Managing Tension Navigating Conflict

Exploring possibilities and limitations of religious beliefs and practices in the everyday life experiences among high school students in Oslo

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Abstract

This thesis explores the topic of *religious limitations and possibilities* in the context of high school students in Oslo. Its main hypothesis is that religious youth hide and control faith information as actors in their everyday-life in the school.

The research question asks *how* and *why* students in this area of society express or repress their religious beliefs. This paper aims to answer this and further explore common markers of religiosity in addition to examining the effects of students concealing their faith.

It is a democratic problem if particular groups in society self-censors to avoid stigma or criticism and therefor in the best interest of our common 'disagreement community' that all views, also in terms of religious diversity, are given a seat at the table.

The qualitative empirical data is gathered through twelve semi-structured interviews with Muslims, Christians and Non-believers from five different high schools in greater Oslo. The methodological approach emphasise both the *phenomena* of how each respondent *experiences* and observes religion and the *discursive* perspectives on what and how they talk about religion.

The main findings, is synthesised in the larger hypothesis of religion being viewed through a lens of *conflict*. This relates to ideas of the *dominant secular discourse* and Christians being subject to what is coined *harsher self-criticism*. The direct effects of the 'conflict narrative' are religious privatisation and believers hiding their belief to avoid stigma. While non-whiteness functions as an immediate religious identifier and hence discredits the actor, whiteness it is argued, conceals religious identity and leaves the religious white only *potentially discredited*. This paper generally supports the theories in Faith information Control, however critiques parts of it and offers an alternative hypothesis suggesting that white silence does not merely hide faith but signifies a secular non-religious position.

Acknowledgements

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Introduction

1.0   Topic

> *I never try to show what religion I have, you know,*
> *just trying to be a normal fellow-student.*

The question which surfaces in the wake of this quote from Ishmael, a Muslim student is this:

Are religious high schoolers an abnormality in todays society?

Norway is arguably a largely secular, some would suggest post-Christian society, yet still with religious inclinations which one is encouraged to keep to oneself. A large majority of Norwegians assumes strongly religious people are intolerant towards others, does not want religious leaders influencing public decision and they support the claim that «religion causes more conflict than peace.» (Botvar and Schmidt, 2010, pp89-90) Simultaneously a majority, although in decline, of the population are members of the Norwegian Lutheran Church. (2017) How does this seemingly paradox effect religiosity in the public sphere and more specifically in the everyday life of a student?

Religion gives meaning and is a valuable resource for a lot of people in the world but it is also a source for conflict and enmity. To some extent this statement gives as much sense as saying that «politics is a resource and a source for conflict», but according to data, the claim that religion is a source for conflict is something the public to large extent agrees with and which certainly adds more negative connotations to religion than to politics. As our society increases in diversity, which place should the somewhat intangible concept of religion have?

A large portion of Norwegians adheres to the idea that religion should be confined to the private realm, a somewhat peculiar push when considering a culture which prides itself in the values of toleration, openness and liberalism. The notion of religious neutrality at its best can promote religious equality and expose government favouritism toward certain religious institutions and practices and deconstruct the hegemony of the once state-bounded Lutheran church. However, at its worst it can be a sugar-coated phrase that conceals bias and discrimination towards religious groups and individuals and ushers these groups further down the «spirals of silence».

(Noelle-Neumann, 1993)

As our society wrestles with certain religious expressions and tries to come to terms with *which* place and *how much* space this very broad concept should be given, it could give valuable insights to explore how the concept of religion is experienced for the religious practitioner. The particular perspectives of young peoples religiosity, which have been less subject to research, could propose a trajectory for the future of religion in our society.

1.1 Research problem

I have formulated my research problem in the following way:

«Exploring possibilities and limitations of religious beliefs and practices in the everyday life experiences among high school students in Oslo.»

In this paper I set out to examine the specific *limitations* and *possibilities* which high school students face when considering to manage information about their faith in their day to day school experience. My hypothesis is that many students keep their religious beliefs to themselves thus I am interested in answering questions of *how* and *why* students in this area of society express or conceal their religious beliefs, the dependent variables here being *expressed* or *not expressed* religious practices and statements.

Hence, my overarching research questions are:

1. Why and how do religious high school students hide their faith?
2. What does religiosity look like for high school students in Oslo?
3. How do the limitations and possibilities effect their religiosity or non-religiosity and their interactions with fellow students?

1.2. Methodological approach

My approach to answer these questions is through qualitative in-depth interviews of students who would fall into the somewhat broad category of *non-believers* as well as *Christians and Muslims,* furthermore comparing and discussing this data with existing material and theories relevant to the subject. In chapter two I go through some of the main theories relating to my research questions

such as *secularisation theories* and *Faith Information Control,* the latter on which I further explore and develop as my own hypothesis of White Silence Signifies Secular which finds basis in the data. I use existing data to give a wider sense of the broader and the particular context my research is set in, both looking at Norwegian religiosity and secularisation and how this it relates to youth in general and youth in Oslo.

In the method section I elaborate on the research design and explain how the sampling was done, how I conducted the interviews, how coding and analysis was done, ethical considerations, my bias and potential weaknesses.

I also give a short 'personal portrait' to introduce my respondents before entering into the analysis of the material.

In the data analysis I have categorised my main findings in two parts, the first concerning how religion is seen through a *lens of conflict*, the second explores the *effects* of this and how they *manage* and *navigate* religious tensions and conflict.

As I am interested in both the *personal experience (phenomena)* of the respondents faith and how they *talk* and *frame discussion* (discourse) on religion, I allow relatively much space to let the data speak. I show how I interpret their experiences and relate interpretations to existing theories and data.

I conclude the analysis by offering five 'ideal-types' of students in relation to conflict and how they navigate and manage religiosity in the everyday life in their school-context.

I finish pulling together the common threads of the thesis in the final conclusions and look briefly ahead, how my findings and hypotheses should be explored further both by academics and by others interested in a diverse society gaining deeper understanding and respect of religious diversity and interaction.

Theory

2.0   Introduction

The first part of this chapter explores different sociological perspectives and definitions on the concept of religion.

Then I look at secularisation theories and in the third I part explore different narratives of Norwegian religiosity and how it has evolved in recent history. Furthermore I look briefly at the particular field of education and religion and then continue with giving an overview of the religiosity of Norwegian youth.

In part five I explore Faith Information Control, on managing and revealing and hiding religiosity, my own further development of this theory and then the relations to *stigma, identity and majority misunderstandings.*

I also describe discourse theory which I apply as an analytical tool in this thesis and explore how certain dominant discourses frame the way youth talk about religion in the school-context.

In the final part I look briefly at the ideas of the Public Sphere and of Disagreement Community and how this relates to the school context, while I end with exploring theories like religious bridging and contact theory which I mainly emphasise as a fruitful way ahead, a route to diminish prejudice against the 'other' and overcome religious bias.

2.1   Defining Religion: A never-ending discussion?

The question of what religion is has intrigued and intoxicated, exhausted and exasperated both theorists, laymen and high school students in Oslo for ages. Is religion man-made or is religion the cause of everything, including man? The latter are questions for theologians and philosophers, while here I will explore some of the different sociological perspectives on religion and further explain how I relate to these definitions in this thesis.

Early sociological perspectives

The early fathers of sociology explore and discuss the topic at length but from various angles. Marx looks at religion in a class-perspective and sees it as a bourgeoise tool to control the proletariat. His infamous quote: «Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and

the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people» (Ryan and Switzer, 2009, p360) argues that religion overshadows the real problems of the material conditions that people endure, religion he argues is a result of a society that neglects and dehumanises its people. He does however acknowledge the honest but failed attempt of religion trying to right the wrongs of society and does not make religion itself his enemy, but sees it rather as a useful tool in the class struggle. His argument does not clearly define or specify the religion in question.

(Croucher, Zeng, Rahmani, Sommier, 2017, pp3-7)

Durkheim sees religion as a central aspect in human life and something which binds society together. He argues that religion, together with law and morality, ensures the equilibrium of society. He is interested in the function of religion and makes the distinction between the sacred and profane and how these concepts interact. (Durkheim, 2001, pp27)

Weber unlike Durkheim wants to explore the role of religion in social change, in politics, economy, and society in general. His classical work The Spirit of Capitalism and the Protestant Work Ethic explores how protestantism and capitalism worked in tandem (not necessarily in a causal relationship as many interpreted him) and propelled the modernisation of Europe, especially the northern nations in the lead over the southern Catholic societies. (Weber, 2005, pp1)

He relates religion with magic and proposes the concept of «disenchantment» an idea adopted by secularisation theorists, arguing that as society becomes increasingly modern, «enchanted» concepts like religion will become superfluous as society proposes rational alternatives. (Weber, 1993, pp1)

Weber is uninterested in religion's function like Durkheim and neither gives any clear definition of it but rather proposes that a definition is perhaps impossible and says that the essence of religion is of no concern for him. (Weber, 1993, pp1)

Beyer argues that sociologists when debating and defining religion often have centred the argument around differences between *substantive* (essential) and *functional* definitions. Whereas substantive definitions attempts to delimit what religion *is*, and focuses on transcendence, functional definitions explore what religion *does*, avoiding references to transcendence, rather emphasising the socio-psychological purposes it serves.

(Beyer, 2006, pp4-5)

Geertz and Assad

Clifford Geertz sees religion as deeply cultural and a process of making meaning in the world particularly through symbols, not a «glue» like for Durkheim and not about dealing with material conditions like Marx or Weber. He is interested in the details (coined 'thick description') of religious life and especially its symbolism and offers his rather specific definition of religion as something «that establish powerful moods and motivations, formulating conceptions of general order and existence, clothing these conceptions with factuality which makes the moods and motivations realistic» (Geertz, 1973, pp87)

Talal Assad critiques this view arguing it has an interior emphasis, noting the use of nouns such as *symbols, moods, motivations, conceptions,* expressions according to Assad that fits well with protestant religion, whereas this definition excludes for instance Islam and Catholicism which are less oriented towards inner belief but rather emphasises practices. Furthermore he criticises Geertz for not addressing power structures in society underneath religion. (Lincoln, 2003, p1)

Assad's further critique of Geertz is also a general argument against defining religion, explaining that the notion that religion is delimited and hence definable is a view that in itself is anchored in a cultural context and not unrestrained from historical and discursive encumbered. Assad´s conclusion is therefore «there cannot be a universal definition of religion». (Lincoln, 2003, p2)

Lincoln agrees with Assad´s point that a definition always will be a product of historical and discursive processes, while he criticises his absolute negation of any universal definition and juxtaposes this with 'language' being set in history caused by discursive processes without efforts at definitions being dismissed. (Lincoln, 2003, pp2-3)

A flexible definition

Lincoln argues that a legitimate definition must be *flexible* and *polythetic*, that is allowing for many categories, and offers his own definition constituting of (he says at a minimum) these four domains:

> *1) A discourse whose concerns transcend the human, temporal and contingent, and that claims for itself a similarly transcendent status.*

> *2) A set of practices whose goal is to produce a proper world and/or proper human subjects, as defined by a religious discourse to which these practices are connected.*

3) A community whose members construct their identity with reference to a religious discourse and its attendant practices.

4) An institution that regulates religious discourse, practices and community, reproducing them over time and modifying them as necessary, while asserting their eternal validity and transcendent value.
(Lincoln, 2003, pp5-7)

He argues that all these can occur in different degrees and interrelate variously but that all are necessary parts of anything properly labelled religion. It allows for simplification and ideal-types such as *discourse* being a hallmark of Protestantism contrasted with *practices* as emphasised in Catholicism or Islam, but he notes that characterisations such as these are misleading.
One interesting differentiation Lincoln makes is what he calls the ideal-types of the Maximalist and Minimalist perspective on religion. The first describes religion being the lens through which you view the world and everything, while the minimalist perspective brings the market and the economy in this meta-position whereas religion is but one of many different spheres and areas of life and the world.
(Lincoln, 2003, p59)

Function system

As a contrast to the etymological origin of the word religion which stems from the latin *religare*, meaning to 'bind together' is to view religion through the concept of a 'function system'. Niklas Luhman's idea which can somewhat be related to the *maximalist perspective* he explains that observing religion in global society through differentiated more or less closed systems based on functionality is better suited to study the topic at hand. He argues further that looking at religion and comparing it to the systems of «states, education, and law especially, has important effects on the religious system and correspondingly what we count as religion.» (Beyer, 2006, pp5-6) Luhman's idea draws from both Durkheim and Weber as they albeit with different outcomes had a *functionalist* approach to understanding religion; they wanted to answer the question of what religion does (functional), not what religion is (substantive). (Beyer, 2006, p4) The critique of this perspective is that it may leave out elements of religion and spirituality which does not seem to have an immediate measurable effect or a specific function.

Beyer applies Luhman's concept of function system and compares then religion to other function systems. He asks questions of how powerful religion is as a system and how much this system influences other systems (Beyer, 2006, p98) This relates to the struggle between the different discourses on religion which I will address later on in this chapter.

Concluding remarks

In conclusion, all of these definitions give different and meaningful perspectives to explain religion as a social phenomenon, as any one definition seems to me lacking and prone to miss important information in the data. However I find Lincoln's definition using the four domains the one that produces a flexible and a multifaceted understanding of religion, adequate both for traditions emphasising practices and for those more concerned with beliefs, which is lacking in Geertz' version. In this thesis I also apply functionalist perspectives related to Luhman's idea of function system to explore the actual consequences of religiosity and its limits and possibilities in the high school context.

My respondents on the other hand, are quite unconcerned with defining religion, they seem to take it as a given, however in my analysis I show how they sub-consciously apply different understandings of the concept both when they speak about theirs and others faiths or world-views. Their views seem mostly aligned with a substantive perspective on religion although they do not articulate this.

In my data I have chosen the religious variables of Christian, Muslim and Non-believer (none) and when interacting with respondents in these various variables, I will use expressions inter-changeably such as *religion, faith, worldview, life-stance* and *belief,* both in the interviews and in the analysis, despite the fact that they each convey different angles to examine the broad landscape of religiosity or the lack of it. This is done purposefully to make the interviews as open as possible to avoid locking the interviewee in one particular set of understanding the topic.

2.2   Secularisation theories

Secularisation Thesis

To explore the topic of public religion and more specifically the limitations and possibilities of religious life and practice in the everyday life of high school students one can hardly avoid starting to look into secularisation theories and how the topic relates to the Norwegian context.

What we call the 'Secularisation Thesis' was a broadly held idea by may academics arguing, in simple terms, that the process of modernisation inevitably would lead to the loss of religion and a society no longer in need of this. The early sociologists like Weber, Marx and Durkheim argued this from somewhat different angles. Whereas Weber assumed that the increased rationality would 'disenchant' people of their religious ideas, Durkheim argued that there would be a corrosion of the sense of collectivity which religious communities gave as societies became urbanised and individualised with less need for gatherings around the 'sacred' in their everyday lives, while Marx on the other hand thought that when the communist society would be fully realised, the masses would no longer crave religious diversions for their sufferings.

The next wave of secularisation theories emerged in the post-war era and was at its paramount in the 60s and 70s with mainly European scholars propagating and developing different versions of the main idea. For instance Karl Doebbelaere argues that secularisation must be differentiated on a societal, organisational and individual level, called, *macro, meso and micro-level*, hence secularisation processes may vary in degree and when they occur in the different spheres. (Furseth, 2003, pp94-122)

However in the 90s we see a shift among many scholars, interestingly mainly voices from America, like Peter Berger and José Casanova (European who moved to America) who argues that the secularisation thesis does not give a satisfactory explanation for the changes and complexity of religion that we are witnessing in the emerging world. Consider Berger, an earlier secularisation apologists recanting his former views saying:

> The world today, with some exceptions […] is as furiously religious as it ever was,
> and in some places more so than ever. This means that a whole body of literature
> […] is essentially mistaken.
> (Norris and Inglehart, 2004, p1)

Rodney Stark claims that the secularisation myth, as he puts it, exaggerates the past religiousness when data over the loss of faith in Europe is presented as evidence for the generalisability of the theory. (Norris and Inglehart, 2004, pp2) Secularisation in this absolute sense seems all but to have been abandoned, or certainly modified to fit with the reality of an increasingly religious population in the world, where perhaps Europe and Scandinavia in particular, could be argued is the exception rather then the rule. Secularisation, Norris and Inglehart argues, should be regarded as «a tendency rather than an iron law».

(Norris and Inglehart, 2004, pp2)

Differentiation

Casanova further argues for the need to distinguish between different kinds of secularisation and suggests primarily that it is a process of differentiation, where religion is secreted from sectors and institutions of society like, politics, media, art, education, and so on. Secondly it is a privatisation process where religion is ushered out of the public sphere and into the seclusion of the individual´s private space. Thirdly it is regarded as a process of loss, whereas religion also loses ground at the individual level both in faith and practice. Casanovas first level would still be supported by many scholars and referred to as a so-called 'weak secularisation', while the following two would fall under 'strong secularisation' (aligned with the secularisation thesis) which would be heavily disputed by a majority of scholars today. (Botvar and Schmidt, 2010, pp95-110)

The comeback of religion

Robert Bellah as early as in the beginning of the 70s proposed the comeback of religion in society and claimed in a Durkheimian tradition that all societies need some kind of 'glue' or civic religion for it to be kept together and survive. (Furseth, 2015, p15)

Hammond in the mid-eighties asked if the secularisation thesis was still viable in an age witnessing Islamic revolution, rise of New Age movements, the entering of conservative Christians into politics. Habermas having previously developed Weber´s idea of differentiation into proposing that secularisation involves the regress of religion and its privatisation, have in later works since the 2000s altered some of his views on this. In 2006 he introduced the phrase post-secular to explain how religion maintains and even increases its public influence and relevance.
(Furseth, 2015, pp14-17)

Steve Bruce disagrees with Bellah, Hammond and Habermas and still holds a quite strong view on secularisation. His argument relies on extensive data on church decline in the UK. Critics argue that although there is statistical decline, the religiosity takes new forms and shapes such as privatised faith and New Age-religion, to which Bruce responds that private faith is difficult to measure whilst New Age he doesn't consider religion in the traditional sense. Here we see an example on how definition of terms has a huge influence on your theory as well. Bruce disagrees with the notion that religion is still here though not so visible since it is pushed from the public scene to the private confides of the home. He suggests Europeans are «uninterested rather than privately devout» and predicts the trajectory of increasing secularisation to continue, also for the future.

(Storm, 2009, p702)

Fox and Sandler argue that modernisation (implies secularisation) has created a religious backlash causing a resurgence of religion in the public sphere again. They claim that modernisation allows for both state and religious actors to «increase their spheres of influence, thus resulting in more clashes between the two». (Fox and Sandler, 2004, p12)

Furthermore they argue that modernisation causes religious actors to further the divide between liberals and conservative. They claim that those who are more spiritually inclined and concerned with otherworldly experiences will detach themselves from mainstream religion and join or form sects and marginal groups, while mainstream actors will attach themselves closer to worldly actors and will adapt a less religious language. They state that these «trends are reflected in the decline of mainstream faiths in Europe while at the same time Evangelical and postmodernist faiths are thriving there.» (Fox and Sandler, 2004, p13)

2.3 Narratives of Norwegian religiosity

The first of Casanovas categories would quite accurately fit the description of religion in Norway the past decades while the push from the public to the private sphere would be more nuanced as for instance with religious language being entirely vanished in politics and in education while in the military and health sector, the Norwegian Church still has a strong presence while Islamic and Humanists clergy also have been tested several places. The third level of his theory stating that loss of religion takes place has indeed taken place when looking at church membership numbers, but one can discuss wether this is all actual loss of religion or rather change into different forms of religion. (Botvar and Schmidt, 2010, pp23)

State religion as a constitutional heritage

Although secularisation is part of the Norwegian story of religion, our nation´s thousand years of Christian heritage is something you don´t loose overnight, especially as the church has been closely tied to the state and obtained a power position for centuries. The Norwegian Constitution is one of the oldest is the world and is very much inspired by both the French and the American, but where the American «wall of separation» between church and state was raised, the Norwegians on the other hand, chose to write into the law «the evangelical Lutheran church remains the state religion»

continuing on to state that Jesuits and Jews are denied access to the nation. It is fair to mention that this was more than 200 years ago, but is still very much part of our socio-religious baggage possibly explaining why both the Christian and non-religious Norwegian have a certain suspicion towards religious authority. (Repstad, 2010, pp371-387) During the course of my writing of this thesis the close ties between church and state have been formally dissociated (after a process of many years), however the Norwegian church still holds a privileged position both financially and socially compared to other denominations and religious communities. In fact, Jonathan Fox who does extensive research on the relationships between states and religious institutions in his ARDA report (2008) found that Norway scores relatively high compared to other European countries when it comes to government favouritism of religion.

