or contemplate or something like that" (yes or no) and a scale of frequency of prayer to God (from "every day" to "never"). Here, results are for those who answer no and never.
[c]10 indicator index present in the 4 waves of the survey: declaring they are a member of a religious or parochial association, attending religious services at least monthly, feeling of being religious, believing in God, believing in a personal God or life force, giving a great importance to God in one's life (level 8 to 10 of a scale), believing in life after death, finding that religion offers strength and comfort, taking time to pray and meditate, trusting in the church quite a lot or a lot.
Reading: while 53 % of people who do not belong to a religious community say God is not at all important in their life, only 4 % of Catholics do.

valued, followed by friends and leisure. Religion comes next, far in front of politics (24 % of Europeans say politics is not at all important in their life, 37 % not important, 30 % quite important and only 8 % very important). So politics is few people's guiding line in life, though many believe in a few general political ideas (as many surveys show). In fact, Europeans are rather less indifferent about religion than politics! This should be kept in mind when we discuss secularization.

Saying you are a convinced atheist is a strong statement of anti-religious thought. And in fact, only 9 % of Europeans claim to be convinced atheists, a rise of 4 points since 1990. With 20 % atheists, France is the most secularized country. The impor-

tance of anti-religious ideas and the strength of the secular tradition since the end of the XIX° century in France – with the separation of State and Church in 1905 – probably explain this high level. Public opinion on religion is probably more split than in many other countries.

Table 8.5 shows the ISSP scale of religious feeling in 2008 compared with 1998. As with Table 8.3, we do not observe any change in the European average but there are only ten years between the two waves of the survey. The results seem to fit those of the EVS: in 2008 30 % declared that they are not religious (from 5 to 7), 22 % are in between, but 49 % claim that they feel religious (from 1 to 3). Non-religious feeling is only dominant in some countries, particularly in East Germany and the Czech Republic, and partly in France, and Sweden.

An Elusive Religious Indifference

On the indicators taken into account so far, we have seen that it is not always easy to identify the most secularized position. With Table 8.6, we try to compare the level of belief and religiosity according to whether people are members or not of an institutionalized religion and whether people are religious, unreligious or convinced atheists.

Obviously, people with no religious denomination show very low levels of belief or religious practice. It is the same thing for unreligious people and even more for convinced atheists. It is important here to underline that, for each belief or behavior, non-affiliated and non-religious people are less secularized than convinced atheists. This conclusion is confirmed by the last line of Table 8.6 showing an index of religiosity: those who present the lowest levels of religiosity are the convinced atheists (65 % of religiosity at level 0) and not the people saying they are not religious (35 % of religiosity 0) nor people declaring they are non-affiliated (43 %). But complete indifference, which ought to correspond to a total absence of religiosity, is rather rare since even atheists may sometimes declare religious behavior or belief: on a religiosity scale, 65 % of atheists are at level 0 and 21 % at 1, 9 % at 2 and 5 % obtain between 3 and 6! 11 % believe in life after death, 2 % pray rather intensely, 2% think God is important in their life (position 6 to 10).

It is also interesting to notice that among the main religions, Protestants are much more secularized than Catholics, Orthodox and other religions. As Jean-Paul Willaime explains (1992), the Protestant religion is more modern than other Christian ones as it criticizes and desacralizes some aspects of the Christian religion.

It appears that many Europeans are not completely clear about their religious feelings. The number of strong believers is not very high in many countries and is generally shrinking. The number of unreligious people and those stating antireligious beliefs is also low but rising in many countries, particularly in Western Europe (Bréchon and Gonthier 2013). So the majority of people is in between, and have

Table 8.7 Believing or not in God (ISSP 2008)

In horizontal %	Do not believe	Do not know	Believe in higher power	Sometimes believe in God	When doubts, feel that I do believe	Believe, no doubts
East Germany	**52**	13	9	8	8	8
Czech Republic	**37**	15	16	7	11	13
France	**22**	16	13	11	20	17
The Netherlands	**20**	14	**22**	8	15	21
Sweden	**19**	**19**	**29**	7	15	10
Latvia	**18**	9	**24**	11	15	22
United Kingdom	**18**	19	14	13	19	17
Denmark	**18**	13	**25**	9	20	13
Belgium (Flandre)	**17**	15	17	14	18	14
Norway	**17**	14	**24**	7	22	15
Hungary	**15**	12	10	**19**	19	23
Slovenia	**13**	6	**29**	10	16	24
Finland	**11**	14	17	11	**25**	20
West Germany	**10**	12	17	12	21	27
Spain	**10**	10	12	8	20	**39**
Slovakia	**10**	5	11	13	18	**40**
Austria	**9**	11	**27**	12	20	21
Switzerland	**8**	9	**29**	7	16	28
Croatia	**5**	4	9	7	16	**59**
Italy	**5**	7	6	12	**27**	**43**
Portugal	**4**	4	11	9	18	**54**
Ireland	**4**	5	10	14	22	**45**
US of America	**3**	5	10	4	17	**61**
Poland	**3**	6	6	9	14	**63**
Cyprus	**2**	3	7	8	21	**59**
Turkey	**2**	1	1	1	2	**93**
Mean[a]	**13**	**10**	**16**	**9**	**17**	**34**

[a]Not weighted by the population of each country. Only 1% did not answer this question.

fairly floating and blurred beliefs and little religious behavior. They are not particularly worried about their religious future.

The ISSP survey very well measures the importance of intermediate opinions on God in a fascinating question with six different statements, while traditionally believing in God could only be measured with a dichotomous question: "Do you believe in God (yes or no)?"[15] With the increasing numbers of uncertain believers

[15]This dichotomous question appears in the EVS which also includes two more precise questions, one about the types of God in which people believe (personal, spirit or life force, they don't know

Table 8.8 Followers of a religion and spiritual identity (ISSP, 2008)

Horizontal %	No religion no spiritual	No religion but spiritual	Religion but no spiritual	Religion and spiritual	DK/NA
East Germany	**70**	8	10	4	8
Czech Republic	**52**	12	19	10	8
Sweden	**35**	15	24	10	16
United Kingdom	**33**	18	22	12	15
Norway	**32**	17	22	13	16
France	**31**	15	30	12	11
The Netherlands	**31**	**21**	23	12	13
Belgium (Flandre)	**31**	3	32	9	16
Hungary	**29**	18	31	14	8
West Germany	**28**	10	34	10	**18**
Finland	**27**	19	27	12	16
Latvia	**25**	**23**	31	15	6
Denmark	**25**	15	33	16	11
Slovenia	**22**	**24**	26	18	11
Austria	**22**	19	30	15	14
Spain	**21**	14	37	20	8
Switzerland	**19**	18	38	19	7
Slovakia	**17**	7	35	**33**	8
Italy	**14**	8	**43**	**31**	4
US of America	**11**	**23**	22	**39**	5
Croatia	**10**	**25**	**43**	23	0
Poland	**9**	7	**59**	18	7
Ireland	**8**	2	**41**	**31**	8
Portugal	**7**	6	**53**	**32**	2
Cyprus	**5**	6	**51**	**28**	10
Turkey	**4**	20	28	**47**	2
Mean[a]	**23**	**15**	**33**	**20**	**9**

[a]Not weighted by the population of each country.

and amount of religious indifference, this dichotomous question seems too abrupt. The ISSP question is presented like this:

> Please indicate which statement below comes closest to expressing what you believe about God.
>
> I don't believe in God,
> I don't know whether there is a God and I don't believe there is any way to find out,
> I don't believe in a personal God, but I do believe in a Higher Power of some kind,
> I find myself believing in God some of the time, but not at others,
> While I have doubts, I feel that I do believe in God,
> I know God really exists and I have no doubts about it.

what to think, they do not believe in any kind of spirit, God or life force), another on the importance of God in your life used in Table 8.6.

Table 8.9 Religion and spirituality crossed with indicators of religiosity (ISSP 2008)

% per cell	Religious feeling ++ (5–7)	Monthly attendance	Life after death	Own way of connecting to God
Religion + spiritual	**93**	**66**	**83**	50
Religion but not spiritual	66	36	55	**57**
No religion but spiritual	29	11	54	**59**
No religion and not spiritual	*4*	*3*	*14*	23
Can't choose/No answer	30	18	35	40
Mean	**48**	**29**	**49**	**47**

Reading: Among people declaring they follow a religion and are also spiritual, 93 % also say they are strongly religious (positions 5 to 7 of the scale). Among people who are not followers of a religion and not spiritual, only 4 % identified themselves as strongly religious.

Between sure unbelief and belief without doubt, four items allow respondents to describe their intermediate positions: incertitude and impossibility of knowing (this is the agnostic position), impersonal higher power of some kind, sporadic faith, or voluntary effort necessary to believe!

Table 8.7 shows that believing without doubt remains the most frequent option (34 %) whereas only 13 % are clear unbelievers and 10 % agnostic. The remaining 52 % have varying levels of doubt. Europeans are more characterized by marked uncertainty (open to a possible religious viewpoint) than indifference, with obvious differences according to country. Some people lean towards unbelief while many others remain very religious. The Turkish result is particularly exceptional (93 % believers with no doubts). Even they do not always practice their religion and rituals, Turkish people are great believers.

In the same survey, another question allows us to identify, at least partly, the very irreligious and religious positions. Respondents are asked what best describes them: following a religion and being spiritual, following a religion without being spiritual, not following a religion but being spiritual, being neither religious nor a spiritual person[16]. This is an interesting attempt to measure the attitudes of people who keep institutionalized religions at arm's length but declare an interest in spirituality, here defined as the sacred and the supernatural.

[16] The four items are labeled:

"I follow a religion and consider myself to be a spiritual person interested in the sacred or the supernatural,

I follow a religion, but don't consider myself to be a spiritual person interested in the sacred or the supernatural,

I don't follow a religion, but consider myself to be a spiritual person interested in the sacred or the supernatural,

I don't follow a religion and don't consider myself to be a spiritual person interested in the sacred or the supernatural."

Table 8.10 Attitudinal scale of religiosity and socio-demographic variables (EVS 2008, EU 27)

	Level of religiosity		
Horizontal %	Weak (0–2)	Average (3–6)	Strong (7–10)
Mean	**34**	**30**	**37**
Man	**42**	29	*30*
Woman	*26*	30	**44**
18–24 years old	**45**	30	*25*
25–34 years old	38	31	31
35–49 years old	36	32	32
50–64 years old	32	30	38
65 years old and more	*21*	24	**54**
Primary school	*18*	28	**54**
Junior high school	34	30	36
High school	34	30	36
University	38	30	32
Very low income	*21*	25	**55**
Rather low	29	28	43
Rate high	37	30	33
Very high income	40	34	27

The results (Table 8.8) show that slightly more people choose the intermediate positions than the most extreme ones. The most atheist and indifferent people are those who are neither follower nor spiritual (23 %). Fifteen percent favor a non-institutionalized religion: they do not declare themselves to be members of a religion but they say they are open to the sacred and the supernatural. So they are far from being completely indifferent to the religious dimension of life. In some countries (Croatia, Slovenia, the USA, Latvia, The Netherlands), this kind of de-institutionalized religion is more widespread. The most astonishing group is the 33 % of people who declare they are followers of a religion but not interested in the sacred and the supernatural which may seem contradictory[17]. It may simply mean that they are followers but not strong believers and involved people (like many Christians who do not attend church).

This interpretation is confirmed by Table 8.9, crossing the answers to this question with some indicators of religiosity (intensity of religious feelings, monthly attendance at services, believing in life after death, claiming one's own way of connecting with God without churches or religious services). The non-spiritual followers are much less religious than the spiritual followers.

The intermediate categories have the highest level of people declaring they have their own way of connecting with God. These categories probably bring together a

[17] Here we reach the limit of quantitative surveys: it is not always easy to understand the logic behind answers. In this case, qualitative interviews are very fruitful.

Table 8.11 Weak religiosity[a] by birth cohort (EVS, EU 27 – *% per cell*)

	1981[b]	1990	1999	2008
From 1982 to 1990	–	–	–	43
From 1973 to 1981	–	–	35	38
From 1964 to 1972	–	44	34	37
From 1955 to 1963	43	40	33	36
From 1946 to 1954	39	35	32	31
From 1937 to 1945	29	27	26	25
From 1928 to 1936	26	23	21	20
From 1919 to 1927	22	19	21	18
From 1910 to 1918	17	15	19	–
From 1901 to 1909	17	–	–	–
Mean	**30**	**31**	**30**	**34**

[a]Level 0 to 2 of a scale going from 0 to 10.
[b]For 1981, the survey was only carried out in 10 western countries, plus Malta.
Reading: In 2008, 43 % of people born from 1982 to 1990 are considered as having low religiosity (level 0 to 2). Only 18 % of people born between 1919 and 1927 were in the same group.

larger proportion of "individualized religious persons"[18], with a personal approach to religion. They are not indifferent religious people or atheist at all.

On Table 8.9, the no-answers do not seem completely indifferent as they do not present the lowest level of religiosity. These no-answers (rather numerous, 9 %) probably stem from people who are not very religious but who find it too difficult to choose their position from these four possibilities!

As it seems problematic to clearly ascertain religious indifference or atheism and to precisely count how many people can be defined as belonging to these categories, we prefer to consider the religious dimension as a continuum going from strong religiosity to its opposite. For that, we consider the attitudinal scale used in Table 8.6 (above) as the best way of measuring the level of religiosity, taking into account combined religious feelings, behaviors and beliefs (Bréchon 2013a, b). This scale will allow us to better understand who the Europeans characterized by low religiosity really are.

[18] In Western societies, the values of individualization defined as a desire to be autonomous and original in one's personal choices are rising. Consequently, even in the main religions, followers tend to be more individualized. They do not accept all the beliefs and moral positions of their denomination, and may even think they have their own way of connecting with the divine.

Table 8.12 Binary logistic regression of religiosity (EVS 2008, EU 27)

	Wald[a]	B coefficient[b]
Man	866	1
Woman		1.4
18–24 years old		1
25–34 years old		0.8
35–49 years old	181	1
50–64 years old		1.2
65 years old and more		1.7
Primary school	76	1
Junior high school		1
Senior high school		0.8
University		0.9
Very low income		1
Rather low income	10	1
Rather high income		1
Very high income		0.8

[a]By degree of freedom. The Wald coefficient indicates the strength of a link, all things being equal.
[b]Odds-ratio compared to a reference category.

Who Are the Irreligious People?

Social Background of People with Low Religiosity

Table 8.10 shows the relationship between the level of religiosity and different socio-demographic variables. Religiosity remains very dependent on gender: women are significantly more religious than men. And this relationship is corroborated in all countries[19]. The explanation of the phenomenon is controversial. Some sociologists explain it mainly by differences in male and female roles, with involvement which tends to be at home or in the public sphere. Family orientation tends to lead to more religious behavior than work and outside contexts (Sullins 2006). Other social scientists – particularly psychologists – talk of more natural reasons: women allegedly take less risk and are – by nature – more fearful, which leads to more frequent religious activity (Miller and Hoffman 1995).

Religiosity is also greatly dependent on the generation of individuals: the young are much less religious than the old generations. Here also, the relationship exists – more or less strongly – in all countries of the EU. An analysis by birth cohorts

[19]This relationship varies in intensity according to country. But the dominant religion of the country does not seem explicative, nor does its level of modernization. Cramer's V – a statistical coefficient measuring the strength of a link – is very high in Cyprus, Latvia, Lithuania, Spain, Denmark, Estonia. The only area where the link is rather weak – but significant – is Northern Ireland (0.10).

allows us to explain the phenomenon (Table 8.11): a generation effect is very clear: each generation is characterized by a certain level of religiosity and is rather stable throughout its life. There is just a slight life cycle effect: generations seem to become a little less irreligious when they become older. It is possible that when people are raising children, they become slightly more religious (Steggerda 1993; Tilley 2003). But the main trend is generational, with strong differences in the level of religiosity of cohorts.

Coming back to the bottom of Table 8.10, we can consider the effect of education and income. People with only a primary school education are much more religious than others (corroborated in almost all countries even if the link is not always very strong). It might be hypothesized that education is one of the possible explanations of irreligion[20]. Education leads people to cogitate, not to simply reproduce ideas and values internalized from the family upbringing, but to discuss the plausibility of religious dogmas; whereas uneducated people are allegedly more easily superstitious and open to irrational thought.

The relationship between religiosity and income is of about same intensity as between religiosity and education (Cramer's V=0.10). When Europeans have a low income, they tend to be more religious and vice versa. Though gender, age, education and income are correlated with religiosity, occupation has almost no impact (V=0.06).

Some of these variables being linked, we have carried out a binary logistic regression (with two categories of religiosity, low for 0 to 5 and high for 6 to 10), adding a geographic area variable[21]. Table 8.12 shows that the gender effect remains very high when other variables are checked. In many value fields, surveys have shown that though the gap between men and women is narrowing, on the religious dimension, the gap remains wide. The generational effect also remains rather high, with strong religiosity above all among aging Europeans. Almost all generations have the same religiosity except the oldest (statistically 1.7 times more religious than 18–24 year olds). This is congruent with the explanations on value change beginning with the baby boom generations, which were also those in which the length of studies exploded. In the regression model, the education effect is not as high as in the crossed table, even if educated people are rather less religious. Compared to other variables, the effect of income on religiosity is weak, except for very high income people who tend to be less religious.

[20] But the level of education also depends on generation. We will consider a little further the respective weight of the two variables, all things considered as equal for other dimensions.

[21] This variable (Western, Oriental, Northern, Southern Europe) only allows us to neutralize composition effects as income and education are linked to the economic situation of each country. So it is not presented in Table 8.12.

Table 8.13 Support of different values according to the level of religiosity (EVS 2008, EU 27)

% per cell	Weak (0–2)	Average (3–6)	Strong (7–10)	Mean
Very in favor of traditional family (6 indicators)	*15*	24	**40**	27
Strong moral permissiveness (8 indicators)	**50**	35	*13*	33
In favor of sharing male female roles (4 items)	56	50	45	50
When jobs are scarce, keeping them for men	13	16	23	18
In favor of a morality with clear principles	*18*	21	**34**	25
Support work values (5 indicators)	40	44	**55**	47
Feeling of happiness (2 variables)	54	55	56	55
In favor of civic permissiveness (7 indicators)	**62**	56	*44*	54
Support authoritarian values (4 indicators)	*41*	48	**60**	50
Reject foreigners from one's neighborhood (at least 2 cat.)	17	17	21	19
Very proud to be from one's country	*33*	42	**51**	42
At least one protest participation (on 5)	**59**	55	*44*	52
Strong support of economic liberalism (6 indicators)	63	65	65	64
Supporter of democratic system (4 indicators)	40	36	39	38
Strong politicization (3 indicators)	50	50	50	50
Right-wing political orientation (6–10)	24	31	**38**	31
Trust in others (3 indicators)	51	50	47	49
Belonging to at least one voluntary organization	38	39	41	41
Supporting solidarity values (10 indicators)	41	46	**56**	48
Strong level of individualization	**70**	54	*24*	48

Reading: 27 % of Europeans are in favor of the traditional family (according our attitudinal scale). But, depending on whether they have a low or a high religiosity, the % goes from 15 % to 40 %.

Weakly Religious People's System of Values

More than by their socio-demographic characteristics, irreligious people can be characterized by what they think on certain subjects. In fact, the individual's system of values still very much depends on their religiousness. It is even the variable which has the strongest effect on the value system (Gonthier and Bréchon 2014). Here we will show this impact, considering a large number of attitudinal scales, about all areas of life (Table 8.13). Each of these scales has been tested and validated in our previous publications (Bréchon 2013a, b[22]).

On many value dimensions, differences stemming from religiosity are appearing. The less Europeans are integrated into a universe of religious beliefs and practices, the less they support traditional family and rightist values, and the more they are in favor of moral permissiveness and of equality between men and women. Irreligion goes hand in hand with a lower work ethic, a very low support of clearly principled

[22] To avoid making this paper too heavy, we do not present each scale in detail.

Table 8.14 Support for different values[a] according to the level of religiosity and gender (EVS 2008, EU 27)

	Weak religiosity (0–2)		Strong religiosity (7–10)		
% per cell	Men	Women	Men	Women	Mean
In favor of traditional family	17	14	44	38	27
Strong moral permissiveness	49	53	13	16	33
Sharing male female roles	51	61	41	47	50
Morality with clear principles	19	17	35	34	25
Support work values	42	36	58	53	47
In favor of civic permissiveness	64	59	45	43	54
Support authoritarian values	41	42	61	59	50
Very proud of one's country	34	32	52	50	42
At least one protest action	60	58	47	42	52
Right-wing political orientation	28	19	42	35	31
Support solidarity values	39	44	55	56	48
Strong level of individualization	66	75	19	27	48

[a]In this table we only take into account the values upon which religiosity has a significant impact according to Table 8.13.
Reading: 17 % of weakly religious men are in favor of the traditional family but 44 % of highly religious men support the traditional family.

morality, authoritarian values, nationalism, solidarity (feeling concerned about other people's living conditions, particularly the disadvantaged) (see also Zuckerman 2014[23]). In terms of political action, religious people have a rather higher electoral turnout rate (not presented in Table 8.13) but they participate less in protests (non-conventional actions).

The last line of the table sums it all up: irreligious people are much more individualized; individualization being defined as willing in all domains to choose for themselves what is good for them, without being determined by their family or social entourage, by the State or a Church. Individualization is in fact the main trend in value change in the last decades in Western Europe (Ester et al. 1993). Individualization and secularization are tightly connected. Religious decline is associated with a rejection of a supreme order, allowing each individual to claim his individual autonomy, without having to follow a God and a religion which dictates norms and compulsory behavior. Though the relationship is very close, it is not possible to say in what way the correlation works: does the decline of belief in God lead to individualization or does the desire for individual autonomy lead to withdrawal from religion?

[23] Zuckerman aims to show (in an American context and in opposition to the Christian conservative right-wing rhetoric) – on the basis of very rich qualitative interviews – that atheists are as humanist as believers in God. And they do not have to face the awful question of evil which is ever-present for followers of the God of love. In fact, though it is true that irreligious people are very individualized and in favor of individual freedoms, our results show that they are not particularly humanist in terms of solidarity.

Table 8.15 Support for different values[a] according to the level of religiosity and age (EVS 2008, EU 27)

	Weak religiosity (0–2)		Strong religiosity (7–10)		
% per cell	18–34	55 and more	18–34	55 and more	Mean
In favor of traditional family	10	24	36	46	27
Strong moral permissiveness	55	38	18	12	33
Sharing male female roles	59	53	47	43	50
Morality with clear principles	15	22	28	38	25
Support work values	34	52	47	64	47
In favor of civic permissiveness	73	46	58	35	54
Support authoritarian values	39	46	53	65	50
Very proud of one's country	32	38	45	56	42
At least one protest action	54	59	44	41	52
Right-wing political orientation	24	24	34	41	31
Support solidarity values	41	41	53	56	49
Strong level of individualization	75	54	30	18	48

[a]In this table we only take into account the values upon which religiosity has a significant impact according to Table 8.13.
Reading: 10 % of weakly religious 18–34 year olds are in favor of the traditional family but 36 % of this age group who are highly religious support the traditional family.

Even if religiosity is a very important factor in value preferences, it must be underlined that not all attitudes are correlated with it. Contrary to common belief, religiosity does not lead to a greater feeling of happiness. Irreligious people who cannot benefit from the consolation of religion are not more pessimist about their life (Zuckerman 2008[24])! And the level of politicization, of trust in others, of associative membership, of xenophobia and foreigner rejection, of support for economic liberalism and democratic systems are very alike for religious and irreligious people. For these values, it is possible that a certain link with irreligion can be observed in some countries depending on national traditions but irreligion and these values have no overall link.

As we have already seen that religiosity differs considerably according to gender and age, it is interesting to check whether the effect observed in Table 8.13 between values and religiosity is always strong for men and women and for young and old people. When we consider the effect of the level of religiosity for men and women separately (Table 8.14), it clearly appears that the strong explanatory variable is religiosity and not gender[25]. The gender discrepancies on values taken into account for each level of religiosity are low[26].

[24] Zuckerman underlines that the rather secularized Danes are the happiest in the world, but the survey data does not confirm the relationship between irreligion and happiness.

[25] For each gender, the level of religiosity differences are striking.

[26] For the same level of religiosity, women are slightly more in favor of gender equality, individualized values and a little less in favor of work values and right wing orientation.

The results differ when age is checked (Table 8.15). Age has more impact than gender. In fact, religiosity and age reinforce each other[27], although religiosity generally seems to be more decisive. So we observe rising or decreasing figures from the young group with low religiosity to old highly religious people. Young generations have more individualized values and they are also more secularized.

Conclusions

In relation to the two theses about religious indifference explained in the introduction, i.e. that it is less extreme or more extreme than secularization, it is clear that religious indifference is a less absolute and complete attitude than anti-religious dynamics. We are not in a post-secularized world where religious indifference is ubiquitous. Secularization is a movement which depends on periods and countries and corresponds to a decline in institutional religions and their religious universe. Beliefs become uncertain, possible but not sure. Religions will probably not disappear, though they are losing part of their social strength, even if the value system of individuals continues to be influenced by their religiosity. Religions are changing and are the place of complex processes of new arrangements to try to adapt their beliefs and moral guidance to the individualized values of modernity. Dobbelaere (2014) explains that in this situation, sociologists have to study other meanings systems than those set out by religions. But before doing that, we can still assert that people with low religiosity have significantly different values to highly religious people.

People who seem to be religiously indifferent are very often not completely clear on their religious position. They are likely not to answer exactly the same thing on these subjects at different times, often accepting the possibility of religious phenomena, but giving little importance to the existence of something beyond our world as they probably do not think that their current acts determine their potential future beyond. Their values are very often in between those of strongly religious and unreligious people.

Data also show the enormous differences in religiosity between countries, which underlines that religions are not an entirely individual choice in an age of individualization. In some national contexts, religion remains the social norm, while in some others irreligion and atheism are socially more and more dominant. When we compare religiosity according to countries, the USA is not an exceptional case of a wealthy and nevertheless religious country. This country remains very religious but no more than some European countries, in particular Ireland and Italy which are also rather affluent countries. And, like Europe, the USA is not homogeneous reli-

[27] Checked by religiosity, age has no effect for some values: solidarity, political orientation, protest action.

giously speaking[28]. So speaking of exceptional cases for Europe or for America is overstating the case.

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[28] According to a wide-reaching survey carried out by the Association of Statisticians of American religious Bodies, counties could be divided into four equal categories (quartiles): though in about a quarter of counties, over 75% of people are affiliated members of a religion, the percentage in the other extreme quartile is 35 % and under (Glenmary Research Center 2000). But, in the previously quoted Pew survey, the percentage of non-affiliated people differs little over large areas, which are probably too heterogeneous: 19 % of the adult population in the South, 22 % in the Midwest, 25 % in the Northeast and 28 % in the West declare they have no religion.

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Religious Indifference and Religious *Rites of Passage*

Pascal Siegers

Abstract Religions indifference is generally defined in terms of what it is not: it is neither a religious belief nor the denial of transcendental realities. Some studies suggest that indifferent individuals, although they have no religious beliefs and practices, turn to religion for specific occasions, e.g. religious *rites of passage*. This study focuses on factors influencing attitudes of religiously indifferent people towards religious *rites of passage* for birth, marriage, and death. Research hypotheses are drawn from the concept of vicarious religion and secularisation theory. The results show that religious factors influence whether indifferent individuals support religious rituals. In line with the concept of vicarious religion support for Churches increase the probability that individuals support religious *rites of passage*. In line with secularisation theory, support for religious rituals depends on a religious socialisation therefore reflects a habit. For those individuals that are not member in a church, value orientations are also related to support for religious rites of passage.

Keywords Rites of passage • Vicarious religion • Secularisation • European values study • Non-religion

Introduction[1]

After sociology of religion turned its attention towards the plurality of religious beliefs and practices in the 1990s, it now discovers that non-religion – just like religion – covers a wide range of different social practices. To capture this diversity of non-religion, a new terminology is needed. The current discussions around the

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scope and the content of non-religion reflect the conceptual ambiguity that still accompanies the debate about the diversity of non-religion.

Frequently, religious indifference is defined as a form of non-religiosity that is neither characterised by some specific form of religious or spiritual belief nor by an outright rejection of religion (Bruce 2002; Pickel 2010; Pollack et al. 2003; Siegers 2010, 2012). Nevertheless, the difference to similar concepts of non-religion – like a-religion, non-religion, secularity etc. – remains vague.

This terminological ambiguity mirrors conceptual ambiguity in discussions about religious indifference. On the one hand, Bruce (2002) argues that indifference is the endpoint of secularisation because anti-religious orientations lose their relevance in a secularised world. Indifference would describe a situation where religion has lost so much of its social and individual relevance that people do not care anymore about the possibility of transcendental realities. In this case, religious indifference is truly secular because the reference to religion that characterises anti-religious positions (i.e. contestation) eventually disappears.

On the other hand, religious indifference might be conceived as lacking direct relationships with religion, but as positioned in relation to religious or more explicit nonreligious positions by relevant agents who render the lack of direct relationships to religion remarkable (Quack and Schuh 2017, 12–13 – in this volume). Moreover, the distance to religion and religiosity might be less stable than the interpretation from secularisation theory would suggest. Davie (2008) argues that a non-religious majority of individuals in secular societies periodically turns to religion when confronted with exceptional events (e.g. illness, death, grief etc.). From this perspective of 'vicarious religion' (Davie 2007), religious indifference would not describe a stable distance from religion but would include the possibility to occasionally participate in religious ceremonies etc.