Casanova argues that this particular type of Norwegian secularisation is part of Nordic Protestant pattern, which he associates with 'ambiguity' and an 'intertwinement' between the secular and the religious. This stands in contrast to the southern European Catholic version which is hallmarked by an antagonism between a secular state and a once hegemonic church, whereas a third narrative is found in America which takes pride in maintaining a secular 'neutral' state, albeit with a public discourse laden with religious language. The Nordic outcome, Casanova argues, have produced a high level of integration between church and state as well as keeping a relatively tight lid on explicit religious language in the public discourse. (Burén, 2015, p83)

Facts and Figures

70% of Norwegians belong to the Lutheran Norwegian Church (Den Norske Kirke, 2017) while roughly 6% of the population are members of other Christian denominations while other religions make up around 3%. A large and growing group is categorised as 'nones', that is Norwegians with no religious affiliation, about 14%. Alternative spirituality is very hard to measure but has been on the rise the past years. (Furseth, 2015, p25-31) Norway also has a high level of organised Humanists, with roughly 80.000 members. (Repstad, 2010, pp371)

Thus Norway, being a religiously complex society, albeit with the vast majority within Lutheranism, makes for an interesting public discourse when it comes to religion as Casanova stated. According to the survey Religion 2008, three out of four stated that religious leaders are often intolerant and a vast majority of 80% agrees with the statement «religion leads to more conflict than peace». (Botvar and Schmidt, 2010, p89)

A majority (63%) are positive towards religious leaders engaging in the public debate, while curiously an almost similar figure (68%) are negative towards religious leaders trying to influence

public decisions. (Botvar, 2010, p85-86)

Botvar and Schmidt points to social factors like the rise in the level of education, increase of women in the labor-force and urbanisation as some of the keys to explain secularisation in Norway. (Botvar and Schmidt, 2010, p19-20) These factors align well with the Secularisation Thesis in regard to modernisation being a key catalyst.

Undoubtedly, Christianity, and especially Lutheranism, has lost some power (in numbers) and influence over the previous decades. This is shown for instance when you compare the numbers above with numbers from 1980 where 87,8% belonged to the then State Church while 0,1% belonged to other religions and 3,2% were considered nones. (Furseth, 2015, p26) This indicate that secularisation as loss of religion has occurred, however, it is uncertain if this trajectory will continue or if religiosity will re-emerge in other shapes and forms.

Fuzzy Fidelity

Consider the above statistics stating that the vast (though shrinking) majority Norwegians belong to the Lutheran Norwegian Church which recently untied its official bonds to the state, with figures that state that 7% practice faith by attending church services once a month and only one out of three Norwegians considers themselves religious. (Botvar, 2010, pp372-375) This constitutes the Norwegian religious puzzle.

'Fuzzy fidelity' is a term originally coined by David Voas to describe an understudied group who are neither very religious nor specifically nonreligious. Storm, borrowing from both Grace Davie and Voas, suggests an explanation for the puzzle arguing that the Norwegians adhere to the idea of *belonging without believing*, and if they believe they choose to do so based on individual conclusions rather than religious authority and institutions. (Storm, 2009, p703)

Storm argues that these 'fuzzies' also can be labeled 'believing without belonging', that is having personal faith, without any connection with traditional religious communities.

Storm found in her comparison with ten European nations that Scandinavia stands out with larger numbers of 'fuzzies' in general, and of 'belonging without believing' in particular. (Storm, 2009, pp703-713) To answer the discrepancy between Scandinavians being attracted to church and minimal or lack of belief, Storm refers to Steve Bruce who explored this and found that church activities such as, *baptisms, funerals, weddings, advent* and *Christmas celebrations* in addition to *preservation of church buildings* were highly rated, while none of them required a «high degree of orthodox theological belief», (Storm, 2009, p713) rather *belonging* and *community* are seen as the core of said practices. Bruce further argues that the Lutheran church has grown in to a symbol of

ethnic and national identity, very much seen as 'our church' (folkekirke) also due to democratisation processes within the church structure in the mid-19th century. (Storm, 2009, pp713-714)

Høeg refers to Jörg Stolz who argues that one category of nones is the *indifferent*; they are not particular critical of religion or religious people but lean on sides of life like, art, nature, humanity which are compatible with a rational scientific worldview. On the other hand the category of the *religion-critics* has an emotional connection to religion, claiming religion has a negative individual and societal effect and resist religiosity in different forms and is not hesitant to voice this view. (Høeg, 2017, pp29-30)

Nonreligious, including 'fuzzies', is an increasing group also among young Norwegians. For instance, 44% of those entering Christian confirmation in 2012 said that they had uncertainties about what to believe, however the number was more or less the same when the confirmation ended after a year. (Høeg, 2017, p27)

Youth between 18-34 stated less support when surveyed on Christian belief and practice than older generations both in 1991, 1998 and 2008. Curiously in 2008, belief in life after death was far stronger than for those between 35-54, showing a case of 'fuzziness'. (Høeg, 2017, p15)

Also the term personal Christian (personlig kristen), traditionally regarded as 'confessing' Christian, with an emphasis on individual salvation, saw an increase from 9% 15-26 year olds in 1985, to 30% (cohort 15-20) and 20% (cohort 21-26), suggesting that the expression has morphed into a different meaning. Høeg interprets it to mean «Christian in my own way'» or «how I understand being Christian» dissociated with official religious authority and dogma. (Høeg, 2017, p26) This fuzziness relates to what Robert Bellah calls 'Sheilaism' from one of his respondents, Sheila, when asked to describe her faith, claims that «it's Sheilaism. Just my own little voice.»
(Storm, 2009, p704)

A recent study by Pew Research Center (2018) on western European religiosity found that the majority of Christians are non-practicing. The research suggests that western European Christians are *more* secular compared to American believers, in fact they found Christians in some countries in Europe are less religious compared to American 'nones'. This supports the idea of religious fuzziness, but also raises the question: «What does it mean to be a Christian?» A question which also some of my respondents pose, which can give some explanation to why some of them mistakenly identifies Christians as non-believers.

Youth and religion

Norwegian youth is far from a homogenous group, also in regard to religion. Sociological research on youth and religion is a field that has had recent growth as this previously was neither seen as a societal problem nor of great influence. Young people were regarded as an unstable and less independent group compared with research on adults. (Høeg, 2017, p10)

The REDco-project found that the majority of Norwegian junior high school students did not care about religion nor did it play any role in their everyday life. Simultaneously for the 1/3 which it did matter to it was important or *very* important. For students with Muslim background 60% said it was important compared to 12% with Christian students. Qualitative interviews in the same research conveyed however a more diverse picture, with some stating that they never prayed or went to the mosque suggesting that religious importance and practice does not necessarily correlate. All the Muslim respondents did state that Islam was a vital part of their identity, while Christian students more often expressed some embarrassment because of their faith, and experienced stigma from fellow students. The group that found religion the most important was students with a charismatic Christian background making for a complex picture of youth and their relation to faith and religious diversity.

(von der Lippe, 2013, pp14-15)

Høeg refers to a survey that found internet to be an important source for young people for questions about faith and religion, this suggesting the private nature of the topic, as it may be easier then engaging in direct conversion if one possibly has not made up one mind. Nevertheless, *friends, school* or *work, family* and *TV* are listed as more important sources, notably, the web could also function as platform for interacting with these sources. (Høeg, 2017, p14)

Høeg refers to KIFOs survey from 2012 where young adults stand out compared to the general population by being less critical of religion. 18-34 year olds are more positive to the role of religion in the world and fewer regard religious people as intolerant. Furthermore young people also see religion as a potentially positive resource, creating inter-religious solidarity. (Høeg, 2017, pp21-22)

The NOVA-report on youth in Oslo (Ung i Oslo, 2012) found that the majority belonged to a religious faith community with Christianity being the largest group (40,2%), then Islam (19,5%) and other religions (6,9%) while 33,4% did not belong to any faith community. When asked about belief in God (in various degrees) they found that roughly 2 of 3 believe in a God while 1 of 3 does not believe in God. Around 10% answered that they didn't believe in a God but rather in a 'higher power'. Differentiated between ethnic backgrounds the survey found huge differences. Among

ethnic Norwegians, 46,2% of the boys and 35,3% of the girls stated that they do not believe in God while for those with immigrant background only 10% (boys) and 7,4% (girls) did not believe in God while the vast majority was positively certain about Gods existence (71% boys and 73,4% girls). Among the ethnic Norwegians, around 40% of boys and 50% of the girls say they believe in God (in degrees varying from «certain» to «with doubt»). (Ung i Oslo, 2012, pp144-145) Another survey from 2013 (Norsk Monitor) largely agrees with these findings showing results with insignificant variations. (Høeg, 2017, p26)

For young Muslims, questions of identity, culture and religion are intertwined. Anthropologist Christine Jacobsen found that for some Muslims, religion was part of their 'ethnic identity-community'. (Høeg, 2017, p23) She further notes that religious clothing such as hijab has a variety of legitimisations, one of them being part of a *feminist liberation-strategy*. They relate this to a modern ideal of individual choice and also claim a critique of the objectification of the female body as a protest to popular culture´s negative effects of social pressure and body-focus. Furseth agrees with Jacobsen's view and argues that for these young Muslims, the hijab is tied to the *inner self* and *subjectivity*. (Høeg, 2017, pp23-24)

High schoolers in Oslo surveyed on extremism and violence, gave the image of support for use of violence as a marginal phenomenon. Between 1 - 4,2% stated that this could be defended to a *high* or *very high* degree. (Høeg, 2017, pp24-25) The survey showed that religion is not the *one* determining factor, but also gender, age, socio-economic status, school performance and geography influences these attitudes, however immigrant background seemed to be important. (Høeg, 2017, p25)

2.4   Religion and Academia

Although the high school context is quite different from the university, it is nonetheless the first entry point for young people into the academic world and its world-views. Also, high-school teachers are submerged in this culture and train of though for years before they appear in a high school classroom ready to educate. Hence I found it relevant to add some perspectives on this occasionally strained relationship.

Secularisation of Academic institutions

Higher educational institutions both in Europe and the US were largely religious until the beginning of the 20th century when the secularisation of universities occurred. Mardsen argues that due to increasing diversification of society it was a «good thing» to end the Protestant privilege in academia, but he adds that this has resulted in the negative effect that secular perspectives are being favoured above other viewpoints. (Mardsen, 2015, pp19-22)

Marsden continues to argue for a need for some guidelines or rules on how to relate to religiosity within academia. He says that the needed privatisation as a response to the protestant hegemony led to an overcorrection and proposes that one needs to re-evaluate the idea of privatisation and rather promote and idea of inclusive pluralism that together with race, class, gender, sexual orientation, also recognises varieties of religiosity. This would mean encouraging rather then discouraging different religious beliefs relating to the «conversations that make up academic life.» This does not exempt observing academic values such as respect and civility, following the standards of evidence and argument, Mardsen adds. (Mardsen, 2015, pp19-22)

Overrepresentation of Nones

Overrepresentation of non-religion and political progressives in academia is commonly accepted and a largely undisputed fact according to Yancey who refers to Gross and Simmons, Tobin and Weinberg, Rothman and Woessner to support this claim. The interesting question is wether this leads to or signifies bias and discrimination. Yancey points out that overrepresentation is just that, and cannot simply be understood as bias and discrimination. He suggests that these issues are far more subtle and difficult to uncover. Self-selection is given as a cause for the massive overrepresentation within academia, that is, religious people could have a variety of different reasons for not pursuing an academic career. But one of those reasons could as well be the sentiment that academia is a religiously hostile work environment. (Yancey, 2012, pp268)

Also Norwegian data correlates higher level of education with lower level of religiosity, (Høeg, 2017, pp187-188) but as Yancey points out, this does not necessitate negative attitudes towards religion, nevertheless, it is part of framing the religious competence in the context of the high schools where I gather my data.

Conflict Narrative

The story of a deep rivalry and historically rooted enmity and persecution with a fluctuant power-balance between religion and science is a popular story fuelled by blockbusters, Dan Brown novels

and others. Elaine Ecklund, a sociologist from Rice university examined attitudes towards the perceived conflict between science and religion and surveyed scientists from 21 elite universities in the US. Her findings conclude that a not overwhelming majority of (both social and natural) scientists does not accept the conflict narrative between science and religion or faith and academia. However, she notes that scientists who assume their colleagues have a positive view of religion will also be less willing to accept the conflict paradigm. (Ecklund, 2009, pp276-292)

Kittelman Flensner also found the conflict narrative to be prevalent when topics like science and faith occurred. Science was associated with reality, truths and facts while a religious worldview was seen as less valid, an imaginative mental product of the brain often interpreted through an evolutionary lens, as one teacher argued, that having «made up imaginary friends» was an evolutionary advantage. (Kittelman Flensner, 2015, pp125)

Beyer suggests that some of the controversies have their basis in constructs within two differentiated function systems. The religious and the scientific each have their specific ways of viewing and dealing with the world, with the effect that each insist their own argument should have precedence (Beyer, 2006, p5)

2.5   Faith Information Control

To explore why students hide or convey their faith one need to consider alternative theories like Faith Information Control (referred to as FIC) explained by Norwegian researchers Vassenden and Andersson where whiteness and non-whiteness are potent factors for displaying or concealing a person´s religious convictions. Their main claim is that whiteness hides information on faith or even suggests 'secular' while non-whiteness reveals it and signifies religious. (Vassenden and Andersson, 2010, p574) Vassenden and Andersson distinguish between signs given and signs given off, the first one exemplified through religious symbols or statements, which one chooses deliberately, and the latter through ethnicity and race, which is visible wether one likes it or not, helps explain how my respondents manage and observe Faith Information Control. (Vassenden and Andersson, 2010, p577)

This shares resemblance with Gofmann's stigma-theory where he talks about the varying degree of the visibility of the stigma, in other words that stigma can be either manifest or latent. For Vassenden and Andersson's however, the non-white respondents did not seem to experience a sense of stigma with their religion being out in 'the open'. As this was already revealed it was

unproblematic in their day to day experience. Gofmann also notes the importance of context as what determines wether an attribute is either a stigma or a symbol of prestige. (ibid, p577)

Iversen uses the idea of FIC to explain how religion is seen as *identity* in his ethnographic work in junior high schools. He observes that when non-whites were asked to reveal their religious position, this was regarded as a rather factual question of ethnic and cultural origin whereas white students understood it as an enquiry into their deepest held personal beliefs.

(Iversen, 2012, p564)

Vassenden and Andersson argue that there are two main religious positions that can lead to stigmas in the Norwegian society, that of the largely invisible 'personal Christian' and the stronger and visible 'Muslim'. The latter being connected to different stories of immigration, terrorism and religious sensitivity among others while the former relates to concepts like secularisation, Lutheran hegemony, Pietism and revivalism. (Vassenden and Andersson, 2010, p 577-579)

Their data shows how FIC works both inter- and intra-ethnically, using the example of a Muslim girls who says that whites identify Muslims by skin-colour then her Muslim friend says that he also identifies fellow Muslims in the same manner. The degree of religiosity is something that also Muslims can apply faith information control on, scaling from practicing to liberal, non-practising, and so forth, but downplaying the fact that they are Muslims seems not to be an option. (ibid, p 582-583)

To explain this religious frankness, Vassenden and Andersson refer to European studies that show that ethnicity is being replaced with religion both in politics and everyday life, they note that this perhaps could signal a positive association with religion as a force for good, and hence young Muslims will aspire to be the face of a positive Islam, they argue, and are therefore not hesitant to reveal their religious identity. Another interpretation, they suggest, is the sense of 'otherness' that Muslims manage, is constituted not merely by one type of stigma, but several. Having lived through experiences of cultural, ethnic and racial stigmas, then to bear the religious stigma doesn't really seem to add much additional weight. (ibid, p587)

Furthermore they argue that for the white ethnic majority, people who take their faith seriously are a minority while it's the opposite for ethnic minorities. They argue that:

> Hence, in intra-ethnic contexts, acts of justification are inverted, with more secular justification within white Norwegian contexts and more religious justification within many ethnic minority milieus. In inter-ethnic contexts, however, being a Muslim constitutes a stigma and something in need of justification. (ibid, p588)

For the white minority, namely the Christian, s/he faces a dilemma: Stepping out and revealing faith information or concealing it, which both requires careful consideration of the given context. Non-whiteness leaves the person in question already discredited argues Vassenden and Andersson while the white Christian is potentially *discreditable* as Goffman calls it. He argues that a discreditable person may want to get any misunderstandings on the table right from the get-go or on the other hand attempt to pass as 'normal' by concealing stigma information. A disclosure can be interpreted as an attempt to evangelise which is a potential risk and possibly uncomfortable for the other person, while for instance liberal Christians could want to conceal faith information for the risk of being associated with conservative homophobes or the likes. (ibid, p588)

Another alternative strategy, common in Vassenden and Andersson's material was that of *delayed disclosure* where the persons 'normality' is first established then faith information is later revealed. Also a reverse example is explained where faith information is revealed through a third party and the believer behaves with caution not to confirm the prejudices already known to her peers. This person, Vassenden and Andersson argues, «does not manage information, but *tension*» as she is already discredited she undertakes what Goffman calls 'covering', that is behaviour aimed to minimise tension caused by a known-about stigma. (ibid, p588-590)

Vassenden and Andersson argues that the other alternative for the white believer would be to display a more visible religiosity to avoid the ambiguity, but adds that this did not emerge as a possibility among their respondents. They argue that the religious invisibility granted by whiteness provides the individual «both freedom and constraints» a luxury the non-whites cannot afford. (ibid, p590)

Delgado and Steffancic argue that the luxury of white 'invisibility' is not transparent to whites themselves. They argue that most whites think little about their own race and that whiteness for the white is not a primary attribute they apply to describe themselves. This again is connected to white privilege and white power. (Delgado and Steffancic, 1997, pp1)

Goffman's theory of social stigma, specifically the form of «Tribal stigmas» which relates to religious stigmatisation as an attribute which is socially discrediting and a deviation from the prevailing religion or non-religion, could also be a factor in explaining why faith is public or private in the school. The high school life is one where few people willingly tries to be different, unless it´s related to a cause that the majority regards with admiration. It may seem religion is one of those causes the majority has not made up its mind. (Goffman,1963, pp24-31)

White Silence Signifies Secular

Whereas Vassenden and Andersson argue that whiteness hides religion (and possibly suggests secular) I suggest, based on my data from the high school context that it does not merely claim religious neutrality but that of a secular non-religious position. Wether this is atheist, agnostic, humanist or anything else does not clearly emerge but rather the broader 'non-religious' lies as the default position, until explicitly stated otherwise or revealed through symbols. My respondents disclose several incidents of mistaking someone for a 'none' when only later they learnt that the person was in fact religious (Christian). One example was one of my respondents who was referred to me, (by use of the snowball method) by a white Christian girl who identified him as an atheist, but to me revealed himself as a Christian. He clearly chose to pass as 'normal' and not apply what Vassenden and Andersson refer to as the strategy of 'voluntary disclosure' as some would do to avoid misunderstandings. Also, this relates to 'fuzzy fidelity' which not only fits the nones but also Christian believers like this one, who packs his faith in layers so it is not immediately obvious to others which category he fits in.

This hypothesis seems to be particular pertinent within an intra-ethnic context, that is, white Norwegians will assume the position of none-believer upon another white Norwegian. Within an inter-ethnic context this did also occurred but so did the inverse experience, at least it was hinted at, from the Muslim respondents that white Norwegians were perceived as Christians, this being connected to Norway being a Christian nation or that majority of Norwegians are members of the Norwegian Church.

Furthermore I argue that this hypothesis is based on the view that non-religion is regarded as a religious 'ground zero', a non-position, a neutral avenue among the many religious alleys upon which the 'other' less enlightened have plunged into. This view is also part of a larger philosophical discussion regardless of whiteness or ethnicity.

Vassenden and Andersson do bring up that secular beliefs, although hidden, are still normative and parallel to that of being white and privileged (Vassenden and Andersson, 2010, p579) and they use the expression 'the white secular mass' as a description that nods in the direction of White Silence Signifies Secular, however without pursuing this insight further. (ibid, 2010, p582)

Science Signifies Secular: Scientific inclination as an indicator of non-religion

Another hypothesis which I closely attach to the idea of White Silence Signifies Secular is the notion that a scientific inclination functions an identity marker of a secular non-religious worldview.

This view brings in an additional strengthening of what White Silence assumes, but cannot fully assert. The respondents seemed very surprised and puzzled to the idea that their science teachers (realist subjects) would be religious. Also here, we find examples of fellow-students who later turned out to be religious were initially identified as nones based on scientific interest and knowledge. I did not gather enough data on this topic to notice any clear tendencies between intra- and inter-ethnic contexts, but the white respondents were those who elaborated most on this matter. This hypothesis, I would argue, supports that the 'conflict narrative' has some significance as a credible story and influences how these youths perceive their peers´ religious positions.

Harsher self-criticism

The experiences and observations of some of the respondents also led me to propose the idea that Christianity is subject to and deserves 'harsher' criticism then other religions and world-views. Although Islam also is criticised a great deal, Christianity seem to stand out in the way that the criticism is legitimised by the idea that this is not a criticism of other people's religion, rather it is seen as some sort of self-criticism. Christianity is not just seen as one of many in a religious pluralist society, but 'our' household religion, which gives 'us', that is white ethnic Norwegians the right and perhaps also the duty to criticise what is seen as negative elements of Christendom and warn against attempts of clinging to the once hegemonic position it has held throughout recent and more distant history. One could argue that the Norwegian suspicion towards authorities and power mentioned earlier, fuels this criticism if Christianity is still regarded an influential structure of power in todays society, however wrongly so according to secularisation theories. I found that several of the respondents observed this phenomena while none admitted to be performers of this harsher self-criticism, however the general feeling was that this was performed by non-believers, particularly those who where placed within the atheistic world-view.

Majority Misunderstanding and Spiral of Silence

Iversen refers to the term coined by Norwegian social psychologist Ragnar Rommetvedt which relates to *unconscious peer pressure*. He claims especially young people have a tendency to overrate how many peers are doing things with high status, while underrating how many are doing things with low status. (Iversen, 2012, p263)

For example the social standing of religion among young people may not actually reflect the reality while for instance alcohol consumption which may be considered «cool» and one believes that

«everybody drinks in the weekends» may not be accurate either. If one accepts the premise that religion is *uncool* or has *low status* then this theory gains support from my data as the majority of my respondents tended to underrate the amount of religious students.

This theory also relates to Neumann's idea of Spiral of Silence, arguing that minorities will keep their opinions and beliefs to themselves if they perceive that these are contrary to public opinion. Albeit her theory does not apply exclusively to religious groups, it may nonetheless relate to why certain religious communities shy away from the spotlight even when their voice could debunk untrue notions or prejudices towards themselves. One of her main examples is the representation of Jews in the media in pre-war Nazi-Germany. (Noelle-Neumann, 1993, pp10) Critics of Noelle Neumann argue that she underestimates the salience of family and friends and the power of communities and organisation to withstand the silencing effect of what is assumed to be the popular opinion.(Fladmoe and Steen Johnsen 2017, pp81)

2.6   Discourse theory

To analyse the interviews in this research I lean on theories on discourse to understand the dynamics of how the respondents talk about religion. Kittelman Flensner refers to Wetherell, Taylor and Yates' definition stating that: «The simplest answer is to say that the study of discourse is the study of language in use». (Kittelman Flensner, 2015, p67) Another emphasis is that it concerns the construction of meaning, yet another is ontological, a lens through which you see the world. She leans on Laclau and Mouffe who argues that all discourses have a gravity towards finding a centre with fixed meanings of different words, and there is an ongoing negotiation of this particular interpretation. When a certain discourse has gained a hegemonic position, with the meaning of a sign (word) standing out as obvious and natural, this is called 'moment'. In contrast, when a sign can contain a diverse set of meanings and interpretations, this is called 'element', while an 'element' *very* open to diverse values and understandings, labeled 'floating signifier', religion, suggests Kittelman Flensner, being of such sort. (Kittelman Flensner, 2015, p80)

Demotic and Dominant Discourses

Sociologist of religion Marie von der Lippe tries to answer the questions *of what, why* and *how* Norwegian teenagers talk about religion and applies Gerd Bauman´s concepts of *dominant* and *demotic* discourses in her analysis. Bauman argues that the *dominant discourse* is related to cultural

fellowships which is applied, amplified and reproduced both on a micro- and macro-level, by individuals and institutions, media and politicians, hence it is perceived as more matter of course and natural then other discourses. While those on the other hand disagreeing with the dominant discourse create a new alternative one, called the *demotic discourse*, aimed to nuance, problematise and possibly dismiss the established discourse. (von der Lippe, 2013, pp7-9)

Von der Lippe argues that the somewhat vague content and not agreed upon definition of a discourse, is a challenge, and refers to Jørgensen and Phillips' minimum-definition stating «a specific way to speak of and to understand the world». (von der Lippe, 2013, p10)

Von der Lippe notes that there are several dominant parallel and competing discourses that influence the agents on a micro-level (von der Lippe, 2013, pp12-13) In what she notes is an oversimplification, she argues that demotic discourses are formulated on a micro-level while dominant discourse is shaped on a societal macro-level. Von der Lippe looks at the dominant media discourse in Norway that the teenagers in her research must relate to. She notes that the discourse on immigration has been 'religionised' since the 2000s, where before one spoke more often of different nationalities or ethnicities now the use of *Muslims* and *Islam* is predominant.
(von der Lippe, 2013, pp11-12)

Bushra Ishaq in her recent study on Norwegian Muslims notes that the media-coverage of Islam is intimately connected to a conflict-narrative, such as terrorism and violence, gender inequality and patriarchy. She refers to IMDi's report which says that Muslims and Islam was referred to in 7700 media-coverings during 2009, where roughly 70% of these had a negative focus. (Ishaq, 2017, p12) Furthermore she mentions the newspaper Aftenposten's survey which found that Norwegians singled out Islam as the one thing they feared the most, above climate-changes and economic crisis. Ishaq also refers to NOVA who found that 58% of youth in Oslo agrees with the notion of an ongoing war between Islam and the West. (Ishaq, 2017, p13)

Secular as dominant discourse

Another example of dominant discourse on religion is Kittelman Flensner who did ethnographic research on religious education in Sweden and found that a variety of secular discourses in the classrooms she observed. She stated that religion related to lack of knowledge and was frequently associated with oppression and regarded as a remnant of the 'dark' past that history and modernisation eventually would rid itself with. Discussions on religion were to a large extent occupied with pinning down religion to an 'essentialist' or 'substantial' perspective (what religion «is») rather then allowing elasticity and religious diversity and various degrees of religiosity to

inform the classroom talks. She further found that the non-religious position was regarded as the neutral and natural premise of the discourse, she argued that specific linguistic expressions served as 'neutrality markers' articulating that which was *obvious* and *natural*. Examples of such were the Swedish «ju» [of course] and «vi» [we] which function to create a shared understanding. Notions of non-religious positions are strong in a secular discourse, she says, but also extends to notions of *freedom of choice, individualism* and *diversity.* (Kittelman Flensner, 2015, pp107-112)

2.7   The Public Sphere and the Disagreement Community

Jürgen Habermas' concept of the *public sphere* is defined as an open part of society which has a universal access and therefore distinguished from the closed and private, and functions as a space where citizens meet and discuss and voices interests and opinions to each other and the state. (Furseth, 2015, pp12-13)

Initially Habermas argued for a public sphere and a public discourse separate from religion and religious language, while later he altered his views saying that religion should be somewhat included. Habermas argued that society has been differentiated and is in need of a common horizon of understanding and agreement when entering into a public conversation. (Furseth, 2015, pp14-15)

In Habermas opinion, all decisions and norms must be founded in an open and free conversation with a resulting agreement which all would adhere to. Habermas was criticised for his notion of common language which excluded ethnic and sexual minorities, women and religious groups, a critique which he listened to and somewhat modified and further developed this in his later work. (Furseth, 2015, p15)

Habermas, says Iversen, argues for a conversation without power-dynamics where it is the *rational* arguments of equal rational participants that is given weight when coming to a decision.

Iversen proposes the *disagreement community* which in a minimum definition is understood as «a group of people with differing opinions while being in a common process to solve a problem or challenge.» (Iversen, 2014, p12) He relates it to democratisation arguing the more democratic a society is, the easier it is to be heard in the public debate.

Iversen criticises Habermas for putting too much emphasis on the rationality of the discourse and claims that our opinions are not merely rational positions, they are also connected to identity and self-image which can be vulnerable to other peoples opinions. Democracy is not primarily a set of values, according to Iversen, but a system to manage disagreement. (ibid, p114) He continues and

warns that one should in fact be suspicious towards a high degree of agreement and a silent opposition in a functioning democratic discourse. According to Chantal Mouffe, this is a sign of groups in society being kept out or by different motifs refraining from joining the public debate and the democratic processes. (Iversen, 2014, p146)

In contrast, the focus on values and the notion of the 'value community' (verdi-fellesskap) related to functionalist sociology (ibid, pp114-122) is potentially problematic as it can assume an *essentialist* view of the community, and therefore be excluding to groups that don't align with the values agreed upon. This resonates with Baumans idea of the dominant discourse and has of course less need for guidelines for an inclusive discourse if the values are already defined and decided by the powers that be.

Iversen argues that the school classroom is an example of the disagreement community, from his own observational studies he found it clear that the students experienced the class as a *fellowship*, while this seemed not to revolve around shared values and ideas, rather lively discussions from different points of views and backgrounds, where the teacher did not see her role as a guardian of common values, rather as a facilitator of good discussions constituted in a disagreement community. (ibid, pp62-67)

The school context relates to both the idea of the public sphere and the disagreement community. I argue that my respondents experience of their schools and perhaps especially the classroom dynamics fits best the idea of the disagreement communities. The students accept the notion that they are 'thrown' into a group that will meet face to face over time, to 'solve' problems and discuss their differences.

However, when the topic is on religion, the 'community' part of the term shows itself particularly fragile and looses to the 'disagreement'. I found that the students thought it very challenging to create inclusive and safe spaces for discussion on religion, they found avoiding the topic preserved the peace better.

Contact theory

Gordon Allport posited a theory for building inter-group acceptance in the 50's, arguing that contact among different groups reduces prejudice and hostility. He argued that four conditions must be present for contact to cause prejudice to diminish:

1. All parties must have equal status

2. Share common goals

3. Have intergroup cooperation

4. Have support of authorities, law or custom

(Putnam, 2010, p527)

Putnam argues that inter-religious friendships, such as for instance neighbours or colleagues, include the first and fourth condition, while possible the second and third could also be met potentially when friendships form during non-religious activities. Research done by Pettigrew and Tropp «assumed that friendship requires the operation of conditions that approach Allport's specifications for optimal contact» (ibid, p528) and their analysis suggested that intergroup friendships are far superior than other forms of contact in its capacity to reduce prejudice. (ibid, p528)

Several later studies confirm Allport's theory, for instance an extensive survey from western Europe done on intergroup friendships found those with intergroup friends (varying from religious, class, nationality and cultural differences) reported more often feelings of sympathy and admiration towards the out-group. (Pettigrew, 1998, p72) Pettigrew compares with other similar studies, and says the results are similar across the lines, but argues that when Allport's conditions are not met argues that the contact can result in sustained or more prejudice, suggesting that high frequency, but low degree of interaction can be examples of such (public transportation workers and health employees).

(Pettigrew, 1998, p66-68)

Cognitive Contamination

Contact theory relates to other theories like Peter Berger's 'cognitive contamination' where he emphasises the cognitive process leading to a *relativising* of ones faith and a healthy uncertainty, rather than the more relational aspect of Allport. He argues that inter-religious interaction helps religious agents to distinguish between the central and peripheral elements of their faith, especially when there is a shared secular discourse. He argues that the process of cognitive contamination is a bargaining process, where the agent needs to consider giving up elements of the faith which are not central while leaving the core nonnegotiable intact. (Berger, 2016)

Both the results of contact-theory and cognitive contamination and the lack of this interaction emerged in my data, which I will describe in my analysis.

Religious Bridging

Robert Putnam who has done extensive research on religiosity in America argues that religion, although potentially divisive and a cause for conflict in *all* societies, in America is marked by a high devotion and high diversity. He says that the high degree of deeply religious individuals while at the same time being a very religiously diverse society, a potentially explosive combination he argues, which in other parts of the world leads to violent clashes, the contemporary United States rarely experiences this nor does it come «apart at its religious seams.» He argues that the concept of 'bridging', that is inter-religious interaction, particularly inter-religious marriages, but also the diversity of neighbourhoods and workplaces are domains in which bridging occurs. (Putnam, 2010, pp493-494)

Being high on devotion and high on diversity can be a recipe for religious disharmony yet this has not happened here, Putnam argues and propose this is the «puzzle of America's religious pluralism.» (Putnam, 2010, p494)

Still religious disagreement here too, can touch a raw nerve, with a chasm between those that have both a high secular and religious level he adds. When measuring how the groups that are *most* religious and *most* secular regard each other, they tend to see the other group as selfish and intolerant while their own group is regarded unselfish and tolerant. Putnam says that their data rightly finds the religious group as unselfish, while the secular are in fact more tolerant, on the flip-side the secular mistakingly label themselves as unselfish and the religious are quite incorrect in describing their own groups as tolerant. (Putnam, 2010, pp499-501)

The use of 'feeling thermometer' measures how religious groups view themselves and other religious groups and shows patterns of inter-religious affinity and hostility. Putnam notes that although there are significant findings on which groups are most *disliked* (Muslims and Buddhists being the least liked groups), feelings along political lines are 'cooler' then along religious categories, showing that «religious tensions in America are relatively subdued» according to Putnam. Furthermore, a far higher number Americans see division along race, economy and political lines, then of religious ones. (Putnam, 2010, pp504-516) Robert Bellah's notion of 'civil religion' as mentioned earlier, functioning as a glue in society, is also relatable to these theories, giving a positive frame where inter-religious contact can flourish.

I use the American example, not because it is directly translatable to a European or a Norwegian context but to make a comparison with a religiously pluralistic society who somehow manages to live relatively peacefully despite the degree of high devotion. Interestingly, being *low* on devotion

and *relatively* low on diversity as the Norwegian society, does not necessarily produce a harmonious society in terms of religious understanding and tolerance. Consider a Norwegian survey from The Norwegian Center for studies of Holocaust and Religious Minorities (HL-senteret) found that Norwegians show a high degree of 'social distance' towards Muslims, Somalis and Romani-people in particular while negative attitudes towards Jews are ranging from 10-26% (depending on the question being asked). (HL-report, 2012, pp5-6)

A majority of the respondents showed 'dislike' towards the possibility of a Muslim, Somali or Romani marrying into their family, while almost half would be sceptical to a Pentecostal, while Americans, Catholics and Jews (in that order) were those that the respondents had least objections towards welcoming in their family. (HL-report, 2012, pp31-33)

In comparison, data from America show that a third of all marriages are interfaith marriages, while 50% of marriages consist of couples with different religious backgrounds (difference explained by conversion).

(Putnam, 2010, pp521-522)

Several of my respondents acknowledged their own prejudices and negative attitudes towards people of other faith traditions and also experienced this from others, which I will show in the analysis-chapter.

2.8   Conclusion

Secularisation theories are important perspectives to understand the context of the Norwegian high school environment and the dominant discourses and secular language which permeates the public sphere. The classical Secularisation Thesis is now mostly abandoned by contemporary scholars and exchanged with 'weak' secularisation and 'differentiation' and the notion that multiple modernities ascribe to multiple modes of secularisation. So also for the Norwegian version which includes differentiation, privatisation, scepticism towards religious favouritism and authority and a particular brand of 'belonging without believing'. The secular dominant discourse relates to my findings where the religious respondents finds it challenging voicing their beliefs.

Secularisation alone, however, does not does sketch out the details of 'why' an individual chooses to control information about his or her faith. Faith Information Control which connects whiteness to hidden and non-whiteness to revealed religiosity, is prevalent among my interviewees, both whites and non-whites of diverse religious persuasions which confirms this theory to a large degree.

However, I did find this theory somewhat lacking in exploring the implications of the 'white hiddenness' and hence developed the hypothesis White Silence Signifies Secular, drawn from my data and further paired it with the notion of science as an indicator of non-belief as an attempt to uncover the layers of limited or invisible religiosity. Also the idea of 'harsher self-criticism' where criticism against Christianity is legitimised as it is 'closer to home' while disapproval of Islam for instance, is seen as critique of the 'other'. Furthermore the idea of a secular dominant discourse explains why religious students find it hard to be heard, and rather opts for hiding their beliefs and opinion. The majority misunderstanding and the spiral of silence are also salient ideas that suggest how none-belief is seen as the norm and thus explain why religious groups wether they are actual or felt minorities, chooses to go further down the spiral that silences their opinions. Allport, Putnam and more, suggest that inter-religious 'contact' or 'bridging' is a key to undo some of these misunderstandings and prejudices which

Method

3.0   Methodological approach

In this chapter I will give an overview of the methodology for this research project and describe the steps of my research process and explain the different choices I made.

My initial research idea was to only examine boundaries and possibilities for religiosity among Christian high school students. After further reflection on the project and conferring with my supervisor I concluded that including different religious positions would give a broader scope to answer my research question as it refers to religion in general and not exclusively one religion. Although exploring the topic among Christians would be interesting in itself, it would immediately raise the question of how these findings would differ or relate in comparison to other religions in the given context, which I see as a far more interesting and telling perspective and would strengthen the generalisability of the research. This decision clearly has a weakness of looking less closely into the particular details of how one set of faith and practices are experienced. On the other hand, the strength is that I was allowed to examine religious beliefs and practices from many different angles in how it is experienced as a general phenomena. Then again the weakness here is off course that *religion* is not one homogeneous and unambiguous concept. However, part of my research problem is to examine if high school students have a reluctance towards *religion in general* (and not just Christianity), thus I would find it lacking to answer this if I was limited to Christian students.

My research problem relates to the phenomena of *experience* and *expressed* and/or *non-expressed* (implying power-relations) religion.

In trying to answer this I have approached the research in a qualitative *phenomenological* and *discursive* methodology. That is, I emphasise the analysis on the *experience* of the respondent and relate this to the set *discourse* or *ideological narrative* to which the respondent ascribes to consciously or not.

Kvale and Brinkman argue that phenomenology is concerned with social phenomena from the point of view of the actor, understanding the world from his or her subjective experiences. (Brinkman and Kvale, 2015, p30) Furthermore, a discursive methodology emphasises revealing hegemonic power relations, and seeing how language is able to *create, maintain and destroy social bonds.* (ibid, p258) Sindre Bangstad also warns that there are weaknesses in using survey-data to measure personal religiosity as the degree of s*elf-reported* faith often can be exaggerated. However, he argues, self-reported religiosity in the interview-context is also not immune to interview-effects which could

cause inaccuracies. (Høeg, 2017, p201) The statistical material I've included is not the basis of my analysis, but mainly for the purposes of explaining the bigger canvas and the total context where my research is located.

Research strategy and design

Furthermore I chose an inductive research strategy (close to Grounded Theory) which led me to first collect the data and then proceed to analyse it with the relevant theoretical framework. Norman Blaikie argues that this type of strategy is appropriate (but not limited) to answer questions of *what* and *how* whereas a deductive strategy would be limited to the *why* questions. (Blaikie, 2007, p9) Tjora argues that the much used Grounded Theory also has an ideal of starting free of any given theories as a good strategy for qualitative research, where both generating data and concepts works in a circular mode, (Tjora, 2017, p32-33) which is close to how I went back and forth from data, analysis and theory.

I chose to gather my own data, both due to the lack of available existing data on the subject and to get contemporary material and be able to address issues that would directly relate to my research question, through qualitative semi-structured interviews.

Another possible methodology I could have applied to answer my research problem is that of the ethnographic perspective immersing myself in the everyday life of high school students in Oslo. This insider look could have given me valuable and very detailed data which would be less accessible through interviews alone. My reasons for not choosing this tool is that it is very time-demanding as well a challenge to gain formal access into schools and classes and furthermore obtain the necessary trust of different religious groups and individuals. Therefore I chose to take the role of an outsider primarily engaging with my respondents as research subjects. Furthermore my project can be placed within the ontological realist paradigm which is concerned with answering the nature of social reality and assuming that what is observed exists independent of the human observer. (Blaikie, 2007, p13) In this research I am not concerned with epistemological idealist perspectives on the actual existence of a God or not or *how* or *if* this knowledge can be obtained, but rather the *subjective social experiences* of the respondents.

Selection of variables

The main dependent variables I decided were *Christian, Muslim* and *Non-believer* or *'none',* and I chose to use an easy and broad definition of those terms, namely if they self-identified within those groups. That means that I chose away other sub-categories such as *liberal* or *conservative, practicing* or *non-practicing, literalist* or *interpretationist,* or other nuances as criteria for my selection, though I did look at these variables in my analysis as some of the respondents themselves used sub-categories to describe their specific strand of faith or non-faith.

My reasoning around choosing these three categories is that these are the largest and also highly visible groups within the Norwegian society. When examining public religiosity, it´s my assumption based on statistics and media presence that Islam, Christianity and Non-religion are positions or world-views that people get an immediate association to from the word religion, before they think of Hinduism, Judaism, Buddhism, Shintoism or other beliefs. While organised Humanists constitute a relatively small group in Norway, the informal group of nones are growing and the notion of secularism and non-religion is predominant in the public sphere. Judaism, Hinduism and Buddhism, although considered world-religions are smaller communities of faith in the Norwegian society, hence I chose to not include these variables as I also anticipated the sampling of those categories to be challenging.

I considered a qualitative methodological approach to be the sensible start to answer my question as opposed to a quantitative approach which would be better at giving the broad strokes in the numbers of how many who would consider religion private or public, but probably not so helpful in explaining the factors for *how* and *why* they *choose* to reveal or conceal faith information and how they relate to this topic in relation to their peers.

I recognise the weakness of the somewhat general category or 'fuzziness' of *non-belief*, which is hard to sort into just one fixed group, I nonetheless bulked up non-religious, humanists, agnostics and atheists all together. Norway being a relatively secular nation, which I will explore in the theory-chapter, albeit with a long tradition of Protestant Lutheran hegemony, it was a natural decision to include this increasing group, even though Norwegian atheists or agnostics would possibly hesitate to be catalogued as members of a group. Furthermore, the categories of *expressed* or *not expressed* religious practices and beliefs are also important dependent variables.

Oslo being the biggest city and the capitol with a highly diverse, pluralistic environment would give me schools that are less uniform into one culture or religion, and perhaps non-belief would be the predominant view. I did consider doing a comparative study looking into schools in the South,

which is a traditionally more religious area than the Eastern region and Oslo, but decided to go with less variables due to the limited format of the research.

Sampling

The number of interviews included in this paper is twelve. The only criteria I had was that I wanted the same amount of boys and girls either in (or starting or ending) second or third grade in high school, and the same amount of Christians, Muslims and nones. As I started my interviews in the summer of 2016 I wanted the respondents to at least have had a year, preferably more, of high school experience. I did not specify any set level of religious/non-religious commitment, but wanted to talk to students that did consider themselves religious, or having a non-faith stance, so someone that we´re set in a specific worldview and not fully indifferent to the matter as such.