This paper addresses the question why religiously indifferent people turn to religion at specific occasions. Is secularisation or vicarious religion a better interpretative scheme to understand religious indifference?

There are many possible events that might motivate indifferent people to turn to religion. For Davie (2007) an ideal-typical case for religious services that non-religious individuals request from the churches are religious *rites of passage* at specific life events. *Rites of passage* are traditionally provided by the Churches. If some link to (conventional) religion persists for religiously indifferent individuals it is most likely to be found for the most common *rites of passage* at birth (e.g. baptism), marriage (e.g. church wedding) and death (e.g. religious funeral). Relying on data from survey research, this study reveals which factors influences whether indifferent individuals support religious *rites of passage* or not.

In the first section I will discuss current terminological approaches to the study of non-religion. The second section discusses which interpretative schemes provide plausible arguments for the analysis of religious indifference. A third section presents how the concepts are operationalised for empirical analysis, and the fourth section tests which factors determine whether religiously indifferent individuals support religious *rites of passage*. The last section summarises the findings and discusses implications for the study of non-religion.

Religious Indifference – Non-Religion's Purest Form?

Although the study of non-religion only recently gained some momentum in social sciences, a significant number of contributions address the problem of an appropriate definition of non-religion and it's expressions in social life (Lee 2012; Meulemann 2004; Quack 2013, 2014; Wohlrab-Sahr and Kaden 2013). For Lee (2012), non-religion is not equivalent to the secular because the latter refers to things that are not related to religion whereas the former refers to things that are related to religion by stating a difference from religion. Non-religion, however, 'describes something that is ontologically distinct from religion in a way that the secular is not' (Lee 2012, 136).[2] The description of non-religion in terms of a difference to religion, she concludes, requires a reference to religion for the definition (Lee 2012).

At least two forms of opposition between non-religion and religion are distinguished in the literature: First, a 'strong' form of contestation that denies the existence of any transcendental reality and conceives of religion as irrational. This form is most often called anti-religious. Contemporary forms of atheism (New Atheism) and traditional materialist ideologies are anti-religious. Second, a 'weak' form of contestation that denies the relevance of religion in everyday life but does not result in a general critique of religion or an outright rejection of the possibility that some transcendental reality exists. Individuals simply do not perceive the relevance of religion for their existence. This is – by and large – equivalent to Meulemann's (2004) definition of religious indifference as a denial of the religious question or of not feeling concerned by religious questions (Pollack et al. 2003).[3]

Wohlrab-Sahr and Kaden (2013) distinguish two different forms of 'weak' contestation: indifference and a-religion. Indifference, they argue, represents the irrelevance of religion to individuals whereas a-religion describes a pattern of distance where religion might be relevant at specific moments in life.[4] This distinction implies that two patterns of weak contestation coexist: A stable pattern, where religion remains insignificant to individuals over the life course and a pattern where the relationship to religion changes over the life course.

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[2] For Lee, non-religion would also include alternative forms of belief, like for example New Age spiritualities, because they are most often defined in opposition to conventional religion. Given her insistence on the ontological difference from religion that the notion of non-religion implies, it would probably be clearer to conceive alternative forms of beliefs as specific social forms of religion because both are related to some conception of transcendental reality. It might be more precise to confine the term non-religion to things that state a difference to religion (and not only to specific forms of traditional religious institutions) without a reference to transcendental realities.

[3] Meulemann's classification is original because it distinguishes unbelief (i.e. the denial of religious beliefs) from indifference and uncertainty. The latter means that individuals acknowledge the relevance of religious questions but feel unable to decide whether there is an answer to them, while religious indifference simply denies the relevance of religious questions.

[4] In contrast, Quack (2014) uses a-religion in the sense Lee defines the secular i.e. as the absence of any relation to religion.

Particularly the assumption of a stable pattern of indifference points to the question when the 'difference' to religion becomes irrelevant to individuals because they lack the knowledge about religion and therefore would not even be able to turn to some religion. This situation would be secular in the sense of Lee (2012) or a-religious in the sense of Quack (2014) and – as a category to classify individuals – is best described as *religious illiteracy*.

The distinction of religious indifference and religious illiteracy is of less importance for the terminology suggested by Quack and Schuh who argue that religious indifference is best understood as a remarkable absence of relationships that characterise more explicit nonreligious positions in a 'religion-related field' (2017, 11 – this volume).

Thus, there is considerable terminological diversity in the literature about different forms of non-religion. In most cases, authors distinguish (1) a strong form of contestation of religion and churches (i.e. an antireligious or atheist mode), (2) a weak form, where religion is not relevant to every-day life but there is no outright rejection of religion and (3) a situation where no link to religion exists (i.e. the secular in Lee's terms). Religious indifference is used to denote either the second or third form of non-religion, i.e. the absence of beliefs and practice and the absence of outright contestation. Moreover, the discussion points to a possible temporal dimension of religious indifference. It might be conceived either as a stable disposition of individuals or as a situational distance to religion.

Vicarious Religion or Secularisation?

From the more general discussion about secularisation and/or religious individualisation in Europe, two approaches provide interpretative schemes for religious indifference. The first is secularisation theory. Bruce (2002) argues that indifference is the most likely endpoint of secularisation because in a world were religion has lost its social significance anti-religious worldviews are not relevant anymore. Empirical studies provide some evidence for this argument, showing that indifferent individuals left the religious field and do not search for alternative religious beliefs (Pickel 2010).

From this point of view, religious indifference would best be conceived as a 'secular' orientation in the sense of Lee or as 'cognitive indifference' in Pollack et al.'s (2003) terms because religion and religious questions are not perceived as relevant to individuals' lives. No relationship to religion exists. Moreover, at the endpoint of secularisation, from the individuals' point of view, the absence of a belief would not constitute a remarkable absence of religion but, in contrast, would be perceived as the 'normal' case.

Criticising secularisation theory for its narrow approach to religion, Davie (2007, 2008) argues that individuals' relation to religion cannot be reduced to individual beliefs and practices. She argues that – in Europe – individuals holding no religious beliefs and without any religious (or spiritual) practice have more or less strong ties

to religion. These individuals turn toward religion if and when the individual or collective circumstances create some need for religious services or offers. Davie calls this situation 'vicarious religion', i.e. a situation in which 'religion [is] performed by an active minority but on behalf of a much larger number, who (implicit at least) not only understand, but quite clearly, approve of what the minority is doing' (Davie 2007, 128). She refers to the Scandinavian countries as an example. In these countries most people are self-described church members. However, surveys show that most people neither hold religious beliefs nor regularly worship (Davie 2008). For Davie this means that even non-religious individuals attribute some value to religion. The most obvious example for vicarious religion is when non-religious individuals request religious *rites of passage* at birth, marriage, death, or any other occasion. Moreover, the concept is not limited to ritual aspects of religion but also encompasses believing on behalf of others or the embodiment of moral norms on behalf of others etc. (Davie 2007).

In its core, vicarious religion describes a division of labour that has also been described for Japanese religion on a family level, where older family members (in general women) practice religious rituals on behalf of the family (Reader 1991). Restricting the definition to situations where a minority is active whereas the majority is passive is not necessary. It is also plausible that a passive minority benefits from rituals performed by an active majority.

More important than the question whether a minority practices on behalf of a majority or vice versa is that Davie's discussion distinguishes two motivations for non-religious people to turn towards religion. The first is more temporal: in most cases some triggering events raise individuals' awareness for religious offers (i.e. rituals). On the one hand, these events do occur on the social level. Davie, for example, invokes the churches' role in organising massive public condolences after terrorist attacks. On the other hand, such triggering events arguably occur more often on the individual level. The most obvious example is non-religious individuals requesting religious ceremonies for *rites of passages* or pastoral care when confronted with illness, death and grief.

The second motivational aspect is support for religion due to its social and individual utility. This aspect is included in Davie's definition when she explicitly states that passive people in the 'vicarious mode' explicitly approve of religious activities. Therefore, Davies notion of 'vicarious religion' resembles Wohlrab-Sahr and Kaden's (2013) term of a-religion, i.e. a distant but pluralistic orientation towards religion which includes the possibility that individuals (re-) approach religion on specific occasions.

In some sense the concept of vicarious religion qualifies the concept of religious indifference by emphasising that religious passivity that is implied by definitions of indifference can change temporarily. The term indifference struggles to capture this temporal dimension in the relationship that individuals maintain with religion.

Davie has been criticised for overstressing the social significance of situational awareness of or contact with religion. Bruce and Voas (2012) argue that a situational turn towards religion – especially for religious *rites of passage* and public grief –

reveals a habit more than a persisting attachment to or approval of religion.[5] When a family member dies, people ask for religious rituals because this has always been the case and therefore the churches are perceived as the 'standard' providers for this service. This is, they argue, much the same as buying food at the grocery store. Turning to religion would then result from a habitual association of specific functions with the churches more than from explicit support for religious practices or teachings. From this perspective, individuals rely on churches for specific occasions because they were socialised into this tradition.

Thus, studying factors that are associated with the disposition of non-religious individuals to turn to religion at specific occasions sheds some light on the relationship that non-religious individuals have with religion if they do not take an anti-religious stance. Is vicariousness a meaningful interpretative scheme for studying religious indifference? Support for religious *rites of passage* are the best example to study these factors at the individual level because *rites of passage* address events that every individual experiences during his life course and they are traditionally provided by the Churches.

Research Hypotheses

The short theoretical discussion above revealed three classes of factors which possibly influence individuals' support for religious *rites of passage* although they have neither religious beliefs nor practice: (1) triggering (life) events, (2) approval of the social and/or individual utility of churches/religion, (3) religion as a habit, and (4) traditional values as indirect support for religion.

Triggering Life Events

The first argument from the vicarious religion debate is that non-religious individuals turn to religion in specific circumstances as a result of triggering life events. A rather simple assumption is that support for religious *rites of passage* will increase with the experience of events addressed by *rites of passage* during the life course. The first important event is the birth of children. Parents then have to decide how they will handle the *rites of passage* (Should the children be baptised or not? Should there be a ritual at all?). This creates awareness for religious services and therefore

[5] Bruce and Voas (2012, 244) argue that the concept of vicarious religion furthermore implies that 'passive' individuals regret their non-religiousness and would implicitly prefer to be religious. This argument seems exaggerated. Davie's discussion of vicarious religion assumes an attachment to religion for the 'passive' individuals but not the feeling of deficiency due to the lack of a religious beliefs and practice.

will probably increase the likelihood of supporting religious rites of passage and particularly for rites at birth.

Therefore, the first hypothesis is that indifferent individuals having children will show stronger support for religious rites of passage than individuals without children. (H1)

The second important event is experience of death in particular the death of a close relative. Coping with the loss of a relative most likely raises awareness for the religious question and therefore also the likelihood of accepting a religious ritual to cope with this answer.

The second hypothesis is that individuals who experienced the death of (at least one of) their parents will show stronger support for religious rites of passage than individuals who did not. (H2)

In fact, these hypotheses do not account for the temporal dimension implied by the vicarious religion theme. The triggering life events mentioned here approximate the temporal dimension by assuming that they have a persistent effect on attitudes towards religion. A more rigorous test would require a continuous monitoring of individuals' religion related behaviour over a long time period with short intervals between measurements, i.e. panel data.

Approval of Church Activities

The second important element of the vicarious religion argument is that passive (i.e. non-religious) individuals approve religious activities. For Davie this support includes approval of the transcendental meaning associated with religious beliefs and practices. However, approving the beliefs of religiously active people is not a necessary condition to support church activities. It is plausible to argue that it is sufficient that non-religious individuals perceive some social or individual utility from religion and church activities. This utility might result from the role churches play in pastoral care, social work and charity, or the defense of moral codes, family values etc. Supporting religious *rites of passage* is, then, an endorsement of the utility perceived from religion and church activities.

Two hypotheses result from this:

First, the more people trust Churches the higher the likelihood that they support religious rites of passage (H3).

In political science literature, trust in institutions is considered to be an indicator for 'generalised support', i.e. support that is independent from specific outcomes or office holders (i.e. clergymen) (Fuchs and Klingemann 1995). Generalised support is often distinguished from specific support for institutions which depends on how individuals perceive the performance of these institutions. Performance, in turn, might be seen in terms of social or individual utility.

Therefore, the second hypothesis is:

The higher non-religious individuals rate the performance of Churches, the higher the probability that they support religious rites of passage (H4).

Religion as Habit

Secularisation theory argues that the request of religious rituals by non-religious people is a matter of habit rather than genuine support of Churches or religion. This means that religious *rites of passage* should be more widespread with individuals that were socialised into religious milieus. Even if they are not-religious anymore, they turn to religious rituals because they 'learned' it this way. For this reason, I expect that *a socialisation into church religiosity increases the probability of non-religious individuals to support religious rites of passage (H5).*

In a similar way, church membership of non-religious individuals might be interpreted as a form of habitual attachment to religion. However, church membership as an indicator for habitual attachment to religion is ambiguous because staying member of a church might also express some residual religiosity within the indifference group. Moreover, in some countries church membership is required in order to gain access to religious rituals. Therefore, instead of testing a hypothesis about effects of church membership I will test the hypothesis in members and non-members separately.

Emphasis on Traditional Values

Davie's definition of vicarious religion does not specify whether approval refers explicitly to the religious content of the religious practices of the active minority or whether approval might be more indirect. Some people – although non-religious themselves – might support traditional or conservative social values and religion is a core element of traditional values in social science and psychological theories (Inglehart 1997; Schwartz and Huismans 1995). Value theories state that religion provides a common moral framework for society which strengthens social cohesion (Inglehart 1997). The churches are perceived as defenders of a moral order that matches traditional value orientations. Here again, support for religious rituals expresses a symbolic endorsement of Churches' public utility. *Traditional values are expected to be associated with stronger support for religious rites of passage (H6).*

Data and Operationalisation

The data in this study come from the fourth wave of the European Values Study (2008–2010).[6] For reasons of measurement equivalence, only data from historically Protestant and Catholic countries were used.[7] Independent samples are available for Northern Ireland and East Germany, so that 27 samples were used for data analysis. The hypotheses are tested only for the subsample that was classified as religiously indifferent in the first step of the analysis. Classification was done by running a multiple group latent class analysis. First, I will give a short summary of the latent class model before I describe how the variables for the regression model were operationalised.

Latent Indifference – Summary of a Latent Class Model of Religious Orientations

Wohlrab-Sahr and Kaden (2013, 193) argue that religious indifference cannot be studied by means of survey research because the questions only cover conventional religiosity. More subtle nuances between different expressions of non-religion cannot be distinguished from alternative beliefs (e.g. holistic spirituality).

To address this critique, the present study uses an empirical classification of religious and non-religious orientations by means of multiple group latent class analysis (Siegers 2012). The latent class model was originally designed to distinguish alternative spiritualities from conventional religiosity in cross-culturally comparative data. Using only indicators for conventional religiosity (e.g. belief in God, belief in life after death, church attendance) would fail to address the critique by Wohlrab-Sahr and Kaden that individuals holding alternative forms of beliefs will, to some extent, be classified as non-religious. The advantage of the model presented here is that alternative forms of belief are not included in the non-religious classes.

Latent class models help to judge which patterns are empirically relevant because they facilitate the interpretation of heterogeneity in the answer behaviour of individuals. Thus, the model presented below confirms the necessity of distinguishing different forms of non-religion at the individual level.

Seven indicators were included in the latent class model. First, church attendance measured the degree of integration into churches as moral communities. Second, the statement ‘I have my own way of connecting with the divine, without churches or religious services’ was used to measure religious individualism, which is a core

[6] EVS (2011): European Values Study 2008: Integrated Dataset (EVS 2008). GESIS Data Archive, Cologne. ZA4800, Version 1.0.0, doi:10.4232/1.10059.

[7] The latent class model of religious orientations described below did not yield meaningful results in Orthodox (including Latvia) and Muslim countries. This is due to the flawed translations of the concept of God item. A documentation of translation problems can be found here: http://info1.gesis.org/EVS/Translation/EVS_V125_Personal%20god.html.

Table 1 Summary of the latent class model of religious orientations

	Anti-religiosity	Religious indifference	Holistic spirituality	Moderate religiosity	Bricolage religiosity	Church religiosity
Church attendance	Never	Never	Never	Irregular	Regular	Regular
Religious individualism	−−	O	++	O	++	O/−
Spiritual interest	−−	−	++	+	++	++
Image of God	None	Agnostic or impersonal	Impersonal	Personal or impersonal	Personal	Personal
Belief in Reincarnation	No	No	Yes	No	No/Yes	No
Time for prayer or meditation	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Importance of God	Not important	Not important	Somewhat important	Somewhat important	Very important	Very important
N	6,298	8,568	2,802	8,974	5,292	5,379
	(17%)	(23%)	(7.5%)	(24%)	(14%)	(14.5%)

Note: −−=strong de-emphasis. −=weak de-emphasis. O=neither de-emphasis nor emphasis. +=weak emphasis. ++=strong emphasis. Data from the latent-class analysis is freeley available for reuse: http://dx.doi.org/10.7802/1337

feature of spirituality. Third, a question on spiritual interest was included in the model to operationalise openness to experiences of transcendence ('How spiritual would you say you are. That is, how strongly are you interested in the sacred or supernatural?').[8] The fourth item (image of God) asked respondents to choose between the personal God of the Christian tradition, an impersonal view of transcendental power that characterises spirituality ('There is some spirit or life-force'), the agnostic position ('I don't know what to believe') and the atheistic position ('There is no God'). The fifth indicator is belief in reincarnation, which is typical for holistic ideas of spirituality (Houtman and Mascini 2002). Prayer or meditation, measuring a private religious (prayer) or spiritual (meditation) practice, is the sixth indicator.

Finally, the question 'How important is God in your life?' (importance of God was included in the model to measure the individual's commitment to religion). To reduce the complexity of the LCA, the original answer scales for church attendance and importance of God were reduced to three categories. For church attendance, categories 1 (more than once a week), 2 (once a Week), 3 (at least once a month) were aggregated to 'regular church attendance,' the categories 4 (only specific holidays) and 5 (several times a year) to 'irregular church attendance' and categories 6 (less often) and 7 (never) to 'no attendance.' Importance of God was recoded so that

[8] In colloquial language, being spiritual is not opposed to religious belief (Zinnbauer et al. 1997). Openness to transcendental experiences is a characteristic of religiosity *and* spirituality.

scores 1 to 3 stand for 'not important,' 4 to 7 for 'somewhat important' and 8 to 10 for 'very important.'

Six classes were needed for an appropriate description of the data. Table 1 summarises the profiles of the latent classes. The first two classes are varieties of non-religion. The profile of the first class is best interpreted as anti-religiosity because it is characterised by an outright rejection of any religious or spiritual stimulus. In particular, individuals within this class deny the existence of God or some higher being. In terms of Meulemann (2004), the religious question is answered negatively by individuals in the anti-religious class.

The second class shares the absence of any religious or spiritual belief or practice with the first class. Nevertheless, the indicators for the concept of God and religious individualism show that members of this class acknowledge the possibility that a transcendental reality exists. This class is best interpreted as religious indifference because there is neither a religious belief nor an anti-religious stance. The fact that within this class the possibility of a transcendental reality is not excluded shows that some weak relationship to religion exists in this class.

The remaining four classes are less important for this study. The third class matches expected characteristics of holistic spirituality. Three more classes are subtypes of conventional religiosity (moderate religiosity and church religiosity) or bricolage religiosity. Tests of measurement invariance showed that the anti-religious class, the holistic spirituality class and the church religiosity class are almost invariant. The remaining classes, particularly moderate religiosity, showed more heterogeneity in the measurement parameters, but the overall interpretation of the classes is unchanged (Siegers 2012).

Structurally very similar results were found with data from the Religious and Moral Pluralism (RAMP) project with slightly different indicators (Siegers 2010). The distinction between anti-religiosity and religious indifference is robust across datasets. It is noteworthy that, with 23 % of the sample, the religious indifference class is the second largest after moderate religiosity (24 %).

For the remaining analyses, I select the 8568 individuals from the indifference class because the present research aims at understanding why non-religious individuals support religious rites of passage.

Operationalisation of the Variables for the Regression Model

The independent variable for the regression model is support for religious *rites of passage*. The questionnaire of the European Values Study includes the question whether respondents 'think it is important to hold a religious service for any of the following events? Birth, marriage, and death.' Responses are given in a binary format (No = 0, Yes = 1).

Table 2 shows the distribution of support for religious rites of passage for each of the three life events across religious orientations. Different from the anti-religious group, a majority of religiously indifferent people agree that a religious ritual is

Table 2 Percentage agreement to importance of religious rituals for life events across religious orientations

	Rites of passage: religious ritual important for …		
	Birth (% Yes)	Marriage (% Yes)	Death (% Yes)
Anti-religiosity	23.7	24.2	35.8
Religious indifference	55.8	54.8	69.7
Holistic spirituality	56.3	55.0	71.1
Moderate religiosity	87.4	86.2	93.6
Bricolage religiosity	87.8	88.8	93.4
Church religiosity	95.0	97.7	98.5
Total	68.8	68.8	77.9
N	35,930	35,853	35,901

important for birth and marriage. For death even more than two thirds agree. About ninety percent or more from the three remaining classes underscore the importance of religious rituals whereas it is only about a quarter to a third within the anti-religious class.

H1 and H2 refer to two different triggering life events. The first is having a child. The operationalisation is straightforward: all respondents who report having children, irrespective of the number of children, are coded 1, respondents without children are coded 0. The second life event is the death of a parent. All respondents who reported they have lost their father and/or mother are coded 1, all other respondents are coded 0.

Generalised support for the Churches is operationalised by a question about trust in churches. The wording is 'Please look at this card and tell me, for each item listed, how much confidence you have in them? The church.' Answers are given on a four point scale from (1) none at all to (4) a great deal.

Specific support for the Churches is measured by the question 'Generally speaking, do you think that the churches are giving, in your country, adequate answers to: (1) The moral problems and needs of the individual, (2) The problems of family life, (3) People's spiritual needs, and (4) The social problems facing our country today.' Whereas the first and the third item explicitly refer to the individual utility of religion, the fourth item addresses the public utility of churches. Given these different dimensions of specific support for the Churches the four items are not summed up to form an index. All four items are used as independent variables in the regression model. Moreover, within the indifference group a significant share of respondents did not answer the questions. To avoid losing to many cases due to listwise deletion two dummy variables were created. The first indicating a positive evaluation of church performance and the second that respondents don't know if the churches give adequate answers to the problems mentioned. Those who reject that churches have individual or public utility are the reference category.

Religious socialisation was measured by self-reported church attendance at age 12. Answers were given on a seven point scale from 1 = never to 7 = more than once a week. Moreover, two questions about the belief in God and hell respectively are

used to measure residual religiosity within the indifference group. Both questions were not used for the measurement model. Belief in God is used here because it is a very general question, whereas the measurement model included a question on specific images of God. The distributions (not reported here) show that respondents easily agree with this question. On the contrary, belief in hell is used because it is a particularly demanding belief that expresses more commitment to religious beliefs. As for the questions on specific support for the churches, two dummy variables are used to include each of the beliefs into the model: one for respondents that reported belief in God and hell, and one for respondents who did not choose an answer. Respondents who do not believe in God or hell are the reference category.

Controlling for residual religiosity in the regression models is a means to make sure that the effects of general and specific support for the churches and the effect of religious socialisation are not confounded with differences in individual religiosity (i.e. that the indicators measure religiosity instead of support or socialisation).

Finally, traditional value orientations are measured by two indicators. First, the postmaterialism index is included as two dummy variables: materialism and the mixed category. Postmaterialism serves as the reference category. Second, the autonomy in education subscale from Welzel's (2010) measurement of self-expression values is used.[9] Respondents are asked to choose from a list of goals that are considered to be important for children's education ('Here is a list of qualities which children can be encouraged to learn at home. Which, if any, do you consider to be especially important? Please choose up to five!'). Selecting independence and imagination was coded +1 and selecting hard work and obedience was coded −1. The items were then summed up so that the range of the index goes from −2 to 2.

Control variables are age (measured in years), gender and education. For education I used the ISCED97 scheme provided by the European Values Study Group in order to enhance cross-cultural validity of the measurement.

Results

For testing the hypotheses I ran binary logistic regression models for each of the three *rites of passage* (birth, marriage, and death), separately for church members and non-members. To account for the multilevel structure of the data (individuals nested in countries) I included country dummies into the regression model to control for unobserved heterogeneity at the country level. This means that estimates for individual level effects are unbiased.[10] The first column of each model reports the regression coefficients. Because logistic models are non-linear the coefficients have to be interpreted on the logit scale (as logarithms of an odds). An increase by one unit in the independent variable increases the log (odds) of supporting religious *rites of passage* instead of not supporting them by the factor B (i.e. the regression coef-

[9] To avoid tautology, the item 'religious beliefs' in the original scale was replaced by 'hard work'.

[10] The reference category for the countries is The Netherlands.

ficient). Because the logit coefficients are difficult to interpret, results from logistic regression are often reported in terms of odds-ratios (Exp(B)). An odds ratio is the factor by which the chance of supporting religious rituals instead of not supporting religious rituals changes for a one unit increase in the independent variable.

Table 3, 4 and 5 report the estimates from the six regression models. With exception of the indicators for specific support for the churches, there is considerably similarity in the three models with respect to the significance and direction of the effects.

First, there is clear evidence that the triggering life events are not associated with a higher probability of supporting religious *rites of passage*. These indicators were used to model the temporal aspect of vicarious religion. Using cross-sectional data, it is not possible to adequately assess temporal dynamics in the relationship of non-religious people to religion (i.e. the occasional consumption of religious goods). Nevertheless, the results show that specific life events have no persistent effects on individuals' attitudes towards religious *rites of passage*. Hypotheses H1 and H2 are not confirmed.

Second, the indicators for support for the Churches – used to model explicit approval for Church activities – have significant and strong effects as expected. For trust in Churches the analysis yield the same strong effect on support for religious *rites of passage* in church members as in non-members. The third hypothesis is confirmed**.** The results for specific support for the Churches are more differentiated. The conviction that the Churches provide answers to moral problems (i.e. an aspect of public utility of the Churches) is associated with higher support for religious *rites of passage* for all three life events with regard to church members. For nones, this is only true for marriage and death. On the other hand, the indicator for public utility – that the Churches give answers to social problems – has weak effects on support for ritual marriage among church members only. The two indicators targeted at more individual utility of the Churches also have different effects. The conviction that the Churches give answers to family problems is related to higher support for religious rituals for birth and marriage, but not for death, among church members and not at all among the nones. This pattern makes sense as births and marriage are important events for family formation.

The conviction that the Churches give answers to the spiritual needs of individuals is related to support for religious rituals for marriage and death but not for birth. Given that a religious ritual for birth does not address the spiritual needs of the new born, these rituals might be more important for symbolic family formation and of less importance for individuals' spirituality. Overall, the results support hypothesis four. The results show that generalised and specific support for the Churches are associated with higher support for religious *rites of passage*. Within the group of religious indifference, religious rituals are more likely to be requested if individuals approve of church activities in very general or in more specific terms.

Third, church attendance at age 12, as an indicator for religion as a habit, is consistently associated with higher support for religious *rites of passage* among members and non-members. Hypothesis five is supported by the data.

Table 3 Results from the binary logistic regression models: religious ritual for birth

	Members			Non-members		
	B	s.e.	Exp(B)	B	s.e.	Exp(B)
Intercept	−1.99***	.38	.14	−4.40***	.39	.01
Triggering life events						
Children = Yes	.09	.10	1.10	−.07	.11	.93
Experienced death of parents	.03	.11	1.03	−.03	.11	.98
Generalised support for the churches						
Trust into churches	.44***	.06	1.56	.47***	.07	1.60
Specific support for the churches						
Churches give answers to moral problems						
No (ref.)	–	–	–	–	–	–
Don't know	.22	.18	1.24	.18	.22	1.20
Yes	.50***	.12	1.64	.54***	.14	1.72
Churches give answers to family problems						
No (ref.)	–	–	–	–	–	–
Don't know	.13	.21	1.13	.12	.23	1.13
Yes	.39***	.14	1.48	.09	.15	1.10
Churches give answers to spiritual needs						
No (ref.)	–	–	–	–	–	–
Don't know	−.16	.16	.85	.03	.20	1.03
Yes	.05	.09	1.05	.14	.11	1.16
Churches give answers to social problems						
No (ref.)	–	–	–	–	–	–
Don't know	.31	.21	1.37	.17	.23	1.19
Yes	−.06	.13	.95	.14	.16	1.15
Religion as a habit						
Church attendance at age12	.10***	.02	1.10	.10***	.02	1.11
Residual religion						
Belief in God						
No (ref.)	–	–	–	–	–	–
Don't know	.26	.14	1.29	.23	.15	1.26
Yes	.64***	.09	1.89	.97***	.10	2.64
Belief in Hell						
No (ref.)	–	–	–	–	–	–
Don't know	.55***	.17	1.74	.39***	.19	1.48
Yes	.37*	.16	1.45	.48*	.19	1.61
Value orientations						
Autonomy in education	−.09	.05	.91	−.19**	.05	.82
Postmaterialism (ref.)	–	–	–	–	–	–
Mixed type	.19	.11	1.21	.39**	.12	1.47
Materialism	.36**	.13	1.44	.55***	.15	1.73

(continued)

Table 3 (continued)

	Members			Non-members		
	B	s.e.	Exp(B)	B	s.e.	Exp(B)
Controls						
Gender (Women = 1)	−.16*	.08	.86	−.03	.09	.97
Age	.00	.00	1.00	.00	.00	1.00
Education (ISCED97)	−.11***	.03	.89	−.14***	.04	.87
N	3,813			3,055		

Note: Coefficients for country dummies not reported here. * p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001

Fourth, traditional value orientations are included in the regression to model indirect approval of church activities and church religious morality. Overall, the results confirm hypothesis six. The probability that individuals support religious *rites of passage* is lower if they emphasise autonomy in education. Moreover, support for religious rituals is related to materialist values. This means that traditionally oriented individuals tend to support religious *rites of passage* although they may not be religious. The results also suggest that the association between values and support for religious *rites of passage* is stronger among the nones. The effects of autonomy in education on support for religious rites at birth and death are not significant among church members. Also not significant is the effect of postmaterialism on the support for *rites of passage* at death.