Given my background within religious student work and hence being a somewhat familiar face or name to at least some Christian youth I sought out some general informants that could lead me on to the respondents I would use for my interviews. I received some background info and a few names to start with from two general informants in two Christian student organisations and one fellow student associated with a Muslim youth organisation. The contact with the Muslim fellow student did not lead to any concrete interviews but the names I got from the one Christian student organisation gave me two interviews, thereafter I applied snowball-sampling which led me to further subjects with both Christians and Muslims who agreed to be interviewed. Thereafter I have pursued this snowball-strategy also for the non-religious respondents. This is considered a good way of getting respondents who may not normally say yes to these studies. The weakness of snowball-sampling is that you don´t really know the path you took, you may end up in a pattern of social network that gives a certain bias which is hard to recognise. The further you move away from this first person it emulates away self-selection. On the plus side was off course that I could directly pursue the potential respondents without relying on only one mediator or going through a randomised sampling process which would be far more time-consuming and demanding.

I chose the above-mentioned sampling strategy both to avoid selective bias as I could easily have used my personal network for the interviews, but which would have influenced the data. The topic of religion is often a personal and sometimes sensitive matter to people, so snowball sampling, I would argue, is a good method because the initial subjects would give some reassurance to the ones they would refer me to. The weakness being though that they may be very much alike. Another weakness I did acknowledge relates to part of the research problem, namely exploring *why* religious

students would conceal information about their faith. I would assume that the sampling method brought out people who were generally *less* inclined to hide faith information, as they in fact did respond positively to joining the research project and thus had to reveal faith information to at least two persons. Nonetheless, I did assume that the respondents would still have valuable data on the topic, as the school-context consists of a diverse set of arenas where the subject still need to consider how and when s/he will control faith information. My assumption then was that I would get respondents who had a high degree of *devotion* and *reflection* either to their religious or their non-religious position, which, in turn was confirmed.

3.1   Interviews

For the interviews I developed an interview-guide which I further edited after two test interviews (which are not included in the data) and also valuable input from my supervisor and my informants on my questions. Kvale and Brinkman call the interview a 'professional conversation' and argues though it may resemble a normal conversation, the spontaneity of a semi-structured interview is manufactured by a well prepared interviewer's skills, posing relevant questions and being an attentive and present listener. (Burén, 2015, p54-55) Tjora argues that the in-depth interview as a method is anchored in a phenomenological tradition where the goal of the researcher is to explore the *experiences* of the respondent and learn from his or her *reflections* on the topic. (Tjora, 2017, p114) This framed the basis of my open-ended questions and together with relevant theory formed my interview-guide.

The interviews were conducted both live in Oslo and via online video applications between June and November 2016. My first interviews were conducted live in either a café, youth-club or library in Oslo, something which likely had an influence limiting the level of privacy and openness of the conversation as the respondents could not be entirely sure that the neighbours were not listening in. On the other hand, the strength was that I as an interviewer was physically present, shaking their hands which can have added the positive effect of making the interview more personal. One of the interviews, conducted in a youth club, were cut short due to interruptions from other youth that was present in the club. The same interview I also consider weaker in quality due to the language barrier, where neither Norwegian nor English was the mother tongue of the respondent, and has as such put less emphasis on this in my analysis. The interviews online gave both interviewer and the informant the opportunity to sit undisturbed which likely eased the conversation in terms of privacy

and anonymity. The choice of online interviews for the four last interviews were simply because the sampling process took longer than expected and I had planned to move to America for a year as an exchange student from August 2016. The time difference also made the planning of the interviews a challenge and therefore dragged the process out in time.

Ethical considerations

As qualitative research often requires direct contact with informants it is necessary to navigate this contact according to the guidelines enunciated by The National Committee for Research Ethics in the Social Sciences and the Humanities, Law and Theology (NESH, 2016). In my communication with the respondents on Messenger before the interview I had given a written statement with brief formal information about the research project and explained them the concept of informed consent which I asked them to reply if they agreed upon. I also repeated this orally in the beginning of the interviews emphasising their possibility to pull out of the project at any time. For two of the interviews I did not have online communication with the respondents on before hand, but recruited them indirectly through an employee at a youth club. After going through the project information and the informed consent form neither of them were willing to sign the form. After some explanation and dialogue I understood this *not* as a hesitance towards my project in particular but rather a general suspicion towards signing any kind of official documents and we agreed that oral confirmation would suffice. One of these respondents was also reluctant when I informed him about the recording but after further explanations agreed to this as well.

All interviews were recorded with my mobile phone and then uploaded to my computer in a password protected folder. Furthermore I used fictitious names on the sound-files to ensure anonymity according to NESH.

The Norwegian Agency of Data Protection states in its Personal Data Act (2017) that information on «racial or ethnic origin, or political opinions, philosophical or religious beliefs» sorts under the category 'sensitive personal data'. As this relates to much of my data I made sure to take measures that met the Acts standards regarding to confidentiality, anonymity, storing, accessibility and informed consent.

Paragraph 32 of The Children Act (2017), states that «Children who have reached the age of 15 shall themselves decide the question of choice of education and of applying for membership of or resigning from associations.» This covers the child´s right to choose his or her religious view, and as all my respondents are over the age that covers this law I choose not to seek consent from parents.

The research interview, Aksel Tjora argues, is a *situated event* or an *intersubjective situation,* where the text and the analysis attract the focus rather than the interviewee, therefore a quotation check is not the norm. (Tjora, 2017, p179) However, I made sure in all my interviews in the end to give space to the respondents to comment or elaborate certain points of the interview or repeat specific questions or answers. A few of the respondents took the opportunity to add further nuances or explanations to their previous answers. One respondent had an emotional moment during the part where she was reflecting on a painful experience, at which I took a step back from the role as an interviewer and allowed her some space and gave her a few words of consolation, considering the situation before returning to the interview.

Positionality and Personal Bias

My own background in terms of religion is that for the majority of my adult life I have worked with religious organisations and churches which undoubtedly has had an effect on my world view and thus gives me a positive inclination towards religiously minded people, however I've been a long-time proponent of inter-religious dialogue as a means to increase tolerance and to understand how one´s own position is regarded by outsiders and vice versa. Yet I do acknowledge the propensity to create *in-* and *out-groups* as a natural feature of the human psyche, so also in my own, hence I've been more conscious and cautious of this throughout this research aiming to be aware of my background and experience in every step of the research process. I dare to argue that I've been conscious of not passing judgement or using language that could reveal personal opinions in the interviews, and that I was particular conscious of this in the conversations with my Muslim and non-religious respondents. My goal was to convey openness and interest for every respondents personal experience and position, however I cannot guarantee that I maintained a perfect 'poker-face' throughout the whole conversation. Also, it is quite likely that the majority of my respondents browsed through the open content of my Facebook page which could have informed them that I've previously been a Theology student and that I've worked in a Christian Student organisation, which off course might have given them a hunch that the researcher could have a positive attitude towards religion in general and Christianity in particular. It is therefore likely that this information will have influenced the respondents for instance in refraining from the lashing out with fierce religious criticism which they may or not may have harboured. Nonetheless, I would assume all people in an interview situation would want to appear mature and reflective and therefor contain any *extreme* views in either direction.

3.2   Transcription

In the process of converting the interview from sound to text I have attempted to be as close to the interview as possible, including abruptions [—], pauses […], laughter, hawks, etc. My aim was to have as much data for the following analysis, rather than starting the analysis when transcribing. I did also make a few notes immediately after the interviews to be sure to remember moods or other visual expressions which occurred during the conversation. I realise aiming for a *verbatim* transcription has weaknesses in terms of linguistic incoherence, but have therefore made choices where the oral language is too incoherent, repetitive or rambling.

(Brinkmann and Kvale, 2015, pp2010-2014)

The main challenge was translating the interviews from an oral Norwegian to a written English without loosing subtle but vital details and points that would get lost in translation. One example that reoccured was the Norwegian expression 'jo' which can be translated as *a matter of course, clearly, in fact, really* or *of course*, but is a more humble or subtle form then the Norwegian 'selvfølgelig' (eng. of course). Here I had to interpret the mood and the context of the statement carefully so I did not give it more (or less) weight or even a sound of arrogance then what was intended. In a few occasions where I was uncertain of the best translation I have kept the Norwegian word and explained it in english.

Coding

The coding was done in two rounds, first a rather coarsely, taking ideas and quotes that stood out from the data, especially relevant to the topic, then sorting it into general domains. The second time I went detailed through all the transcriptions and sifted out more text and produced close to 150 codes which I then structured in different domains or categories. This type of coding, Kvale and Brinkmann calls 'data-driven, as it is takes an inductive approach (or grounded theory) as it starts with the data itself and not with previously developed codes, called 'concept-driven' which starts with the theory. They further argue that for the novice-analyst, a *meticulous* coding is helpful as it gives an overview over large data and forces the researcher to acquaint herself with the details of the material; in addition, it is relatively simple to divide into steps .(Brinkmann and Kvale, 2015, pp227-228)

Analysis

I have approached the analysis with Sleiermacher´s Hermeneutical Circle as a framework. Firstly looking at the linguistic aspect of what is actually being said by the respondents and secondly, the psychological interpretation where I´m trying to get inside the mind, motifs and emotions of the respondent. (Blaikie, 2007, p117) As mentioned, the phenomenological methodology explores the *reflectiveness* of the phenomena experienced, which is something I have emphasised in the analysis. I've placed the data into the framework of existing theories and also attempted to elaborate on some theories and suggested alternative theoretical perspectives.

Also, 'discourse analysis' has been part of my toolbox. Parker relates discourse to *ideology*, which I find interesting as religion, by many is seen as ideology. Furthermore Kvale and Brinkmann set the discursive perspective close to the dialectical viewpoint, as they are both concerned with revealing contradictions. (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2015, pp258-259)

The perspective that the social world is driven ahead through *contradictions* is an interesting analytical tool for this thesis, as actors in religiously pluralist societies constantly needs to navigate contradictory tensions. I will further elaborate on 'discourse theory' in the main theory-chapter.

Another important distinction is what Brinkmann and Kvale make between a *biased* and a *perspectival subjectivity*, in regard to interpretation and analysis. They argue that the biased subjectivity is the researcher focusing on evidence that supports his view and neglects data contrary to his own conclusion, in other words careless and casual in his work. I have attempted in the analysis to take the position of *the perspectival subjectivity* which is present when the researcher will adopt a variety of perspectives to show that he can steer the interpretations in multiple alternative directions, not as a weakness but rather as a testimony to reliable craftsmanship. (ibid, p241)

3.3   Reliability, Validity and Generalisability

The reliability of the research, Tjora argues, is strengthened in the *degree* of openness and reflection of the researcher's own positionality. (Tjora, 2017, pp235-238) I have discussed this in a section above but will add that my previous experience and motivation on the topic from working within a Christian student organisation for several years can be regarded in other ways then an academic stumbling block. I argue that it has given my valuable insights both into the topic and the context of

the research, however I also note that it does not make me neutral when entering into this project. However, absolute neutrality in the interpretative tradition which this qualitative research stands in is not assumed, according to Tjora, it is rather assumed that having pre-hand knowledge could be a resource, on condition that one gives an account of this and how it could influence the research. (ibid, p235)

I have been aware of this positionality especially during interviews, where it was sometimes challenging not letting my knowledge of the subject create leading questions. Also in the analysis, I have been conscious not sifting out data which did not fit my arguments, rather justifying my selection based on validity. However, I also note that the selection could have been done differently. I could have chosen other codes focusing on for instance the relationship between culture and religion, however, then I did make the selection of data and the interpretations that would best answer the research problem. This is the concern of the validity of the research: Can we connect the answers we derive from the data to the actual questions we have started out with? I argue that I can and furthermore that I have interpreted the data anchored in relevant sociological theories hence strengthening its validity. I could have chosen to emphasise alternative theories such as 'identity-formation' and 'stages of faith' and turned the research in a more social psychology perspective á al theories of Erik Eriksson and James Fowler, but again, relating to the research-question I found Faith Information Control and Secularisation theories to be the main theories that were talking with my data more directly.

Tjora argues that within qualitative research you can test the relevance of a project either in a *naturalistic, moderate* or *conceptual generalisability*. (ibid, pp245-248) I have made an attempt to conceptualise the research arguing with one general hypothesis or narrative and further conceptualising this hypothesis using ideal-types in the Weberian tradition. I am aware of this method of generalisability has weaknesses and can be oversimplifying, but nonetheless, it points to what I argue is salient tendencies which can be explored and tested through further research.

3.4   Twelve Tales: Presenting the respondents

My analysis is based on these 12 youth and the one-hour interviews where I got to know them and their experience of religiosity in their school. I wanted here to give a brief introduction or first-encounter, which perhaps could make it easier to sort them in the Analysis-chapter coming next.

While setting up these pseudonyms and stories, where both names and some of the factual information is anonymised, was that I had challenges describing how to describe their ethnicity. Should I say just 'white' and 'non-white', explain where they grew up, if their parents are ethnic Norwegian, Pakistani or mixed, or should I describe their features in even further detail? I immediately noticed that in terms of whiteness, I had taken this for granted, as the default, and it was the non-whites that had to explain their ethnicity and background, this being the first nod to the Faith Information Control theory and could be seen as an EAR, meaning empirical analytical reference point according to Tjora, who says these functions as early poignant observation indicating a potential direction for the further analysis. (Tjora, 2017, p257) No doubt whiteness and non-whiteness was salient clues to pursue.

Martin (19) is an ethnic white Norwegian who just finished his last year in a high school in Oslo and at the time of the interview had just started a gap year at a Norwegian Folk High School (folkehøyskole). He somewhat cautiously identifies himself as a Christian and says that his faith gives him a sense of support and something that helps him being honest, while he is more ambiguous when it comes to the afterlife. He says that religion for him has become of greater importance to him after finishing high school. Interestingly the person who referred him to me identified him as an atheist.

Rosa, (19) an ethnic white Norwegian, self-identifies as a non-believer and a non-religious person. She has a very Christian grand-mother, but her parents are also non-religious. For her she doesn't like to be categorised into a religious box, and also refuses to be labeled a humanist, atheist or agnostic even though she acknowledges those are all carriers of ideas that influence her somewhat. She has a curious and open attitude towards religion in general but thinks that discussions on the matter is futile, because it seems to lead to conflict rather than understanding, which is something that bothers her.

Fatima (19) is an ethnic Pakistani who grew up in Norway and feels that having this background gives her an additional resource to navigate a multi-cultural society. Her Muslim faith is strong, she describes her faith development correlated with experiencing bullying and inner turmoil as a teenager before reaching a more mature belief. At the time of the interview (July 2016) she has just finished her third year of high school and was en route to study at the University.

Ishmael (17) is an ethnic Somali and has grown up both in the UK and then Norway. He sees having a multicultural background is a resource when it comes to respecting people of others faiths and life-stances. Being a Muslim has always been natural for him, at the same time he sees himself as a 'normal' youth, not much different from his non-religious peers. At the time of the interview he was getting ready to start his second year of high school.

Anton (19) is an ethnic white Norwegian who at the time of the interview was finishing his last year of high school in the greater Oslo-area. He has a Christian mother, but describes his entrance to faith as a conversion experience, that took place when he spent a year abroad as an exchange student. He is very much involved in the schools Christian Union and is both open about his faith and wishes to share it with his fellow students.

Kjerstin (19) is an ethnic white Norwegian who says she has never been embarrassed of her Christian faith although she does not admit to hold all the answers. She practices her faith daily and seeks advice from parents and finds strength, purpose and encouragement through her commitment to the Christian Union that she´s leading at her Oslo high school.

Aminah (19) is an ethnic Pakistani who grew up in Norway and regards her Muslim faith as something both very personal and private. Islam is very much part of her identity and her everyday life which for instance mean that she prays regularly in school and fasts during Ramadan, but she stresses that her faith is her own and is not on display. Her choice of not wearing a hijab is also a personal decision related to the idea that she want people to get to know her as a person first, rather then having religious prejudice forming an opinion of her. At the time of the interview she was getting ready to be a university student.

Lars Christian (18) has grown up in Norway with Chinese parents. He says religion is something 'others' are into and a topic he does not reflect much upon. However, he is keen on discussions in class and is concerned with rational positions and logical arguments and sees both atheists and religious people as equally irrational conclusions. Still he emphasises mutual respect and admits to having personal biases which colour his perspective on religiosity as much as anyone else.

Jahmal (19) grew up in Afghanistan and Iran and came as a teenager to Norway and he just finished his last year of high school. He is ambiguous identifying as a Muslim, as he is not

practicing, but still finds identity in the tradition he is brought up in. He is very critical of mixing politics and religion and is sceptical of religious people trying to influence children. He could very well be labelled 'cultural Muslim' but does not use a term such as that, but negotiates between faith and identity, discussing if he can be 'good' enough to categorise himself as a Muslim, something he does not have a deep longing for anyway.

Hanne (19) is a ethnic white Norwegian humanist. Simply having She says that now she has come to appreciate religious elements in music and literature while when she was younger she was more loud in voicing her scepticism and reluctance towards religion. She is particularly frustrated with people who attack people of other religions and sees inter-religious dialogue as crucial but also acknowledged this as nearly impossible in the high school climate she was in. During the time of the interview she was in the Norwegian Defence.

Grete (17) is a Norwegian-Latin-American (mixed parents) who grew up in Norway. She identifies as a Christian and says she has been a believer all her life but started developing a personal faith aside from her parents during her teenage years. She is quite open about her faith and feels that without it she would lack meaning and direction. She is not afraid to voice her opinion in class discussions, where her values are closely connected to her religion. Still she sees that some objects to her faith based on prejudices around Christians rejecting science, which is not how she interprets the scriptures.

Arash (18) is a Muslim who grew up in Afghanistan and came to Norway as a teenager. He still learns Norwegian and is just starting his third year of high school. He is proud of his Muslim identity and says these things are natural for him, as he has never been challenged much on his faith, which seems to be knit together by both ethnic and religious identity. Language was a barrier in this interview, hence it was shortened and therefore not emphasised much in the analysis, as described earlier in the sampling paragraph.

Analysis

4.0   Introduction

I have divided the analysis in two sections based on the main findings in the data, how I interpreted them and their relation to the main theoretical perspectives that I see adequately answering my research problem.

In the first section I give an analysis of what the respondents think about religion in their everyday school context and propose the *conflict-narrative* as the larger story or discourse they frame religion in, and as such functions as a specific lens through which they view and interpret religious identity, language and practices. I explore the different findings which is associated this view, and argue that they can fit under the conflict umbrella.

Section two proceed to explore one of the effects of the conflict narrative, namely that the students is forced to control and navigate around religion in their school-context. I examine how Faith Information Control is experienced both on a *personal, inter-religious* and *intra-religious* level and how the students navigate around religion in their day to day interactions. Furthermore I discuss the relation between non-whiteness and ethnicity and look at how both teachers and students manage faith information navigating through or around the dilemma which the students face through the dominant and competing discourses in play in the school context. I propose the hypothesis of 'white silence signifies secular' and a related idea of science as an identifier of non-religion.

PART ONE

4.1.0   The Conflict Narrative

> *People want to avoid bringing up that topic in every way they can.*

I argue that for the majority of my respondents religion is viewed through the lens of *conflict* or *schism,* for some consciously and some not. It is regarded as a sensitive topic that divides and creates categories, although some respondents also find examples on religious expressions and

elements that could potentially bring people together. When they discuss the religious beliefs and practices of their fellow students they apply a far stricter category-set then when they talk about their own faith, which has more nuances and layers. I argue that they to a certain degree talk about religion based in a rigid *substantive definition* in contrast to the functionalist perspective, which Beyer distinguishes between. (Beyer, 2006, p4-5)

However the functionalist perspective, is also present, particularly as Luhman's function system states, (Beyer, 2006, p5-6) where religion potentially is a source for conflict between the other systems, for instance seen in the schism between the *science* and *religion* domains. There are however instances that suggest religion *may* have a reconciliatory effect, albeit few weaker in their articulation.

The respondents find the concept of religion to function as an identity marker that separates the 'me' from the 'you', 'us' from 'them', hence generating a sense of *otherness* in the school-environment. As this otherness is generally perceived negatively, the logical conclusion must be to minimise the cause of otherness, hence supporting the *privatisation,* as Casanova argues (Botvar, 2010), of religious expressions and statements. The other option of facilitating inter-religious dialogue seems to be a somewhat utopian idea, where previous attempts and experiences have deemed this a lost cause. Interestingly some inter-religious interaction occurs between the Christians and the Muslims, while nones are not engaged in this. This interaction functions as a safe-space where religious students can 'come out' with no fear of prejudice, as the differences in this context does not seem to cause conflict. I will discuss here several topics which I have placed under the larger umbrella of the 'Conflict-narrative'.

4.1.1   Categorisation-refusal

One of the, to me surprising ideas that emerged from the very first question in my interviews asking the respondents to describe their faith, religion or life-stance, seem to throw them a bit of, often going in long circles before closing in on revealing their specific position. Martin, who eventually identified as a Christian seemed to say that he fitted within several categories of faith, but concluded saying *«Christianity fits me best»*. Jahmal shifted throughout the entire conversion by using 'we' or 'us' and 'they' or 'them' when speaking of Muslims, showing his ambiguous experience navigating this identity.