Finally, the indicators controlling for residual religiosity within the indifference class are also significant predictors of support for religious rituals, both among members and non-members. Overall, the results show that within the group of religious indifference support for religious rituals is strongly related to individual's residual religiosity and religious socialisation.

Discussion

Descriptive results showed that a majority of religiously indifferent individuals supports religious rituals for birth and marriage and more than two-thirds thinks that a religious ritual is important for a funeral. This means that within the group of non-religious people there is a considerable potential for at least periodical attachment to religion.

But how can we interpret this attachment? Is support for religious rituals by non-religious individuals an expression of conscious approval of religion in general or church activities in particular? Or does it simply reflect a habit, i.e. a cultural tradition followed independently of its religious meaning?

The data analysis yielded that religious factors are important predictors for support of religious *rites of passage* whereas triggering life events have no effect. The two different interpretations of religious indifference from secularisation theory and from vicarious religion are not mutually exclusive. On the one hand, religiously

Table 4 Results from the binary logistic regression models: religious ritual for marriage

	Members			**Non-members**		
	B	s.e.	Exp(B)	B	s.e.	Exp(B)
Intercept	−1.16***	.39	.31	−2.89***	.34	.06
Triggering life events						
Children = Yes	.09	.10	1.09	−.15	.11	.86
Experienced death of parents	−.19	.10	.82	−.07	.11	.93
Generalised support for the churches						
Trust into churches	.44***	.06	1.55	.45***	.07	1.57
Specific support for the churches						
Churches give answers to moral problems						
No (ref.)	–	–	–	–	–	–
Don't know	.00	.18	1.00	.16	.21	1.17
Yes	.19	.12	1.21	.47***	.14	1.61
Churches give answers to family problems						
No (ref.)	–	–	–	–	–	–
Don't know	−.04	.20	.96	.03	.23	.23
Yes	.41***	.14	1.51	.21	.15	.15
Churches give answers to spiritual needs						
No (ref.)	–	–	–	–	–	–
Don't know	.15	.16	1.17	.17	.19	1.18
Yes	.26**	.09	1.30	.27*	.11	1.30
Churches give answers to social problems						
No (ref.)	–	–	–	–	–	–
Don't know	.39	.20	1.47	.15	.22	1.16
Yes	.32*	.13	1.37	.11	.15	1.11
Religion as a habit						
Church attendance at age 12	.05*	.02	1.05	.06*	.02	1.06
Residual religion						
Belief in God						
No (ref.)	–	–	–	–	–	–
Don't know	.04	.13	1.04	.23	.15	1.26
Yes	.49***	.09	1.63	.84***	.10	2.32
Belief in Hell						
No (ref.)	–	–	–	–	–	–
Don't know	.61***	.16	1.84	.31	.19	1.36
Yes	.35*	.15	1.43	.86***	.20	2.35
Value orientations						
Autonomy in education	−.12*	.05	.89	−.22***	.05	.80
Postmaterialism (ref.)	–	–	–	–	–	–
Mixed type	.28**	.10	1.32	.43***	.12	1.54
Materialism	.56***	.13	1.75	.54***	.15	1.71

(continued)

Table 4 (continued)

	Members			Non-members		
	B	s.e.	Exp(B)	B	s.e.	Exp(B)
Controls						
Gender (Women = 1)	−.18*	.08	.84	−.03	.09	.97
Age	.01	.00	1.01	.00	.00	1.00
Education (ISCED97)	−.10***	.03	.90	−.25***	.04	.78
N	3,806			3,050		

Note: Coefficients for country dummies not reported here. * p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001

indifferent individuals who *explicitly* approve of church activities, both in terms of general and specific support for the churches, have a higher probability of supporting religious rituals for important life events. It is noteworthy that the perception of public utility of churches (i.e. answers to social problems) has hardly any influence on support for religious rituals. It is obviously the perceived individual utility of churches that counts for *rites of passage*. These conclusions are valid for church members and nones. Moreover, there is not only evidence that direct approval has an effect on support for religious rituals. The fact that an emphasis on traditional values has a positive effect on the likelihood of supporting religious rituals refers to the importance of *indirect support* for church activities. However, the effect of traditional values seems to be more important among the nones. This is meaningful because the nones have less direct attachment to religion than the church members. Indifferent individuals with traditional value orientation probably perceive Churches as providers of moral order and therefore approve of religious activities. Therefore, the vicarious religion interpretation is at least partly supported by the data.

On the other hand, the indicators for religion as a habit, deduced from secularisation theory, also had strong effects on support for religious rituals. A religious socialisation is positively related to support for religious *rites of passage* among the religiously indifferent. Individuals socialised into conventional religion support religious *rites of passage* even if they are otherwise indifferent to religion. Support for religious rituals might be seen as a leftover from a more religious past. The positive effects of the indicators for a residual religiosity also point to this interpretation. It is an open question whether new generations who never attended church will still request religious rituals.

Interpreting religious indifference in terms of vicarious religion or in terms of religion as a habit is not mutually exclusive. Even if approval of religion and Churches is a stable disposition of religiously indifferent individuals during the life course, it might decline following the same pattern as belonging and believing (i.e. as a third step of secularisation). Support for religious rituals by religiously indifferent people might be part of a transition from 'fuzzy fidelity' (Voas 2009) to fully secular orientations. The more religious socialisation weakens, the less individuals will perceive church rituals as standard 'services' for *rites of passage*. Secular service providers (e.g. humanist unions) might fill this gap or – more probably – individualised (and secular) rituals will emerge.

Table 5 Results from the binary logistic regression models: religious ritual for death

	Members			Non-members		
	B	s.e.	Exp(B)	B	s.e.	Exp(B)
Intercept	.05	.49	1.05	−2.16***	.30	.12
Triggering life events						
Children = Yes	.04	.12	1.05	−.19	.10	.83
Experienced death of parents	−.10	.13	.91	-.02	.11	.98
Generalised support for the churches						
Trust in Churches	.57***	.08	1.77	.46***	.07	1.58
Specific support for the churches						
Churches give answers to moral problems						
No (ref.)	–	–	–	–	–	–
Don't know	−.07	.22	.94	.03	.21	1.03
Yes	.15	.16	1.16	.32	.14	1.37
Churches give answers to family problems						
No (ref.)	–	–	–	–	–	–
Don't know	.10	.25	1.11	.19	.23	1.21
Yes	.27	.18	1.31	.16	.15	1.17
Churches give answers to spiritual needs						
No (ref.)	–	–	–	–	–	–
Don't know	−.22	.19	.80	.10	.18	1.11
Yes	.58***	.12	1.79	.44***	.10	1.55
Churches give answers to social problems						
No (ref.)	–	–	–	–	–	–
Don't know	.63	.26	1.88	.00	.22	1.00
Yes	.17	.18	1.19	.04	.15	1.04
Religion as a habit						
Church attendance at age 12	.05*	.03	1.05	.09***	.02	1.09
Residual religion						
Belief in God						
No (ref.)	–	–	–	–	–	–
Don't know	.31	.16	1.36	.42**	.14	1.53
Yes	.71***	.11	2.03	.81***	.10	2.24
Belief in Hell						
No (ref.)	–	–	–	–	–	–
Don't know	.62**	.21	1.86	.18	.19	1.19
Yes	.10	.19	1.10	.64**	.22	1.90
Value orientations						
Autonomy in education	−.11	.06	.89	−.20***	.05	.82
Postmaterialism (ref.)	–	–	–	–	–	–
Mixed type	.06	.13	1.06	.43***	.11	1.54
Materialism	.29	.16	1.33	.73***	.14	2.07

(continued)

Table 5 (continued)

	Members			Non-members		
	B	s.e.	Exp(B)	B	s.e.	Exp(B)
Controls						
Gender (Women = 1)	−.16	.10	.85	−.01	.08	.99
Age	.00	.00	1.00	−.01	.00	.99
Education (ISCED97)	−.14***	.04	.87	−.18***	.03	.83
N	3,826			3,038		

Note: Coefficients for country dummies not reported here. * p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001

At least during this transition, the pattern of vicarious religion provides a useful frame for analysing some elements of European secularisation. Individuals without religious beliefs or practices continue to support church activities and are likely to request religious rituals for themselves and their families. This pattern expresses a persistent attachment to cultural resources that are seen within the religious tradition. Whether this attachment persists when religious socialisation continues to decrease most likely depends on the efficacy that religious rituals have for non-religious people.

The cross-sectional data used in this analysis does not allow answering the question whether vicarious religion or secularisation provides a better explanation for non-religious individuals' relation to religion through the life course. This is a major limitation of the present study. Panel data on religious orientations and behaviour (i.e. the factual use of religious rituals) would enable a more appropriate test of the competing hypotheses on why indifferent individuals turn to the Churches and when they do so during their life course. This would also allow testing whether triggering life events have a short term effect on requests for religious *rites of passage* that was not visible in the cross-sectional analysis. Detailed panel data on religious beliefs and practices, however, are scarce.

Results from the data analysis also yield insights for the terminological discussion in the study of non-religion. First of all, within the group of religiously indifferent individuals there is considerable support for religion and church activities. Therefore, a more differentiated approach to religious indifference can be useful in order to distinguish those who have no relation to religion (i.e. who are indifferent in Wohlrab-Sahrs and Kadens terminology) and those who can be localised within the religion-related field because they have a positive attitude toward the churches (and probably towards religion in more general). From the perspective of secularisation theory, however, this finding does not constitute a remarkable absence of religion but, in contrast, a remarkable presence or persistence of religion. Remarkable means that we need further explanations on why non-religious individuals continue to support – occasionally – what religious actors are doing.

Conclusion

This paper aimed at explaining why non-religious – and in particular indifferent – individuals support religious *rites of passage*. The results show that they do so because they support the individual or public utility of church activities. This is in line with the concept of vicarious religion. At the same time, a religious socialisation and some residual religiosity also foster support for religious rituals. This suggests that inasmuch as religious socialisation weakens, support for religious rituals will decline. After belonging and believing, diminishing support for the churches public utility might be the third stage towards fully secular orientations.

More research and panel data are needed to appropriately model the relationship of non-religious people to religion and the Churches.

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Bio- and Ethnographic Approaches to Indifference, Detachment, and Disengagement in the Study of Religion

Johannes Quack

> *[I]f the anthropological study of religious commitment is underdeveloped, the anthropological study of religious noncommitment is nonexistent. (Clifford Geertz 1973, 2004, 42)*

> *[T]here is only one method in social anthropology, the comparative method – and that is impossible. (Evans-Pritchard, see Needham 1975, 365)*

Abstract This chapter introduces the life stories of Marion and Prakash to the reader. It is based on a combination of ethnographic fieldwork and biographic interviews conducted in India and Germany. It addresses the complementarity of these methods and their appropriateness for the study of indifference to religion and religiosity, and reconsiders the relational approach to the study of nonreligion with a focus on indifference. On this basis the chapter, first, contrasts different understandings of religious indifference and highlights its conceptualisation as a situational stance opting for the path of least possible engagement. Second, the chapter analyses the conditions for the possibility of displaying such an indifferent stance in the German and Indian case. The chapter concludes by comparing the stances adopted by Marion and Prakash to thereby address the limits of the concept of religious indifference.

Keywords Biography • Life-history • Ethnography • Indifference • Detachment • Non-religion • Secular • Religion • India • Germany

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Introduction: Simply Not Religious

'I guess I'm simply not religious.' This is how Marion, a 27-year-old woman from Germany describes herself when asked how she would label herself with respect to religion. She reports not to believe in any religious doctrines, she does not perform any religious practices and she is not associated with any religious group. Moreover, the analysis below indicates that she does not care about all this; instead, she is concerned with other things in her life. In the academic study of religion, she would be described as 'indifferent'. The slightly younger Prakash whom we will get to know better below, on the other hand, is a self-declared Hindu living in New Delhi. He participates in some major Hindu rituals, abstains from eating beef, joins his family on pilgrimage, and he worries about their cast-prejudices. This makes him not quite indifferent to religion, or so it seems.

This chapter attempts to complicate such a straightforward assessment on three grounds. First, it contrasts two different conceptions of religious indifference. An understanding of indifference that opposes the position of Marion and Prakash as briefly indicated above is juxtaposed below with an understanding of indifference as a situational stance that generally chooses the path of least possible engagement. According to the latter understanding of 'indifference', Prakash's approach to religion may be similarly labelled as such. Second, the chapter discusses whether the conceptualisation of indifference as a 'remarkable' absence (Quack and Schuh 2017, 11–12 – this volume) is appropriate and what the conditions for the possibility of taking such an indifferent position might be in both cases. Finally, the limits of comparison between the two people from Germany and India and thereby the limits of the concept of religious indifference are addressed. Some of the respective problems are already visible in their respective self-assessment; While Marion calls herself 'simply not religious', Prakash argues in a way few Germans would talk about their religious belonging: 'My family members are Hindu so I am a Hindu, I was born a Hindu so that's it.'

The following reflections are part of a larger attempt to describe and analyse how and why people understand themselves as not (very) religious in different sociocultural settings. The underlying idea is to not reproduce the often researched perspectives of those presumably at the centre of a given religious field, but to look at religion and the world in general through the eyes of those who would locate themselves at its periphery or outside of it. This research touches particular on questions concerning the conditions for the possibility of taking or ignoring religion as a constitutive 'Other' of one's identity formation keeping in mind that 'religion' means different things in each case. Conceptually, the analysis is based on a relational approach to nonreligion (Quack 2013, 2014); methodologically, it employs a combination of ethnographic fieldwork and biographic interviews conducted in India and Germany. The focus of this chapter is, however, primarily on the latter kind of data. The following conceptual and methodological sections provide some background information in this respect. Marion and Prakash will be further introduced to the reader in the main part of this chapter. In the concluding section, the

above-mentioned points challenging a straightforward assessment of religious indifference are elaborated upon. Given that the larger research project is at an early stage the notion 'approaches' in the title is to be understood not only in reference to two distinct but complementary methodological procedures but also as an indication of a first approximation, as an attempt to make a preliminary advance in a largely unexplored research area.

Conceptual Preliminaries: The Diversity of Nonreligion and Indifference

I proposed elsewhere (2013, 2014) that 'nonreligion' should be understood as a heuristic term that denotes phenomena that are generally not considered religious but whose significance is more or less dependent on their specific relational assemblages with the respective religious field. This definition is part of a relational approach to study nonreligion that is inspired by Pierre Bourdieu's methodological relationalism and his contributions to sociological field-theory (e.g. Bourdieu 1971, 1996). The relationally of this approach has to be understood in two distinct but interrelated ways. On the very fundamental level of social theory I follow Bourdieu by conceptualising 'the real as relational' and therefore opposed to 'substantialist' philosophies of the social world. Bourdieu's conceptualisation of 'fields' can be seen as operationalisation of this relational mode of thought (see Vandenberghe 1999). On the empirical level this conceptual framework suggests to research why and how specific positions are considered to be (more or less) within and outside a religious field and why and how they are mutually related to and shaped by each other on different levels. Different modes of nonreligion result from the various configurations of the religious field they are related to as well as different kinds of relationships at stake (but for an encompassing description of a distinct mode of nonreligion much more is needed, see Quack 2012). The aim thereby is not to define 'religion' or 'nonreligion' but to understand relationally why and how people declare themselves nonreligious or are described as such in specific research settings.

In this larger approach, all more or less nonreligious positions taken together – including secular scientific approaches to understand and explain religion – establish a religion-related field that surrounds any given religious field (Quack 2014). This religion-related field is the co-constitutive outside of a religious field and thereby indicates the heterogeneous field of research for the study of nonreligion. By drawing attention to the co-constitutive aspects of a religion-related field, I try to utilise the genealogical insights of Talal Asad (2003) that religion has to be understood in the light of its other (s)[1] for a conceptual approach to study contemporary

[1]Asad used the singular. But given the diversity of nonreligion the book series started by the Nonreligion and Secularity Research Network (NSRN) in collaboration with DeGruyter is called 'Religion and Its Others' http://www.degruyter.com/view/serial/247534.

religious-nonreligious entanglements empirically. This helps to illustrate how the elements considered inside a religious field as well as its relationships with its religion-related surrounding change geographically as well as temporally and are how they are embedded in various religious and secular normative orders. To assume an autonomous, single, and clear-cut religious field across time and space would not only be a gross and distorting simplification of the complex realities of different religious manifestations in different cultures, as this paper illustrates below, but would also contradict the underlying relational conceptualisation of the social world.

On first sight and in contrast to pronounced modes of nonreligion, religious indifference can be characterised by an absence of any relationship with the respective religious field. Accordingly, it seems that the socio-cultural context does not matter for any assessment of religious indifference since the observation of a mere absence of relationships with religion is enough to conclude the matter. In the following, I problematise such an approach. Thereby I draw on the introduction's conceptualisation of religious indifference as indirectly related to religion by relevant agents in the religious and religion-related field. While pronounced modes of nonreligion are characterised by distinct and direct relationships towards the respective religious field, the apparent absence of such relationships is nevertheless rendered 'remarkable' in cases of indifference by relevant agents. Any assessment of such an indirect positioning only makes sense, however, in a specific socio-cultural setting.

Methodological Preliminaries: Bio- and Ethnographic Approaches

The larger research project of which first findings are presented here is based on a combination of ethnographic fieldwork and biographic interviews conducted in India and Germany. This procedure was chosen because the latter effectively supplements the former. The complex complementarity can only be indicated here. Life histories introduce a focus on the genesis of a person's contemporary position and whether these are structured to important events, sudden turning points, or gradual changes in people's lives. They further help to uncover in what way (if at all) religious matters somehow frame the self-understanding of one's life. Yet, the genre of telling one's whole life privileges the narration of certain aspects, while others, such as daily practices that became part of an unquestioned routine, are hardly addressed. Routines and other matters difficult to verbalise in turn become particularly well visible through participant observation. Finally, both approaches enable deep insight into the ways in which people live their lives without imposing a specific research question on them and help to avoid the treacherous dichotomy between individual and society.

With respect to the sampling strategies in India, this research is based on people who represent self-declared but non-organised 'nonreligion'. The initial selection criteria for interviewees were assessments of religion, religiosity and its respective

lack, according to a more or less random group of Indian friends in New Delhi. My research assistant, Pallabi Roy, and I simply asked friends of ours whether they know of people whom they consider 'not religious'. When contacting the persons, we told them that our background is in the academic study of religion but that we are interested in their whole life histories. Those we had interviewed initially recommended further interviewees to us. This procedure was chosen to avoid implementing an a-priory distinction between religion and nonreligion. The larger part of the interviews in India took place in the more or less distinct milieu: young (18–40 years), educated (university degrees), urban (many lived in one or several of India's metropolises), leftist (ecological, multiculturalist, anti-capitalistic, anti-communal), creative (associated with an 'arty' or alternative scene), sophisticated (cosmopolitan, English-speaking), and middle-upper-class of India's capital. In addition to this sample, we used other means to find 'contrasting' cases with less social, symbolic, and economic capital.

The interviews in Germany are more diverse with respect to e.g. the geographic and social position of the interviewees. They basically come from all walks of life and parts of Germany and are not supplemented with any kind of participant observation. In India, participant observation did take place in different pockets of the above-mentioned milieu, connected to some universities in Delhi and to various cultural activities in the Indian capital and by just 'hanging out' with several groups of friends. This means that I was not frequently talking to all the people I interviewed but that I was meeting their larger groups of friends who primarily belong to these networks and milieu. While I was in contact with some of my friends for many years during my various stays in Delhi and continue to do so until with until today, the formal interviews took place within summer 2013.

The kind of interviews conducted as well as their analyses are based on a critical engagement with the German tradition of life-history research as conceptualised by Fritz Schütze (Schütze 1983) and developed further by Gabriele Rosenthal (1995; see also Fischer-Rosenthal and Rosenthal 1997). Within social and cultural anthropology, the focus on individual biographies is, on the one hand, nothing new; for India, see the edited volume *Telling Lives in India* (Arnold and Blackburn 2004). In many research settings, life histories and other forms of oral history were gathered and analysed. This was hardly done, on the other hand, on the level of methodological sophistication characteristic for the above-mentioned approaches.

Given that these methodological approaches are less known outside Germany, some background information is useful here. In this tradition, formal interviews start after some introductory conversation with a 'stimulus' or life-story-telling-prompt that invites people to narrate their life as detailed as possible. The content of this stimulus is particularly important because the interviewee is invited to narrate her entire life on this basis. In contrast to conversations in everyday life, she is given the opportunity to start an extensive monologue and the stimulus only provides one initial prompt and indicated direction. In this respect we asked ourselves to what degree our interest in 'religion' should be noted before the interview and taken up in the stimulus. Given that the interviewees usually knew a bit about our academic background, we decided to explicitly stress in the stimulus that we are not only

interested in religion but in their full life story.[2] The final version of the stimulus was very similar for the interviews conducted in German, Hindi and English:

> We are interested in your life history, not only in religion. We would like to hear about your whole life, about the experiences most important to you. Therefore, we would like you to tell us your life. Please take as much time as you wish. We will not interrupt you, we will just take down some notes. Now we would like you to narrate the story of your life for us.[3]

Ideally people narrated their lives afterwards, as basically all interviewees did for a time span between thirty minutes and three hours. After the main narration, a couple of questions were asked that directly referred to what people had said in the initial narrative concerning their life in general and anything related to religion in particular (immanent questions). Thereafter, all interviewees were asked the same set of questions specific to the respective country, which we had prepared in advance (exmanent questions). This second part of the interviews focused on religion as a daily practice, related senses of belonging to a religious community, and cognitive engagement with religion. Moreover, these questions addressed issues centrally associated with the religious practices of the respective religious community of each person. In both countries we asked, for example, what kind of wedding a person had or would like to have. While we asked about special diets and fasting in India, we asked about religious education in schools, youth groups, and related offerings in Germany. The respective questions and answers reveal differences in the underlying conceptualisations of religion in the two settings by the researcher as well as the interviewees.

The analyses of such interviews trace social processes and developments as manifested in the unfolding of people's lives. Such material allows for a reconstruction of the structures seen as underlying life-histories and for uncovering in what respect people see themselves as active agents or as driven or even determined by social conditions. The focus thereby is not only a reconstruction of what happened according to the interviewees but also on the way in which people try to (re) present themselves today. In addition to the interpretation of the content, further interpretative tools, such as linguistic markers of engagement or disinterest (including pauses, stammering, etc.) or nonverbal signals thereof (including the posture, gestures, etc.), were used to complement the analysis. In the following, I will present my analyses of the two cases from Germany and India. These two interviews were chosen because a preliminary analysis indicated that something similar but hard to pin down is at stake in these two cases.

[2] Our hypothesis that dismissing an explicit focus on religion in the initial stimulus nevertheless underlines the theme of religion was confirmed in the interviews.

[3] Over the course of this research, this stimulus was not always used exactly as presented here. One example of an interview where an important redirection of the interview took place in the initial stage of the interview is the first example presented below.

Marion (Pseudonym) from Bavaria, Germany[4]

By the time of the interview, Marion is a 27-year-old graduate psychologist from northern Bavaria. She has lived in several larger German cities her entire life with the exception of a stay in South America for a couple of months. Currently, she works as a manager of a small theatre company and as a freelance actor. She is unmarried, has no children, and is not affiliated with any religion.

Being a 'none', i.e. not being religiously affiliated is nothing special in contemporary Germany. Monika Wohlrab-Sahr (2009) wrote in her analysis of a major survey (Religionsmonitor), that about one-third of the population in Germany does not formally belong to any religion, out of which two-thirds are not interested in religion at all, viz. religion has no importance within their life.[5] While only 21% of those over 60 years old maintain that they did not have a religious education, this number has already increased to 52% for Marion's age group (i.e. those between 18 and 29 years old in 2008).[6] And, as we will see later, this is indeed the case here.

But given the methodological concerns of this paper, it is appropriate to mention – before further introducing Marion – that in her case the topic 'religion' was particularly stressed at the beginning of the interview. As with all the other interviews, it started with the above-mentioned stimulus. This was followed by a general 'ratification' by the interviewee, paired with a query concerning the focus of the interview. The interviewer replied that 'it is actually so that the main topic is religion and nonreligion' and thereby placed this topic much more obviously in the centre of attention than planned and executed in other interviews. Given the importance of the stimulus for the way in which people narrate their lives, it could be assumed that such an emphasis would increase the chance that Marion would address religious issues in her main narrative. This, however, was not the case at all.

Marion begins narrating her life with her birthplace. This is followed by a reference to her two-and-a-half-years-older brother; her parents are not mentioned. By doing so, she already implicitly indicates her tense relationship with her parents, which becomes increasingly obvious over the course of the interview. In her third sentence, she states that she first moved when she was 4 or 5 years old; additional moves follow and shape her life. Her parents are only introduced later on, significantly in the context of their breakup. When Marion was 'eleven or twelve', her parents divorced and she grew up alone with her mother. Arguments and fights

[4] The interview was conducted originally in German by Louisa Gröger as a participant in a research-seminar given by the author. All the following statements in quotation marks are translations by the author.

[5] The respective absolute numbers are roughly three times higher in East Germany if compared to the West.

[6] Related studies show that religion and spirituality are continuously ranked lowest when Germans are asked which aspects of life are most important to them. Family, friends, and leisure time activities come first, and work and politics are considered significantly more important than religious matters (Bertelsmann 2013, 13–14). Here again, the importance of religion is considered to be steadily declining and we seem to be dealing with cohorts.

between the two characterised this time. The situation 'escalated' when she was seventeen, which resulted in her plans to move out. Judging by Marion's statements, her mother's reaction to her announcement that she was leaving was neither considerate nor caring. Given that the mother was not able to afford the four-room apartment alone, she terminated the rental agreement despite the fact that Marion had trouble finding a place as she was still underage. In the following months, Marion lived at different friends' places.

Marion describes the following years as 'a pretty crass time.' She 'hung out' with people, who 'somehow didn't get very much done and smoked a lot of pot'. Nevertheless, she not only managed to get her *Abitur* (A-level) under such circumstances, she also enrolled in psychology and eventually graduated successfully from university. For this purpose, she had to change apartments several times because not all the living constellations she tried had been suitable for concentrated studying and working. At the same time, she did not want to leave this 'crass' circle of friends and their respective ways of living altogether. She only did so after successfully getting her final degree when she treated herself to a several months stay in South America. Back home in Germany, she started to live off being a trainer for smaller projects and a freelance actor.

Throughout the whole period of (relative) independence, i.e. starting with the age of seventeen, Marion also went to psychotherapy and retrospectively she finds this therapy very helpful. This means that she is used to talking to other people about her life to some degree and later we will see that 'psychological' perspectives and expressions are a part of the way in which she reflects on her life.[7]

The actual narration of the first biographic section, however, is not as linear and chronological as presented so far; it consists of two thematic strands narrated more or less separately from one another but intertwined in terms of chronology and content. The first narrative section mainly addresses her living situation and friendships with different people; here her returning psychological problems play a role. The second story line introduces her long-term friendships and passion for theatre. Both strands taken together form – as it is the case in many biographies of young adults – a kind of 'coming of age' story: an unstable teenager who experimented with different ways of life and struggled to find her own way only to become a young woman who slowly settled and learned how to deal with being an adult in general and with earning money in particular. Specifically noteworthy is that she does not refer to her parents before and after their breakup and she does not mention her mother before and after she moved out at seventeen. Indeed, moving out at seventeen was a crucial step for Marion. On one hand, it resulted in a great deal of independence rather early in her life.[8] The constant changes in her living situation subsequently, on the other hand, show that this independence has not easily consolidated in a clear and self-reliant way of life. By means of changing her living conditions, she was successfully able to 'overcome' several of the tough situations she

[7] We are dealing, however, only with a limited degree of reflexive loops and narratives of self-(re) negotiation characteristic for people with a lot of therapeutic experiences.

[8] Compared to other adults who start to study at university after their *Abitur* (A-level).

had been confronted with, without fully being able to wind it up and 'master' all the underlying problems.

Single life periods were shaped by anxiety, panic, and uncertainty. In these 'bad' or 'crass' times Marion still managed to give her vita a positive twist by focusing and working on herself. Her self-appraisal of having the ability to successfully overcome adversity is evident in two examples of self-evaluating insertions: '(it was) hard work. The prouder I am now that I somehow made it.' And: 'I had to fight for it a lot, but then I made it.'

The narration ends with a classic 'coda'; it arrives in the present, an uncertain glance into the future is projected and in the end her most important concerns are repeated: theatre and travel.

In the subsequent break it is not the interviewer but Marion who rises to speak. She realises: 'and now I haven't at all talked about religion' and laughs. Evidently she remembers the extended stimulus where religion and nonreligion were declared the main topic. Accordingly, she complements her life history with a few sentences containing information about religious matters in her life. This starts with the assessment that 'at home, religion never played a great role', although her parents baptised her in the protestant tradition. They seem part of the group that has been described as belonging without believing and practicing (Hervieu-Léger 2006). This description is supported by a short narrative, which contrasts her personal ignorance and her nonreligious household with the religiousness of her grandmother:

> Well I remember being at my grandmother's once, when I still was a little kid, my father's mother. And she wanted to pray before going to bed and I simply didn't know that before. And somehow it scared me, because she said 'good lord would you make me pious so that I'd go to heaven'. And I didn't even want to go to heaven because I wanted to stay here, on earth. And I found it to be a bit creepy.

Marion ends her chronological narration concerning religion and nonreligion in her life with her decision not to be confirmed after her mother had given her the freedom to make up her own mind about the process. The three women therefore represent a steady decline of religious engagement. Marion continues with some reflections in very general terms on whether religious people can handle twists of fate better than nonreligious persons.

> Sometimes I think about whether people that really have strong beliefs can handle twists of fate or sudden changes in life more easily, because they have an explanation for them. But I just don't think that way. Well I'd find it interesting, but until now there hasn't been anything that would have fully convinced me. No religion.

This statement is indicative of Marion's equation of 'religion' with rationalised individual beliefs (in addition to institutions like the church) and a way of thinking that may have a positive explanatory and therefore psychological function for some people. She does not think that way, she is not convinced, she is not a believer.[9]

[9] The degree to which such an implicit individualised and intellectualised understanding of 'religion' is common in Germany will be discussed below. I would like to thank Mascha Schulz for pointing this out to me.

And considering her education as well as her problems while growing up and especially the topos of 'overcoming' and 'managing' that reoccurs throughout her whole life-story, it is comprehensible that she speculates about the psychological functions of religion. But at the same time, this is a plainly hypothetical question for her. Obviously, she does not know anyone who could handle twists of fate or sudden changes in life more easily due to a firm religious belief.

With this less than three minutes long sequence she ends the first part of the interview. Her references to religion were therefore presented 'after the fact', i.e. after her main narrative. In the subsequent parts of the interview, the interviewer tried to broach the issues of other realms of life where religion may play a role, for example religion classes in school. Here as well Marion was confronted with religion by the outside world and her personal reflections, triggered by the interviewer's questions, remain extremely general. She can only remember people or trivialities but not the religious contents of events, not to speak of her own experiences, questions, or concerns. For example, she had 'a very nice religion teacher' that always read a lot aloud; 'and we always drew pictures.' Later she switched to the 'ethics class' – i.e. a secular alternative to religious worldview classes – without particular reason. Marion apparently has been to church-run recreation camps a couple of times, but is unsure as to whether it was Catholic or Protestant and whether 'some kind of Sunday masses' were offered on a voluntary basis. Apart from that, this recreation time 'actually had little to do with church'.[10] Among her friends, religion has not played a role. Her decision against confirmation was explained by Marion with reference to her unreligious social environment, 'it was not a deliberate decision'. Instead of dealing with the issues herself, she followed her peers: 'Well it was like, I think if I would have had friends that would have all been confirmed in that time, then I'd say that I of course also want to do that'. But the way it was 'I somehow didn't feel like it'. This statement exemplifies what is going to be argued below, namely that a stance behind a decision may be more important than whether the decision turns out to be positive or negative.

The only relevant position towards matters of religion is found in Marion's answer to the question as to whether she finds the separation of religion and the state sufficient in Germany. We included this question because we are interested in both, indifference towards 'religiosity' and towards 'religion' (Quack and Schuh 2017, 17 – this volume). On the question what she thinks about the separation of religion and the state in Germany Marion argued:

> I think it's not good how much money the government spends on religion, I mean organisations run by the church, whether its hospitals or kindergartens that are church-organised. In doing so, their moral concepts have to be obeyed in Catholic hospitals. And such things mean for nonreligious or non-Christians that it's very hard to work in such institutions.[11]

[10] In contrast to other types of nonreligiosity, she does not express any interest in meeting people with similar worldviews. The tendency is that she finds people with 'a different opinion or conviction' more exciting. Still, she does not describe any engagement with such people.

[11] The separation of church and state is not as strict as commonly assumed with respect to Germany. To give but two examples: While religious education in state schools is under government supervi-

Does this mean Marion engages with religion primarily as a social factor? To some degree, obviously, but this single point of self-positioning should probably not be overemphasised. In the months preceding the interview, Catholic hospitals have been in the press, inter alia because in Cologne a woman, who had supposedly been a victim of rape, had not been admitted for examination by two Catholic hospitals.[12] Shortly thereafter the press discussed whether public hospitals run by the church should have the right to decide employment issues depending on their religious values.[13] So it is not astonishing that a politically informed person more or less indifferent to religion took a stand on religious discrimination at this point in time.

In sum, Marion did not talk about religion in her main narrative. She did so only when she remembered the interviewer's interests. In her added reflections, the topic of religion does not emerge because of intrinsic interest or personal experiences but is brought to her by the outside world in general or via some specific persons, i.e. the religiousness of her grandmother scares her. The fact that she did not get confirmed was not because of a conscious decision against religion. At no point did she deliberately take a clear position in favour or against religion. In the case of the confirmation, she simply followed the prevailing practice of her peers. When she reflects about matters related to religion she remains very general. At the end of the interview, a couple of labels were read out to Marion out of which she was supposed to choose one. This activity indicated that she did not know words like 'agnostic' or 'secular' as well as that she has no firm stance in these matters; she is only 'guessing'. In choosing a label she said: 'I guess I'm simply not religious'.

Prakash (Pseudonym) from New Delhi, India

Prakash was born in 1994 and has a brother who is 2 years younger than him. His parents came from Bihar to New Delhi, and his father studied at a prestigious college in New Delhi and later became a professor at another college as famous as the first. While Prakash says that he does not adhere to anything associated to Hindu-religion(s) he still accepts – as stated above – the label 'Hindu' due to his family

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sion and realised by the federal state institutions in most cases this means, however, that religious education is designed, executed and supervised by representatives of the Protestant and Catholic church (Alberts 2007, 328). The secular alternatives, as chosen by Marion, are not always an available option. Secondly, parts of the German welfare state are under the authority of the two major churches, as for example through the *Deutsche Caritasverband* (Catholic church) and the *Diakonie Deutschland* (Protestant church). They run various kinds of institutions, ranging from kindergartens to hospitals to hospices. Together they are in charge of more than one Million salaried employees and another 1.2 million volunteers. While these organisations are largely funded by the 'secular' state they use as employers guidelines aligned with their religious orientations.

[12] http://www.spiegel.de/panorama/koeln-vergewaltigungsopfer-von-katholischen-kliniken-abgewiesen-a-878210.html; accessed June 04 2015.

[13] http://www.spiegel.de/karriere/berufsleben/katholische-kirche-als-arbeitgeber-konfession-gilt-als-qualifikation-a-879450.html; accessed June 04 2015.

background: ‘My family members are Hindu so I am a Hindu, I was born as a Hindu so that’s it’. Within the Hindu system of castes the family would belong to the ‘lower’ so-called ‘Other Backward Class’ (OBCs).[14] While lower caste background usually goes along with less economic and cultural capital we are dealing in this particular case with an affluent upper middle class family in a rich neighbourhood of New Delhi (the parents moved there two decades ago). Both kids studying at elite schools, the family employs a 24/7 housekeeper and a maid. Prakash therefore grew up in a setting where he could ‘afford’ to not know about the caste background of his family until he was 16 years old. This stands in contrast to other interviews where experiences of discrimination in the name of caste hierarchies were central causes for a general criticism of religion and related self-identifications as not-religioius. In the family, three generations live together and Prakash is financially and in other ways dependent on his family. Prakash’s narratives imply that his grandmother particularly exemplifies common strategies of ‘sanscritisation’ by adopting practices associated with high-caste Hinduism, such as strict vegetarianism and by further attempts to transform economic and social into caste-related cultural capital (thereby largely reproducing what Bourdieu would call the ‘rules of the game’ as set by those higher in the caste-hierarchy). Accordingly, caste was and is implicitly always an issue in his family. In general, Prakash’s family is a good example of what is labelled as the thin ‘creamy layer’ on top of the otherwise still largely disadvantaged lower caste groups within the Indian society.

In reaction to the above mentioned stimulus, Prakash started with his family background and the schools he went to. After a few minutes, he stopped his narration and asked abruptly: ‘So what do you want me to [tell you]?’ I answered with an approving smile and a gesture that he simply should continue narrating his life the way he started and based on ‘whatever comes to mind’. It seems that Prakash at this point remembered the emphasis on religion in the conversation prior to the interview as well as in the stimulus because he did not continue with his life history. Rather he started a somewhat incoherent and detached insertion on the different positions towards religion within his family.[15] In this excursus, Prakash highlighted, first, that his grandmother is ‘very religious’, and that she and his mother are strict vegetarians while his grandfather, father, brother, and he himself are not. In fact, their household features a separate gas stove, a separate cylinder, separate plates, and a separate fridge given that his grandmother does not touch anything connected to the preparation of non-vegetarian food. Second, Prakash mentioned that his

[14] The Mandal Commission of 2006 lists 41% of the Indian society amongst the educationally- and socially-disadvantaged castes labeled ‘Other Backward Class’ (OBC).

[15] A friend of a friend had asked him whether he would like to participate in an interview on religion. When Prakash had asked me what my interest in religion was I had told him: ‘There are lots of studies about religion in India and usually they ask the *pundits*, the *mawlawis / moulvi*, and the priests what religion is all about while I am interested in the life and perspective of people who are not at the center of religion.’

whole family visited the *char dham* as a pilgrimage. Yet, he is not sure about the names of the places and confuses Kedarnath with Rameswaram.[16]

These two points indicate aspects that were reiterated and further elaborated upon in the second half of the interview, namely that he belongs to a family where the women, especially the grandmother, are seen as quite religious, while the men each exemplify a different and less religious position. He contrasts, for example, his grandmother's daily visits to the temple to his father, who prays every morning and 'does like a few rituals but not like he is very religious', while he and his brother do nothing of this sort. In general, the interview reveals that Prakash implicitly distinguishes four positions: He contrasts, first, his father's intellectual and historical interest in religious teachings and the religious places they had visited ('the mythological stuff'), with, second, the genuine religiosity of his grandmother ('the religious way'), as well as, third, the somewhat rebellious anti-religious arguments of his brother ('all nonsense'), with, fourth, his indifference to all these issues ('not interested'). This distinction is, however, not made explicitly by Prakash, rather he at times wonders aloud whom and what to associate with religion.

After this brief insertion, Prakash continues with the topic he was narrating before, as if nothing had happened. This insertion is the only reference to religion (according to mine as well as his understanding of 'religion') in the narrative part of the interview. The rest of his life history is linear, coherent, and chronological. In his modest way, Prakash downplayed his academic credentials and extra-curricular activities such as sport. The one thing he is particularly keen to discuss is his interest in filming. Here, both his demeanour and his conversation style changed, as he became lively when talking about the school competitions he attended, about the projects he completed, and the kind of films he likes. After the interview, he presented a selection of his shootings to me and at some point I had to stop him because I was running out of time.

Nonverbal indications of engagement or disinterest are often not considered in the interpretation of interviews although they can be quite telling. In this case, the enthusiasm for filming clearly contrast the indifference he displayed when I raised matters related to religion in our conversations prior and after the interview and within the exmanent questions. In the following I will first present examples for my unsuccessful attempts to make him talk about religion in the second part of the interview as well as three instances of particular importance for the discussion of religious indifference.

One of my immanent questions referred to Prakash's experience with the death of his close friend right after he had finished his schooling. Prakash was happy to follow my invitation to further narrate this loss and he did so in a quite 'secular' way: to him this tragic incidence was both 'sad' and he described his friend as 'unlucky'. Given that the concept of being 'just unlucky' is both somewhat peculiar

[16] There is the '*Chota' Char Dham* (the 'small' four abodes) referring to four pilgrimage sites in the Himalaya: Badrinath, Yamunotri, Gangotri and Kedarnath, while the 'large' *Char Dham* includes four places at the geographical borders of the subcontinent: Badrinath, Dwarka, Puri and Rameswaram.

and usually not part of a religious framework (in contrast to notions like kismet, destiny, fate, doom), I asked Prakash to add a few words on the death of his friend in his first language, Hindi, despite his excellent command of English. His answers in Hindi, however, remained 'immanent'. His main point remained that he was very sad and that his friend was just 'just unlucky' (the English word was repeated in Hindi). I briefly told him why I had asked him to shift to Hindi and he in turn explained to me, referring to probability rather than other means of evaluation of the incident: 'I think I said "unlucky", because it (the particular illness of his friend) doesn't happen to everyone, right? A few out of a million people or two hundred million people, so he was unlucky'.

My first exmanent question simply asked whether any personal experience connected to religion comes to his mind when looking back on his life. Prakash answered that he has no idea how to relate his life to something religious: 'I never. I can't remember, but not very like a religious experience'. All my further attempts to make him narrate positive or negative, smaller or larger issues connected with religion in his life failed. Either he said that there simply are none or he gave rather general information about the way in which his family members, particularly his grandmother, practice religion. Whenever he talked about religion, his focus was on the practices that he observed and never on his own feelings, beliefs, hopes, or fears. Even with respect to the role of religion in contemporary India, Prakash did not take a somewhat engaged position. According to Prakash, the role of religion in India is 'not an issue' for him or his friends, as they simply talk about other things: 'That's how things are'. Given that India is often considered to be 'notoriously religious' – especially with respect to identity politics – this may seem exceptional indeed; it is likely, however, that this stereotype of India is not the whole story (Quack 2012).[17]

According to its Constitution, India is a secular nation that upholds the right of citizens to freely worship and propagate any or no religion or faith. There are ongoing and fervid discussions among Indian intellectuals and politicians, however, about what kind of 'secularism' would be appropriate for India, if any, and whether religious and nonreligious cultural practice are readily distinguishable at all (e.g. Bhargava 2004). The consolidation of the Hindu 'right-wing' groups (BJP, RSS, *Sangh Parivar*) relocated religious matters at the heart of the political system.[18] At the same time, one of their main aims is to spread neo-Hinduistic ideology by invalidating religious and cultural differences between groups constituted under the label 'Hinduism' and position this unified block against other religions, mainly against

[17] On the possible correlation of 'indifference to religion' and 'indifference to politics' note the discussion in the introduction referring to the problematic association of religious indifference with overall apathy and immorality.

[18] One of the most famous cases being a large pilgrimage in the name of the Hindu God Ram, the *Ram Rath Yatra* (God's chariot procession) to Ajodhya in 1990 that resulted in communal riots and later in the demolishment of the mosque in Ajodhya 1992 and further nation-wide riots. According to the BJP one aim of this yatra, 'contrary to what the pseudo-secularists claim, . . . was to raise "fundamental questions" such as: "What is secularism? What is communalism?"' (See http://www.bjp.org/leadership/shri-lk-advani/yatras/?u=ram-rath-yatra).

Islam.[19] Despite all this, Prakash remained disinterested and unengaged in such matters. Concerning religion in general, he said that it seems 'pointless' to him. He continued that religion may be both 'good and bad in a way' because 'it's all man made things to keep people scared which is good in a way also, that if I do something wrong, I might get punished, so it prevents them from doing something wrong.' But he immediately added that he 'never really thought much about that'. He also personally added: 'I never really see anything for myself to do, something religious'.

All such statements clearly show no personal engagement and his answers often are ad-hoc attempts to deal with questions on a topic not of major concern to him. To some degree, in other words, we are dealing here with the attempt of the researcher to entangle Prakash in a religious discourse that he feels no reason to enter himself but does only to the degree that answers to my questions force him to do (see Blankholm 2017 – this volume). The respective evaluation is vaguely critical – 'pointless' – but never hostile or dismissive. The crucial sentence is: 'I never really thought much about that' and it is underlined by his visibly unmotivated way of answering the questions. Prakash does not display a pronounced mode of nonreligion, as there are no decisive experiences he had with religious people or issues; it rather seems that his indifference towards religion only gets 'disturbed' when other people, primarily his family – but in this case the researcher – confront him with religious issues.

Having said this, there are three instances of particular concern about labelling 'religious indifference'. In all three cases, Prakash was unable to simply avoid engagement with religious matters. These are related to the topics that I suspected to be of some importance within South-Asia and which where therefore addressed in all interviews by me: food, caste, and ritual, which are in many cases interrelated. First, Prakash narrated a situation when some distant friends for whom he was working as a cameraman stopped to have a beef *biryani* (a mixed rice dish with beef) in Old Delhi. Prakash had never eaten cow or buffalo meat in his life and initially he had said to his friends that he wanted to try it. In the end, however, he did not because something 'kept mocking, nagging me in the head that I shouldn't. These little things. My grandmother would mind, these things just kept nagging me in the head'.

[19] These political groups stage religion through large public processions (*yatras*) and use every opportunity to brand their opponents as favouring non-Hindu minorities and therefore as "pseudo-secular" and anti-Hindu. Moreover, a tragic history of murder, attacks, riots, and bloodshed in the name of religion continues to influence the perception of other religious groups, feelings of threats and vulnerability, and related debates of accusation and suspicion. Examples hereof are the traumatic experience of partition, the large-scale riots against Muslims in Gujarat 2002, and the 'Mumbai blasts' in 2011. Finally, prevailing debates about the relationship between religion and superstition on the one hand and science, and rationality and modernity on the other hand influence public discourse. These date back at least to the 19th century, fuelled by Jawaharlal Nehru's modernist agenda, and are perpetuated today not only by rationalist groups, but also within academia (see Nanda-Nandy debate, Quack 2012, 302–311) as well as in public media.

The second example concerns aspects of social exclusion in this case not related to his lower caste status but to experiences of those even lower than him. Although officially abolished, the so-called caste system continues to have a major influence with respect to social structure and inequality in India. There are laws and social initiatives to improve the socioeconomic conditions of those recognised as lower caste population. Publicly 'caste' it is most visible with respect to debates around 'affirmative actions' and in marriage patterns, as marriage announcements in any major newspaper or on respective Internet platforms would show. In relation to caste distinctions in particular and religious differences in general, private life is often influenced by regulations of exchanges of 'coded substances' such as food, service, money, words, and bodily materials (e.g. Marriott 1990). With respect the classical example of commensality Prakash reports the 'little thing' that domestic helpers in his house are 'discriminated' against because they are made to eat from separate plates and in separate places. Apparently this is 'dictated' mostly by his grandmother and accordingly it is the grandmother who 'gets angry' when he and especially his brother raise this issue from time to time. Interestingly, he asked me whether caste discrimination is to be linked with religion or not. This underlines (a point indicated above and elaborated upon below) that the distinction between religion and nonreligion is often not easily drawn, probably even more so for those indifferent to religion.

The third example is related to religious rituals that Prakash considers being 'stupid and pointless'. His main example here is how after the death of his grandfather two things occurred: *pundits* (Hindu priests) had to be paid for elaborate rituals and he and his brother were supposed to shave their head. With respect to both issues, the brothers started a discussion and they even had 'sort of a fight' with their grandmother. The large expenses for ritual experts to perform the final rites are, for Prakash, 'a very stupid thing'. Rather than giving the money to the *pundits* he and his brother had suggested they feed some of the beggars they would meet on the way to the temple. To him, the payment of well-to-do religious experts is 'more of like of negative, backward sort of a thing, than something helpful,' it is 'a good business' for the *pundits*, but overall it is 'a waste of time and resources'. Prakash's line of argumentation here comes close to one characteristic of most Indian rationalists, i.e. questioning both the underlying rationality and morality of such religious practices (see Quack 2012, 271–280).

Given the way people deal with life-cycle rituals in general and death rituals in particular in India I asked Prakash how he would imagine his final rituals. He answered that he would not like to have any resources wasted for his funeral: he would prefer to be buried without a coffin, since a coffin or a funeral pyre would waste wood. Rituals should not be performed, instead, he would consider donating his eyes or organs. This answer also, on the one hand, resonates with the anti-religious arguments within the Indian rationalist movement (Quack 2012, 228–235). It provides the opportunity, on the other hand, to highlight again the problems and ambiguities of differentiating religion from other aspects of the Indian society and culture by way of a particular example: the way in which religious ideas and practices may influence also apparently secular 'exchanges' in India are related to the

giving of *dan*, which refers to an unreciprocated gift or donation, and evokes the topics of caste and kinship and in many forms of Hinduism provides the donor with religious merits and counters 'sin'. While there are cases of clearly religious (Copeman 2011) as well as plainly anti-religious (Copeman and Quack 2015) practices of organ donation in India, in most cases an attempt to differentiate between religious and nonreligious interpretations of such gift giving and donation runs into difficulties.

With respect to the Hindu tradition that after his grandfather's death all male family members are supposed to shave their heads, the different positions of the two brothers become clearly visible. Prakash's brother did not want to do this and his refusal resulted in a fight with the grandmother. Prakash did shave his head although he considered it unnecessary. He thought that his brother was making quite an issue out of it: 'I didn't mind, so I did it', thereby underlying the difference between the contentious position of his brother and his more or less indifferent line of least possible engagement.[20] These two positions evoke as well as inverse the adiaphora-struggles as outlined in the introduction to this volume. To remind the reader, in the first adiaphora struggle of 1548 the extent to which the reformed churches could perform Catholic rituals as something peripheral (adiaphora) was debated and in 17th century Germany Lutherans and Calvinists discussed whether a visit to a theatre is sinful as such or whether it is morally indifferent (adiaphora). Prakash and his brother disagreed whether the Brahmanic tradition of head shaving is to be considered a neutral act and may therefore be performed with an indifferent attitude or whether the perceived irrationality and underlying support of the priestly caste makes it not at all 'adiaphoric' (the latter is a reformulation of how Prakash described his brother's position).

An interpretation of Prakash's position with regard to food, caste, and rituals has to consider his place within his family as well as his family's place within the Indian society. To start with the latter, the somewhat privileged position of his family has to be noted. Due to the economic and cultural capital of his family Prakash is able to 'afford' to be nonreligious to some degree just as he could afford not to know his caste-background until he was 16 years old. Considering the ways in which everyday life functions in different parts of Indian society this is not the norm. There are countless descriptions of life situations where people are forced to deal with their caste position and the respective religious practices on a daily basis. Further interviews with people from 'lower' casts and with lesser capital confirm this point not only with respect to caste, but also with respect to the question of what it may 'cost' to denounce religion and religious affiliation altogether. In one particular case, a self-declared nonreligiosity meant isolation not only from his caste-group but also his family, and resulted in moving to Delhi with the (successful) attempt to start a new life. Prakash, on the other hand, is in a social position where matters of

[20] One may differentiate here, however, between an indifference towards the religious 'meanings' but not towards the underlying social conventions and norms.

caste as well as of religious behaviour and belonging can be ignored more easily.[21] His position in the Indian society not only allows him to pick and choose like-minded friends within the same status group and to meet new friends in largely secular spaces such as the university, but it also gives him the possibility to develop filming as a secular hobby that gives him joy and fulfilment. In other words, to some degree he can afford to avoid people, situations, and spaces where he would be confronted with religion much stronger than he already is.[22]

Prakash's position within his family is neutral with respect to explicit religious positionings. He is close to everyone and therefore not willing or able to take sides with any of the views conflicting on matters related to religion. Neither he nor his brother is interested in the mythological and historical aspects of Hindu-traditions like their father is. Nor are they following the daily religious practices and ritual prescriptions, as their mother and especially their grandmother do. Yet, Prakash's brother takes to some degree a confrontational and anti-religious position. In schematic terms, his brother's position can be understood as representing the other side of the tension indifference is located in (as illustrated in the introduction to this volume). The religiosity of the female family members as well as the more pronounced nonreligiosity of his brother in a way challenges his indifference. Despite these challenges from different sides, Prakash, however, tries to remain 'neutral' and to detract from any positioning. Only where this is impossible, i.e. with respect to the central debates in the family, there are a couple of instances where Prakash was more or less forced to take a position towards the respective issues himself. This last point is of particular importance for the analysis of the two case studies in the concluding section of this chapter.

Conclusion: Situated Stance, and the Limits of Comparison

The aim of this chapter was to discuss the notion of religious indifference as part of a larger research project that aims at documenting and analysing religious-nonreligious entanglements in different cultural contexts. Hereby two different ways of conceptualising religious indifference can be contrasted to each other: indifference as a consistent and substantial position and indifference as a situational stance or attitude. The former option assesses the substantial position taken by Marion and Prakash and presumes its consistency over time. Along the most common understanding of 'religion', indifferent people should not believe in religious doctrines, should not perform religious rituals, should not belong to any religious tradition, and should not care about all this. Along these lines Marion could be

[21] This argument holds for non-religious as well as inter-religious settings. The daughters of two major figures within the recent 'rightwing' Hindu nationalist movement, A.K. Advani and Subramanian Swamy, married Muslims. This would be much more problematic within the lower cadres of this movement.

[22] Gender also is at stake here, but elaborations on this aspect will take place elsewhere.

described as indifferent given that she displays no religious beliefs, behaviours and belongings, and given that she is disinterested in issues related to religion. Prakash, on the other hand, would be seen as less indifferent, because he calls himself Hindu, shaved his hair as part of Hindu-rituals, refuses to eat beef, and joins his family on pilgrimage but worries about their caste-prejudices. The latter conceptualisation understands 'indifference' as denoting a stance at stake in specific situations. In this perspective the content of an answer is less important if compared to the underlying attitude of interest, relevance, and engagement or of detachment, disengagement and disinterestedness. To Prakash, it was less important whether he shaved his head or not when his grandfather died. Given that he did not care about promoting or condemning the religious practices at stake in this case he chose the way of least engagement. Indeed, in all instances whereby Prakash somehow associates with religion his underlying stance displays a remarkable absence of personal attachment. Similarly, the question whether Marion got baptised and confirmed or not, is not as important as investigating her indifferent attitude towards it then and now. In the case of confirmation, she simply did what all her peers did without personal investment in the issue as such.[23]

With respect to the research methods to assess religious indifference along these lines, narrative interviews focussing on the biographies of the people and including a set of immanent and exmanent questions seem to be an apt tool. To some degree at least, an underlying attitude of disinterestedness can be detected in a careful analysis of interviews. The examples above indicate that the content of affirming or dismissing answers to religion-related questions can be less important if compared to an attitude of disinterest. The nonverbal shrugging of shoulders displays what is going on better than the more or less random answers people give because they were prompted to do so. Ideally, this is complemented with participant observation because this further helps to capture what is difficult to verbalise in interviews such as visible disinterest and observable absence of engagement and what else may take place outside of a formal interview setting. Indeed, participant observation is probably best suited not only to gradually assess of degrees of certainty and assertiveness but especially degrees of being involved with such issues in the first place.

The approach proposed here further highlights in what way relationships between religiosity, religious indifference and pronounced modes of nonreligion may be seen as gradual and situational, as part of an on-going process of shifting positions and positionings. People largely indifferent to religion are likely to have various 'dispositions' towards religion that may be activated and intensified in other situations. If Marion were to meet a person who had learned to deal religiously with similar life-crises, her interest in therapeutic qualities of religious beliefs and practices might grow. On the other hand, Marion's general objection to state-funded social welfare institutions run by the church could be extended to a more general

[23] Notably, both Marion and Prakash belong(ed) to the majority religious tradition within each country. However, neither should religion in Germany be reduced to Christianity nor India to Hinduism. Interviews e.g. with (former) Muslims in both countries reveal differences in position and positioning to be elaborated upon elsewhere.

criticism of the privileges churches have in Germany along the lines of the respective nonreligious organisations in Germany. Likewise, if Prakash were to be confronted more frequently with forms of discrimination and humiliation in the name of caste, he probably would not only become more caste-conscious but also more anti-religious in general, given that the respective dispositions towards such a mode of nonreligion are traceable. In other words, religious indifference in such cases is not only gradual and relational but also provides the possibility to move, or to be mobilised towards both, religiosity or other modes of nonreligiosity.[24]

A second concluding point draws on the conceptualisation of religious indifference on the basis of a 'remarkable' absence (Quack and Schuh 2017, 11–12 – this volume). Following the introduction, religious indifference is conceptualised as lacking direct relationships with religion, but as positioned in relation to religious or more explicit nonreligious positions by relevant agents (including the researcher) who render the lack of direct relationships to religion remarkable. The crucial questions here are obviously, rendered remarkable by whom and according to what criteria, to what foregoing expectations, and in comparison to what. Prakash's indifference, for example, is not only brought under consideration by me as researcher, it was noted and commented upon by his friends and he would not reject this label. From my perspective and given my understanding of 'religion' in the respective settings both, Marion and Prakash could be described as basically indifferent according to the conceptualisation suggested above and if contrasted to the respective milieus. Both did not themselves relate their life in general or important aspects or experiences therein to religion in any relevant way. Religious issues were not mentioned as any motive or guiding principle structuring the respective life history and were not otherwise addressed as biographically relevant in the main life-narratives.[25] When confronted with questions concerning religion the answers of both were not very specific, and comprised common sense as well as other kinds of noncommittal considerations. The few instances of engagement with religion were not intrinsically but externally motivated, be it the religious grandmother or the questions by researchers that lead to ad-hoc considerations or predictable biographical markers such as life-cycle rituals. In other words, relationships to religion were only established indirectly when others confronted them with religious matters. All this is also true for the case of Prakash even when he had to take a position with respect to the consumption of beef, caste, and rituals. It was not that he wanted to

[24] In Bourdieuian terms one could add that the conceptual point that a position is continuously defined by both, its actual and by its potential location in the structure of the field. The potential is thereby as important as the actual. It captures the (limited) ways in which positions can change, e.g. by reactivating dormant relationships or by forming new relationships available to such positions. The notion 'disposition' refers to these (limited) potentialities of relationships that are currently not manifest in a particular case and therefore not directly observable. Potential relationships can further be inferred by reconstructing the general positions within the structure of the field.