> *But I used to pray, and go to the mosque and these things, but not now. Mm. I do go to the mosque some times to help out and stuff, but I´m not a practicing Muslim person, like [...] if you are a true Muslim, it means to be a good person, right. It´s not about not eating pork, drinking, not looking at girls.*

He elaborates by explaining that he, since he does not practice refraining from pork and alcohol, he is not considered a Muslim in the eyes of other Muslims, but for his part he could both regard himself as a Muslim and not. He shifts between seeing 'Muslim' a somewhat salient identity and heritage and the notion that 'religion causes division' and his distaste for this.

The idea of the *normal* as opposed to the *abnormal* or *special* is a recurring topic for many. Aminah speaks about how she sees her values as «very similar to other Norwegian young peoples values, I don´t see a large contradiction in that.» Fatima as a practicing Muslim herself, seems to think quite differently of the difficulty Jahmal has of placing himself within a religious category. She argues that the basic creed (believing in one God and Muhammed being the last prophet) is the minimum criteria for a Muslim but that there are a wide variety of degrees of being Muslim:

> *So you have different pyramids so to speak. So there are extremists, which there are just a very few of, then you have liberal muslims, so to be a «normal» muslim, it is very difficult to say what that is.*

She stresses that Islam is very personal and does adjust well to individual needs. She does acknowledge however that this can be challenging to put into real life and says that although she regards herself a moderate Muslim she has mistakenly been perceived and labeled a liberal by other Muslims.

Rosa who´s a nonbeliever says that she doesn't have anything against faith, she just doesn't have it and that might place her in the vicinity of the agnostic category although she says that: *«I haven't defined myself either. I haven't placed myself in a certain box, like.»* She does make it clear that she does not care about the new atheism movement. *«I don´t like the whole concept of denying God, so that´s why I´m an agnostic. I don't like the bam-bam-bam. [mimics shots]».* Hanne echoes the similar concerns. She says that:

I think it´s hard to put myself in a box. It´s important not to make this distinction. If you all the time need to defend yourself, this creates a lot of conflict.

[…] it´s hard to place yourself in a box, because I don´t really think it´s important to construct a separation. I think, I feel this is why you see a lot of problems. Given globalisation, religions come closer to each other, and then you see, fewer religious people but also stronger religious people, because then you sort of have to prove your faith, contrasted with other peoples beliefs.

Hannes concern relates to Putnam's idea of *high devotion* and *high diversity* as a potentially volatile mix. (Putnam, 2010, p494) She repeats the phrase about placing herself in a box four times and have clearly reflected deeply about the topic of categorisation and the problems it causes. When probed upon a concrete position she chooses agnostic rather than atheist and non-believer rather than believer and prefers the term humanist when asked to describe her worldview. She does however acknowledge that there are positive sides to globalisations effect on religion, among these being the individual's possibility to choose from a diverse spiritual smorgasbord:

They're like, yes I believe in Jesus but I don't believe in this and that, and I like Hinduism also, if you get what I´m saying. That believe say, I´m Christian slash Buddhist, like. I have actually seen that example, like Christian Buddhist or Buddhist Christian. The person was Christian but thought Buddhism was a very nice [koselig] religion, like, and wanted to be that also, like. And then it´s easier to choose for yourself when there are so many options […] I think it´s a thing that people choose for themselves what they want to believe in, it´s not that they just buy the whole package, you can sort of, make your own thing

Hanne's train of though echoing Bellahs concept of *Sheilaism* (Storm, 2009, p704) and also the *fuzzy fidelity*. (Storm, 2009, pp703) The notion of *individualism*, for these respondents seems to stand in contrast to categorisation and might explain the hesitation or even refusal to be «put in a box». Even those unafraid of labelling themselves a Christian or Muslim or a none, makes sure to point out that this is not merely an inherited system of belief but something they have carefully reflected and chosen for themselves. Only one of the respondents, Ishmael, does not specifically point out his faith as a personal choice but rather emphasises being born in a Muslim family, always having had faith, and growing up as a believer as the *natural* thing for him.

4.1.2 Conflicting identities

One key topic which is examined by sociologists of religion is how religion is either understood as an identity category or as belief. This question seems to occupy my respondents as well and creates the challenge of conflicted identities. Aminah talks about people she knows struggling with what she calls *double identities*:

> *So, that is that they feel they have to be a different person at home, and a different person outside to be accepted. And I know that in certain environments it´s difficult to distinguish yourself, being different, while at my school I felt that this was not too big of a problem. But I know young people who feels that they cannot handle being in between, like their religion, or their family, it´s something that is not accepted, so, it´s not something they have chosen themselves, and then it´s very difficult to bring that out of the door so to speak. Yes, and this is also perhaps, so that some youth feel that they have a double identity, it´s very difficult for them to fit in to society, so it's either or for them, really.*

Kjerstin who has never been shy about being a Christian, says that she sees other believers in her school who are undercover believers or 'closet-Christians'. One of her friends is a pentecostal who is very open about her faith on social media:

> *She is very forthright about it when she´s not in class. She even has a background image on the pc, but like, she does not like dare to say anything about it.*

Kjerstin says that she does not think she is embarrassed, but rather she does not want to stand up for it or come out in the school context and she further relates it with Christians being unpopular in her school, which speaks to theories of the *dominant discourse* (Kittelman Flensner, 2015, p107-112) and Gofmann's idea of being *discredited* (Vassenden and Andersson, 2010, p588) and Rommetvedt's majority misunderstanding. (Iversen, 2012, p263)

Ishmael, although being quite frank about his identity as a practicing Muslim, does make sure that I understand that he is *just* like everyone else:

> *I don't really stress much about it, I do pray five times a time, I hang out with friends, go to parties, like a normal youth, except that I pray five times a day, that´s the only thing that´s different from ordinary, typical youth. Yes, I think a lot of young people today struggle with double identity.*

This suggests that he doesn't see *conflicting identity* as a salient challenge for himself, although he recognises that others see it is a struggle. Ishmael points out that refraining from alcohol is the one moral choice that identifies him as a practicing Muslim and distinguishes him from his Norwegian friends.

> *They say I don't drink or[—] But I go out with friends, have a good time and stuff, without drinking.*

He says his parents trust him when he goes out with friends but he know of others who might not have this privilege. Furthermore Ishmael talks about observing the daily prayer, and thinks that if you are open about it you get respect from your peers, but he knows about someone who tried to conceal the fact that they were praying and was maybe more embarrassed about it. Hanne talks about the interplay between traditional beliefs and individual reflections around faith and argues that «religion is based more on identity today than before.» She elaborates:

> *Well, to have faith, opinions and principles is what makes you a person. It´s very important to have a principal basis when you´re going out in to the world, like.*

4.1.3   Faith of the Fathers: How family affects religion

Faith in relation to family background is also linked to the concept of *ethnicity* as a religious identifier. Jahmal connects his own religious identity more so with his family and upbringing then the doctrines or practices of said faith:

> *I usually don´t call myself a Muslim but, eh, since I´m born in a*
> *Muslim family and grew up in a Muslim country, so because of that I*
> *guess I call my self a Muslim, so [—] But I´m not a practicing*
> *Muslim, so, eh, for instance I eat pork, and drink, and all of that.*

Aminah on the other hand stresses that her Muslim faith is an individual choice and somewhat downplays the potential effect parents have had:

> *For me, religion is something very personal[—] I´m born in a Muslim*
> *family, so, that has something to say, even if I live in Norway. But I*
> *have actually studied Islam somewhat, so. I feel its a religion suiting*
> *me.*

Ishmael connects his faith to his family background saying that he is born into a Muslim family and has therefore always been a believer, as is the same with his siblings. He doesn't seem to stress the importance of the individual choice related to faith, but speaks a lot about Muslim culture and Somali culture contrasted with Norwegian culture or popular culture. He also speaks about Norway as a Christian country and contrasts the Muslim prayer five times a day with talking about «you Norwegians who pray every now and then» adding that: «You go to church on Sundays, but the rest is like laid-back».

Jahmal who is not a practicing Muslim seems to be conflicted over how to fit in to the religious landscape. As mentioned he shifts during the interview from talking about 'us' or 'we Muslims' and 'the Muslims' or 'them' or 'they'. When asked about this ambiguity he implies that Islam is not solely an individual choice but something «based on the family, right.» He finds being caught in this duplicity somewhat tiresome and impossible and illustrates this with a traditional saying from his upbringing:

> *You both want to be in wedding and funeral at the same time, that*
> *doesn´t work you know. [—] I kind of pity myself somewhat, because I*
> *don´t know why, I go to the mosque, but I don´t practice Islam, so I*
> *don´t see any point to it really [laughs]*

Kjerstin also acknowledges that her background has had an influence on her religious position but interestingly states that: «*I have believed all my life*», clearly emphasising the individual nature of

her Christian faith. She does however rely on her parents when she has unresolved issues around her beliefs:

> *So, I had to ask mum and dad what´s the answer to that, like. I've*
> *always reflected a lot around faith, and I've always known that the*
> *Lord is my Father, like, or Jesus is my brother, so, always known what*
> *I stand for, like. If I was uncertain on anything in the Bible, then I*
> *asked mum and dad.*

Rosa the non-believer ponders if she as a child perhaps had some sort of faith, possibly deriving from her grand-mother, but has not had any conversion to non-belief, but seems to suggest it just dawned on her that she does not believe in religion or what she calls «creatures out of this world», but adds «plus my parents are not religious. So you do get influenced through that as well, then.» This suggesting that the respondents have to do a great deal of negotiation between the notion of their position as an individual decision and the recognition of the fact that they have been born into a specific tradition they cannot easily escape.

4.1.4   Privatising religion: Navigating conflict

> *I´m usually very cautious with what I´m saying, cautious about discussing religion,*
> *until I know what that person is, because I don't want to offend anyone.*

Several of my respondents suggest that keeping a lid on religious expressions and statements is a way of containing and preventing conflict. Thus privatisation functions as conflict or tension-management, a way to reduce inter-religious animosity. However, for some of the respondents, this conscious or unconscious strategy seem to lead them down a *spiral of silence*. Aminah argues that:

> *[…]people want to avoid bringing up that topic in every way they can. So, the point*
> *is to keep it hidden or personal, really […] religion has less significance, in the*
> *public debate. I also feel that religion enters it on a negative way, or is presented in*
> *a negative way.*

Hanne reflects wether the strongly devout Muslims in her class were insecure of the response and therefore chose not to voice their opinions on different matters. She thinks that religious discussions given too much space in the classroom could potentially lead to conflict, and for religion in general argues that:

> *[…]what is a legitimate criticism of religion is the way religions encountering each other creates conflicts.*

A recurring topic during the interviews was class discussion on religion, most common in Religion or Philosophy classes but also occurring in other subjects. The common idea from my respondents was that when you enter in to a discussion on religion you're navigating dangerous waters, some even suggested that the classroom situation is not a suitable arena for these types of conversations. Aminah experienced some of her fellow-students had a negative view on religion in general and were against all things religious and felt that engaging in dialogue or discussions with them was futile:

> *[…] they always wanted to look down on religion and show the negative sides of religion, but I remember I tried to avoid getting in discussions with them, because you know that certain people doesn't want to hear anything against their own opinions and then it´s just better to just avoid talking to them, really.*

She continues:

> *I remember, so people, would almost not accept that others had a religion or religious faith at all, that was people which, I meant that they were almost excluded because they had a religious faith.*

She explains that perhaps it's not religion per se but rather some contentious topics like homosexuality that sparks the fiercest discussions, but does acknowledge that topics like this is indirectly linked to religion. She feels she has to defend herself and explain that just being a Muslim does not automatically make her a homophobe. Furthermore she recalls a situation where the atheists sat and ridiculed the theists and tried to convince them not to believe in a god. Rosa talks about loosing hope in positive fruits of religious discussions:

It's fun when they are open about faith, it was fun to discuss, or I thought it was fun but I found out that it doesn't really work to discuss religion. After this week actually. It was fun, first, but then there were a bit many that were sceptic, and those who tried to defend their views, or talk about Christianity, they were somewhat attacked, so, it was difficult, it was almost uncomfortable to watch, yes. I just found out there´s really no point, so. But still I found it interesting and somewhat fun, so. [...] It was mostly these hardcore atheists that were allowed [to ask questions]

It seems the idea of the classroom as 'disagreement community' according to Iversen, is at play in some of the respondents' classrooms, but with an emphasis on the first word and perhaps the lack of the second. Iversen shows how the teacher in his research functioned as a facilitator of disagreements and good discussions while in my data, this task seems to have overcome the teachers in some instances. (Iversen, 2014, pp62-67) Hanne experienced her school as one where religion was very much a private matter, the reason for this belief was simply that religion was not a topic of discussion. Interestingly she thinks that in society in general religion is less private now then before, she says that:

[…] it has become a more public issue, what you think and do. Because it effects so much of the other stuff you think about and believe.

Furthermore she states that she navigates carefully in conversations involving religion:

But I´m usually very cautious with what I´m saying, cautious about discussing religion, until I know what that person is, because I don't want to offend anyone. And even if you should be ok saying whatever you want, I let myself be influenced by the person I´m talking to, if I know what he is. If I talk to a Christian, I would perhaps be more cautious with what I´m saying about Christianity, compared to when I´m talking to an atheist.

Grete fears that we're entering a world with less tolerance for religious views and relates this to the privatisation of religion:

> *So I'm somewhat worried. I think it's a bit creepy that people are so afraid to share their opinions, this thing with it being a private matter. I hope not that, the whole worlds heads his way, I hope it's just Norway and that it perhaps turns, but I dont know.*

Here we see that the respondents suggest that privatisation as part of the differentiation theory has the negative effects of creating less understanding and tolerance for non-secular views, much related to the idea of the *secular dominant discourse*. (Kittelman Flensner, 2015, pp107-112) Another explanation is given by Lars Christian who admits that he thinks the debates are very uniform but explains this with there being very few religious students in his class, and adds that the class have been together for such a long period that he thinks it should be safe to voice your opinion wether you are religious or not. Still he does recall a lecture where the class watched a video of Christians giving somewhat amusing reasons for their belief to which the class laughed. He says that maybe if you were religious you would not react in the same way.

Anton argues that it's impossible *not* to offend anyone and «stepping on some toes» when the topic of religion comes up. He speaks about the ambiguity of valid criticism that makes you reflect over your own beliefs and being in a discussion that turns into quarrelling. I interpret Anton to be arguing for a discussion on religion which is less self-sensory and rather allows for people to be offended. He several times used the term 'political correctness' to describe the debate climate in his school. He recalls an incident with a girl in school who accused him of being political incorrect and a misogynist, not believing in equal rights:

> *[…] she meant that I was a homophobe who hated everything that had to do with humans and homosexuals and all, looked down on women and stuff, based on what she had read in the Bible […] I guess she understood in a way that it was wrong, but since I see myself as a Christian with an active faith, suddenly this was the way she saw me, just because I'm a Christian […] that it doesn't coincide with all the laws that we have in this country.*

Anton experiences what is called guilt by association, something he could have prevented but did not by not acting out the two alternatives Gofmann suggest for a discreditable person, which is either get misunderstandings out in the open right away or pass as normal to hide stigma information. (Vassenden and Andersson, 2010, p588) Anton contrasts this experience with people

arguing on equal terms disagreeing with his actual faith debating his opinion and thinks that you have to take what comes at you:

> *[…] try to show as much respect as possible, agreeing to disagree, it often ends up like that; you believe something, I believe something, and we care about each other anyway.*

He does admit that it is not just easy being open with your faith and says it's a constant pressure that he understands can be scary for some:

> *I think a lot of people think its easier to be quiet about it. So, I believe that, there are some Christian in different schools and universities, but its easier to be silent, because its easier to get through the everyday life then, and just slide beneath, not being challenged.*

Interestingly the 'silence' that Anton refers to is what fellow-students interpret as secular according to my hypothesis *white silence signifies secular*. (see theory chapter) Martin formulates the dilemma of giving room to all sides and opinions and at the same time not stepping on anyones 'religious' toes:

> *I would say it´s important to facilitate so one can believe whatever one chooses. But it's also important not to offend or desecrate anyone with your opinions, because, then you talk about an offence [krenkelse]. And that would be inappropriate if one should follow the school regulations. […] If you went hard in one direction, and said stuff that was not within the social norm, it happened that people looked down upon you, but it was more like, instant, like, «you cannot mean that!».*

Here we see an example of how a dominant discourse effectively silences expressed norms situated in alternative demotic discourses when the dominant discourse as Mouffe calls it has reached 'moment'. (Kittelman Flensner, 2015, p80)

4.1.5 Creating safe-spaces for religiosity

> *Something I find funny; those that I speak most about faith and religion with, that's the Muslims, really. I have a lot of Muslim friends, so for them it's very important, so, they usually wear hijab, yes.*

In this quote Grete argues that she connects better with people of other religions than those without any religious belief, and possibly also fellow Christians who are silent about their faith. This experience that Grete finds amusing can be interpreted as a community revolving around shared stigma; on the one hand the white Christian is *potentially* discreditable while the non-white Muslim is already discreditable due to both *signs given off (ethnicity)* and *signs given* (hijab), and thus the encounter between two adherents of quite contrary traditions of belief creates a *safe-space* for religious dialogue. (Vassenden and Andersson, 2010, p577)

I argue that the privatisation of religion creates a need in the religious student to find safe spaces within the school environment for religious practice and conversation. The Christian Union and more informal Muslim prayer groups being arenas for intra-religious gatherings around shared practices and beliefs, but also informal inter-religious dialogue and fellowship seem to be appreciated by several of the respondents. Interestingly, the non-believers see little or no need for this kind of fellowship or safe space. Hanne says she is not interested in gatherings for humanists or non-believers, while Lars Christian laughs at the idea of atheists forming a fellowship in his school. On the question if he would have joined a group like that he says:

> *I personally don´t think being an atheist is very rational either, so I don´t think I would have joined that fellowship, but I had definitely paid attention to what they did, like.*

He adds afterwards that if there was an agnostic group he would have attended, but doesn't seem to have entertained the idea or a willingness to initiate one. Rosa recalls the Christian groups in her school and says she think they had events to create more understanding around their faith which she found nice. When asked about if she would consider any alternative activity or group she says:

> *For people not believing in God? For those who doesn't want to define themselves [laughter] No I wouldn't want to join a humanistic thing, no. [...] I don't believe I*

would want to join any religious or life-stance group at all. [...]I don't have a need
to share the fact that I don't believe or engage with others, so, about that.

Martin reflects on his school being open for religion:

Open? I don´t know. I would say faith is accepted [speaking of his
own Christian faith], but there´s a lot of people that don´t like
Christians that much, some more than others.

Kjerstin is heavily involved with the Christian Union in her school and even stated that knowing about the group was one of her motivations for applying for that particular school. She states the group as something as an arena that strengthens her faith in her everyday life emphasising the intra-religious community as a salient safe-space devoid of stigma. Kjerstin, like Grete says that she connects better with religious students than non-religious students, explaining that they understand her better and that although they have conflicting beliefs they still encourage and respect each other in spite of the differences. This suggests that the common bond of actually having a religious belief rather than not is something that is 'thicker than blood', overcoming cultural and ethnic differences is lesser obstacles than that of a real or perceived antagonism towards religion. I interpret this experience as an argument against the idea that conflicting beliefs create conflict, for Kjerstin and Grete, it clearly increases inter-religious respect and tolerance.

Gofmann also notes the importance of *context* as a factor that determines wether an attribute is either a stigma or a symbol of prestige. One interpretation here is that for Kjerstin, religiosity is a hidden stigma most of her school-day, while both in an intra- and inter-religious context, the stigma turns into a prestige, which explains why she seeks out these spaces. (ibid, 2010, p577)

Anton on the other hand seems to thrive among different groups and is unafraid of sharing his beliefs with people. He is nonetheless part of a Christian Union in his school, which provides some support and a stigma-free space, but at the same time does not seem to depend on this exclusively as a safe-space. In his perspective the school is seen as a mission-field, in other words, a cultural space in which he ought to engage and not withdraw, hence he argues his Christian fellowship functions as a base for evangelism and spreading the love of God. Still he recognise that this arena might be the safe-space that others need to be able to come ask «*questions they wouldn't ask a priest*». He says the school were positive towards their social and evangelistic initiatives like handing out buns

and coffee and setting up posters wishing the students good luck on exams and having religious gatherings (andakt). However, initially the group was faced with scepticism. Anton tells that some teachers were concerned if the group would stand with a microphone in the schoolyard condemning people to hell. Anton explains that this was due to them having «an image of how Christian meetings were» and he argues «it was positive to change that». This could be interpreted that Anton and his group were already discredited and faced with prejudice, hence they had to apply 'covering' and 'tension-management'. Anton, though recounting episodes where he experienced his faith as causing tension and dislike, seemed to be an exception to the stigma-narrative as he did not seem to bear his religiosity as a stigma, but rather as a symbol of prestige, possibly based on inner conviction and an environment outside his school which supported him on this.