[25] In the specific case of someone who was religious early in her life and later became indifferent, it would be necessary to assess how important these early experiences are for the person she is now. One could argue that the degree to which these matters are biographically relevant to this person influences the degree to which she is indifferent.

absorb himself within these issues but that relevant agents, such as his grandmother or the researcher, made him to engage with them.

The two case studies may seem somewhat asymmetrical because Marion appears to be more representative of her milieu and age group. It is important but not very surprising that Marion related almost none of her experiences to religion and therefore illustrates the 'disinterested indifference' (bordering ignorance) of a considerable proportion of her generation in Germany. She represents the apparently growing group of Germans for whom religious issues are simply of little or no concern in whatever respect. It is quite remarkable how Prakash, in contrast, displays a considerable degree of indifference towards both aspects of personal religiosity as well as towards religion as a general social factor. Especially the pervasiveness of religious identity politics of South Asia is to be considered here. Compared to the other Indians met within the same milieu and age group his disinterest and disengagement is indeed remarkable.

Having said this, it needs to be asked to what degree it makes sense to compare the attitude of Marion towards religion in Germany to the stance displayed by Prakash towards religion in India in the first place. The final section therefore addresses the limits of such a comparison and thereby the limits of the concept of religious indifference.

Anthropology is necessarily always to some degree comparative. The question is how one proceeds and to what degree the comparison is explicit. With respect to the comparison of Marion and Prakash, I am ambivalent about the advantages and disadvantages of the applied conceptualisation. My ambivalence results from the fact that what has been called 'religious field' in Germany and India is significantly different, not only with respect to size and diversity, but with respect to its location in and entanglement with the larger society, its history and its constitutive features, and with respect to its entanglement with the analytical terms employed here. A lot can be said in this respect, but I will restrict myself to two illustrative and interrelated points. First, we can question the conditions for the possibility of indifference to religion on a fundamental level. In the literature, one finds at least three distinct but interrelated answers to that question. Some scholars would argue, that the 'Mosaic distinction' between true and false religion is a precondition to conceptualise religious indifference. In his controversially discussed work, Jan Assmann (2003) argues that this distinction is central to 'Abrahamic religions', while 'polytheistic' traditions much more easily 'translate' their cosmologies between different communities and cultural groups and allow for pluralistic coexistence. This leads to an embedding of religious issues within unquestioned and taken for granted (*doxic*, in Bourdieu's terminology) aspects of the respective culture and thereby makes the concept of indifference to religion as misleading as an emphasis on true and false religions. Second, it can be argued that indifference became relevant only when a 'modern' understanding of 'religion' as intellectual and private decision concerning the existence of some 'supernatural being' disseminated during and particularly after the European enlightenment – you can believe, doubt, deny, remain agnostic or indifferent. Questions of a positive, negative or indifferent belief-evaluation are simply less central in a place where religion is less concerned with private individ-

ual beliefs but more with social status or existential belonging. Finally, as the introduction to this volume discusses (Quack and Schuh 2017 – this volume), some would hold that a certain degree of secularisation is a precondition of religious indifference. In other words, processes of secularisation within the larger society are a condition for the possibility of individual religious indifference, which in turn is seen by some as the endpoint of the respective secularisation processes (e.g. Bruce 2002). Irrespective which one of these three suggestions one favours, they all point towards problems related to assessing religious indifference in a cultural context where a 'Mosaic' distinction, the 'modern' understanding of religion, and/or processes of secularisation are not as central. A similar argument can be made with reference to Charles Taylor's opus magnum, *A Secular Age* (2007), where he tries to capture central historical transformations that shaped the role of religious life in modernity in the 'North-Atlantic world'. A similar work with respect to South Asia would look very different because of the above-mentioned points as well as the entanglements between and the diversity and pluralism of philosophical, religious, and other existential traditions and cultures in South Asia, which more likely implies acknowledgements of context-sensitive particularities. Universalist understandings of 'religion' as they took shape in post-enlightenment Europe (Asad 2003) as well as the more recent universalised understandings of 'the secular' as an expression of a distinct cultural autonomy that prevail in some academic and public discourse of the 'North Atlantic world' are not the default position in South Asia. All this constitutes a quite different 'religious field'.

Second, we can also look at the genealogies and semantics of the terms at stake. With respect to what has come to be seen as the majority religion, Hinduism, many scholars argue that the term is misleading because it evokes a single religion where there are distinct groups and traditions that often have little in common. Moreover, some scholars (as well as some *Hindutva* proponents) argue that Hinduism is better understood as a 'culture' or 'way of life' rather than as a religion. The founder of the Hindu-nationalist or *Hindutva* movement, Sarvarkar, propagated Hinduness as a self-declared rationalist and atheist. All this underlines the point that labels such as 'Hindu' (or 'Muslim' or 'Christian' in different parts of the world) do not necessarily signify a set of beliefs or the following of the respective practices in South Asia; they might be primarily indicative of a social and cultural identity. To declare not being part of such a community is considered rather strange in most parts of Indian society; just as everyone is part of a particular language-community and was born in a particular region, everyone is expected to identify with a religious community. Accordingly, there is a relevant amount of people who label themselves 'Hindu' or 'Muslim' even if they consider themselves to be not religious in other respects.[26] They partly do so because they were born into this religious community, their names signify such an affiliation, and because people would make this connection anyways on a day-to-day basis. In Bailey's words, we are dealing with a 'strong underlying

[26] Related debates are discussed – albeit in a rather different context – under the label 'belonging without believing' in Europe in the aftermath of Grace Davie's *Religion in Britain since 1945: Believing without Belonging* (1994).

sense (vague but quite perceptible) that being part of a community was something given, always there, inescapable, a moral inevitability' (1996, 22).[27]

To sum up, the academic study of religion has raised many questions, approaches and concepts – not the least 'religious indifference' – and these have largely been applied and discussed primarily with the 'North-Atlantic world' in mind. The understanding of 'indifference' as a further alternative to either religious belief or atheism (and related modes of nonreligion) evokes an often criticised individualised and intellectualised ('modern') understanding of 'religion'. The relational understanding of 'nonreligion' in general and of 'indifference' as situational stance in particular partly moves away from such implications but probably still does not do full justice to the social and existential implications at stake in many parts of South Asia. The very concern with religious indifference seems to be one with peculiar European history and on this basis the comparison conducted above remains ambivalent. On the one hand it is striking and noteworthy how similar the underlying stance of Marion and Prakash seems to be. Both, in their own way, take the path of least possible engagement with the religious issues they are confronted with. Along these lines, it can be concluded that engagement with religion (as understood by Prakash and Marion, respectively, as well as how I understand the term) so far was not crucial to their identity-constructions and the ways in which they live their life. If we therefore label the two as indifferent to religion this does not mean, however, that we are talking about the same thing. We are dealing with an apparently similar stance in quite different settings. The comparison highlighted this ambivalence and thereby is illustrative of as well as obfuscating important distinctions. While Marion is able to ignore different religious and nonreligious labels in the first place and therefore is able to describe herself as 'simply not religious', this is not the case for Prakash. He cannot 'simply' denounce his Hinduness because (not) being Hindu in his case does not simply mean (not) being religious in the same way as (not) being Christian does in Marion's case. Prakash tries to make clear, however, that he is not seeing any further religious implications of his inherited Hinduness by stating 'my family members are Hindu so I am a Hindu. I was born as a Hindu so *that's it*' (emphasis added).

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[27] Against this background it comes with little surprise that the notion 'secular' primarily indicates to be not-communal in India ('communal' denotes religio-ethnic ideologies favouring some communities over others and is often associated with violence). This kind of secularity is labelled 'pseudo-secularism' by the Hindu-right, because it supposedly favours minority groups over the postulated Hindu majority. Further notions of 'Indian secularism' (*sarva dharma sama bhava*, all religions are equal) include the political equal support of all recognised religious groups as well as the ideology that all religions lead to the same truth – all of which is not the 'Other' of religion the secular is attributed with in other parts of the world.

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Varieties of Nonreligion: Why Some People Criticize Religion, While Others Just Don't Care

Petra Klug

Abstract This paper explores why indifference towards religion shifts into a critique of religion. Using everyday life-definitions and based on interview data, it develops and tests the hypothesis that experiences with religious people and the way they treat and impact others is a primary factor in how the non- or irreligious evaluate religion, and whether they remain indifferent or begin to criticize it. This calls for a context-based approach, rather than a mere typology of responses toward religion or the classification of personality types. Furthermore, it sheds light upon a feature that is often overlooked: Religion—depending on its role in society—affects not only its adherents, but the lives of the irreligious, too. Therefore, the article calls for a new understanding of religion and an approach to the study of religion and irreligion which studies the two in relation to one another.

Keywords Critique of religion • Indifference • Anti-religious • Discrimination of atheists • Prejudice • Nonreligion • Irreligion • Religion • Homophobia

On Labeling the Irreligious

In recent years within Religious Studies and other disciplines there has been growing attention paid to the irr- or nonreligious[1] (for an overview about this flourishing field see NSRN.net). Studies in this field map a broad variety of ways in which nonreligious people relate toward religion, ranging from selective appreciation, via "fuzzy fidelity," indifference, peaceful coexistence, to critique, and the so called "anti-religious" identities (Voas 2008; Cotter 2011; Lee 2012; Smith 2011; Cimino and Smith 2007; Wohlrab-Sahr and Kaden 2013; Zuckerman 2012; Kosmin s.a.).

[1] I use the terms irreligion and nonreligion interchangeable.

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But this paper addresses a somewhat different question, and searches for *causal* relations by asking *why* some people criticize religion, while others stay indifferent. I work with a Grounded Theory approach and trace instances of both indifference and critique in people's biographies. I include the three general constellations of (a) people who became indifferent, (b) people who were indifferent and started criticizing religion, and (c) people who try to become or stay indifferent. Through a reconstruction of the crucial factors for the shifts between indifference and critique I determine their relationship to religion on the basis of qualitative interview data. As this data suggests that the experience with religion itself is the main factor that determines people's relation towards it, this calls for a new understanding of religion—one that allows not only a study of the relation of irreligion to religion, but the relation of religion and non-religion towards one another.

Many assessments of indifference have been normative, either in a negative way (for an overview see Quack and Schuh 2017, 9–10—this volume) or in a positive way (for an overview see Catto 2017, 69–72—this volume). I follow Quack and Schuh in viewing indifference in a sociological and descriptive rather than a pejorative way, but I work with a definition that is closer to convention and everyday usage of the terms. This keeps the focus as open and broad as possible and remains understandable across the borders that exist between the general public and academics. But before I begin, I want to prevent a potential misunderstanding: As the term *religious indifference* indicates that the indifference still has a religious quality to it, I want to use the term *indifference toward religion* when it's applied to irreligious individuals. However, that still leaves open the question of what indifference actually is. The dictionary defines the term "indifferent" through a number of descriptors, like: marked by impartiality; unbiased; something that does not matter one way or the other or is of no importance or value one way or the other; something that is marked by no special liking for or dislike of something or by a lack of interest, enthusiasm, or concern; neither excessive nor inadequate; moderate; being neither good nor bad; mediocre; being neither right nor wrong; being characterized by lack of active quality; apathetic, neutral, not differentiated; or capable of development in more than one direction (Merriam-Webster s.a.b). Obviously, these descriptions are grouped around three aspects, through which I want to operationalize indifference: The first is the lack of interest, the second is the lack of bias, and the third is the lack of activity. So in order to rearrange this information into a concise definition of indifference toward religion, I want to summarize it as such: *Indifference toward religion is a lack of interest in or concern about religion; an attitude or feeling which is unbiased, open, neutral and marked by impartiality in regard to religion; and a behavior which is passive in terms of religion.*

The term on the other side of the spectrum in this examination is *critique.* To "criticize" is defined by Merriam Webster as to express disapproval of someone or something; to talk about the problems or faults of someone or something; or to look at and make judgments about something, such as a piece of writing or a work of art (Merriam-Webster s.a.a). This definition points out three aspects of critique which I want to combine in my definition of critique: *to make a judgment; to talk about problems; and to express disapproval.*

The third term which is crucial in my study—namely non- or *irreligion*—is defined simply as a lack of religion. It is important to stress that this includes *all people who are not religious*: the ones who are indifferent or areligious, on the one hand, but on the other, those who have developed a relation to religion—the "non-religious" in the terms of Lee (2012) and Quack (2014). Therefore my definition is close to the notions of irreligion of Bagg and Voas (2009) and Zuckerman (2012) and differs from Campbell's (1971, 17–39) understanding of irreligion as it encompasses a lack of all types of religion, not just of the dominant ones.

Last but not least, the terms irreligion and nonreligion obviously depend on the term *religion*. Although I did not start out with a very clear understanding of religion, through my research I developed a significant addition to the common definitions of religion. Just as the relationship between religion and irreligion is interdependent, the understanding of religion might become subject to change in the light of the study of the irreligious. But let me come back to this question at the end of the paper.

The question of how the nonreligious' responses towards religion are conceptualized is one of the most vividly discussed in the new field of irr- and nonreligious studies. Here it is striking that critique of religion is often confused with atheism or a lack of belief, ascribed to an anti-religious "identity," or constructed as an anti-religious "type" which people are categorized into. Siegers (2017, 180 – this volume), for example, refers to individuals characterized by missing church attendance, a lack of spiritual interest or religious individualism, no image of God or belief in reincarnation, no time for prayer or meditation, and a lack of importance of God in one's life, as "anti-religious." Religious indifference for Siegers differs from anti-religiosity through an agnostic or impersonal image of God and more spiritual interest as well as religious individualism. Silver et al. (2013) also distinguish different types of nonreligious people. In regard to the expression of critique, at least two types are of interest: There is the commonly humanistic or naturalistic "Activist"-Type, who seeks "to be both vocal and proactive regarding current issues in the atheist and/or agnostic socio-political sphere," often grouping around egalitarian issues; and there is the "Anti-Theist"-type, who "is diametrically opposed to religious ideology" and "proactively and aggressively asserts [his or her] views towards others when appropriate, seeking to educate the theists in the passé nature of belief and theology." This type can be considered atheist or new-atheist, according to Silver. And Wohlrab-Sahr and Kaden (2013, 192–193) propose an anti-religious type which is characterized through its negative interest in and antagonism towards religion.

Two problems stand out regarding these attempts to classify people or identities into such categories: The first Problem arises from the use of the term "anti-" as in "anti-theist" or "anti-religious": These one-size-fits-all categories fail to differentiate between a lack of personal religion, on the one hand, and a stance towards religion, on the other. But a personal lack of religion is not necessarily connected with a negative evaluation or even discrimination toward religion in society. As Lois Lee (2012, 132) has pointed out, "many people express a sense of difference from religion that neither involves hostility nor indifference." So one can be nonreligious but still have a positive view of religion and its role in society. On the other hand, there

are people who are in fact religious but still argue against the influence of religion upon politics and state.[2] Therefore it is necessary to distinguish between a personal lack of religion and the evaluation of religion in society. The generalizing "anti"-terms seem to be of little help here. The second problem, which is closely linked to this but may be even more profound, is that these typologies pay little attention to the question of *why* people or groups may show negative reactions towards religion instead of, for example, indifference or appreciation: In Siegers' (2017, 180—this volume) approach the mere lack of personal religiosity and practice is already defined as an antagonistic stance, which leaves no room for asking this question at all. Silver et al. (2013) see a relation to certain psychological personality types[3] or personal states of mind in those who have recently deconverted from sometimes conservative religious traditions. And Wohlrab-Sahr and Kaden (2013, 193; 197) assume nonreligious agitation or a scientific worldview as the basis for the indifferent becoming anti-religious. One factor for the evaluation of religion is usually left out in these approaches—and that is religion itself. While, for example Wohlrab-Sahr and Kaden, see atheism as *being* anti-religious with regard to the conflict between religion and science, they see the religious as *being attributed* as anti-scientific (2013, 206). An insight into the reasons for critical responses towards religion would therefore not only be an important contribution to the study of irreligion and nonreligion, it might also reveal a much broader systematic problem in our understanding of religion.

The most instructive hypothesis regarding the question of why some people criticize religion while others stay indifferent stems from the approach of Steve Bruce. He states (in reference to Bryan Wilson) that strong expressions of atheism or agnosticism are more typical for religious cultures and that indifference would be more characteristic for a secular society. Widespread indifference would be the "endpoint of secularization" (Bruce 2002, 40–42). Bruce's thesis is well supported by empirical and historical data (Bruce 2002, 45–103; Bagg and Voas 2009; see also Bullivant 2012, 100–101). And only recently Phil Zuckerman showed that the differences between the irreligious responses towards religion—much softer in Scandinavia than in the US— "can be partly explained by the fact that religion is much more widespread and pervasive in the USA than it is in Scandinavia." (2012, 18) Nevertheless, Stephen Bullivant contests this thesis. He wonders why at the beginning of the twenty-first century Western societies that are not particularly religious show a rising interest in religion, or in his words, why "predominantly secular (or nonreligious) societies, where relatively few people are interested in *being* reli-

[2] For the United State, for example, the religious supporters for the separation of church and state reach from Roger Williams, not only seen as a father of American Baptism, but also a theorist of the "wall of separation between the garden of the church and the wilderness of the world" (1932, p. 435) to the several religious minorities in today's United States society (for an overview see Boisi Center).

[3] Within psychology there exists a broad variety of approaches that relate religion and ir- or nonreligion to different psychological parameters. For an overview: Wildman et al. (2012) and other articles in this issue, for a comparison of religious and irreligious people among others Hunsberger and Altemeyer (2006).

gious (i.e., believing, practising, and/or affiliating religiously), might nonetheless be ones where people are, in some significant way, interested *in* religion." (2012, 101) Analyzing the reactions to national tragedies in Britain, the reaction to the death of Pope John Paul II, and the interview material of Lois Lee, he finds "religious non-indifference" even in such a nonreligious society as in Britain. So if Bruce's explanation does not convince fully anymore, the "why"-question is reopened and must be studied in depth, not only with statistical correlations but with qualitative methods that are able to reconstruct causal relations by tracing down the transitions from indifference towards critique in individuals' lives.

Grounding Theory in Data

This paper is based on material from my PhD-project[4] regarding the relationship between the religious and the non-religious in the United States. I conducted over 140 qualitative (group or individual) interviews of different lengths, about 70 with atheists and about 70 with believers who are either of different religious affiliations or nonaffiliated in Texas and California. The interviews were either prearranged or spontaneous. The questions were modified according to the subjects brought up by the interviewees or to specific research interests. As I was interested in the relationship of the religious and the irreligious towards each other, potentially everybody was of interest for me and I recruited some of my interview-partners by asking random people in the streets, in front of supermarkets, or during their work-shifts. Of course this is not a random-sample in the statistical sense, but it made it possible to gain access to people who are otherwise understudied because they are generally not interested in religious questions and, therefore, fall through the grid of many recruiting mechanisms.

As the whole project takes an exploratory research design approach, so does this paper. It is based on qualitative data analysis influenced by the Grounded Theory of Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss (Glaser et al. 2010; Strauss 1987). That means that I do not start out with a thesis, nor do I try to fit my data into theories. Instead I start my analysis with open questions and analyze the data by identifying prevalent patterns, refining them with new material, and confronting them with contrasting material in order to explore the basic meaning structures of the answers. So instead of using data in order to prove or disprove a theory, I use the data to create theory. For this paper, I selected cases that seemed to be of interest relative to the question of religious indifference, and particularly to the question of why some people are indifferent, while others criticize religion. From the many cases I analyzed in regard to this question, I selected a few that best illustrate common patterns. So while the

[4] Next to the participants in the study, I want to thank the German National Academic Foundation (Studienstiftung des deutschen Volkes), German Research Foundation (Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft DFG), University of Leipzig, Pitzer College Claremont, University of Texas and University of Bremen for the support provided for the realization of this research project, as well as Marc Burckhardt and Tom Byrne for their help in countless ways.

patterns found in the cases below are apparent in other cases, too, in order to fully show each pattern I limit the presentation to typical cases and confront them with contrasting or seemingly contrasting cases in order to test the hypothesis which I developed out of the material.

Conditions of Indifference and Reasons for Critique

Based on the broad definitions which I outlined, I searched my extensive interview material for instances of religious indifference. As my data allows for a solid sociological reconstruction of crucial turning points from indifference to a critique of religion I explored if and (if so) how a causal relationship between the two can be traced. In the cases that I analyzed I differentiated three patterns, without claiming completeness. The first is a case where a person has become indifferent, the second is one where a person was indifferent but began to criticize religion, and a third is one where the interviewee wants to be indifferent, but feels affected by religion in a way that leaves her in a permanent state of anxiety regarding the subject. These three contrasting cases are, again, contrasted with cases that differ in certain aspects in order to test and refine the developed hypothesis. The general context of the research was the United States, and all interviewees were living in Texas at the time of the interviews. However, my research shows that the context not only differs widely within different parts of Texas, but mostly depending on the individual's personal environment and experience. That's why I abstained from including a chapter about the general context (for religious history and culture in Texas, see Storey 2010; Storey and Scheer 2008, for religious demographics see Pew Research Center 2016) in favor of covering the personal stories of the interviewees at length.

(a) *"I hadn't given it much thought."*

I begin my examination with the most striking example of indifference I could find in my data. The interview took place in an under-populated area of Texas consisting mainly of ranches and cattle, referred to by the interviewee herself as "in the woods." She sold fruit and vegetables on the side of a rural highway. I stopped, bought some fruit, and asked her for an interview—which she could hardly refuse because there were no other customers. She was raised Baptist. In her childhood she had had good experiences with a church, had liked the pastor, and later lived in different cities where she tried out other churches as well. Now in her fifties and living in a rural area, she no longer goes to church, as she has little spare time and hasn't gotten to know the people. "So, it doesn't appeal to me," she said. Interestingly, the belief or disbelief in God did not seem to be related to her decision about attending church, which seemed to have mainly social benefits for her. Asked if she believes in God, she answered:[5]

[5] To increase the readability of the interviews the interviewer's interjections like "Hmm" and "Uhh" were removed from the transcript, although in all the interviews the interviewer signalized

> Not really, um. I don't know. I hadn't really given it any thought. Um, my kids just, they go to church with their friends, but I hadn't really, I hadn't given it much thought, really. I think you picked the wrong person.
>
> Interviewer: Huh?
> I think you picked the wrong person to interview.
>
> Interviewer: Oh, no, that's, that's very interesting.
> I don't really have strong beliefs in either way, so…

While she does not believe in God, she tries to moderate this by saying "not really" and that she did not "really" think about the question before, though throughout the interview it's clear that God doesn't play a role in her life. Not only does she not have strong beliefs either way, she even tries to put that in the most moderate way she could. As if to further relativize her nonbelief, she points out the church attendance of her children, again shifting from the belief dimension towards the social dimension of church. Her disinterest in the spiritual aspect of religion also shows in her descriptions of religious groups primarily in terms of their appearance, for example the exclusive wearing of skirts by Pentecostal women. Furthermore, she mixes up the names of denominations, such as Pentecostal and Protestant, indicative of a low interest regarding religion in general. This is why she said that she might be the wrong person to interview about these questions. She probably wouldn't have been that outspoken about her absence of belief if I hadn't asked her specifically. Her overall attitude is non-judgmental and dispassionate. Asked for her thoughts on atheism, she answered with a generality:

> Everybody should have their own view. I mean, I don't think that anyone should be pushed to do anything.

So while she personally does not believe in a god, her claim for religious freedom—especially for the right not to be coerced into actions or different perspectives—is extended to everyone. In line with her indifferent atheism, she views atheists in the passive position of potentially being forced into something, as opposed to attacking others regarding their religion. Despite her low interest, she does not judge religious people, nor does she disparage her own former churchgoing or that of her children. Throughout the interview, her perspective remains largely detached and nonjudgmental. However, at one point an interesting type of judgment does appear. Asked if she gets invited by others to join church services, she answered:

> Out here: no. Nobody asks you. You're either there or you're not. I haven't had anyone ask me to go yet. Not out here. . . . Out here, there's more hard-working people that just, have farms and do stuff like that, that ... I mean, they're not just un-religious, but they're not really… religious isn't their priority.

When she sets that in contrast to her life in a larger community, it becomes clear where the precondition for indifference lies in this case. Asked how it was in the cities, where she lived earlier, she answered:

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interest with verbal and nonverbal expressions in order to encourage people to continue their narratives.

> It was more church related. You went to church more. . . . We had the Mormons come by, we would laugh at them. Because… My son had a friend who was a Mormon. They would do just about anything. But they'd come by, they kept trying to get him to go to church. But we'd just look at them… Because, I mean, we weren't, we weren't going to his church. No, he wasn't a Mormon, he was a Jehovah's Witness.
>
> Interviewer: Uh, OK. Hmm, hmm.
>
> I mean, there's pushier religions and there's laid-back religions. I've gone to a few churches of either one, and it's just ... None of them really appealed to me.

In this passage she talks about the repeated attempts by Jehovah's Witnesses to get her son to go to church with them. Her reaction was to laugh, and not to go. Her next association with the situation relates to the pushiness—the social pressure and control—exhibited by a religion. She describes trying some stricter religions, as well as some who were less strict, but not finding any that satisfied her. So while she herself was apparently pretty open to different things, a repeated attempt to proselytize caused a negative reaction, one from which she does not distance herself today. This is in line with her former claim that no one should be pushed to do anything they don't want to. At the point where she felt a kind of pressure, her open attitude towards religion turned into a negative evaluation.

In summary, the interviewee is indifferent about the existence of god, is largely non-judgmental about church, and claims religious freedom—in the "negative" sense of freedom from religious coercion—for everyone. However, in a situation where she felt pressured, she developed a negative view toward that religion. This means that even a person who is fundamentally indifferent towards religion can develop negative evaluations in a coercive setting. So indifference does not seem to be an intrinsic characteristic of people as such but, in fact, seems to be dependent on circumstances that are perceived as voluntary. And experiencing pressure from religion can cause a negative evaluation to develop.

(b) ***"You get tired of being pushed around, and so you just come out about it."***

In order to test this hypothesis, I wanted to gain an understanding about the role the specific religious context plays. Therefore I analyzed someone whose situation changed strongly because of a move to Texas and who changed his attitude towards religion significantly as a result of this process. While he was relatively indifferent toward religion before, after his move he became more critical, outspoken, and active. I met the interviewee in an Atheist Group in South Texas. I asked who might be interested in participating in my study, and he volunteered. The interviewee is in his early twenties and lives in a rather small town in South Texas; his atheist group is located in another, larger town nearby. The interview took place in a café that the interviewee chose. Asked at the beginning of the interview to tell me his story of becoming an atheist, he summarized it this way:

> Okay, well, um, I was pretty much raised secular, without a religion, and I did attend churches when I was younger for the fun of it, for social reasons, because friends and stuff would go. And then I just kind of. .. the internet… Well, I called myself an agnostic until I learned the actual definitions of someone that said, 'There is no God,' and I actually learned that it's just someone who doesn't believe in one, and you either believe or don't believe. And so, basically, I'm an agnostic atheist. […]

> And so I never really had issues because I have never really talked about it. It was just kind of what I thought, you know, like I never talked about not believing in astrology either. Because I lived in [a town in a different state, PK], and it has a lot of, like, liberal hippie type people there, a lot of, like . . . Because it draws that culture because of art shows. And it's a mountainous town and brings that type of tourists.
> And then I moved to Texas my sophomore year in high school, to [a small town, PK]. And… a lot more conservative, a lot more . . . Not so many . . .
> [This other state, PK] had a lot of religious people, but they were more liberal, liberal religious people, you know, like… They were Christian but they didn't have to be homophobic. Down here there is a lot more of that, a lot more prejudice.
> I started finding people online. . . . And I became not militant atheist but more vocal about it, I guess, more wearing it on my sleeve, not denying it when people asked me, like openly. If I'm in a crowd and people ask me, I'll tell them.

Though not raised religiously, the interviewee had positive experiences with religion anyway, which he associated with friends and fun. Although he was aware of being different from believers, this did not play a big role in his life; one could call him indifferent. In retrospect, he connected this with the liberal climate and openness of the religious people he came in contact with. His situation changed dramatically with his move to Texas, where he experienced more prejudice among religious people. He linked that to their religious views, without generalizing this for all religious people. In fact, he goes on to point out the discrimination of non-Christian faiths in Texas, too, for example, through the influence of the Christian religion on state politics. Along with the aforementioned prejudices, he felt affected on other levels: accusations from peers of immorality related to his lack of belief, disrespect from the family of a dating partner for not joining them in church, and a Christian prayer at his graduation ceremony, among other things. Later, he learned of the problems those who actually protested against such Christian ceremonies in schools got in to, which only added an anticipation of future conflict to his past experiences. He himself describes the connection between his activism and his religious surrounding as such:

> If there was no discrimination toward atheists, it wouldn't be a big deal to come out. You know, you say that, 'I'm an atheist,' and no one cared, then you wouldn't really feel the need to tell people. But, since there is discrimination, you… kind of get to that mindset where either I can be pushed around by society or come out. Like that... And you find all of these other atheists—millions of atheists that are part of all sorts of atheists organizations, it's kind of empowering. And you get tired of being pushed around, and so you just come out about it . . .

For him the identification with atheism not only ends the problem of not being completely honest about oneself and the misunderstandings this caused with others, but also opens a path to meeting new people with whom he has more in common, as the interviewee relates in describing his first meeting with an atheist group:

> I was immediately comfortable, rather than being around people who tend to have more prejudiced views or more bigoted views toward minorities and stuff because their religion says that.

But even where the political component outweighs the social component of his engagement, this has a more defensive character:

> Living in a super-religious—one of the most religious states… And it's kind of nice to get your voice heard, and that, you know, being… Getting your voice out there rather than just being quiet about it while a bunch of religious people are actively . . . And they have the right to be active. Everyone has free speech. But they are going to use their free speech to say, you know, 'Religion needs to be in government, and religion needs to tell us what to do.' I am going to use my free speech to argue back and so that is one of the main reasons why I was coming out as well. Just that I like politics and politics is influenced by religion. And so I like to push back against that—peacefully, not mean or anything—just peacefully like that.

But, in keeping with his beliefs regarding the unequal treatment of different religions, his political goal is not to replace the endorsement of religion with his own atheist view, but rather with equality, which would be achieved by not adopting any sub-group's belief system as official.

> For instance, we had a prayer, a specific Christian prayer about Jesus, at my graduation. And you can't do that! Because it's a government-run school, and so… You can't promote one religion. You have to . . . you don't promote any. And you don't have an atheist prayer either… Like an atheist reading from, like, 'The God Delusion' [Book by Richard Dawkins, PK], and … You have to remain neutral.

So this second case confirms the results of the first: that critique is something that develops out of the experience a person has with religion. But it allows deeper insight into what exactly it is about religion that caused critique: Here, like in the first case, the interviewee is and stays relatively indifferent toward religious beliefs. He draws the line where he feels that religion infringes on the rights of others, including himself, and opposes any kind of coercion of others. Therefore, his main concern is the influence of religion upon government and public institutions. He includes not only atheists in this defense, but also minority religions and people who experience prejudice because their lifestyles differ from religious doctrine. So, although he does not phrase it that way, indifference in the sense of neutrality or an unbiased view towards people's beliefs, persuasions, and lifestyles is actually very close to his political view.

I want to contrast this by comparing it with two others cases, which I will introduce only briefly: One differs in the outcome of the same situation. The other is slightly different in the path that led to the critique. In the first contrasting case a young man left his indifference towards religion not to criticize religion, but to get interested in another religion. When he first came to the US from India to study, he did not believe in God and was only superficially familiar with Sikhism, the religion of his family. The first people he got to know and who helped him were Christians. Because of his bond with them, he began attending several of their Bible studies. But at some point he felt that the mission was more important for them than the friendship, and he became disillusioned with this form of interpersonal relationship. His attempts to pull back from them caused even greater efforts by the Christians, further alienating them from each other. In reaction, he began learning more about Sikhism. While still rejecting the idea of a god, he was drawn to this faith because of the concept of religious tolerance that it embraces. Although for him a religious difference did not prevent friendships from forming, the attempts to proselytize

caused them to collapse. In this case, the confrontation of a formerly indifferent person with one religion caused him to identify with another religion more strongly. But in emphasizing the quality of tolerance in the latter belief system and in still rejecting the idea of a god, he seems to be defending his own freedom of thought in a society where a religious affiliation carries weight. That means that some basic patterns of the hypothesis are valid even with a different outcome. Furthermore, his case indicates that indifference towards his personal beliefs might have been preferable to him, as his emphasis was on developing friendships despite the religious differences.

The second case I tested my hypothesis with involves a scientist who moved to the US from the UK. Asked how he became an atheist, he said that he never believed but started to be interested in religion through the writings of Christopher Hitchens, a strong critic of religion. This might lead to the conclusion that criticism of religion can cause someone to move from indifference toward the rejection of religion. However, if we analyze the interview further it becomes clear that he was drawn to Hitchens because his writings made sense in the light of the influence of religion on society. He noted, for example, that in the United States a portion of his taxes go to support religious efforts which he does not agree with and which are not open for everyone, as well as attempts to limit scientific education for religious reasons. So while the case shows how critical writings can promote critique of religion, this example does not contradict the thesis: It's again motivated by the impact of religious doctrine—in this case, state sanctioned and tax-supported—and in defense of equality that he leaves his previous indifference toward religion.

(c) ***"There is only so much crap I can deal with."***

Based on the finding that indifference seems to be a valuable perspective for some of the nonreligious, I'd also like to present examples from persons who try to be indifferent toward religion but become involved through their environment. The first interviewee is a young woman in her twenties whom I met as a potential customer of the enterprise where she worked as an administrator. She asked me why I was in the US and I told her about my study. She immediately related it to her own experiences, so I asked her if she wanted to participate. For the interview, we met at her apartment in Austin. She was raised in an evangelical environment, homeschooled, and sheltered from the influences of the broader society. As a teenager, she was very active in charismatic churches and wanted to dedicate her life to the faith. But after a mission trip to Mexico, she came to the conclusion that spreading the gospel did nothing to lift people from poverty or improve the quality of their daily lives, and she became disillusioned with her religion. In college, she began questioning the literal and moral truths of the Bible, as they conflicted with concepts like Evolution which she was beginning to learn about in school. She began meeting people with different lifestyles, including gays, and herself had premarital sex. So "it wasn't matching [her] life experience any more." Initially she did not feel free to "come out" as an atheist. This fear resulted in a number of problems, including succumbing to pressure to marry someone who did not suit her, which led to divorce after only a few years. After she came out, she became active in efforts to support

atheism online, as she felt a release from the religious pressure in her life. But after a number of difficult fights over the subject, she abandoned those efforts—it was too exhausting for her to deal with the repercussions.

> It's hard to decide where the line between my happiness ends and where the responsibility to my beliefs starts. You know, like, how unhappy do I make myself in my life in order to fight for the validity of my beliefs? Do I make myself miserable trying to debate with people who probably not gonna change their minds, that they're wrong? Or do I say 'Hi' and we chat about our families or whatever, and we just go our separate ways. You know, that's a lot easier.

So her wish for indifference became bigger than her wish to create change. These negative consequences led her to no longer openly identify as an atheist:

> I don't really identify myself openly as an atheist anymore. I do openly identify myself as a feminist, because that's something that's more important to me, you know. And also because… as much crap as I get for being an independent minded woman, I get way more for not believing in God, you know. And there is only so much crap I can deal with. So, yeah, so I don't, I don't participate in most of this online stuff anymore.

This, again, underlines the strong negative perception atheists suffer from in the US. The consequences prevent her from identifying as an atheist, and from expressing her opinion or her (un)beliefs. Similar to her personal relationships, she pulled back from her public activism, having determined that her well-being was more important than her activism on behalf of her convictions. But her indifference is not complete: she still feels part of a demonized group, and mentions at various points that she fears a future filled with religious fundamentalism. She perceives this on a more global, abstract level:

> Even in the atheist community there is this really strong movement to kind of like fight back and really become a public… um, um, like, improve, I think, is the intention. The intention is to improve the way that we look to the American public. Because they are really afraid of us and they really hate us and they think we are gonna destroy the nation. Literally, they say it all the time on the news. [Laughing] And it's a little scary, because it's like… What if things go crazy someday, you know, and some charismatic persons takes over the country and it's like: 'The atheists are evil! Let's all imprison them!' You know, it's not like we haven't seen this happen in many countries, all over the world, and it's still happening, you know, to lots of different religious groups as well as atheists. So it's a little scary.

But she also shares very concrete fears for her future and that of her potential children. After expressing her concerns about the crumbling separation of church and state in the US, she states:

> I've been reading articles recently about how the Republican Party has basically been taken over by these very radical Christians. And they don't think of themselves maybe as being radical… I think they do. I think they know how far they've gone with their beliefs and I think they are proud of it, because it goes back to that whole theology of the army and warriors for Christ and you know: 'We are gonna go change the whole world, you know, to... better glorify Him'—the ideas that I was taught when I was a kid. And they have taken that into the political realm of America and it's really scary. It's really scary, because I am not going to lie about my religious... lack of faith, you know my lack of religion, you know in order to preserve myself. But if I had children I would, you know. Wouldn't you? Who wouldn't?

As much as she wants to be indifferent, to place a veil of harmony over the arguments about religion, there's a deeper fear about the influence of religion on politics. Based on her own experiences as a former Evangelical Christian, she sees political developments that parallel theological claims. In this light, the abstract concerns become concrete and scare her, especially when she thinks about her potential children. This case at the first moment seems to contradict the developed hypothesis, because it was the relief of religious pressure that made her becoming active about her atheism, and it is the conflicts with religious people that keep her from openly criticizing it. But this is true only on the level of expression, especially for online activism or small-talk. On the level of her thoughts and feelings, the experienced or anticipated influence of religion on society and her life deeply concerns her. Another important finding from this case is that not all forms of non-activity are caused by indifference, even if it might appear so. Atheists often feel pressured to keep their beliefs secret because of the religious environment they inhabit. But at the same time, indifference—even where intended—becomes impossible if a person lives in a society where he or she feels threatened and demonized.

I'd like to contrast that with a case where a withdrawal from expressing one's unbelief isn't an option, because it gets disclosed by others. The interviewee, a 30-something year old accountant, has been an atheist more or less all his life. He even attempted to adopt Christianity, but could never convince himself to truly believe. So during his childhood and teen years, he simply went through the motions of religion in order "not to pick up that fight." But as an adult he doesn't want to lie about himself anymore. He is married to a Christian woman. Until the marriage, it didn't seem to make a difference to either of them, but after that, she started complaining about his atheism and pressuring him to become religious. While he was fine with going to church, he was not able to believe. He is publicly not out because he fears the loss of his job, but the conflict about religion has been dragged into their shared personal network—for example, when his wife refers to him as "my atheist husband" in the presence of others. This has caused many of their friends to pull back from him, which he mourns and suffers from. But as withdrawal was not possible in his situation, he came to terms with it and began discussing his views openly with those religious friends within their circle who accepted him despite the differences. He even defends his (very accepting) Mormon friend against the ridicule of others, again showing that indifference—in the sense of equality—can be a positive goal of atheists. This, again, supports the hypothesis: While he was indifferent toward religion in the sense that it did not prevent him from marrying a religious person, the pressure he receives from this person now causes him to explain and defend himself and therefore become active regarding his atheism. At the same time, it deepens the divide between the atheist and the religious, who are not accepting of his unbelief. Taken together, these two cases make clear that the context that prevents people from being indifferent can be as broad as American society or as narrow as an individual marriage.

Summary & Discussion

In the beginning, I asked the question *why* some people criticize religion while others are indifferent towards it. I found that the personal experience of religion was the main factor in the sense that indifferent people start disapproving of religion or criticizing it when they feel an infringement or pressure from religion on their own lives and/or on the lives of others. This hypothesis was developed out of the material and was confirmed through different cases. The contexts that affect this relationship range from the societal to the interpersonal, from the impact of religion on politics, to specific religious cultures, to the arena of marriage and family.

It's important to note that neither indifference towards nor the critique of the role religion plays in society determines the relationship towards religion as a whole, or towards religious people in general. Several of my indifferent or critical interviewees held friendships or good relationships with religious people. The critique of religion's role in society and in people's lives can even lead to a defense of religious minorities against religious discrimination.

In particular, the social aspect of religion in building community can remain attractive, and some people take part in religious services or other activities despite their irreligious perspectives. This resembles Lee's (2017, 112—this volume) and Siegers' (2017, 183–186—this volume) finding that some of the indifferent even take part in religious life circle rituals. It is also in line with my result that indifference towards religion is not an intrinsic characteristic of individuals, but rather is dependent upon conditions which allow for indifference, and that those are bound to the perception of non-infringement on people's lives and rights. Indifference towards religion seems to end where an unwanted normation—often in the form of pressure, prejudice or discrimination—is perceived. This does not only extend to experiences in the past, but also to anticipated conflicts or more general influences on the world.

That bears broad implications not only for our understanding of irreligion, but for our understanding of religion itself. If religion is an important factor in the lives of irreligious people, too—when people feel discriminated against, limited in their actions, or even frightened—we need an understanding of religion that is able to include this. If we look at common definitions of religion, they typically frame our understanding of religion through its meaning for believers, practitioners, or adherents of religion. What religion might mean for the nonreligious—or for the "rest" of society—is not included, and remains a blind spot in the understanding of religion (Klug 2015a, b). In order to understand the relationship between *religion and its others* we must expand our definitions of religion beyond its meaning for the religious and come to an understanding about the repercussions of religion upon society and culture. And that means recognizing—depending on the degree of societal obligation to be religious or not that exists or is pursued by the respective groups—that religion and irreligion influence *each other*. This would lead to a double-sided approach, where not only the relation of irreligious people toward religion is examined, but also religious beliefs, norms and practices in their relation to and their impact upon the irreligious or other minorities. So, the study of irr- and nonreligion

must address not only how the nonreligious "co-constitute" religion, as Quack (2017, 195—this volume) has stated in reference to Talal Asad (2003), but how religion impacts, shapes, normalizes, and therefore co-constitutes irreligious people's lives and experiences, too.

I want to illustrate this point with the example of homosexuality and homophobia, which came up in my interviews quite often: Homosexuality is a social practice that is not intrinsically related to religion or atheism. If it is discussed in relation with religion, this is because religion broaches it. So, if we think of the relationship between religion and individuals or social practices that are themselves not religious, we have to take into consideration that this dynamic might not necessarily result from irreligious worldviews, identities, or prejudices towards religion, but rather from religion's attempts at normating and regulating social practices in the first place. Most religions contain a set of norms that extend to the irreligious (or to other believers), and conflicts between religion and irreligion (or other religions) can be rooted in this normation. As others (Kaufmann 1987; Quack and Schuh 2017, 9, 16–17—this volume; Bagg and Voas 2009) have noted, too, it is important to determine what exactly it is someone is indifferent toward, interested in or antagonistic against. Therefore, the typologies that speak of the "anti-religious" identity or the "anti-theists" without further defining what these people oppose and *why* they do that are highly distorting.

My data suggests that the most crucial point in determining indifference toward or critique of religion is the role religion itself plays for people's lives and in their society. With regard to potential other factors for critique of religion as proposed by Wohlrab-Sahr and Kaden (2013) or Silver et al. (2013), I would plea for more complex approaches: The impulse for critique can stem from irreligious sources, but seems to resonate within a backdrop of people's experiences with religion itself. An analysis of the content of these critiques shows that they are usually not limited to the truth claims of religion, but focus on the impact these claims and subsequent policies have on people's lives, be they irreligious or nonconforming to religious norms and doctrine. Science definitely plays a role in how people abandon faith, for example, as it provides an alternative worldview. But a scientific outlook can lead to indifference towards religion as well. A conflict may arise though, when religious norms limit scientific study. With regard to arguments concerning the role of personality types, it has not been tested here, but there is no reason why there shouldn't be angry people among the atheists, too. To take that as an explanation, without considering the potential reasons, still seems to oversimplify the matter.

Bruce's hypothesis that the social significance of religion is a causal factor for the development of the interest in or indifference towards religion is supported by my data. However, Bruce's assertion that this is connected to the popularity of religious beliefs can neither be supported nor denied, as in my study I did not connect the interest in religion with the percentage of religious people in the environment. But the examples showed that the percentage of religious people might be less important than the degree of compulsion with which religious norms are enforced

or compliance is expected from each individual.[6] To think of the social significance of religion not only in terms of the quantity of religious people but also in terms of the quality—the way religion is adhered to and practiced—could also help to solve Bullivant's puzzle of why, in a secular society like Great Britain, so many people are still interested in religion: If we consider that the (experienced and anticipated) impact of religion on Great Britain increased after 9/11 and the war against religious terrorism, the number of religious people is only a secondary variable for the social significance of religion itself.[7] Lee (2017, 114—this volume) finds it unlikely that people are indifferent towards religious terrorism, and concludes that indifference towards religion must mean something else. Against this assumption, I would argue that in order to determine factors for the increasing or falling interest in religion, it is exactly these topics that need to be included. This could at least partly explain phenomena like the New Atheists, who became successful in an era that is characterized by the atrocities of religious fundamentalism, particularly post 9/11.

Other findings appeared but could not be tested further because they were not the focus of this paper. Indifference towards religion is not necessarily seen in a negative way by the irreligious. People who are indifferent, as well as those who criticize religion, often value indifference in the sense of non-discrimination, not just for themselves but also for religious minorities. Nevertheless, this should be reciprocal: The interviewees presented here (as well as the vast majority of other irreligious people I interviewed in the study) were comfortable with others being religious, as long as this did not affect their lives or the lives of other minorities. In this respect, there seems to be a special concern about the influence of religion upon politics and the public sphere, especially public schools and education. This is closely linked to the finding that irreligion and atheism were seen primarily as a passive conviction rather than an active attitude. Even where organized and political in nature, the overall motivation for these activities was defensive, in the sense that their goal was to limit the extension of religious norms on social and legal systems. This relates to the discussion of secularism and the separation between church and state, and is worthy of further study, though it cannot be discussed here. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that not all cases of inactivity are due to indifference. It can, on the contrary, be due to fear of repercussions. Hence the dependence of critiques of religion on the religious environment is two-fold: It encompasses not only the reasons for these critiques, but also the preconditions under which a critique is possible at all. Some atheists don't feel free to come out because of the negative perceptions about atheists in their society or personal environment. Coming out can have social benefits,

[6] These are factors that Bruce would reconnect with the proportion of religious people in society. The purpose of Bruce's book was not to explain indifference but to defend the secularization theory and therefore to make assumptions about whole societies and their development. As I studied individual cases, I cannot comment on this topic here.

[7] Furthermore, Bullivant does not count the increase in immigrants religiosity and the terror attacks as an increase in the religious influence upon society but as a growing "visibility"—and therefore redefines the explanans as the explanandum: While he sees the rising "visibility" of atheism as a fact that requires explanation, the increased "visibility" of religion is seen as an effect of the growing atheism, rather than a potential explanation.

as well: it can be empowering, because it potentially opens up new circles of people and new possibilities for community. But it seems that for some people, even in a plural society like the United States, the (experienced and anticipated) repercussions they get from outing themselves as atheists—or for activism on behalf of it—seem to be too high. This is in line with research about the discrimination of atheists (see Weiler-Harwell 2011; Edgell et al. 2006; Cragun et al. 2012).

Limitations and Future Challenges

It appears that the definition of indifference towards religion taken from the conventional meaning of indifference was able to capture the studied phenomena well and can be illustrated with data. There are in fact people who—at least under certain circumstances—lack religious activity, interest in and bias toward religion. Actually, it was rather stunning how similar the narratives were to the interview material presented by Johannes Quack (2017—this volume), despite our different methodological and theoretical approaches. That means that we describe a phenomena that can be traced in cultures as varied as India, the US, and Germany. But as in each qualitative study these results are not representative in the sense of quantity. This study posed a why-question and searched not for a statistical correlation but for a causal relationship that can be shown in data through the reconstruction of individual cases. Nevertheless, it would be fruitful to further test the result in quantitative studies.

Additionally, there are several limitations that need to be pointed out. First, I want to address the question of geographical context: All the cases included in this paper were living in Texas at the point of the interview. As the whole project contains data from Texas and California, it was of course tempting to include data from California here. But the cases from this paper as well as the whole project show not only that the differences *within* states are much bigger than the differences *between* states. They also show that what is experienced as personal context differs widely between different individuals. Therefore, I decided to show the variety within a certain state over the (obvious) differences between states, which were only addressed in the three examples where people moved to Texas from other places. Nevertheless, widespread cultural norms in a context are of relevance, and might be addressed in a further paper where Texas could be compared to California.

Another limitation is more profound: Texas—as well as the whole United States—is a predominantly Christian setting. Hence, the results are not to be generalized for all religions and forms of religiosity, not even for all monotheist religions. But the point is not to generalize for Christianity, either: From the finding that indifference and critique are influenced strongly by the role religion plays in people's life, no assumption can be made about religion in general, except that some forms of it norm other people. So in order to gain further insight about the religious side of the religion-irreligion relationship, religious people have to be analyzed as well (for an analysis of the religious' view on atheists, see Klug 2013 and 2015b).

A different point is that experience with religion—and therefore indifference towards or critique of it—might differ not only along individual and cultural contexts, but may be shaped also through intersections with variables like gender or race. I did not evaluate my data statistically. Nevertheless, we could gain insight into possible connections from qualitative analysis, as for example in the case of the young woman who prioritized her feminist activism over the open critique of religion. Given a limited capacity for activism, other issues—though connected—might be more pressing for different subgroups in a society. Similar remarks could be made about the role of ethnicity and cultural background. But each of these points would deserve a paper on their own.

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The Limits of Religious Indifference

Joseph Blankholm

Abstract This essay explores religious indifference as an example of that which stands beyond the scope of social scientific knowledge production. In turn, it uses religious indifference to consider the social scientist's role in constituting the religion-related field. The literary character Bartleby and the ethnographic character Gino provide two case studies for examining particular types of religious indifference that cannot be known to the researcher. As fictions, they offer a way to explore that which would otherwise remain illegible, and they serve as humbling reminders of the inescapable limits of inquiry. To better understand the role that researchers play in constituting the religion-related field, this essay relies on other ethnographic examples to compare differing notions of "entanglement" and their implications for the study of nonbelievers and the nonreligious. The essay concludes by offering researchers a choice: to pursue religious indifference or to leave it alone.

Keywords Religious indifference • Atheism • Secularism • Nonbelief • Belief • Knowledge production • Fiction • Ethnography • Critical theory

Catching Myself Entangled

One of the central aims of this essay is to acknowledge the ways in which my fellow researchers and I participate in the construction of the religion-related field (Quack 2012, 2014; Quack and Schuh 2017, 11, 15–16—this volume). Making myself the first object of study allows me to point to why social scientists favor certain methods and ways of knowing, and in turn, allows me to mark the limits of our inquiry. This essay stems in part from the ethnographic research I have conducted among organized nonbelievers and secular activists in the United States. Surveying the

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landscape of America's nonbeliever organizations, I have attempted to show who is responsible for making the American secular (Blankholm 2015).

When I first began conducting fieldwork among nonbelievers in the United States, I was the most informal of participant observers. Living among a certain class of young people in New York City, almost any conversation about my profession as a Religious Studies graduate student became a discussion of religion and its oft-perceived opposite, atheism. Thankfully, I now have stock responses that I can use to steer the conversation away from a topic that most Americans consider private (Blankholm 2010). Though I would eventually focus my research solely on the members and leaders of nonbeliever organizations, my preliminary fieldwork was more exploratory. Several of those I interviewed did not join groups, either intentionally, because they found them too "religious," or without intention, simply uninterested. Some of these non-joiners considered themselves indifferent to religion. It did not matter much to them, and they found it strange that it would matter to me.

In those early conversations, my goal was to capture how people talk about nonreligion in everyday life (Bender 2003). Looking over my field notes, I find a mix of those who wanted to discuss religion and those who did not. According to one young woman who was born in China and has lived in the United States since she was a teenager, religion makes no sense to her because Taoism is not really a religion, and she does not understand what the term is supposed to mean (see also Fitzgerald 2007). In another interaction, a young man told me he does not think about religion because it is not very important to him (see also Wallis 2014, 84). Struggles to name and describe were so persistent that they became the central question of my research even after I turned my focus to nonbeliever communities. Conversations often centered on the inadequacy of labels for describing the various ways in which people do or do not believe, behave, or belong religiously. Though in those early stages of my research I did not ask those I spoke with how they identify themselves, they often asked me, or they volunteered an answer, even when self-identification made them uncomfortable. Some struggled to find the right words, as I sometimes do when someone asks if I am religious. Not even my most interested interlocutors found it very easy to declare themselves inscribed within the bounds of a particular term.

Why is it so hard to name oneself? Perhaps resistance to labels or the challenge of description stems from a voluntarist desire to construct and select one's own beliefs (Modern 2011). By rejecting how they fit into a larger history or set of institutions, those eschewing common labels can reassert their individuality (Bender 2010). Perhaps labels are always negotiated relationally, and social encounters only temporarily reify recognition or identity (Day 2011). A list of options or an open-ended question sets in motion a process of self-identification that the researcher can observe in the reflexive speech of the informant (Day and Lee 2014). I did not conduct enough interviews or participant observation among the vaguely or somewhat nonreligious in order to claim with any authority why many of those I spoke with found description so difficult. Their struggles and my perceptions of my own led me to focus my research on those who join nonbeliever communities and adopt

self-conscious identities. Though organized nonbelievers do not always agree on labels, at least they name themselves.

Lee has confronted the challenges I sought to avoid by studying how those who identify as "not religious" or "nonreligious" understand "religious" things and their relationship to them (2012b, 2014; see also Day 2011). She has suggested terms that scholars should adopt when situating nonbelievers and the nonreligious in the context of broad concepts like secularism, secularity, and secularization (2012a, 2014). "Nonreligion," she asserts, describes "anything that is identified by how it differs from religion," including New Atheism and humanist life-cycle rituals (2014, 468–9). "Secularity" is linked to "secularization" and is "a concept used analytically to study the relative significance of religion" (469). In brief, "nonreligion" describes positive manifestations, affirmations, and avowals framed in contradistinction to religion, and secularity describes religion's negative decline, restriction, or marginalization.

I have not adopted Lee's divisions in my own work because the landscape of organized nonbelief in the United States includes avowedly *religious* humanists who are non-theistic and who often consider themselves secular. These individuals might join a humanist community like an Ethical Culture Society or a Society for Humanistic Judaism—groups that consider themselves religious, but which are also members of national organizations that advocate for nonbelievers, such as the Secular Coalition for America and Openly Secular. Describing all nonbelievers as "nonreligious" would overlook the many instances of secular/religious hybridity in the United States and affirm a strong boundary between secular and religious that has not always existed and that not all nonbelievers share.

After conducting sixty-five in-depth, semi-structured interviews with the leaders and activists who run America's major nonbeliever organizations, I chose "nonbelievers" as an efficacious umbrella term to describe what they have in common. Some religious humanists I spoke with have objected to my using this term by arguing that they are "believers" who affirm humanism and its ethics. Though I mean an ellipsis for a longer phrase describing those who do not affirm belief in most conceptions of God or the supernatural, they are right to object because they belong to a tradition of non-theistic religious humanism that is more than a century old and grows out of a combination of Unitarianism and Auguste Comte's Religion of Humanity (Olds 1996). They have beliefs about the world that one could fairly label religious *or* nonreligious.

Digging into the intellectual history of nonbelievers reveals hundreds of years of debates over which practices and forms of organization are too religious or sufficiently secular. Those debates have generated much of the common nomenclature that scholars adopt, including the terms "humanism" and "secularism" (Blankholm 2014, forthcoming). "Nonbelievers," like any single term, cannot be neutral and is always already part of a discursive inheritance (Foucault 2002 [1969]). Not even a neologism like "brights" is free from negative connotations, despite its being invented to avoid them (Dennett 2006, 21). Scholarly terms are no less overdetermined, even when contextualized by rigorous genealogical research (Asad 1993, 2003; Day 2011). Elsewhere I have argued that American researchers, religious

organizations, and organized nonbelievers are so discursively and institutionally entangled that the distinction between scholar and object of study is more of an efficacious fiction than the product of what Bourdieu has called "epistemological vigilance" (Blankholm 2015, forthcoming; Bourdieu 1988 [1984], xiii; see also Bender 2012).

Lee's terms arise from her research in the British context, and they are no less apt than mine. She identifies five ways in which people employ the terms "not religious" and "nonreligious" to affirm meaningful stances with respect to religion (2014, 469–70). Some use them as substitutes for other "nonreligious" labels like "atheist" or "humanist," either interchangeably or because they want to use a more socially polite placeholder (470–2). Others consider themselves "spiritual," but not "religious," and use "not religious" or "nonreligious" to emphasize that distinction (472). Still others use the terms to express "engaged indifferentism," or "non-nominalism" (472–476). The engaged indifferent, as opposed to the more passively indifferent, use generic descriptors to communicate a lack of "cultural attachment" to religion and to underscore its irrelevance (476). Non-nominalists want to avoid labels altogether and do so for a variety of reasons. By dissecting the generic labels of the religious field's surplus, Lee provides a precise vocabulary of the margins and enables social scientists to better locate the limits of their inquiry.

A Not Beyond the Religion-Related Field

In the remainder of this essay, I explore a version of the "non-nominal," which as Lee observes, sometimes overlaps with "engaged indifferentism" when indifference entails resistance to being inscribed within the religion-related field (see Quack 2014; Quack and Schuh 2017; Cotter 2017, 46—this volume). The "non-nominal" I examine is different from Lee's, though similar. My appropriation delimits a boundary beyond which scholarly inquiry cannot proceed. In the two case studies I consider, the interviewee retreats from or refuses the researcher. From the perspective of the social scientist, this form of the non-nominal is the purest specimen of "religious indifference." If the non-nominalist does not name or even describe herself, she *de facto* refuses the differences that a researcher asserts. Despite the researcher's attempts to make the research subject recognize a difference between religion and nonreligion, the entirely indifferent non-nominalist persists in recognizing no difference. In so doing, the non-nominalist becomes a special kind of other for the researcher—a self that does not research.