4.1.6   Science versus Religion

The narrative of religion at its core being at odds with scientific enquiry is a popular notion, also among the students I interviewed. I was surprised but perhaps not shocked that almost all of them, wether religious or not, entertain some version of this *conflict story* in various degrees. The religious students being those that starkest oppose the story and argues that religion and science can coexist, still seems to hold this view in a more subtle and internalised way. Anton for instance, when asked to describe the religiosity of his classmates, says that *«it was like a casserole, we had those very pro science, atheists, like hard evidence»*.
Grete is an example on a more subtle view on this conflict and voices a strong criticism towards both students and teachers who she says *construct* the conflict between science and religion, which she in fact thinks are fully compatible with each other:

> *No, so I think they can work together, I´m very fond of both. But, this is my personal opinion again. So I don't take the Bible fully literal, like the creation story I read a bit more [metaphorically].*

She says that for her part she believes in Big Bang and evolution and cannot fathom how some believers claim that the world is 5000 years old, and express frustration that some would take the Bible as literally as that. Still, here she does say that there *are* in fact believers who hold their belief to the extent where they do become the antagonist of science, but for her part the line is drawn with

creationism. However, the core doctrine of Christianity can also be considered unscientific, namely that God became man, died but then rose to life after three days, though few believers would draw the line here and count themselves as anti-scientific because of this belief.

> *«I've, chosen not to believe in it, you know. So, then I have maybe chosen natural science, in a way.»*

Hanna explains why not being religious was a choice and thinks that a scientific worldview was the more natural choice for her, suggesting the two are contrasting views, however she does modify this immediately saying: «Now, I´m not saying that these things can´t be combined, right. That´s not what I mean.» Furthermore, Hanna says that having a strong faith, she uses the term 'Biblicist', such as believing the earth is 7000 years old and the specific details about the story about Noah and the arc, then this was criticised:

> *It was ridiculous to think like that, because it goes against science you know. […] the Bible says something else then what the theory of evolution and the Big Bang theory states. So when people believe the Bible in a slavic way, eh, that then becomes very easy to criticise.*

Notice how Hanna shares the same idea as Grete who is a Christian, both arguing that some form of religious belief is in conflict with science.

Fatima does not give this topic much thought but explains that: *«Religion has nothing to do with science really. Those who try to mix religion and science, I don't really care for really. So my physics teacher used to say.»*
However she does reveal a possible internalised belief in the conflict-narrative when she hints that most of her teachers, being academics are probably unbelievers. One could of course interpret this in the direction that Fatima and the others who aligns science with a non-religious position are up-to-date on statistics on the 'overrepresentation of nones in academia' (Yancey, 2012, pp268) and how 'higher education correlates with lower religious belief' (Høeg, 2017, p187-188), but I find this less plausible as the 'conflict-narrative' is so deeply imbedded in our culture that alternative demotic discourses have a tough challenge. Both Jahmal and Ishmael did not offer any specific thoughts around this matter. Aminah tells an episode from a classroom discussion where a boy

voiced his scepticism towards the evolution theory and then experienced the group turning against him quite forcefully:

> *[…] People were like, oh, oh my God, is he stupid, or, doesn't he know anything. So that's like, yes, eh, maybe he didn't really say that, so he has biology and realist subjects, so maybe he was kidding or, but people took it seriously because they knew about his religious background. I felt that people became very negative in their attitudes towards religious people, and that influence you as well. When I for instance tried to defend him and said, no, you really shouldn't have this negative attitude towards him, it was just total negativity towards religion.*

Lars Christian, much like Kittelman Flensner observes in the Swedish classrooms, connects rationality with his own agnostic, non-religious worldview and attaches an irrationality to other positions:

> *I personally don´t think being an atheist is very rational either […] Now, I dare to say that I have pretty much sensible friends, many of them who are also agnostics, but, I have met a few atheists, and when I sort of ask them why they are atheists I don't get a very good answer either, in a way, so. I get the same answer that I get when I ask religious people why they are religious.*

Lars Christians assumption further connects a scientific interest to non-religion as he argues that *«it's quite obvious that the realist teachers are, eh, many of the realist teacher not are believers.»* When asked to elaborate on this he says:

> *It´s in the way that they relate to religious questions and when there is a religious statement, you see a reaction in their face, without them necessarily saying anything [laughter]*

He does acknowledge that religion and science are not incompatible by necessity:

> *I would say it´s wrong to say that science and religion are oppositions, because, religion I would say, is so loose, so personal. Eh. But, eh. When I say realist, I mean*

perhaps that one holds to the scientific method, that if one cannot prove something, it does not exist either.

4.1.7   Teachers find religion a contentious issue

My data suggests that also teachers apply the conflict-perspective when handling religion in the classroom. The majority of my interviewees portray the teacher as one who knows religion is a contentious matter, needing to be dealt with delicately so not to exclude or offend any groups or persons. Rosa for instance is quite certain that her teacher restrained the class during debates attempting to function as a what Iversen refers to as a facilitator in the disagreement-community of the class (Iversen, 2014, pp62-67):

> *The teacher made sure not to take the discussion very far as it could be uncomfortable. […] it was quite off the topic and an uncomfortable atmosphere, so, they avoid these discussions.*

Lars Christian agrees that teachers nowadays are very careful about making statements on religion. Grete's experience is that her teachers take a non-religious, secular position as a matter of course and assume that most are non-religious, this relates to Mardsen's notion that a secular perspective has replaced religion as the favoured viewpoint in academia (Mardsen, 2015, pp19-22):

> *That has frustrated me a lot. […] I think it's a bit sad. It seems like the teachers think like, how it's like in the school that's the way it is everywhere. Not at all! Most of the world is still religious. […] The teacher was pretty distinctly atheistic, and then, you notice that the students really want to have the same opinions as the teacher often, so then everyone became very strongly, eh, yes, they were very much on that side, so, yeah, against religion. So there were a few that were agreeing with me but they didn't dare to [say it].*

She suggests that the teacher could be a reason why students keep their faith private, but also thinks that grades are a factor:

> R: [...]So you want to do well and do what the teachers says and say what the teacher likes. If you think like that then you don't say so many things…
>
> I: So you could almost risk your grades?
>
> R: I got a bad grade, 5 instead of 6, the only subject I didn't get 6. But, no.
>
> I: Was it worth it?
>
> R   Yes. I cant say anything I don't stand for. I thought about complaining, but I didn't bother to argue with that teacher, it was so uncomfortable. Yes. It´s really unfair, really.

Martin thinks that teachers should be careful with giving out information on their personal religious views:

> I think that religion, as a lot of other things, is a private matter, so when you are an employee you should not promote so much of your own ideas or values, and rather just do your job, like.

I would argue that this way of managing religious plurality is a *self-fulfilling prophecy.* If the teacher sees religion as contentious and tries to facilitate the classroom conversation such as to avoid sensitive issues and keeping a lid on polarising views, that would in my opinion fertilise a suspicion towards views of the other, perhaps also be prone to misinterpreting and caricaturing certain religious views which are not voiced as loud as the moderate ones, which therefore would prove the conflict-narrative adapted in the first place. I do not argue that there are no areas of tension when religion is discussed, there certainly are, however, I do not believe that the conflict-lens is the best with which to frame discussion and dialogue on faith as it assumes a quite locked both *substantive* and a *reductionistic* view of religion.

4.1.8   Negotiating cultural norms

To further examine questions of what is *Norwegian culture* and what does it mean to be a 'normal' high school student in Oslo, are questions of little interest to the respondents. For them both the Norwegian and the normal seems given; the Norwegian is still very much very white, it's about drinking alcohol and partying during the graduation (russe-feiring), being liberal and progressive on topics like dating, different forms of sexuality and relationships. These sentiments are quite strongly

formulated by the religious respondents but to a lesser degree among the non-religious, who do not talk about it in the same way, the reason why, I would argue being these cultural attributes or values are not an explicit challenge to their worldview, as they are likely to be in a Muslim or Christian moral system. Consider the conversation here with Aminah:

> I: So drugs. Is this a recurring topic?
>
> R: Yes, like at parties… People offer like a beer, and you say no and they ask why, and then I have to explain a bit. I think thats ok, I get used to it.

It seems that she implies; this is just how the norm is, better not make a big deal out of it. Fatima says this about Norwegian culture:

> I: So you said Norwegian culture, what is that?
>
> R: Well, you see a lot of Norwegian youth culture, in the graduation parties [«russetida»], [laughter]. So my graduation celebration was really different from what ethnic Norwegians really did […]
>
> Yes, all about moral values. The other one, like «Yeah, I´m gonna adapt to the Norwegian culture» drinking and such, going to parties. The other one was like, no, staying away from that. […] like I had some muslims in my year who chose to drink, and like, yeah, do what everybody else did, so.[…] I think there´s like a modern cloud over us, like not believing in anything, or believe in everything, like, not believing in God, just that one becomes dust when you die, this is very modern, right. This defines the Norwegian culture. But a lot of Norwegians, I think, 40 or 60 percent, belong to the Norwegian State Church, but there are very few of them going there on Sundays.

Fatima describes here in her own words a version of the secular dominant discourse that Kittelman Flensner talks about. She equates belief in *anything, everything* and *not God* with Norwegian culture, ascribing this to modernity, w view which seems to fit right in with secularisation theories à la Steve Bruce. (Storm, 2009, p702)

Fatima clearly finds the discrepancy between church membership numbers and devotion to practices and attendance a curious case which is referred to in the theory as 'fuzzy nones' and 'belonging without believing'. (Storm, 2009, p703)

I think Fatima pinpoints an important perspective of the Norwegian majority view of morality and religiosity here, showing why then some Islamic practices pose a challenge to this as they tend to be more public and visible. For instance the prohibition against alcohol poses a challenge for a Muslim wanting to integrate well, as she realises that joining this part of Norwegian (youth) culture forces her to break a valuable Muslim practice. While for the Christian, which historically has had restrictive relationship to alcohol, sees no threat to his private believes wether he drinks a beer or not. One can argue that here the Muslim, is a minority in multiple levels, in terms of both, *religion, ethnic* and *moral.*

Jahmal on the other hand, puts an equation between being Norwegian and Christian, arguing that those that express Norwegian cultural are Christians:

> R: *Most are off course Christians, so they are Norwegians, so they are Christians.*
> I: *Is that the same thing then?*
> R: *Eh, no, not necessarily, most would be practicing Christians, but I do have two or three buddies that, eh, are not Christians, and, eh, don´t have religion at all.*

He is hinting at the Norwegian culture being synonymous with a more flexible view of Christian morality. It is not implausible to interpret Jahmal's view deriving from superficial knowledge of the Norwegian religiosity. For instance if one moves here from a different nation like Jahmal, it's not unreasonable to assume that Norway and its citizens identify with Christianity based on Church-membership numbers, and the notion that a nation 'must' have a religion or at least a majority-religion which is in fact a common idea throughout the world. Ishmael also hints at the same view when he once during the interview said, *«you Christians»* assumedly just connecting my whiteness to being Norwegian and therefore Christian, showing the exception from Faith Information Control, which argues that whiteness hides religion. He further explains that for Norwegians, culture is separate from religion but says that where *«we are from, culture is like important, connected to religion.»* Assumedly, he is not just speaking on behalf of his Somali background, but the 'we' referring to Muslims in general. When asked about the core of Muslim culture he thinks for a bit and answers *«praying five times a day, being a good person.»*

One interesting tendency I find is that while the Muslim respondents talk about the challenges with the Norwegian culture are mainly of *moral character*, the Christian ones are more concerned with the Norwegian norm being that of *non-belief and scientism,* where earlier the Christian worldview had centre stage. One can argue that for the Muslims who emphasise religious practice, the core of their faith is threatened while for the Christians, at least Protestant Lutherans who focus on doctrine, it is the crux of their beliefs that are under attack.

PART TWO

4.2.0   Faith Information Control

My main hypothesis in this thesis is that religious youth are silent on mattes of faith, particularly their own. FIC gives a reasonably good theoretical argument to how and why this happens, and as such is strengthened by my data. Vassendens and Andersons differentiation of *signs given* and *signs given off* (Vassenden and Andersson, 2010, p577), the first one exemplified through religious symbols or statements, which one chooses deliberately, and the latter through ethnicity and race, which is visible wether one likes it or not, helps explain how my respondents manage and observe Faith Information Control. My data does to a large degree confirm this theory, especially in regard to non-whiteness, in terms of whiteness I both criticise and stand on the shoulders of Vassenden and Anderson and suggest my own theory of 'White Silence Signifies Secular'.

Nonetheless the respondents seem to have the perception that *non-whiteness* and more particular a *middle/near-eastern* appearance indicates Islam. Ishmael, a Muslim with Somali background reflects wether he has ever been identified as a Muslim, just based on his appearance:

> *No. yes [,,.] every now and then, but not that much. Most ask me, if*
> *they don´t find out if they don´t know me, they ask, are you a Muslim*
> *or Christian?*

I interpret that Ishmael to not primarily sees himself in terms of his colour, hence the little reflection wether this is how others identify him as a Muslim. Lars Christian, whose appearance is south-east Asian, I argue both by himself and others is not viewed explicitly with the lens of religion, despite

him being a person of colour. He does acknowledges his view on the topic when regarding others as a prejudice and a bias:

> *I notice for my own part that I have a prejudice that, or maybe not prejudice but a premonition that people from the middle east or say Pakistan or India or something like that, one is perhaps a Muslim then.*

Rosa, the non-believer stated how she had a friend from Sri Lanka, who is in fact a Christian, but is regularly mistaken for a Muslim and have experienced being excused when it comes to eating pork for instance. Also south-east Asian appearances does less reveal any religion, as Lars Christian, with Chinese background stated:

> *Well. I have in fact read that Chinese often is called model immigrants, because they integrate so well, and that could be partly because of, eh, majority of Chinese are nor religious and, eh, these things, so.*

Martin explains that his views on ethnicity and religion has become more nuanced and more mature over time. This relates to Allport's Contact theory (Putnam, 2010, p527). Martin further explains that his prejudices changed especially after meeting people from these regions of the world that did not affiliate themselves within Islam.

> *[—] some immigrants from among others, Afghanistan and Eritrea and the likes came here, and they were very Christian, which was a bit unusual to me, as most people with this background were Muslims, so before I maybe used to think that if you had, like, a more Somali appearance, you probably were a Muslim, whereas now I feel that unless you wear a hijab its very difficult to determine which religion different people have, so.*

Martin acknowledges that he was not aware of these nuances in high school but attributes his new perspective to his experience of encounters with people from the countries he mentioned, living together at the Folk High School, which entails both *high frequency* and *high degree of interaction.* As Martin exemplifies here I suggest that the prejudice explained in FIC is potentially more prone to be accepted by younger people who do not have the maturity nor the life-experience to take in a diverse set of nuances when it comes to religion.

However, grown-ups which have a broader spectre of categories and nuances, might also have certain prejudices set on «autopilot» which they normally don´t reflect a lot over. This might be a greater challenge as the older you get the more set in your ways, relationships and experiences you become, and prejudices may be more difficult to root out. This experience further relates to what Peter Berger calls cognitive contamination, emphasising that it is in the actual encounters with the 'other' where the relativising of your own faith or opinion, which in turn helps you to see the 'other' and his religious identity as multifaceted and nuanced, hence you also see what you have in common and not just what separates you. (Berger, 2016)

Aminah with a Pakistani ethnic background said this about her choosing not to wear a hijab: *«I want people to first get to know me as a person, not me as a Muslim.»* This clearly speaks to her wish to manage the *signs given.* (Vassenden and Andersson, 2010) Her skin colour she cannot change to prevent people from jumping to conclusions but what she deliberately reveals she will control. One can argue that her attempt is somewhat futile, related to what Anton, the Christian boy says:

> *People are more surprised if, say a person from Pakistan is not a*
> *believer, so. It´s like «Wow, you´re not a believer?»*
> *[…] Off course he is a Muslim, its more like a matter of course than anything else.*
> *So people are more, you could say surprised if say a Pakistani or something is not a*
> *believer […]*
> *I cant think of anyone really calling themselves Christians, perhaps there were some*
> *Hindus or Muslims, maybe who was that because, they said this explaining it with*
> *their background, like, this was identity for them*

Even though Aminah's faith is somewhat private she says that:

> *[—] this identity, I don´t think Islam and me are two separate things,*

it´s like, if you get to know me, you also get to know Islam.

Aminah specifies that her motivation for this control is not fear of being ousted as a Muslim even though she acknowledges that topics like ISIS and terrorism make her want to explain and defend her faith. I interpret this that she does not see it as a personal stigma for her. She says that this has changed after she has matured *«I don´t have to distance myself all the time [—] like, people ought to understand that themselves».* Furthermore she states that some of the consequences she faces from teachers for instance, is the feeling of falling under suspicion of family domination or control because of their prejudices towards Islam:

> *I have experienced prejudices from teachers based on my skin-colour.*
> *For instance when I wanted to get good grades, they thought this was*
> *because of pressure from the family, even though I experience my*
> *family as quite liberal when it comes to studies [—] The prejudice*
> *that sticks is that Muslim families only want them [their children] to*
> *study medicine or law, like [—] I had other students in my class that*
> *wanted to study medicine, and wanted to achieve and studied hard*
> *and was more depressed, but I didn't feel that they were questioned*
> *with the same like me, so I had to defend myself all the time.*

This is particular prejudiced and stereotypical attitudes that also the other Muslim respondents touched upon, but with examples from friends and not themselves.

Martin suggests that context is crucial for getting knowledge on the religiosity of your peers. He thinks you can get very different outcomes if you ask at a party, alcohol included or in the middle of class. He thinks that there is perhaps a majority of students in his school that are believers in the sense «believing in something more», but even this very vague notion can be somewhat sensitive to reveal.

Non-whiteness or Nationality?

As shown here my data does to a large degree confirm the theory posited by Vassenden and Andersson in terms of non-whiteness. However, I think this theory over-emphasise the notion of skin-colour, as other identifiers such as *science and moral positions* also are salient which I will

come back to. Further, there is ambiguity between *skin-colour and ethnicity/nationality* which albeit colour gives you the first impression, ethnicity and nationality seem to be far more precise in identifying which specific religion we are talking about.

Ishmael argues that at least for his situation, Nationality is a more viable identifier than race and skin-colour. He says that since most Somalis are Muslims, then people can learn his religion when they know this about him. This off course depends on peoples ability to differentiate a Somali appearance from an Eritrean (Christian) or other African appearances, which for many are also connected with Christianity, at least more so, than a Middle-eastern appearance. Jahmal also shares this idea and says: *«Nationality sort of explains religion, a bit, like.»*

One can interpret this in the direction that non-whites, don not see themselves in the broad category of 'non-white' but has interpretative resources to distinguish both a Somali from an Eritrean and an Indian from a Pakistani, whereas whites with less interaction with people with a multi-ethnic background 'throws all the eggs in one basket' and reduces anyone that looks non-Norwegian or rather non-European to Muslims.

Consider Rosa's friend, the Sri Lankan Christian who experiences being mistaken for a Muslim as an example of bulking non-whites into the religious 'other' category, clearly not a none nor a Christian. One may indeed interpret this in terms of religion being a sensitive issue especially in regard to unfamiliar practices such as food regulated as *haram* and *halal* which many ethnic Norwegian are aware of. They may act out of a desire to be on the safe side not offending anyone, thereby ending up offending the unexpected.

Another instance, Kjerstin, the Christian, identified her classmate as a Muslim deriving from information on his country of origin, being Bangladesh, quite the logical assumption as the majority religion there is Islam, while 9% are Hindu. Nonetheless, this is an example of associating religion with ethnicity, even though no explicit information on his faith seem to have been given. Another, possible not so logical conclusion is from the same girl categorising all the students of the immigrant classes as Muslims. Most likely there could be several religions as well as nones represented in those classes, as immigration to Norway stem from religiously diverse nations which also include regions and areas with Hindus, Christians, Buddhists and others.

Nonetheless for my respondents, both non-whiteness and (foreign) ethnicity seem to be a viable and logic identifier of religion and particularly salient for the Islamic religion.