Borrowing from Taylor (1993), the "non-nominal" is a "not" of denegation, which joins the distance between namer and named, etic and emic, distinction and indifference. By prodding and pulling at this "not," we cannot undo it, though we can come to understand how it only tightens more when we attempt to describe that which turns away from the differences our descriptions require. As I demonstrate in this essay's final section, recognizing the limits of our ability to produce knowledge helps us better understand the role played by indifference and its illegibility in

constituting the religion-related field. It makes this field meaningful by standing outside of it. For if the religion-related field contained everything, then why qualify it with an adjective? Would it not be *the field*, *in toto*?

In each of the following two sections I present a brief study of a fictional character in order to mark out the limit beyond which the non-nominalist stands. During my years of field research, numerous potential informants have declined to be interviewed, ignored my calls or emails, or even refused to speak to me during a face-to-face encounter. Though I have kept a record of only a handful of these occasions, I cannot glean much from them, and I do not know what these informants might have said had we spoken. In most of these cases, I cannot even call their non-response a refusal because doing so implies an intentional attempt to reject or turn away. Of course, their intentions remain opaque. Despite my desire to know their sincerely held beliefs, I am left guessing at the contents of their private minds (see Keane 2007). To speak of these informants, I must invent ethnographic characters—fictions—who can participate in my descriptions in a way that they never actually did. To underscore this guesswork and the fictions it demands, I now analyze two fictional characters who appear to refuse participation.

The first character is Bartleby, the literary invention of Herman Melville and the title character of a short story he published in 1853 (1949). The second character is Gino, an ethnographic invention described by the sociologists Michel Callon and Vololona Rabeharisoa (2004). By choosing two very different sorts of characters, I want to emphasize that they are fictions not because they were never once flesh and blood, but because we cannot know them. Drawing from the descriptions their authors provide, I will attempt to elicit from them their thoughts concerning religion. Though I will fail—both because they are fictions and because they do not respond—I remain certain that they will reveal much about the limits and nature of our scholarly exploration of the religion-related field.

Bartleby: I Would Prefer Not to

In Melville's "Bartleby, the Scrivener: A Story of Wall-Street," an unnamed elderly lawyer recalls his experiences with a mysterious man whom he describes as "one of those beings of whom nothing is ascertainable, except from the original sources" (3). After an uptick in business, the lawyer hires a third copyist: Bartleby. Though at first he seems like a model employee, working "silently, palely, mechanically" to transcribe documents day and night (16), when the lawyer asks him to proof-check a copy, Bartleby responds with his singular refrain: "I would prefer not to" (18). As the lawyer begins to observe him more closely, he realizes that Bartleby never leaves the office and subsists solely on ginger cakes he buys from the errand-boy. When he tests Bartleby by asking him to go to the post office around the corner, he responds in his usual way: "I would prefer not to." He then asks Bartleby if he *refuses* to go—"You *will* not?"—and Bartleby clarifies: "I *prefer* not." (27). Frustrated at first, the lawyer eventually resigns himself to Bartleby's persistent near-refusal.

Stopping by his office one Sunday morning before church, the lawyer finds Bartleby inside, half-dressed, after having slept on the couch. In an act of sympathy, he allows him to stay: "What miserable friendlessness and loneliness are here revealed! His poverty is great; but his solitude, how horrible!" (33). Soon after, Bartleby declines to do any more copying, and when the lawyer fires him and tells him to leave, he prefers not to. Though he begins to stand for hours at a time "in dead-wall reveries" (35), the lawyer again grows an affection for him and tolerates his presence in the office. When Bartleby begins to make visitors feel uncomfortable, the lawyer worries for his reputation and rents new offices in order to avoid removing him. The new tenant has Bartleby arrested, and when the lawyer visits him in jail, he bribes the "grub-man" (65) to make sure he receives enough food. Despite his efforts, when he returns to the jail to visit Bartleby a few days later, he finds him curled up against the wall in the jail yard, dead from starvation after having preferred not to eat.

With Bartleby, the "inscrutable scrivener," (47) Melville has created a masterpiece of indifference and illegibility. In his preference to "not," he is both passive and opaque. His apparent will is stubborn and unresponsive to the demands of others, and yet he is unimposing and leaves no trace beyond the memories of those who knew him. As a scrivener, he merely copies and creates no text of his own, but he prefers not to even passively ventriloquize when the lawyer asks him to read aloud to check for errors. Bartleby never reveals anything about his personal history. He does not respond to "common usage" and "common sense" (21), and when the lawyer implores him "to be reasonable," he gives only a "mildly cadaverous reply": "At present I would prefer not to be a little reasonable" (39). The "unaccountable Bartleby" (53) is beyond the reach of knowing.

Because the lawyer resents the pity he feels for Bartleby, he refuses to accept that Bartleby might desire to remain unreachable or not desire at all. He can only imagine that Bartleby possesses a suffering inner self: "I might give alms to his body; but his body did not pain him; it was his soul that suffered, and his soul I could not reach" (36). Though he offers him money and help finding a new job, Bartleby never accepts. He has been reduced to the function of a machine, transcribing without thought. Yet he appears to continue to will, however passively, even against what seem to be his interests. The lawyer's strange diagnosis gives insight into what ails Bartleby: "[T]he scrivener was the victim of innate and incurable disorder" (36). Without an indefinite article to qualify his disorder, Bartleby is not the victim of *a* disorder; he is the victim of disorder itself. He prefers not to be ordered.

If read as a story of religious indifference, "Bartleby" and its title character's seemingly willful passivity refigure the challenges facing social scientists of the religion-related field. Fired from a previous job at the Dead Letter Office after a new boss was hired, Bartleby resembles the demographic surplus that surveyors face when religious definitions and perceptions undergo a shift. The "religiously unaffiliated," the "nones," and the "nonreligious" are "catch-all, residual" categories (Bullivant 2012, 104; Pasquale 2007) and symptoms of a survey in need of revision (Hout and Fischer 2002, 615–16; Day 2013, 107). Over time, survey questions become increasingly like dead letters. Those being surveyed do not acknowledge

themselves as the recipients and perhaps do not even recognize the language of the sender. They return the letters unopened, responding without answering. In reply to social scientists' attempts to make them into objects of research, potential respondents offer only a mildly cadaverous, "I prefer not to."

Researchers might reasonably ask, "Prefer not to what, exactly?" They must parse religion into belief, behavior, and belonging in order to isolate and disentangle the "nots." To which aspect of religion would Bartleby prefer not? What if a respondent is legible within the surveyor's categories of behavior and belonging, but remains inscrutable on questions of belief? And like Bartleby's lawyer, surveyors press their inquiry: "You *prefer* not to, or you *will* not?" The two verbs are not the same, and their difference matters when taking account (Voas and Ling 2010). After dissecting the contents of the religiously unaffiliated, the secular, and the otherwise religiously indifferent, social scientists can revise and refine their instruments and interpellate their addressees more successfully (Althusser 1971). They receive fewer "nots" in response because they have asked questions that make their respondents more legible.

As religiously indifferent, Bartleby aggravates with his "passive resistance" (24). His "nots" cannot be disentangled. Like the informant who refuses or ignores, he does not offer his personal history, and he leaves no secondary trace. Researchers are left in the position of the lawyer-narrator, relying on the available data to convey whatever little they can. Researchers who use methods designed to find Bartleby and elicit his response are more successful in making sense of him, but they can never capture that which they do not elicit (Day 2011; Wallis 2014). Even when prodded with precision, Bartleby prefers not to. Some survey questions will go unanswered, and some informants will never respond. Unaccountable Bartleby looms in a dead-wall reverie.

Gino: 'I' Am Not the 'I' That You Want 'Me' to Be

In an article entitled, "Gino's Lesson on Humanity: Genetics, Mutual Entanglements and the Sociologist's Role," Callon and Rabeharisoa interpret their experience interviewing a man who suffers from limb-girdle muscular dystrophy (LGMD) (2004). "The sociologists," as they refer to themselves, and as I will refer to them hereafter, are studying the influence of patients' organizations on medical research and seeking first-hand accounts from those involved (Callon and Rabeharisoa 2008). They visit Gino at his home on the island of La Réunion, a French colony roughly 1000 kilometers east of Madagascar. Gino's brother, Léon, is the charismatic vice-chairman of the Réunion Island Muscular Dystrophy Association (ARM) and is municipal councilor of a village in an area containing around 30 families affected by LGMD. According to Léon, Gino is "pretty unsociable" and "really withdrawn" (2), and though Léon has introduced the sociologists to other patients, he has been unable to convince his brother to meet them.

When they finally do interview Gino, he is affable, but quiet and disengaged. The sociologists report, "It was difficult to get anything out of him other than a few mumbled and sometimes inaudible words" (3). His muscular dystrophy is not as severe as Léon's, but bad enough that he was dismissed from his job as a welder two years before. Though at times responsive, he mostly allows his wife or brother to speak for him, either nodding or smiling in agreement, or giving no signal at all. He only joins the conversation in three brief exchanges, and each involves a refusal: of treatment for himself, of participation in the ARM, and of testing to see whether his children have the disease. At one point during the conversation, he announces to no one in particular, "I like football" (4).

Attempting to account for Gino's reticent behavior and his three refusals, the sociologists construct a character named Gino, whom they build around the bits of information they already have. Like Bartleby, he is "one of those beings of whom nothing is ascertainable, except from the original sources" (Melville 3), and like the lawyer, the sociologists struggle to make sense of their encounter with a mysterious man who "refuses to hear and to understand" (Callon and Rabeharisoa 2004, 10). By narrating themselves as "the sociologists" and analyzing "the interview situation as a model of the public arena on a reduced scale" (6), they "suggest an interpretation that takes the question of sociological interventionism seriously, including the effects it has when it makes reluctant actors talk and imposes questions on them in which they have very little interest" (6). The Gino they create and interpret is not merely refusing or retreating, but actively adopting a way of being that the sociologists foreclose by interviewing him. His silence does not reflect "stupidity" (10), and his refusal of knowledge is better understood as a refusal to enter their arena: "He is opting, or at least that is our assumption, for another form of morality and intelligence" (15). Like Bartleby, Gino is a "not," and the lesson he teaches the sociologists is equally helpful for the study of religious indifference.

The sociologists apply two related concepts to interpret Gino's refusals: entanglement and articulation. "Entanglements" are the attachments to people and things that constitute a particular actor or object (16). Gino, as they imagine him, refuses to be entangled in ways that will reshape him and transform his moral obligations. The technical application of scientific discoveries "causes the proliferation of new entities that bring with them unexpected webs of relations and potential entanglements" (17; see also Latour 1999). If Gino accepts that there are things called "genes," then their existence has implications. The genetic science that says his children might be carriers of his disease without ever manifesting symptoms creates a moral imperative for him to change his behavior by getting them tested. His acceptance of genetic science would transform his ontology and reposition his role within it: "The collective is redistributed, reshaped; the compassion takes new routes that are mapped by genetics" (17). Because he loves his children, this scientific knowledge that Gino has long avoided hearing, and which his brother presents in front of the sociologists, creates an obligation. From the perspective of those who already accept this ontology, "Either he understands and he is monstrous, or he does not understand and is nothing but an idiot" (18). Rather than affirm their visceral

reactions, the sociologists speculate that he is neither. Gino appears to refuse to accept this new network of attachments and the reconfiguration they demand.

The concept of "articulation" helps the sociologists explain why Gino's refusal of new entanglements manifests as monstrosity or ignorance. Like the lawyer asking after the suffering of Bartleby's soul, they wonder about Gino's inner life and the sort of will he might conceal: "Why do the sociologists that we are have the feeling that Gino's hesitant words and silence are intended to hide something from us? Is there a real Gino hiding from us?" (19). Unlike the lawyer, they observe themselves asking, and they make their assumptions an object of inquiry. They scrutinize their belief that Gino is a subject with private and public selves, and they acknowledge that they have judged him for not summoning his private self to answer their questions and submit his opinions to public debate. In the act of interviewing, they *de facto* demand that he articulate his thoughts for public presentation. Because "there is no public space that does not carry with it moral normativity" (22), he must edit and affect his private self in order to articulate it. The sociologists are an "attentive and silent" audience, and their questions impose an obligation on Gino to correspond to both their norms of public articulation and their norms of moral judgment.

If Gino articulates his refusal, he is monstrous because he has become entangled in the ontology of the sociologists and his brother. He has submitted himself to becoming one who articulates a private self in public statements, which are subject to public norms and debate. If he refuses to articulate, he is ignorant, and in a way, still monstrous from the perspective of those who *know* and thus expect him to behave differently. This is Gino's double bind, created by the demand that he double himself. In those three moments of participation, which are also the moments of his three refusals, he becomes a particular kind of subject: an autonomous in-dividual who is, ironically, divided into private and public, interior and exterior (21). In the interpretation of the sociologists, Gino's refusals are not attempts to "safeguard his intimacy or private life;" "What he is resisting is a certain way of simultaneously defining *both* the private *and* the public spheres" (13; emphasis in original).

Gino is thus a sort of non-nominalist. Articulating his interiority would reshape him into a new kind of subject, entangled in a new ontology. His non-articulation declines the differences the sociologists assert. He can remain ignorant only if they choose to ignore him. Standing at the edge, he is a limit case of indifference; he is a "not" that cannot be disentangled:

> In the range of possible forms of encounterings-confrontations, Gino's interview occupies a singular, extreme, position. Gino accepts the confrontation but reduces it to its simplest expression. His silence is interrupted only by the painful confession of his will to remain ignorant. The only point at which he accepts the form of agency proposed by Léon is when he says that he refuses it: 'I' don't want to know, which paradoxically means: 'I' am not the 'I' that you want 'me' to be. (24)

Chastened by Gino's lesson, the sociologists suggest a new approach that attends to "the limits and conditions of sociological inquiry" (24). Actors being studied can refuse, can remain opaque, and can choose their "mutual entanglement"—all without being interpellated as "free-willed, autonomous and responsible individual

subject[s]" (6). His lesson helps describe the limit approached by scholars of religious indifference.

In the following two sections, I borrow the concepts the sociologists use to interpret Gino and apply them to the study of religious indifference. In the first, I discuss some of my own ethnographic characters and introduce another kind of entanglement described by Bender (2010, 5–18) in order to examine the social scientist's role in constructing the religion-related field. How do social scientists entangle the subjects of their research—and how are researchers and those they study already entangled? In the second, I borrow from an essay by Baudrillard (1985) to demonstrate how a subject can perform as an object and embrace a more passive kind of indifference than that of Gino. In the essay's conclusion, I synthesize these explorations of entanglement and ignorance, and I present researchers with a choice.

Caught in the Act of Making Labels

Since the early 2000s, all of the major nonbeliever organizations in the United States have grown in membership, budgets, and staff. For example, during an interview at their headquarters in Madison, Wisconsin in December of 2012, one of the leaders of the Freedom From Religion Foundation told me that the group considers itself to be "the largest expressly atheist and agnostic organization in the country." They currently have around 20,000 dues-paying members, which is 4 times the amount they had in 2004. Like other groups, their budget has grown in recent years, and as of early 2016, they employ more than half a dozen attorneys. Larger budgets and new outreach opportunities afforded by the internet (Smith and Cimino 2012) have also enabled organizations to fund initiatives aimed at growing membership and encouraging more Americans to identify with labels like atheist, humanist, and freethinker (Cimino and Smith 2007).

A number of scholars have observed that America's major nonbeliever organizations have played an important role in the process of identity formation among nonbelievers (Cimino and Smith 2011; Smith 2011, 2013; LeDrew 2013; Guenther et al. 2013; Kettell 2014). For example, leaders from the Secular Coalition for America (SCA), the movement's largest lobbying organization, told me that one of their founding goals was to unite groups that had spent the previous decades fighting with one another. Since its founding in 2002, SCA has grown to a coalition of 18 organizations and now includes all of the major groups in the country (Blankholm 2014; Guenther et al. 2013). Their current president, David Niose, is the former president of the American Humanist Association, and he was the lead attorney for a lawsuit that challenged the inclusion of "under God" in the Pledge of Allegiance by arguing that humanists should be protected as a religious minority (*Doe v. Acton-Boxborough School District* 2014). He is also author of *Nonbeliever Nation: The Rise of Secular Americans*, in which he encourages nonbelievers to "come out" by publicly claiming a "secular" identity (2012).

Niose's strategy is not unique among secular activists. In 2007, the Richard Dawkins Foundation for Reason and Science (RDF) started the Out Campaign, which modeled its efforts on the gay rights movement. In April 2014, RDF, SCA, the Secular Student Alliance, and the Stiefel Freethought Foundation joined together to found Openly Secular, a coalition that also encourages nonbelievers to adopt a "secular" identity and considers gay rights activism a model for its strategy. In the months after its founding, all of America's major nonbeliever groups signed on as partners.

Though in their public rhetoric, organizational leaders sometimes cite data from Pew and other polling organizations to trumpet the rising numbers of "secular" Americans (Funk et al. 2012; Blankholm 2014), during interviews and conversations, they were more guarded. As one leader cautioned when explaining his organization's goals, "The 'nones' aren't necessarily atheists." Several told me that they consider religious disaffiliation an opportunity, but not a guarantee. For instance, Marcus, one of the leaders of the Humanist Community at Harvard (HCH), warned against the simplification of polling data, and his observations are worth quoting at length:

> I think that the movement is in an interesting position because I see this time as one of huge potential and quite significant danger. We're looking at a demographic landscape that's never been better for nonreligious organizations in this country. More and more people are identifying as nonreligious or functionally nonreligious. A recent Gallup poll—Gallup or Pew, one of the two—said that 30% of Americans were nonreligious by its reckoning. Not by their own definition, but by their reckoning of their behavior. Not young Americans, all Americans. That's a massive demographic shift. And those people, in my view, are potentially our people if we work out how to reach them and activate them, energize them, excite them. . . . I think there's a huge opportunity right now, and my concern is we'll miss it because we'll fight with each other, which always happens. We won't take seriously the challenges of actually organizing people. We'll do what [the organization] American Atheists tends to do and say, 'Oh, 30% of people are atheists! We're done. We've won the cultural war.' It's like, 'Well, that's absurd.' They always use the figures wrong. They never use them with sufficient nuance or care.

During the same interview, Marcus quoted directly from Putnam and Campbell's *American Grace* in order to emphasize the importance of creating "morally intense, nonreligious social networks" (2010, 361). I had read the book not long before our interview, and I recognized the passage immediately. Talking to Marcus and listening to the ways in which he parsed categories and observed their efficacy reminded me of myself and my fellow scholars. In the emerging field of secular studies, we have struggled to find labels and descriptions that both capture what we find in the field and resonate productively with scholarly theories and models. Marcus showed me that he and I were entangled, not just in our discourse, but in our very endeavors.

During her fieldwork among spiritual practitioners in Cambridge, Massachusetts, Bender (2010) found that scholars who study spirituality are deeply entangled with those who practice it (5–18). Like Marcus, practitioners read scholarly research and appropriate its theories and technical terms for their own ends. The conversations that Bender had with her informants took place in a shared discursive space that

could not be easily divided into etic and emic. As a researcher, she found herself "caught… in a web of relations" (15). This mutual entanglement shapes the construction of concepts like "spirituality," and Bender urges scholars to include entanglements as objects of their research (2012, 67). During my fieldwork among the leaders of American nonbeliever organizations, I also found myself frequently entangled in the discursive web that I share with my informants. Caught together in the "not" of researcher and researched (Taylor 1993), we each play our part in the ongoing reconstruction of the American secular.

For instance, one leader named Greg invoked Alfred Korzybski's dictum that "the map is not the territory" in order to make a point about language that he emphasized throughout our interview (1958). Though he did not mention Korzybski by name, his use of the analogy was apt: "I'm not an atheist," he told me. "It's a little presumptuous to say you're anything. To say you're anything isn't totally true. You get into the old Wittgensteinian word games again. What do you mean by God? Well, everything is God. OK, then I'll go for that." In Greg's perspective, words like "God" and "religious" are analogous to maps that represent territory, but which are not the territory itself. Because no word can ever perfectly circumscribe reality, words are always representations, which, like maps, simplify in order to achieve certain ends. Jonathan Z. Smith has made a similar point using the same phrase from Korzybski (1978). Smith observes, as Greg does, that life often disrupts the map that religion (or science) makes of it, and all maps struggle with incongruity (289–309). When talking with Marcus and with Greg, I am thrown back upon my own caughtness and become aware of our mutual entanglements. I am also aware of the limits I face when trying to create a reliable map that includes everyone from religious humanists to anti-religious atheists. Is it possible to create a map that includes the indifferent?

Pairing Bender's notion of entanglements with that of the sociologists (Callon and Rabeharisoa) refigures the mutual entanglements of nonbelievers and those who study them. For the sociologists, "entanglement" describes the things, such as genes, that researchers, scientists, and others with authority create and proliferate. Bender's notion is more grounded in discourse, affording less ontological reality to the "things" that researchers name. The two are closely related, and they both denegate the distinction between etic and emic (see Taylor 1994, 595). The sociologists flatten the distinction by viewing human subjects and things as actors in a network of nodes reconstituted by their changing attachments. Bender "nots" the distinction by demonstrating how social scientists and the subjects of their research constitute their shared discourse, though each side still depends on the distance and differences that distinguish them. The researcher needs a non-self to study, and in the case of my own work, nonbelievers rely on the authority of scholars to support the ways they use language, interpret data, and make arguments. We constitute each other in both sameness and difference.

By concerning themselves with the religion-related field, and especially by dissecting the categories "not religious" and "nonreligious" in order to revise and refine survey instruments, social scientists produce new things, or labels, which they hope will better entangle those they study. Researchers navigate a complicated web

of stated and tacit entanglements. The stated entanglements are the identities that individuals affirm, even nonreligious ones; the tacit entanglements are those that researchers identify despite what the individual affirms. From the flat perspective of the sociologists, these entanglements are all equally real and equally constructed, no matter who brought them into being. From Bender's more discursive perspective, researchers share their language with nonbelievers and bear the burden of constructing the distance and difference needed to maintain the boundary between researcher and researched.

Regardless of the ontological reality one attributes to the things that researchers produce, nonbelievers and social scientists resemble one another in their attempts to create categories that individuals will recognize as authentically representative of their inner selves (Keane 2007) and thus acceptable to affirm publicly via the media of surveys and interviews. As Day has shown (2011), this is not a simple process of matching external and internal, but a complex dialogue that occurs within networks of social relations, often among those with unequal access to power. Nonbelievers and social scientists are both engaged in a world-making poetics—a *poiēsis* (Heidegger 1977 [1954])—but they differ in their entangled constitutions because they are embedded in different projects. Nonbelievers who create new submovements like the brights or Atheism+ are experimenting with new categories that they hope will entangle more people. For them, the fact/value distinction—the "is" and the "ought"—is fully blurred because they want to mobilize those they entangle in a purpose-driven social movement (Kettell 2014). They are looking for the most effective label for accomplishing their activist ends. And though researchers are ostensibly invested in accurate description and must perform distance and difference from their objects of research, they must also borrow from the terms and labels of their informants in order to create the finely tuned categories that are more likely to capture them and their private beliefs (see Latour 1993). Bartleby is hard to talk to, but learning to speak like him is one approach to getting him to respond.

Social scientists are entangled in a vast international network of governments, universities, grant-making foundations, religious and nonreligious organizations, and other actors and institutions that both support and appropriate the research they produce. Because of the role they play, and in order to affirm their authority, they must perform an ontologically precarious distinction between facts and values, is and ought, de-scription and pre-scription (Callon 2007). Other nodes in their network make values-based decisions in order to fund and otherwise encourage certain research, and those who read that research appropriate it for a variety of normative ends. Researchers must produce knowledge that qualifies as objective according to agreed-upon standards, and they must attend to the distinction between facts and norms. Sociologists like Smith et al. (2013) and Gorski (2012), have argued in recent years that social scientists should embrace their role in constructing values rather than continue to perform the necessarily incomplete acts of separation that make them "objective." Put differently, they argue that scholars should become ignorant to these distinctions in order to affirm a new kind of sociology, as Gino attempted to remain ignorant in order to affirm another kind of humanity. This is our entangled "not."

Opacity, Transparency, and Objects

With the help of Baudrillard, I want to distinguish the opaque indifference of Bartleby and Gino from a different, more transparent sort. In an essay on "the masses" and polling (1985), Baudrillard develops two lines of argument, both of which are helpful for thinking about the problems of entanglement and articulation as they relate to the religiously indifferent. In the first, he considers the consequences of successful polling, which produce a high fidelity representation of the masses for their own consumption. By revising categories with more and more precision, researchers "overinform" the objects of their research and create a tautological circuit (580):

> Through this feedback, this incessant anticipated accounting, the social loses its own scene. It no longer enacts itself; it has no more time to enact itself; it no longer occupies a particular space, public or political; it becomes confused with its own control screen.

The pollster can observe changes in the composition of the categories, but if the categories themselves are perfectly encompassing, then the field is complete, and the masses have been reduced to "useless hyperinformation which claims to enlighten them, when all it does is clutter up the space of the representable and annul itself in a silent equivalence" (580). If the categories of the researcher and the object of research are perfectly aligned, they cannot produce anything other than the expected result. Misalignment—unexpected results—is the basic condition of novelty.

High fidelity polling in which respondents fit with researchers' expectations is only possible when the mass, as Baudrillard also calls it, is complicit. He thus describes a "de-volition" or a "secret strategy" in which the mass desists from its own will (584). This is Baudrillard's perverse inversion: by abnegating its will, the mass has unburdened itself of its transcendence, and for its "greater pleasure," it has compelled the "so-called privileged classes" toward its "secret ends" (586). Embracing passivity, it no longer needs to will itself and can conform completely. By playing along with the language game of the researcher, the object of study does not have to do the difficult, creative work of generating a self for public representation. The object of research becomes entirely knowable, never preferring not to. In the process, the object of the mass becomes invisible in plain sight: it is transparent. Because the will is normatively privileged, the mass "is violently reproached with this mark of stupidity and passivity" by the classes to which it delegates its will (586). It is not possible to know if the mass is more than it appears because it dumbly offers no more than what is expected. By being fully knowable, the mass is supposedly understood. If the researcher does not become too suspicious of its transparency, the mass can be, in a sense, ignored.

In a second, related line of argument, Baudrillard suggests that the inherent imperfectability of polls makes them objects of "derision and play" (581). They are, for the masses, a kind of spectacle or game (581), and they hold up an "ironic mirror" that reflects both their ability to influence the outcome of the poll and the poll's inability to produce an accurate simulation. Tacitly, the mass demands the production

of spectacles for its consumption. It enlists the researcher to do the work of ascertaining for it an understanding of itself, which it then merely affirms. Rather than identify and pursue its wants, the mass delegates to others who tell it what to desire. The mass does not, for instance, entertain itself, as both subject and object of the verb *to entertain*. It *is* entertained, passively, thereby tasking the researcher with its entertainment. The researcher produces an image of the mass, a study, that supposedly describes it, but which can only reproduce its own logic and assumptions. The mass enjoys the pleasure of being spectator to its supposed self through the act of polling. The campaigns encouraging people to write "Jedi Knight" as their religion in the last two UK Censuses are symptoms of this mirrored, ironic engagement (Voas 2014, 117–18). The mass appreciates these surveys for their misrecognition. In their appearance of totality and through their derisive subversion, surveys remind the mass of the ineffectuality of the state and the imperfectability of the representative powers of the media. The residual of polling is the fun part.

In Baudrillard's model, Bartleby and Gino are not objects because they are not complicit. The "object" is a kind of indifference that "disappears" (583) in a field because it aligns its will so thoroughly with the expectations of the researcher. Its legibility is so complete that it becomes transparent; it goes-along to get-along, and it camouflages itself in the process. Bartleby and Gino are different. Non-tautological, they stand in the generative space beyond the circuit, to which the researcher must always react. They stand in the opaque surplus of the researcher's categories precisely because they refuse to play along. They are living challenges, but only alive as fictions that the researcher creates in order to understand that which remains uninscribed. The lawyer-narrator cannot grasp Bartleby, so he tells us his story. The sociologists cannot know Gino, so they credit him with affirming another kind of humanity. In these acts of *de facto* refusal, Bartleby and Gino are more available than objects, but they remain inscrutable. They are ignorant, and they prefer to be ignored.

Pausing for Religious Indifference

In this essay, I have explored religious indifference as a way to delimit the religion-related field and consider the role of the researcher in its constitution. In Bartleby, Melville creates a literary character who remains unaccountable, "preferring to not" even to the point of death. With Gino, the sociologists create an ethnographic character to teach us a lesson about entanglement and articulation and explain why some informants should be left alone. Bender's notion of entanglement is somewhat different, focusing on the ways in which researchers and those they study can co-constitute discourse, assumptions, and aims. Baudrillard has helped to demonstrate the tautological circuits that complex entanglements can produce. Caught within these loops, research subjects become transparent objects who play along, unlike the refusing Bartleby and Gino.

Taken together, these opaque, *de facto* refusals and transparent acts of de-volition are the persistently inscrutable artifacts of social scientific knowledge production. They are limit cases—extremes that are unlikely to find exact correlates in practice, though any social scientist would have to acknowledge that not every subject agrees to become an object of study and thus remains illegible. The researched are more commonly something in between, sometimes affirming and fitting snugly within the researchers' categories and assumptions, and at other times struggling to translate their self-understandings into something legible for study. Religious indifference in its extreme—as the refusal to acknowledge difference—marks the limit beyond which scholarly inquiry, with its need for distinctions, cannot proceed. It also tantalizes as a source of novelty; it offers the unknown, and perhaps, the unknowable.

Forgetting for a moment that Bartleby and Gino are fictions, it can be tempting to ask what motivates their ignorance and their seemingly willful desire to ignore and to be ignored. Why must a researcher question that her informants have wills, that they have private selves, and that upon request, they could present these selves publicly for consumption as data? It can also be tempting to suggest that the challenges raised by religious indifference are surmountable and merely require new categories and rigorous methods that can inscribe more fully and create better, more accurate representations of the real. Within the assumptions that prevail among social scientists, these are the right questions to ask. And yet, what I have tried to describe is a more basic problem. Religious indifference has provided an occasion for exploring the assumptions required to produce social scientific knowledge. This production requires complicity from its objects—namely, that they should be subjects of a certain sort, who play along, but not too much. They should give us a little bit of surprise and invent something new, but still remain legible or mostly so. Silently looming over every attempt to describe are the indifferent, opaque, and often ignored.

In a lecture that Pierre Bourdieu gave at the French Association for the Sociology of Religion in Paris in December of 1982, he warned those in attendance of the need to separate themselves from that which they study: the religious field (Bourdieu 2010). "[I]t is for each sociologist to ask," he told them, "in the interest of their own research, when he speaks about religion, whether he wants to understand the struggles in which religious things are at stake, or to *take part* in these struggles" (2). Those with an interest in the religious field belong to it: "Interest," according to Bourdieu, "in its true sense, is what is important to me, what makes *differences* for me (which do not exist for an *indifferent* observer because *it is all the same* to him)" (3). A scientific sociology of religion—an objective sociology—requires indifference to religion. Further, this indifference cannot be an unstudied one; it must arise from intention, as an affected state, effecting an "epistemological break, [which] works through a social break, which itself supposes a (painful) objectivation of bonds and attachments" (6). Even severing social ties might be insufficient because "words borrowed from religious language" could provide an unconscious vehicle for religious assumptions (ibid). A scientific sociology of religion can only be produced by a sociologist who has gone through a process of self-"objectivation," severing her relationship to the religious field by assuring that it *makes no difference*.

Religious indifference is a special kind of indifference because "religion" so often stands in for "norms." Interest in it is antithetical to "objectivation."

This, too, should give us pause. If it is all the same to the observer, then why name a thing religion? We return again to this question of *the field*, qualified by an adjective or *in toto*. What makes the religious field *religious* if there is no difference, and why does the researcher want to inscribe certain things within it while leaving other things outside? The same could and should be said of the religion-related field. If indifference is really the aim of the social scientist of religion, then we ought to consider why it is that we are so concerned with interpellating subjects of research and putting them into relation with religion. What difference does it make to us? Does it really make none? The production of social scientific knowledge requires fictions: characters like Bartleby and Gino, of course, but also the fictional distinctions between private and public, emic and etic, and facts and norms.

When paired as a phrase, religious and indifference become a terse, eloquent reminder of both the transparency of entanglement and the opacity of ignorance. Objects we engage agree to become subjects for our studies so that we can make them objects once more and aggregate them in narratives that apparently have no interest in the religious or religion-related fields. Those objects who do not agree, we exclude, and they remain illegible and unknown, insignificant by definition because they have failed to signify and we have been unable to relay their signals. Outliers, inscrutable scriveners, unaccountable Bartlebys, they are not the I's that we wish them to be, so we continue on without them, as if they do not exist. Religious indifference is the ever-retreating limit beyond inquiry. As we improve our methods and entangle the indifferent in the religion-related field, they are no longer indifferent, having been brought into relation with religion and asked to recognize the differences that we also recognize (apparently despite our indifference).

Religious indifference is thus a challenge to the scholar because it asks her to reflect on her aims. If religious indifference is a threat to the expansion of the religious or religion-related fields, then the scholar must shine light on this darkness. If it is a fragile outside deserving of protection, then the scholar must ignore it and stop producing descriptions that demand its participation and account for it in an ever-widening field—no longer religious, but always standing in relation. Here we are at the heart of the thing. Religious indifference demands of us that we ask what it is we are doing, why we are doing it, and what will be different once we have done it. It is a fiction that thrusts us back upon our fictions, calls our attention to our entanglements, and delimits the boundary of our inquiries. It stands outside, daring us to pursue it or ignore it. Do we inscribe it, or do we allow it to remain indifferent? Regardless of whether we give chase, we ought to pause for a moment to wonder what we intend to do with religious indifference once we catch it. We should also worry more than a little about what might happen if it catches us.

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Embedded Indifference and Ways to Research It

Cora Schuh and Johannes Quack

Abstract This volume comprises in total eleven chapters with different geographical and historical focuses, methodical approaches, and notions of indifference. Each chapter engages with the roles and characteristics of religion in a given society and related contestations – and, accordingly, provides insights on the scope and form of religious indifference as well as related normative evaluations. This chapter addresses different understandings and applications of indifference and focuses on two main themes. It first aims to summarize the ways in which indifference is shaped by different histories of religion and secularity. It secondly discusses various notions and ways of operationalizing indifference proposed by the different contributions as well as how they relate to different methodical approaches. This will coincide with a final discussion of the limits of research on indifference in order not to end but to further stimulate debates on the observations and arguments assembled in this volume.

Keywords Indifference • Non-religion • Secular • Secularization • Normativity • Sociology of religion • Religious studies • Anthropology of religion

Indifference in Its Historical and Social Embeddedness

One main comparative frame is the different histories and constellations of religion and secularity that shape the conditions for indifference (and nonreligion in general) and allow for understanding it as a socially and historically embedded phenomenon – both in scope and meaning.

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The originality and quality of the papers, rather than regional diversity, oriented our choice for the different contributions. The different case studies nevertheless cover a variety of national and regional contexts, with particular focus on Europe – especially the UK Estonia and Germany – as well as Texas (USA) and Quebec (Canada). The references to India highlight the strong regional and conceptual preoccupations with the North-Atlantic World of such debates. Indicators for religious indifference are the numbers of non-affiliated, and as the chapter by Pierre Bréchon (2017, 147 – this volume) underscores, the numbers of religious non-affiliation differs greatly between countries. His data does not cover all countries discussed here, but it gives an impressive glimpse into the differences between on the one hand, Estonia with almost two thirds of the population non-affiliated, and on the other hand, the USA with a great majority of religiously-affiliated people; The UK and Germany rank somewhere in between, with about one third of non-affiliated. Such differences are mere indicators for diverse national and local traditions with regard to religion and secularity.

For the UK, e.g. Rebecca Catto (2017, 65 – this volume) speaks of a "simultaneously Christian, secular, and religiously plural" society. While religious people still constitute a majority, the number of religious "nones" is rising, while religion and migration-related diversity are recurrent topics of public political concern. Beyond national frames, as several chapters argue (Catto, Klug, Quack), situations differ strongly according to certain milieus and local or individual contexts.

As will be discussed later on, assuming the indifferent among the non-affiliated is only one option though. One might also think of them as among the moderate religious, or the nonreligious populations (Lee 2017, 115 – this volume). Different historical traditions in any case shape and determine the possibility, the scope and character of indifference. Each paper places a different level of emphasis on this consideration: We learn from David Nash's chapter that secularist movements influenced British secularity and thereby also constituted the base for indifference in two ways. On the one hand, their activism increased democratic rights for irreligious people and thus arguably furthered the state's indifference to religion. On the other hand, while aiming to neutralize religion, their activism at least in parts aimed at substituting religion with a substantive alternative – hopes that did not materialize as most of them envisioned (Nash 2017, 26–31 – this volume). Beyond that, Nash looks at various narratives of indifference rooted in British history and culture, and advocated by different religious and "other" actors, which saw decreased social and political importance for religious or confessional divides, and thus constitute a normative motif for secularization and, related, indifference. This is true for the Christian adiaphora debates, as well as those on multiculturalism and the secular narrative that religion would be "of the past" (Nash 2017, 37 – this volume). While the first two narratives regulate diversity, the last may eliminate any legitimate space for religion and – potentially – explicit nonreligion. At the same time, these narratives might motivate competing secular orders, accentuating or delegitimizing religion as an identity marker.

Christian and secular traditions are also central to Chris Cotter's chapter. These traditions work together to make religious artefacts to be perceived as potentially

unremarkable or obtrusive. Cotter speaks of a "liberal secularist discourse (2017, 58 – this volume)," to which all his interviewees referred and which "extols 'moderation' (or, equivocally, indifference)" but can itself be regarded as strategic and powerful rather than genuinely indifferent (XY 24f). Such a secular ideal marks a border realm, where indifference is likely to turn into more negative perceptions of religion – and thus, more pronounced forms of nonreligion – once the private/public divide is seen to be transgressed. Lois Lee as well, understands indifference not as a response to an abstract or ideal-type notion of religion, but as shaped by certain values and interests. While she presents a case of strong indifference, her overall argument is that among the populations labeled as nonreligious, people would more often be nonreligious in any substantive form than genuinely indifferent.

Also Catto's chapter touches upon religion as a collective marker and public phenomenon in (religiously) diverse settings. In reference to Grace Davie, she argues that the rising nonreligiosity in the UK contrasts a growing public interest in religion, particularly focusing on the government's emphasis of faith and interfaith as a means to stimulate social cohesion. Her empirical focus is on a local community, with a strong tradition of interfaith. The thing with interfaith is that it activates religious identities in the very act of bridging them. As a means of social integration, interfaith thereby struggles with religious indifference in the same way that it does not have anything to offer to the indifferent. While her paper partially criticizes indifference as an obstacle to social engagement and cohesion, her discussion of indifference in the social sciences also sheds light on an alternative mode of integration. Such would subordinate religious, and other "collective and comprehensive" markers to functionally differentiated and individualized relations, and focus on general tolerance and benevolence, and increasingly loose and non-communal social bonds. This resonates with the liberal secularist ideas of tolerance and individual liberties and citizenship as describes by Cotter (2017, 58 – this volume) and Nash (2017, 29 – this volume). All papers on the UK point to the different roles religion might have, or be ascribed to, in terms of national and social integration, identity, and cohesion. These themes also emerge in other chapters that focus on other parts of the world.

Regarding post-migration religious diversity in Quebec, for example, Marian Burchardt shows how indifference is problematized through debates on national identity and secularism. Until the mid-twentieth century, Quebec was one of the most religious regions of the Western world, and in comparison with larger Canada has been strongly influenced by Catholicism (Burchardt 2017, 85 – this volume). From the 1960s onward, Catholicism lost its influence on the social and the individual level which was associated with emancipation and liberty. In the context of new religious and ethnic diversity, the character of the nation is re-negotiated as both, secularist and culturally Catholic. Indifference is construed as a problem from the perspective of secular activism and cultural-religious visions of the nation. Secular activists assume that religion not only fades but leaves an identitarian gap that needs to be filled with "substantive" nonreligious identities–to take up Lee's terminology–in order to not be re-Christianized. The indifferent thus appear as weak defenders of secularity and its associated liberties (Burchardt 2017, 94–95 – this volume).

Atko Remmel's chapter shows that distance to religion and indifference is intimately tied to Estonian national identity. This distance to religion predates Soviet rule and is rooted in the distance towards the Baltic-German Lutheran church establishment. Like religion, also Soviet atheism did not gain dominance, and thus indifference became a prominent label for people asserting neutrality vis-à-vis competing claims. At the center of Remmel's paper is not the management of diversity, but the Soviet concern for the Communist project and the loyalty of Estonian people, with the promotion of atheism as a crucial element in that. The self-identification of the state as atheist and its competition with religious organizations renders indifference in an ambivalent position. On the one hand, it is positively seen as distance to the churches, while on the other, it shows a limited identification with atheism, and is thus considered instable and vulnerable to renewed Christianization. Again, this speaks to the papers of Nash, and Burchardt.

While the introduction distinguishes between *religious indifference* and *indifference to religion*, all papers show that these two might be interrelated in complex ways. As Burchardt (2017, 86 – this volume) argues, (personal) indifference to religious institutions and practices does not give an automatic answer to the role religion should have in society. Religious indifference might well be based on an implicit secular ideal, regarding the differentiation of state and church and the non-interference with the "personal" religious and worldview choices of one's consociates, something which renders it not really indifferent to religion. In the sense that indifference comes with latent normative notions of secularity, transgressions of such a normal and normative order might also lead to non-indifferent responses – as many of the contributions in the volume illustrate. Notions and evaluations of (different forms of) religion, including what they are indifferent to, might also be informed by people's overall values (see e.g. Bréchon, Burchardt, Cotter). On the other hand, though, as a stance which leaves the space of religiosity "unfilled", indifference might also be swayed by new forms of religiosity potentially with unforeseen notions regarding the social role of religion.

As already indicated, religious, secular, and nonreligious traditions might not only be linked with notions of the nation, but also function to label populations and inform subtler social relations and hierarchies. To the degree that religion is not a separable social phenomenon indifference to religious-symbolic orders becomes difficult. This is addressed in Johannes Quack's chapter, which focuses on Germany as well as India. Based on a case study of a man from a higher income, but low cast Hindu family, he discusses the scope for indifference members of such milieu have. While certain economic and cultural capital might allow a relative indifference to matters of caste, the embeddedness and pervasiveness of "religion", not only in everyday practices, but also in personally important social relations, renders indifference complicated. Quack contrasts this with a case study on a young German academic and suggests that her comprehensive attitude of disinterest might depend on a lack of confrontation in the context of more general social indifference towards religion. In this case, similar to Estonia and in contrast to India, indifference (in the sense of a distance to religion) is hardly "remarkable".

Turning to the US, common themes are both its strong secular tradition as well as the fact that non-affiliated populations still constitute a minority compared with the large majority of Christians. Having said this, Petra Klug (2017, 224 – this volume) argues that even while her research is located in Texas, small scale settings and people's "personal environment and experience" were more important than this general context. Klug presents different case studies of people who had a rather indifferent stance towards belief, and a somewhat unpassionate, yet tolerant view on people's religious affiliation. Based on this, indifference appears as the strong value of granting individuals the space and room to choose for themselves. In her account, indifference shifts into more negative views on religion whenever this expectation on mutual tolerance is infringed. In line with the relational approach to nonreligion discussed in the introduction (Quack and Schuh 2017, 11–16 – this volume), Klug shows how religion affects the lives of the nonreligious and argues that the way religious people treat the nonreligious is a core reason that leads people to switch from indifference into more negative stances on religion.

Looking back at the analysis so far, the chapters have addressed different ways in which religion can be institutionalized in the nation or other socio-political communities. Three models can be distinguished, each with different consequences for the place of the indifferent as well as the normative evaluations of indifference: religious or secularist definitions of the nation, religious or worldview pluralism, and individual citizenship. Interfaith, as Catto shows, is basically pluralist, and is based on diverse (but naturally limited) collective religious and worldview identities as markers for social identification and a starting point for integration. From the perspective of individualized citizenship, religious pluralism might be cast of as mere apologetics of established institutions, while religious indifference might be rendered normal. From the perspective of a pluralist model of integration, individualism, and indifference constitute a problem for integration, while at the same time the indifferent are not represented. Furthermore, while pluralism implies a notion of segregated equality, religious markers might also inform notions of institutionalized inequality, as illustrated by the case of India. This as well, conflicts with notions of individualism. Both, pluralism as well as individualism contrast with religious and nonreligious definitions of the nation as illustrated in the chapters by Burchardt and Remmel. At the same time, as Burchardt (2017, 96 – this volume) shows, a secular definition of the nation might also be seen as the necessary precondition for the integration of all, regardless of whether they are nonreligious or affiliated with minority religions. From the perspective of a religious notion of the nation, indifference is problematic. From the notion of atheist ambitions, indifference might constitute a welcomed distance to religion; it is, however, insecure and contestable victory. Cultural values and memories, including narratives of the nation, of suffering and victories are thus central to shaping notions of religion and secularity – and indifference. As the chapters by Cotter, Klug, and Quack show the role of religion is not only a matter of vertical relations between citizens and states, but is carried out in and through other social relations. Different models of state organization might correlate with different norms of social interaction and discretion.

With regard to the link between indifference, cohesion, and participation, several papers might be sharpened to the somewhat tautological conclusion that only in a context where religion is societally unimportant (adiaphora) religious indifference is possible without a more widespread disengagement from society. This is true in terms of religion as a resource, an objectified social category, or a contested claim-maker in the public political realm. In any case, the indifferent – if they do no assert their indifference or the secularity of the state – inhabit a difficult position, finding themselves at the margins of cultural communities or potentially deprived of recognition and influence. Different authors make different emphases in that regard. While Catto (2017, 79 – this volume) problematizes indifference on the backdrop of an idea interfaith-based social cohesion, Burchardt (2017, 84 – this volume) frames the impossibility to represent the indifferent as a problem for common notions of democracy, freedom of religion, and equality. Who may speak in representation of the indifferent in social debates about the role of religion in society? Remmel shows, how indifference, while to some extent associated with the nation, at the individual level correlates with lower levels of education. Again, the co-dependence of indifference *to* religion and indifference *of* religion holds true not only on the national or macro-societal level, but also that of inter-personal relations, bonds, and affections. Here as well, various levels of tolerated and manageable differences and indifferences might be at stake.

The quantitative chapters by Pascal Siegers and Pierre Bréchon by nature of their methodical approach include data from different national contexts and address indifference against the background of different contextual factors. Siegers focuses on religious upbringing as well as certain incidents in people's life courses which might motivate those who have generally kept a distance from the religious field to situationally turn to religion. His paper shows that it is people´s upbringing that effects people's turn to religion. Beyond that, both Siegers and Bréchon discuss general value patterns and attitudes correlating with religious affiliation respective the individual's distance to the religious field: Siegers tests a positive notion of religion and churches as part of a more general conservative set of values; Bréchon emphasizes the correlation between religious non-affiliation and individualist and liberal values. Both chapters resonate with those contributed by Burchardt, Cotter, and Nash in addressing the correlation between liberal frames on life and society with religious indifference. Bréchon's contribution further verifies to some extent the fears of secularist or atheist activists regarding the fragility of indifference by showing how in some post-socialist countries religious affiliation rose again after the regime change.

How Is Indifference Conceptualized and Researched?

Several papers hint at the apparent inconsistency, fluidity, vagueness and the blurring boundaries of indifference. At least in parts such fuzziness seems to be the result of expectations based on an orthodox notion of religiosity. In the introduction,

we suggest that a distinction should be made between pragmatic modes of religiosity for which orthodox and theological coherence is not very relevant (*relative indifference*) as opposed to its narrower use for those populations who are not interested in religious matters at all (*absolute indifference*). As is the case for the other differentiations described in the introduction and the individual chapters, questions of methods and operationalization are central here.

In general, the volume comprises a variety of methodical approaches. Siegers and Bréchon's chapters are both based on quantitative data and underscore how diverging operationalization of indifference account for indifferent populations, differing in scope and characteristics. The great majority of chapters are based on qualitative research. They display a variety of different interview techniques ranging from semi-structured and biographical interviews, to more experimental techniques; as well as ethnographic methods of observation. The different ways of approaching the people in such settings also has potentially large impact on the way in which indifference is assessed. Joseph Blankholm's contribution is an exception to the dominant focus on empirical case studies. He uses a fictional and an ethnographic character for a meta-discussion on research on indifference. Further and interrelated, chapters differ in their operationalization of indifference.

Starting with or Prompting Religion

Approaching religious indifference by means of empirical research is difficult, not the least because it can lead to the dilemmas explicated by Blankholm, Cotter, Lee and Quack: How can a meaningful sample be identified? How can a researcher assess people as indifferent after making them talk about religion? What are the shortcomings of methodologies that do not prompt discussion of religious issues? These particular dilemmas result from defining indifference as a lack of genuine engagement for religion-related matters.

If by contrast, indifference is defined as the (passive) rejection of specific offers of the religious field (such as beliefs, practices, institutional affiliations) it might be more easily detectable. This shows from the contributions of Bréchon and Siegers and to some degree Lee. The quantitative data they discuss, at least for certain parameters, indicates a relatively stable indifference to the religious field. But, while to some degree the data allows distinguishing explicit atheists from other nonreligious people, the distinction between on the one hand atheists and other convinced nonreligious, and on the other hand, the indifferent is difficult (Bréchon 2017, 157 – this volume). Further, while a (relative) distance to religion can be detected, as soon as one takes different parameters together, the picture becomes blurry, and absolute indifference seems hardly an empirical phenomenon (Bréchon 2017, 157 – this volume). Siegers (2017, 172 – this volume) as well, focuses on people who in many ways display indifference to religion while at the same time embrace other forms of religion such as religious rites of passage, something he understands as a form of "vicarious religion." His operationalization of indifference

is noteworthy as he excludes all those who explicitly state that they do not believe in God. While this generally resonates with the distinction of indifference and anti-religious positions, this operationalization still rules out those who, when push comes to shove, negate the existence of God, while they might otherwise not identify with atheism. Their nonbelief might be as non-assertive as their rejection of any church affiliation. This group (which one might also label indifferent, not atheist) might be less inclined to participate in religious rituals. A potentially similar reason leads Bréchon (2017, 157 – this volume) to conclude that those labeled "atheist" have lower scores for religious engagement compared to the non-affiliated or self-declared non-religious.

Qualitative methods also "bring religion in," and potentially turn indifference into at least moderate engagement. Lee, for example, conducted semi-structured interviews that started by asking interviewees about their religious or nonreligious self-classification, followed by a discussion of their answers. She found that her interviewees generally opened out into broader discussion of self-classifications as well as into wider discussion of issues related to religion. Her strong prompt with respect to the topic "religion" which might make religious indifference–or at least, indifference to religion–a less likely category. The interviews conducted by Quack, in contrast, started with a more general and biographical stimulus, which allows people to talk about their lives without mentioning religion. The genre of biographical narratives, however, tends to decrease reference to certain aspects of religion, since it usually does not include accounts of daily routines, every-day religiosity, beliefs, or attitudes. For this reason, Quack also conducted participant observations capable of relativizing the indifference of life stories. Other authors have addressed these and other methodological questions in researching indifference. Both, Cotter and Remmel asked people to talk about selected pictures or words. Their research captures when people perceive things as more or less religious, and what they associate it with. A variety of open and explorative methods, as Cotter argues, helps to analyze different discourses about and different levels of engagement with religion.

Indifference as a State or an Underlying Attitude of Going Along

Taking up the paradox of asserted indifference opens a path for an alternative notion of indifference. While we might think of indifference as a passive rejection of religion, it can also be seen as a way of passively going along with religion. In that sense, indifference will not necessarily be expressed by a distance to religion, but potentially just by a relative acceptance of it, informed by an underlying attitude of indifference. Klug, Lee and Quack have paid attention to the various ways in which people express disinterest during an interview. Quack (2017, 211 – this volume) highlights that regardless of the content of their answers, the indifferent spirit behind answering – the underlying attitude of disinterest (sometimes bordering at

ignorance) – can also be seen as manifestations of indifference. In that view, the indifferent are those who answer questions related to religion by shrugging their shoulders and choose the path of least possible engagement. Lee (2017, 116 – this volume) argues in this respect that indifference does not simply indicate an absence of engagement, but is rather an absence of "meaningful engagement" with it. If the indifferent are characterized by an attitude of going along, as also Lee (2017, 116 – this volume) argues, people indifferent to nominal labels will go with what is suggested to them. In that sense, people might self-declare as religious, if they consider it a historically-normal label, without giving much importance to it. People who hold more explicit nonreligious views by contrast might assert their indifference to (or the indifference of) religion.

This aspect of indifference arguably is difficult to address in quantitative work, as the spirit in which people fill in surveys is not directly reflected in the outcomes (compare the respective discussion of Blankholm 2017, 244–245 – this volume). Bréchon (2017,162 – this volume) has at several points tested whether those ticking "undecided" boxes in a survey could be labeled as indifferent. He argues that this is not the case, as such individuals still score high on religious beliefs and practices. If we follow Lee's (2017, 110, 115 – this volume) reasoning, it is possible to find the indifferent among the nominally religious, as well as among those classified with nonreligious labels while asserting distance to religion (potentially by feigning indifference) might rather be indicative of more explicit nonreligious views. She suggests that people labeled as or claiming to be indifferent would often be more substantially nonreligious than both surveys as well as people themselves suggest, and that religion or religiosity plays rather limited role in contemporary societies.

Situational Aspects of Indifference

While fuzziness refers to the incongruent rejection of different aspects of religion by the apparently indifferent, it might also have a situational aspect in response to situational confrontations with religion, as already indicated above. Cotter (2017, 59 – this volume) argues against labeling people as genuinely indifferent. He proposes instead that we see them as possibly engaged in multiple non-identical discourses on religion, rendering moments of indifference more context-based and situational. Nash (2017, 41 – this volume) suggests that indifference constitutes snapshot moment, a "pause" between the adaption of religious or secular narratives. Given the existence of narratives of indifference, though, he also argues that such pause might be of unpredictable duration. Additionally, Quack's (2017, 211–212 – this volume) contribution explores how indifference might give way to more direct relations to religion. On the basis of his two case studies from India and Germany, he outlines why both may feature dispositions towards either more pronounced modes of nonreligion or towards increased religiosity, depending on the relative closeness of the religious field. Again, this resonates with Klug's findings on how people indifferent to religion might adapt a more hostile position when confronted

with more "pushy" forms of religion. This begs the question, however, how – when it is drawn into a proselytizing discourse – indifference could be asserted other than by giving it up.

Another example in that line of thinking is Lee's (2017, 113 – this volume) observation that people felt more relaxed participating in rituals of foreign religious traditions when compared to those of their *own* religion as it was only in foreign rituals that people felt they could have a clear role as observer. Here, the sole potential of being counted in creates a situation similar to that faced by the early Protestants in the so called adiaphora struggles, when things were at the same time enforced on them and declared indifferent (Quack and Schuh 2017, 4 – this volume). The potential religious turn of the indifferent, as mentioned in relation to the Burchardt's and Remmel's chapters, is what makes it suspect to secularist and nonreligious activists. On the other hand, a position of genuine indifference might have to be given up in situational opposition to lures and claims of the religious (or nonreligious). This raises the question, when a situational positioning leads into a more stable stance. If situations add upon each other, where is the turning point where explicit nonreligious (or religious) positions stop being a situational response and take over?

Indifferences Between and Beyond Religion

To speak of indifference means to adapt a perspective of expected and disappointed relevance. The indifferent are by definition at the margin of something, determined more by a negativity than something substantive. One can be indifferent to many things; promoters of many causes will always be confronted with varying degrees of indifference. Indifference to religion has respectively found central concern in religious apologetics as well as studies on secularization. This volume, and the conference that preceded it, chose a somewhat paradoxical approach of framing indifference as a phenomenon indirectly related to religion. As the introduction to this volume explains, this was done in reference to a "relational approach on nonreligion" and the concept of a "religion-related field". While on the one hand indifference is beyond direct relations with the religious field, the idea was to emphasize the competing religious and nonreligious claims made on the indifferent that render the lack of direct relations remarkable. Such competing claims on the indifferent are a common theme in this volume.

Against this backdrop and in line with the relational approach to nonreligion this enforces the question of the role of the researcher or theorists in construing categories and thus potentially being the one to draw indifference in relation to religion. Scholars themselves can have different ideas on indifference. While in parts they seem to purport triumphant accounts of secularization, others show concern about social cohesion and disintegration in relation with indifference. Both Burchardt's and Remmel's chapters are most insightful with regard to academic-political entanglements. Burchardt (2017, 87, 94 – this volume) shows how prominent scholars in the field are also valued as experts on necessary changes of secularism, which brings them in the center of public-political debate. On the other hand, he shows how

scientific products – such as statistics – constitute an essential part of secular activism. In a similar line, Remmel (2017, 126 – this volume) engages with the entanglements of sociological research in religion, atheism, and indifference with Soviet anti-religious politics. Here, the discovery of widespread indifference and thus the partial failure of promoting atheism even led to the devaluation of sociological research altogether.

Some of the participants and several of the chapters in this volume raise concern about scholarly methods and approaches that might contribute to entangling the indifferent and luring them into more substantive positions, if not simply conceptually wiping out indifference. In that context, the suggested relational approach to nonreligion as well as other approaches that bring indifference in line with forms of nonreligion found critical interlocutors. Particularly the contributions by Blankholm and Cotter reflect about the limits of a field-approach to indifference. They argue that given that indifference also includes a distance from nonreligion, and that indifferent actors would in parts regard also nonreligious organizations as "too 'religious'" (Blankholm 2017, 240 – this volume), it should not be seen as part of a religion-related field (Cotter 2017, 48–49; Blankholm 2017, 243 – both this volume).

While Cotter's criticism leads him to suggest a discursive approach to indifference, Blankholm places the meta-scientific debate central to his argument, locating the researchers in the same analytical frame as their objects of inquiry. Accordingly, the researchers and the religious and the secular activists easily end up in a similar position as all offer labels and identities the indifferent might be willing to subscribe to. Even if primary motives differ, all three tend to entangle the indifferent in discourses and fields of positions, which were not theirs by default and in which they would prefer not to engage with.

The revised introduction to this volume took the critical remarks by all contributors into account. But to some extent they might as well prevail. For some scholars the role of indifference would be to demarcate both a religious as well as a religion-related field. The relational approach (as discussed in the introduction) contends that claims on the indifferent constitute indirect relations with the religious field. As rightly noted by Blankholm and Cotter among others, the moment the indifferent are drawn in, and an indirect relation is turned into a (however situational) more direct relation, it is no longer feasible to speak of indifference. These and other questions necessitate further reflections on methods and on the contested and normative character of the very label. We are confident that the papers in this volume all manifest valuable contributions to such a cause, and we hope that this work might inspire further research.

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