4.2.1   Visible faith

I asked several questions about the symbols and the visibility of religion or non-religion in the interviewees everyday life experience. *Hijab, cross* and *realist subjects* (Norwegian term for school subjects such as, Maths, Physics, Chemistry and Biology) seem to be some of the *visible* markers of life-stance and religion that I elicited from the data. Interestingly symbols like the hijab or the cross, seems function in a somewhat different dynamic as religious identifiers. Consider Lars Christian's statements about girls wearing hijab:

> *Yes, I don´t know if it can be called a symbol, but, there are quite a*
> *few girls wearing hijab in any case. That´s pretty common. And then*
> *one would know, well, one doesn't know for certain, but it's probable*
> *that this person perhaps is a believer.*

Rosa adds her thoughts when asked about the cross as an identifier of religion:
> *But you can of course wear that [cross] even though you are not a*
> *Christian, so. A lot of people think it´s pretty, you know.*

This suggests that there are more interpretation and nuances to wearers of Christian symbols while less so for Muslim ones, at least in the two examples of the cross and the hijab. Kjerstin also acknowledges that one could bear a cross with various motives, while the hijab is a clear confirmation of a Muslim position:

> *So, for instance for muslims, with the hijab, you have to show it very*
> *clearly that they are muslims, but for me personally, it´s more about*
> *my relationship to someone above me, and not that I should go*
> *around showing this, even though there could be a lot of different*
> *reasons for people wearing a cross around the neck.*

Ishmael immediately brought up *names* when asked about religious symbols, more specifically Muslim names, exemplifying how when he presented himself with his Arabic name, at least for his own part saw that as a religious identifier and even had a reference to this from the Quran. He also mentioned religious clothing, but this was more rare in his observation. Some respondents brought

up how different students cover their bodies with clothes of different length, symbolising sexual purity or on the other hand promoting oneself towards the opposite sex. One could interpret this to mean that less clothes signifies less religion according to the interviewees. None of the respondents manages to identify a specific non-faith or atheist or agnostic symbol, but several of them, from all creeds, seem to imply a strong connection between realist subjects and a non-faith position. A rational, objective, scientific approach to a topic could be interpreted to presume a non-faith position (as in Science Signifies Secular), in the eyes of some of the respondents. When asked about his school's relation to religion Lars Christian applies the notion of realist or science ideals and interests to position his school in a non-religious frame-work, which is a view that several of the respondents hinted at:

> *Eh. So, now I go to [nickname of the school], and there are several realists who go to (name of the school) eh, so its safe to assume that most people at (name of the school) are not believers, or at least agnostics, but, eh, there are also quite some believers, so [—] We respect all people in the school, you know.*

Hanne gave some of her thoughts as to why she is a non-believer:
> *It has probably more with me choosing to be on a realist subject study, so then I haven´t really thought much about it [religion]*

On the topic of teachers´ religion, several of the respondents assumed that the realist subject teachers were non-religious and saw this as logically following their scientific interests. Hanne said:

> *[Sounding intrigued] I would find it very interesting, eh, if my biology teacher was a Christian, I would find it very interesting to know that.*

This touches base with Vassenden and Andersson's theory of Faith-Information-Control where information about the religion of the non-white respondents in their study was largely more available than their white counterparts. One exception to this fascination for teachers and their relation towards science and religion was Fatima's response:

> *To be honest, I don´t really care what religion my teachers have.*
> *Religion is supposed to a private matter.*

Then later on, she does state that she has similar assumptions as several other respondents about teachers being non-believers. The notion of religion being private occurred in several interviews as matter of factual both for religious and non-religious alike, this seemed to be an accepted truth, the discourse was rather on were to set up the boundaries for what kind of practices and statements that should be private or public.

4.2.2   How students manage Faith Information Control

Grete gets the impression that fellow Christians in her school try to avoid talking about faith in school.

> *[…] When I speak to Christian friends on what it is like being a Christian, talking about Christianity, then they try to change the subject, really, they think it´s a bit uncomfortable. I´ve given up talking about it then, really. Because they think it´s so uncomfortable*

Anton uses the phrase 'coming out' and talks about how he admires Christians that are open about their faith in school. When asked about how he thinks this relates to students of other faiths he says that it's easier for them then for Christians, arguing that «*it is culturally accepted that they [Hindus and Muslims] bring their faith in»*. The expression of 'coming out' as it is mostly used for explaining the process of revealing one's homosexuality is interesting in this context because it implies that it is a difficult process also for the religious person, not coming without a cost. It also underlines the theory of Faith Information Control and White Silence Signifies Secular, arguing that religious people *need* to reveal their faith unless they wish to fall into the category of non-religion, which of course can be comfortable, relating to Gofmann's idea of 'passing as normal'. Anton goes on to talk about his personal experience of 'coming out' to his friends:

> *So the day after, the Monday, I met my friends, they saw that something had happened to me. I was no longer uncertain of who I was or who I belonged to. It was an identity and a big freedom. […] they knew me, and thought «Anton, he could*

never be a Christian the way he᾿s running around!» So I met them, shared my faith,
and what God had done and. They were all shocked because they thought that I had
pranked them till I returned home, so. In the beginning they were ok with it, so, but
then it was more difficult for them to share the same views as me, so slowly but
surely our roads departed.

When asked if he feels some sort of social pressure relating to his faith, he says that everybody were conscious of his faith and asked question, but the only pressure he felt was that of having to live up to a certain moral standard, sensing that people saw him as better than themselves. He goes on to say that he had to let that go and show his class that he struggled with ordinary problems as well as them. As Anton has a rather clear 'before-and-after-story', in regard to his religious conversion he thinks this has been a help for him when displaying his faith. In addition he says he has some tattoos that reveal something about his faith, as he both have Bible-verses, and other Christian symbols displayed on his body. I argue that Anton, as a white believer, having ousted his faith both by statements and also signs given (tattoos and being part of Christian Union) exemplifies the already *discredited* person which manages *tension* not information, by applying what Goffman calls 'covering', that is behaviour aimed to minimise the social tension created.

4.2.3   How teachers manage Faith Information Control

On the one hand most of the respondents think that the religious identity of the teacher is and should be a private matter and thus irrelevant for the lecturing, on the other hand many students are very keen to hear what the teachers personally believes and thinks about religion, beyond the 'neutral' textbook answer. In some classes and for certain teachers the topic of religion seldom or never comes up, such as for the realist subjects, while for religion and philosophy classes, discussions on faith is rarely far away. Interestingly though, several respondents stated or hinted that they would find it curious or surprising if they learnt that their chemistry or biology teacher was a believer (as opposed to an atheist or agnostic), hence confirming the *perceived* causal relationship between a scientific worldview and non-religion. Consider this dialogue with Grete:

> I: *Do you know what religion or faith the teachers have?*
> R: *No. [deviates to talk about a teacher from elementary school]*

> *Now it´s more like, the teachers opinions emerge quite clearly, and then I notice that they are atheistic, all of them.*
>
> I: *Without them telling, but…*
>
> R: *Yes, But I've got realist subjects so there aren´t too many discussions, it´s mostly in the common topics and history and philosophy. I actually think my math teacher is Christian, it´s really just speculations, but I feel I can notice it, like.*

Anton experienced his (white) religion teacher giving out information about her faith because he himself was so open and eager to talk about his own faith. He found that she was into New Age and said that the two of them had *«quite some dialogue»* in some of the lectures. Other than that he 'sensed' his Norwegian teacher was a Catholic based on references he made from literature and the Bible. He also noticed another teacher praying towards Mecca, during certain times of the day, but didn't have this teacher in his classes. Jahmal is ambiguous when it comes to teachers showing their religion:

> I: *How would you experience it, if a teacher was clear about their religion?*
>
> R: *[pause]*
>
> I: *Negatively or not?*
>
> I: *Eh. Both, yes and no, this is where it sits, right.*
> *[deviates into the relation between religion and politics]*
> *Because when you are a teacher, you are a person that other students look up to. Particularly for younger kids. If you go around with a big cross around the neck or a big burka, I thing it´s not nice to do, because then you show that, you teach how youth should be in the future. I think kids should not learn about religion, they should be older.*

Interestingly, few moments later in the interview Jahmal describes a friend of his being discriminated against in job-interviews because she wore a hijab, which ended up with her removing the hijab for the next interview which landed her a job. This is something he is frustrated with. We see her an example of an internal discussion of the dilemma of religion in the public sphere. On the one hand he wishes to protect children (in the school-context) from religion and religious symbols like the hijab, on the other hand he finds it discriminatory that his friend came to the conclusion that her hijab was hindering her entering the public sphere of the job-market.

Martin also voices the idea that the school context is a part of society should be particular cautious about displaying their religiosity:

> *Yes, so as a teacher you shouldn't say, like, I'm a Christian or Muslim or atheist. I feel that most are conscious about it. Not all, but most […] Some teachers, definitely not all, [—] well the religion teacher, it was very evident, that she was a Christian, she never told us, and if you asked she wouldn't answer. She did it very much to come across as neutral, and that it was only a few minor things that she didn't think about, like, that gave her away. Put she tried to come across as neutral. It was almost like, «we in Christianity, and they Muslims», but she never used those words. But I felt that she gave out the message in that manner. I think it was good that she tried as hard as she did, to not make one view stand out as better than others.*

Jahmal elaborates further on teachers revealing their personal beliefs:

> *I don't know so much about it. Or if they have then, it doesn't show in school. They try to keep it hidden. I don't know why, if it relates to their career or what.*

When asked about a teacher wearing religious symbols like a hijab or cross he first says he would be fine with it as long as a teacher focus on the job, but then concludes that he does agree that it's best if teachers don't show their personal beliefs and advices them to keep religion to themselves. Interestingly when asked about the school being an open space for religion he propagates the idea of a multi-religious school saying all should have equal rights and backs up his argument with a story from going to school in Iran where one of his friends had to hide the fact that he was a Christian, so out of fear of getting a beating, he pretended to be a Muslim.

This idea, trying to have it both ways, both being positive to the multi-religious society and at the same time shoving religious symbols and statements into the private sphere shows the dilemma many of the respondents face. They want to propagate a tolerant and inclusive democratic society but cannot find another viewpoint on religion than through the conflict-lens, and therefore wishing to avoid confrontation, end up suppressing and excluding certain religious practices and expressions with the motif of preserving the fragile and capricious social bonds.

4.2.4 Majority misunderstanding

> *I think the majority are atheists probably. There's probably little doubt about*
> *that. Maybe one or two percent Christians.*

The majority of the respondents believe that *non-believers* are the largest religious or rather non-religious group in their school. Although I do not have statistics on the particular schools, data on youth in Oslo and Norway fills a broad religious canvas and also brushes some marked strokes relatable to the context I am researching as well. As outlined in the theory chapter, the numbers of Oslo youth in the NOVA-report who are members of organised faith communities are by far the majority, 76,6% over the non-religious 33,4%. Examination into actual beliefs, bring up the nuances in the portrait, showing that the groups that express «certain» *belief* or *non-belief* in God are quite similar, roughly one out of three on both ends. However, in the middle we have the 'fuzzies' who say they 'feel they believe, but have doubts' (25,8%) and those who 'does not believe in any God but a higher power' (10,7%).

What stands out is the *ethnic differences*, for instance almost half of the ethnic Norwegian boys claim that there is no God, the number being 35,3 for the girls. While for those with immigrant background the overwhelming majority believes in God and are quite certain of it too, with 71% for boys and 73,4% for girls. (Ung i Oslo, 2012, pp144-145)

Based on these figures one can still discuss if the respondents are *almost* correct or *gravely* incorrect in describing the nones as the largest group. After all they are all just guessing without the textbook answer in their possession.

Anton thinks that generally in Norway there'a s pressure on Christians. He is aware of other believers but get's the feeling that *«we're a bit scattered [—] I guess we can regard ourselves as a minority in that sense.»* Grete also thinks the Christians are outnumbered by non-believers in her school:

> I: *What do you see as the majority view or religion in class?*
>
> R: *I think most are atheists, really, some agnostics perhaps, but.*
>
> I: *So the majority are atheists?*
>
> R: *Yes, otherwise it would come clearly forth.*

Her criteria for being a Christian, which is 'coming out' publicly with your faith shows perhaps little flexibility, but is not an illegitimate demand in the ears of a devout evangelical Christian who would easily turn to Paul to justify this, who argues that to be saved you need to believe in your heart and *confess* with you mouth. (Romans 10:9-10)

Kjerstin is quite convinced that the non-believers are the biggest group in her school. Her expectation is that other religious views should be visible or recognisable in some shape or form. Hanne also thinks that the religious are outnumbered in her school by the nones. She thinks that Christians are the second biggest group but adds: *«There´s not a lot who speaks loudly about being Christians, same with Muslims. But I still think there were more Christians there.»*

Rosa also shares the sentiment that there are more non-believers in her school and connects this to the fact that it is a very realist-oriented school, but adds that this is merely an assumption.

I would argue that the view that *«most are atheists»* is connected to Rommetvedt's idea of Majority Misunderstanding which relates to how young people *underrate* and *overrate* activities or positions based on *low* or *high* status. (Iversen, 2012, p263) Previously in the analysis we have seen how religion is regarded with scepticism and what some perceives as distaste and less rational. Given this low status it's not implausible to arrive at the conclusion that religious believers are a minority as so few of them are willing to go public with their faith. Also *the spiral of silence* connects to this dynamic as less and less people are willing to voice their religious views, causing both their fellow believers and the non-believers alike to conclude that religion and its adherents are diminishing. (Noelle-Neumann, 1993, pp10)

Interestingly here I see the views of the Christians and the nones differentiate from those of the Muslims. Aminah is the only Muslim who actually shares the idea of non-religious being the majority both when she refers to her school in particular and the overall Norwegian society, she says:

> *I feel that most people don't have any religious stance at all. I think often, when we sat in religion class and talked, a lot of them said they were baptised, but now they didn't feel they had a faith in God even. That it only, that they perhaps only were Christian by cultural heritage, so to speak. That it wasn't any religious belief in it.*

> *[…] I feel people, most enter in to their life stance or religion when they get older, I feel young people don't think too much about it, plainly, that youth are not that concerned with their religious belief, really*

She addresses here the nuances perhaps hidden to Jahmal and Ishmael who see Norway and the majority population as Christians based on memberships statistics and cultural heritage, while Aminah interprets what Storm and others propose as 'fuzzy fidelity', this as a particular ambiguous religiosity.

Martin is the exception which does not believe 'atheists' or 'nones' are the majority in his school, he thinks Christians are the biggest group. Perhaps he is not just better informed by statistics, though that may indeed be the case, but I would suggest that because he himself can be categorised in the large group of 'fuzzies', having been occasionally mistaken for a none based on his more withdrawn faith, he might acknowledge that the large group that keep their silence on religion are rather Christians like himself. I find this interpretation no less plausible than other alternatives.

My data covers five different schools so based on what kind of schools are included in the selection we could find some variation if that looked different, for instance if many of the schools would have more or less students with immigrant background or if several schools were practical oriented high schools (yrkesfaglige).

4.2.5   White silence signifies secular

> *So when you say nothing about religion people think you´re non-religious…*

A curious finding which is not as explicitly stated in the theory I found, though it lives in the same neighbourhood as Faith-Information-Control, is that silence on religion and faith seems to signify a particular position. Whereas Faith Information Control focuses on whiteness as a category which manages tightly information on religion and thus controls wether ones views are revealed or hidden, this theory elaborates how people interprets this control and more specifically the silence, as one explicit position, namely *secular* or *non-religious*. I argue that non-faith could be set as the default mode based on findings in my data. With this is I mean how the respondents, in all categories of

belief, assumed that fellow-students who were *silent* on religion, both in statements and symbols, were most likely non-religious. They signified unseen religion with secular and holding your mouth about it, meant that you belong in the non-religious category.

> *There was one person which I thought was, eh, an atheist, but who was very much a believer, so.*

This was an example that occurred more than once during my interviews. In fact Martin, one of my respondents that I got through snowball-sampling turned out to have an entirely different life-stance than the one the person referring him thought. She referred him on to me as an atheist while he turned out to be a Christian. In other words: His silence on religious stance and values, possibly combined with some realist subject inclination was sufficient to box him as a non-believer. Lars Christian, the agnostic also puts the wrong life-stance label on a fellow student based on both silence on the matter and an interest and talent for science and realist topics. Interestingly I never found this notion going the other way; that some were thought to be a religious believer and then was in fact an atheist or agnostic. This presumption seems to support the idea that a secular stance of non-faith is the default position that everyone starts out with. This could be considered somewhat strange since more than 70% of the population are members in the Norwegian Lutheran Church. Then again, as mentioned, only around 7% regularly attend church services. On interpretation for this paradox what Storm refers to earlier mentioned; 'belonging without believing'. If Norwegians *do* believe they choose to do so based on individual conclusions rather than religious authority and institutions. (Storm, 2009)

> *So, I´m an agnostic, so, I don´t have a very close relationship with religion. I don´t think about it very much in my everyday life, so it´s more like, a thing [...] others are into, maybe.*

How Lars Christian explains his position of agnosticism could be interpreted to imply a somewhat indifferent or uninterested attitude towards religiosity. It could also be interpreted as an objective position, as in «my position is a sort of neutral and default, something which I don't have to reflect on and choose because it is a given». Others stands, on the other hand has to explain and defend why they place themselves on either sides of the religious axis. Of course this interpretation could understand this quote incorrectly, that he perhaps has considered the options and landed as an

agnostic.

This relates to Bruce, one of the few who still defends strong secularisation theory and thinks that Europeans are «uninterested rather than privately devout». (Storm, 2009) However, one can also argue that the silence on religion is and indicator not of loss of religion but religion as a withdrawn matter in Norwegian society, at least among young high schoolers in Oslo. Different secularisation theories, for instance Casanova (Botvar, 2010), supports this push of religion from the public to the private sphere, nonetheless this does not entirely explain why young people assume that silence on the matter *explicitly* or *implicitly* signifies non-religion. Rommetvedt's concept of the majority misunderstanding fits with this finding. That is young people will underrate the number of religious youth based on the assumed un-coolness or low status. (Iversen, 2012) This is something that at least the Christian respondents related to. Kjerstin arguing that Christians were disliked and not exactly seen as 'cool' in her school.

Anton views do however present a challenge to this theory arguing that certain voiced ethical positions and visible moral lifestyles can serve as indicators of a non-religious view despite explicit silence on the matter of religion:

> *You had others who were very clear how they should live their own life, so. When it came to partying, and, how they should work and stuff. So that was very clear. [...] Yes, it was like that, so. Their thoughts, or mindset was like; doing as much fun that I can before I die, rather than not doing anything. [...]they were perhaps angry or disappointed if they were not allowed to do as they wanted, [...] everything from alcohol to sex to, it's like, within certain areas, like marriage and so on.*

Anton's observations can be interpreted as 'signs given off' which reveal an irreligious and hedonistic life-style incompatible with a religious position. Clearly this view is connected with his own ideal of a Christian as a particularly morally and ethically good person, hence he categorises contrasting views as non-Christian and thus secular. However, one can indeed argue that Christians can be hypocrites just as any other category.

Rosa suggests that the majority of the teachers in her school can be identified as nones, a view shared by several respondents, but doesn't find this frustrating as some of the other do, but rather natural:

So when you say nothing about religion people think you´re non-
religious, it´s a natural thing for me to think since I am not religious,
and a lot of my friends are not religious, so that´s why I think like this.

With her statement, Rosa confirms the idea of White Silence Signifies Secular although she notes that one have to be cautious about it, she at least thinks that this description fits her school. Furthermore Rosa makes a curious observation about a fellow class-mate who she placed in a sort of religious amphibious state observing how he was *«raised in a muslim [—] like partly, yes, between a Muslim and an atheist.»* Technically speaking, this seems like a contradiction but perhaps this is comparable to an ethnic Norwegian being born into the Lutheran Church, but not necessarily adhering to its creeds, relating to 'fuzzy fidelity' (Storm, 2009) and what Stark and Finke calls «socialised religion», (Norris and Inglehart, 2004)

The difference though from this student is that he is being identified by a fellow student as a Muslim even though some of his ideas gives the impression that he is perhaps closer to an atheistic position. This suggests that both family background and hence ethnicity is a salient identifier of the non-white position, perhaps even trumps statements of belief, while whiteness or Norwegian-ness reveals religion less and even places you in the secular camp until stated otherwise. A comparable concept within Christianity is that of the 'culture Christian', that is a none who adheres to the cultural heritage of Christendom and perhaps also to the church through rituals such as baptisms, confirmations, weddings and funerals, but with no strict requirements of doctrinal belief. Perhaps there is a need for a 'cultural Muslim' or a similar term within Islam? For now the distinction here seems to be more along the lines of degree; *practicing* and *non-practicing, liberal, moderate, conservative and fundamentalist* and so forth.

4.2.6 Science signifies secular: Realist subjects as an indicator of non-religion

Something I have attached to the idea of White Silence Signifies Secular is the notion that a *scientistic inclination* is an identity marker of a secular, non-religious worldview. The conflict narrative as previously outlined relates to this idea as well, arguing that there is an unreconcilable schism between science and religion. The logical outcome on the one end of this schism is that if you buy into the 'science package' you have to give up the religion-deal, and vice versa - there's no

'two for one' deal here. Several of the respondents apply the role of science and interest in it as an indicator of non-religion.

For instance, Lars Christian, the agnostic, shares about how surprised he was when a fellow student he identified as an atheist turned out to be *«very much a believer»*. Asked on why he assumed this initially he answered:

> *Well, it derives from what is called personal bias, so maybe this*
> *person was excelling in mathematics and interested in realist subjects,*
> *and one does not usually combine religion and realist subjects*
> *together. So I assumed that it was probable that this person was not*
> *indeed religious, but, one can be mistaken. [quieter] So the realist*
> *classes take that as a matter of course. It´s not[—] It's set as*
> *opposites, religion and science, when I think of it.*

The Muslim student Fatima sees religion and science as two different domains and says that she doesn't care for those who try to mix the two. Kjerstin, the girl who was active in the Christian Union group, thinks that fellow students see a schism and opposition between faith and science. Rosa, the non-believer also implies that her non-belief is naturally related to her interest in science and realist subjects. Grete, the Christian, claims with fervour that many of her fellow students and teachers hold the conflict view and says that:

> *So the realist classes take that as a matter of course. [—] It´s set as*
> *opposites, religion and science, when I think of it. How to explain it,*
> *so you can´t take that word for word, then. I believe in Big bang and*
> *somewhat in evolution, so what do they say, that the world is 5000*
> *years old, according to jewish, so that I don´t believe. I think it is as*
> *old as the physicists claim it is, I don´t understand why people should*
> *take the Bible as literal as that, really.*

Grete experiences that opinions like these are placed upon her and that Christians are seen only in black and white and not with any shades of grey when it comes to these things. Elaborating her own view as a person of faith she thinks that faith and science are complementary and can work well together, and that she´s fond of both disciplines. Her take on the Bible is not a literalist

interpretation. She illustrates that the Bible does in fact speak of life first originated in the water which science also holds and says that she doesn't read the creation narrative as a correct historical account. Hanne, the humanist non-believer speaks directly to Grete´s worries. She acknowledges there are different ways of interpreting the Bible, nonetheless she uses the expression being a 'strong Christian' for the ones who have a literalist approach to scripture implying that believers who have a less literalist understanding of the texts and set these aside for scientific explanations are weaker or less serious in their faith.

> *[—] is it called, eh, Biblicist, or, no. Well if you believe word-for-word*
> *what the Bible tells you, like the earth is 7000 years old, and that the*
> *Arc is so and so long, so. Yeah, these things were criticised. It was*
> *ridiculous to think like that, because it goes against science you know.*

Hanne seems to think that in theory, religion and science can be combined, but when it comes to show the schism is just too wide to bridge, at least for the literalist believer:

> *So, if you take this with how old the world is, well, the Bible says*
> *something else then what the theory of evolution and the Big Bang*
> *theory states. So when people believe the Bible slavic, eh, that then*
> *becomes very easy to criticise.*

Personally, Hanne explains that crucial in her process on choosing or not choosing faith was weighing the positive and the negative sides, which landed her with the only feasible alternative; natural science. She finds it somewhat curious if others with an interest in science also combines this with religion:

> *[Sounding intrigued] I would find it very interesting, eh, if my biology*
> *teacher was a Christian, that I would find very interesting to know.*

Fatima talks about the religiosity of the teachers, arguing that it doesn't really matter as long as they do their job, but at the same time assumes that most of them are non-believers without giving further explanations:

> *He was, I think, Atheist. He could just as well be Jewish, Muslim,*
> *Christian for all I care, it would be the same [—] Ehm. Yeah, I often*
> *had conversations with him, so I experienced that he was an atheist,*
> *or like, I don´t know. As long as he was a good teacher it doesn't*
> *matter.*

Furthermore, she assumes that her history teacher is atheist or *«maybe agnostic»*. Grete claims that most of the teachers are non-believers without them explicitly stating so.

> *The teachers opinions emerge quite clearly, and then I notice that*
> *they are atheistic, all of them. [—] It seems like they take it as a*
> *matter of course, most teachers. They say like, while we in the*
> *western world, so we have distanced ourselves from religion, he takes*
> *it as a matter of course that none are religious. That has frustrated me*
> *a lot.*

The essence of the data shows that firstly, the notion of faith in opposition to science is a fairly established idea among these youth. Secondly it is that religious believers are not allowed to present their own self-defined world-view but first has to work through preconceived ideas that their peers attribute to them.

4.2.7 Harsher self-criticism

The data suggest that Christianity is more subject for criticism and even dislike than other religions or non-religion. Christianity is not just seen as one of many in a religious pluralist society, but 'our' household religion, which gives 'us', that is white ethnic Norwegians the right and perhaps also the duty to criticise what is seen as negative elements of Christendom and warn against attempts of clinging to the once hegemonic position it has held throughout recent and more distant history. This I propose as the notion of harsher self-criticism. I found that several of the respondents observed this phenomena while none admitted to perform this harsher self-criticism, the general feeling was that this was performed by non-believers, particularly those who where placed within the atheistic world-view.

Consider Hanne's experience with people talking down on religion:

R: [—] Because if people say, yeah, I believe in Allah, we had Muslims in class too, then you approach Christianity and people might not think that, eh, they don´t see that as equally important, so.

I: Hmm. Right. What do you think is the reason for this?

R: I don´t believe people don´t dare [to criticise], but it´s a topic that, in the everyday life, it´s a huge topic, whether one should be open towards other cultures and religions, you know with refugees and these things. You are sort of, on one side off the case, either you are for or against, and you have to show that: «No, I´m open, I want our country to be multi-cultural». But [—] that also includes Christianity, you know.

I: Mm.

R: It´s not that people don´t dare, they want to show respect. People want to show respect, and then they maybe forget that [Christianity] is just as important.

R: Why do you think that is?

I: That it is easier to criticise Christians?

R: Mmm.

I: Because it´s closer. It´s like a friend that yo have, or an acquaintance, or an unknown, saying something, you´re like [mimics thinking]: «Oh my god. This I disagree with». But if it's like your brother saying like: «Oh, I wish you could send them all out of Norway» then you had of course struck back hard, you know. Because it's closer, you feel a bit more secure. Maybe. And Christianity is the state religion, is that what it´s called?

I: Mm.

R: Then it´s like, you have more right to critique it, you know. It feels like that.

I interpret Hanna that she suggests there is some sort of right to pass a *stricter* judgement on Christianity, as she says it is like a brother (in contrast to a third cousin), and hence can be seen as the official Norwegian religion, as it (rightly) has been for centuries. One could argue that the Norwegian suspicion towards authorities and power mentioned earlier, fuels this criticism if Christianity is still regarded an influential structure of power in todays society, however wrongly so according to secularisation theories. Several of the respondents seem to have a challenge distinguishing what is factual critique and logical arguments and what is prejudice and bigotry. Kjerstin relates people not liking believers with the fact that they make 'clever arguments'.

> *In [name of the school], there´s a lot of people who don´t like*
> *believers, and they are very clever making arguments, so I was the*
> *Christian in my class, so it was like bam bam bam [—] It was a lot of*
> *back and forth, but then in the end, I was the one who didn't have*
> *answers, right.*
> *I don´t think I´m disliked for being a Christian, but I think I would*
> *have been better liked if I wasn't.*

She continues to talk about how she has developed as a person and as a Christian during her years in high school and how this harsher-self criticism has influenced her:

> *R: It might be that I´m a bit more insecure. That I have*
> *   withdrawn a bit.*
> *I: As in socially?*
> *R: Yeah, socially. It hasn't made me more insecure, like*
> *   personally with my faith, but in the school context, sort of.*
> *   Because we are [—] It´s been, I've found out that during these*
> *   years there are more Christians in my school that don´t dare*
> *   to be affront [voice shivers] because it´s not popular to be a*
> *   Christian in the school.*

Kjerstin's experience relates to Goffman's 'tribal stigmatisation', how she considers the 'tribe' Christians to be socially discredited and stigmatised. Furthermore, Kjerstin talks about feeling excluded, not being invited to parties, the reason being her faith she explains. She does admit to not

having wanted to go to parties with a lot of alcohol present, but she says this rejection was then interpreted as a general rejection, causing her not to get invitations.

4.3.0   Ideal-types

To finalise the analysis I have created five ideal-types which emphasise certain findings and interpretations above others, which nevertheless reveal salient features of the way these high school student experience and relate to religiosity in their every day life. The main narrative of 'religion as conflict' which I have argued for in the first part and how they control this conflict in the second part of the analysis is what I frame these ideal-types around.

Grønning refers to Max Weber who argues that an ideal-type is a methodological tool «for revealing underlying causes of specific social phenomenon». (Grønning, 2017, p1) Furthermore, they are simplifications which draws out singular traits as reference points. They are characterised by being an idea of something in its pure form, but does not exist in reality. (Grønning 2017, p1)

However simplifications or caricatures, I argue that these ideal-types show some of the tendencies and dynamics in play in regard to possibilities and limitations for the religiosity of high school students in Oslo, and hence is an attempt in adding conceptual relevance or generalisability to the research.

The Conflict Magnet

This ideal-type is rather confident in her own system of belief, receives 'prestige' from her intra-religious community and sees her faith as an integral part of her identity and everyday life. The two are inseparable. She may attach some sense of stigma to her religiosity in the school-context but disregards this as a cost worth paying. For this person to hold religious opinions to herself would feel like diminishing part of her identity. Hence this ideal-type pulls negative attention and conflict to herself as she voices her opinion. This person likely has a high degree of *devotion* and arguably holds the most *literalist* perspective among all the ideal-types, to her worldview or religious position. The Conflict Magnet is more frequently found within Christianity and also Islam but could also be located as part of an assumed or real majority like the non-religious secular position, then more likely as an atheist than an agnostic.

The Conflict Initiator

This person holds debate and discussion in high esteem, and engages willingly in them with the perspective that the best logical and rational arguments will be left standing. The Conflict Initiator holds the view that no position is exempt from tough critique or ridicule, hence debates with fervour and is arguably more inattentive to the feelings of the counter-debaters. He adheres to the idea of the classroom as a 'disagreement community', but is presumably less accustomed to *him* being the person which the majority disagrees with. If so, then it is likely on a topic that is not a salient part of his identity or world view which he couldn't let go of. He does not view his personal life-stance attached to any stigma and likely has a view that values, ideologies and religions are not personal entities which can get offended, hence is willing to raise his voice on matters of importance although uncomfortable to discuss.

The Conflict Fleer

This ideal-type carefully calculates the cost of being public with his religious views as being to high to pay for what he sees as minimal benefits and chooses deliberately to privatise his religion and disengage from the rest of the 'disagreement community' on this matter. Religiosity for him is attached to a high level of stigma in the school-context but functions as a prestige among his intra-group. The Conflict Fleer is more likely to be a minority position in the school-context, assumed or real, and likely to have a high degree of devotion, for instance practicing, conservative Christian or Muslim. One could also argue that the segment of 'fuzzies' relates to this ideal-type, however, this is probably a more subtle implication as he if so, may or may not have chosen a fuzzy and vague religiosity to avoid conflict and stigma.

Conflict Blind

The Conflict Blind is mostly unaware of the tensions present during heated discussions or in sublime comments aimed to sting a particular religious position or argument. She has generally accepted the dominant secular discourse as the given frame in which religion is interacted with, but is more or less indifferent to the matter: «Why can't just everyone believe whatever they want within the privacy of their homes?» She might conceal a fuzzy fidelity inside a Christian or a non-religious identity but is less likely to be a Muslim or a hard-line atheist. If and when temperature rises when religion is brought up she will shrug and ask people to not take themselves so seriously.

The Conflict Manager

This person sees religious diversity as a positive thing, but also a matter which requires sensitivity and restraint when brought up around the lunch table. The Conflict Handler seeks to create a space for dialogue with mutual understanding and respect and is sincere in his attempt to understand the 'other' and clear away any prejudice. This person is also likely to be found inside a religious or non-religious fuzziness, not seeing it as overly important to share his personal opinions on faith; «as long as we understand and respect each other!» In this honourable aim however, it is likely that he neglects the importance of critical thinking and possibly also makes compromises or understates his own opinions and socio-religious identity, in the process of diplomacy.

I argue, in the basis of my respondents and the experiences and observations they describe, most of the students in my research would be found among the Conflict Blind and Conflict Fleers. One of them relates to the experience of a Conflict Magnet and some to the Conflict Manager, whereas possibly one of the respondents imply having taken the role of the Conflict Initiator.

My main aim here with these five ideal-types is more of giving an analytical epilogue, rather then establishing these types as strict typologies. They are, as I understand them merely allusions of the main argument I have presented in the analysis; that religion is seen through the lens of conflict in the particular high school contexts in my research, and could hence point towards what I regard as an interesting direction for further research and testing,

4.4.0   Conclusion

I have argued in this analysis that there is one over-arching narrative that frame the way these high schooler view and navigate their religion in their day to day school interaction. What I call the conflict story is explained in the first part of the analysis with several sub-topics which I have interpreted into the larger narrative of religion as conflict. This is not the only valid interpretation, nonetheless in my approach emphasising the respondents experienced religion I find this a plausible argument.

Furthermore in part two I have shown that one of the consequences of accepting the premise of conflict is that the students navigate around and control faith information, and thus find the main theory of Faith Information Control to a large degree supported by the data. However, I found FIC

somewhat weak on the point of emphasising colour over ethnicity and nationality, and not pursuing the implications of the 'white silence', leading me to propose that whiteness not exclusively hides, but rather reveals a non-religious position. Juxtaposing this with science as a *signs given*, an indicator of non-religion, I argue that the main conflict-hypothesis stands strengthened.

Conclusion

5.0   Main findings and main argument

My main argument from the data is the hypothesis of *religion is seen as conflict.* It is a view held by the majority of the respondents implicitly or explicitly, which I argue has had profound effects and implications that many of the students seem to be largely unaware of. The analysis is structured in two parts, so that the following ideas sort under the conflict-narrative in part one while part two addresses how this conflict is navigated.

I argued that the respondents largely accept the *dominant secularisation discourse* although there are other competing discourses in play as well, for instance one discourse which argues that religion is not in fact incompatible with a rational scientific world view, but that the two can peacefully co-exist within their own separate domains or function systems.

The conflict-narrative is supported by the concept of *categorisation refusal.* Several of the students found it hard in the beginning of the interview to label themselves with one category before they had the chance to elaborate and apply nuances to this category. However, putting others into religious categories did not seem to be that big of a problem for some of them.

Some of the Muslims in the selection were aware of the concept of double identity as a challenge for fellow Muslims but did not see it as a huge issue for themselves. Also one of the Christians recognised this as her friend's strategy. Instead of dealing with a double identity, the concept of hiding their identity (implying double) was more common.

All of the respondents except one Muslim, stresses the *individuality* of their religious or non-religious belief, however they subtly acknowledge the role of parents, family and somewhat cultural context as having had some kind of influence as well.

A commonly accepted idea was that religion is a *private* matter. On a note, none of the respondents distinguished between the expressions private and personal. Hence the data in this thesis does to a high degree support secularisation as *differentiation* and *privatisation*, which also marks the general Norwegian secularisation narrative. I argue that the push and pull dynamics of privatisation is part of causing tension between the religious and the non-religious students.

The one thinks of the school context as a religiously *neutral* space, meaning secular, and free of religious expressions and practices, while the other is frustrated that her ideas and opinions are

overlooked or frowned upon as invalid in a secular discourse, and understands *neutral* as religiously diverse and *open* for all views.

Negative attitudes and remarks towards religion are a relatively common phenomena for some of the respondents. More so for the Christians in the data than the Muslims, while the non-religious students did not recall any particular negative remarks about theirs or other non-believer's life stance. I furthermore found that it was difficult to distinguish for some of the respondents what was *dislike* and *general negativity* towards religious people and what was fair and *legitimate criticism* of religious views. Some of the experiences suggest that they somewhat overlap.

Nonetheless, one salient strategy to avoid negative attitudes was that of *self-selected* privatisation of faith, refraining from bringing up the topic. Some of the respondents did so anyway but experienced this as exhausting and emotionally draining.

Another strategy was to seek out both *intra-religious* and *inter-religious safe-spaces*, the first often as formal groups and close friendships, whereas the second as informal meetings and conversation with friends and classmates. This was something that both several Christians and Muslims mentioned while none of the nones brought this up.

One example of conflict that was frequently brought up was the schism between *science* and *faith.* This was implicitly or explicitly referred to by all but one of the respondents (Muslim). The religious, especially the Christians opposed the schism, but implicitly showed with their practice that they accepted it with subtle statements. The nones sided science closely with their own non-religious world view and found it somewhat curious that religious believers could also embrace science as they did. However, several of them noted, that indeed the conflict between science and religion is not necessarily true, they argued that it was connected to a literalist and often conservative view of religious scriptures, which also some of the religious students agreed with.

The respondents implied that their teachers had commonly accepted the conflict-narrative and the secular dominant discourse as they navigated cautiously around their own religiosity. Teachers attempted to function as facilitators of constructive debates it was seen, but sometimes assumed a non-religious position as the neutral in a debate. The main idea was that teachers also avoided the topic if they could.

Norwegian culture was associated with religion by some and secularism and loose morality by some. Half of the Muslims saw Norwegians as Christians based on Norway being a Christian nation while the other half associated Norwegian culture with a rational, secular culture, as did also several of the Christians.

As it were, Norwegian majority culture was also seen by most of the religious respondents as conflicting with their own religious cultures. The Christians differed from the Muslims however in emphasising the opposing belief-systems (as in science and faith) while the Muslims emphasised opposing systems of morality, these domains both representing the struggle between a dominant discourse and demotic discourses.

The main strategy that the respondents both experienced and observed in regard to navigating religion, supports the idea of Faith Information Control. Several respondents mistakenly identify students as nones or atheist who are in fact Christians. Some of the Muslim respondents take it more or less for granted that they are identified as Muslims, relating to the idea of non-whiteness as *signs given off*; whereas one of them tries to control and subdue this information but finds it hard. Two of the Muslims suggest that ethnicity and nationality are more salient identifier than skin-colour. Some of the whites have admitted to or observed prejudiced behaviour towards non-whites. Some of the Muslims relate to the experience of being *already discredited* while many of the Christians navigate between the *already* and *potentially discredited* positions. However, more of the Christians than of the Muslims seem to experience the role of being discredited as a stigma.

Religious symbols are given more salience as a religious identifier when worn by nonwhites than whites. Some also suggested the idea that *how* one dresses, devoid of any explicit religious clothes, could function as an identifier, meaning less clothes correlates with less religion.

Almost all the respondents assume that nones are the largest religious or non-religious group in their school. Statistics suggest that this may be an over-exaggeration or even a majority-misunderstanding, as surveys suggest that religious youth outnumber nones in Oslo. Even so, the notion of fuzzy fidelity and Rommetvedt's theory which argue that young people will *understate* what they believe to be a less popular or accepted position may give one explanation to this.

The data gives basis to the hypothesis that whiteness combined with silence on the matter does not in fact conceal religion as FIC argue, but may *signify a non-religious* position. Attached is the idea that a voiced or visible interest in *science* functions as a non-religious marker.

Several of the respondents observed that Christianity is both more criticised and disliked of the different world views. One of the nones suggests that Christianity more so than other religions is seen as 'our' own and therefore gives the duty and the privilege to treat it with what I call a 'harsher self-criticism'.

All this constitutes the meta-narrative of *religion seen as conflict* and as such religiosity needs to be *managed* and *controlled*.

I do not however argue that this is the *only* interpretation and analysis of the data, religion was indeed viewed and experienced with a diverse set of lenses on, but what I *do* argue is that I found this to be the most *salient* theme which can be seen as a common thread throughout the descriptions of how these respondents experiences and observes religiosity in their schools.

5.1   Weaknesses, strengths and relevance of the research

In terms of *reliability, validity* and *generalisability* and how these can be seen or tested in qualitative research with a phenomenological approach, I have argued that the thesis passes the test in the method chapter. Both in being *transparent* and open about my *positionality* and *potential bias*, connecting the selections and choices to the research question being answered and finally bringing the argument together in a *conceptual generalisability*. As this conceptual relevance I have proposed one main argument of *religion seen as conflict* and sketched out five ideal-types based on several of the hypotheses in the analysis.

I recognise this part to be the weakest point of the research as this method of generalisability is prone to oversimplifying and neglecting other factors. A valid criticism of the ideal-types is that they tend to overlook a more complex web of inter-actions between the types, which I agree with. However, I do not argue that the conflict hypothesis and the typology are relevant at all times in all contexts, but that they point to tendencies found in the very specific school context of the respondents, which may or may not have value of transmission to the greater youth context and also the general population and the Norwegian culture. That can be tested and explored with further research on the topic.

I would argue that the research has societal relevance and potential related to propagating inter-religious dialogue in terms of contact theory and religious bridging, preventing prejudice and

racism, and in turn reducing religious stigma such as experienced by the religious students. I believe it could have importance for both students themselves to be aware of the dynamics of religiosity in the school-context as well as teachers that would be well advised to practice their skills as facilitators of religious diversity in the 'disagreement community' of the classroom.

Furthermore I argue that *how* we talk about religion in the public sphere, is part of defining the dominant discourse, which of now constitutes of secularism and of religion seen as conflict, which I have argued.

Allowing and encouraging religious pluralism in the school context, would both be inclusive and invite the important practice of religious criticism which could reveal destructive elements of religion. I would propose that the Stålsett commission (NOU, 2013) and its idea of the *religiously open* (livssynsåpne) society could provide a better alternative discourse on religion, not necessarily devoid of tension and conflict, but at least I would argue, it would be levelling the playing field somewhat, and hopefully provide a better starting point to engage in inter-religious discussion which could help bridge the religious chasms which looms beneath our fragile disagreement community.

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Appendix

Interviewguide

I wish to explore the limitations and possibilities for religious practice and beliefs within the everyday life of the school. My hypothesis is that many religious students keep their religious beliefs to themselves thus I am interested in looking into how and possibly why students in this area of society expresses and/or controls their religious beliefs.

Using semi-structured interviews with some set questions and the possibility to probe and get a conversation flowing more organically I believe is a good method to apply when approaching this topic that can be somewhat sensitive. Religion is to a large extent considered a private matter in Norway and therefore looking into personal individual reasoning behind the choice of concealing or conveying information about ones faith or worldview would not be sufficiently done through surveys or just ethnographic methods.

I believe my questions, starting wide, letting the subjects talk more freely about the topic, then focusing and probing their answers and possibly challenging the ideas and the personal decisions of the interviewees would give me some explanations to my research question. I will ask about the majority views, their feelings towards other religions, peer pressure, the relationship between ethnicity and religion. I will also ask wether some religions are treated differently then others or if the concept of religion is treated more as a whole. Further on I will ask more personal questions and also some judgement questions, so not to just get descriptive or «correct» answers, but also challenging them in getting normative responses on the topic and especially the schools official stance on religious matters.

Form

One interviewer meets the respondent either live in a coffeeshop or on FaceTime or Skype, recording the conversation lasting approximately 45-50 minutes.

1. Framing:

Informal conversation (2-4 minutes)

Information about the research project and the informed consent (2-4 minutes)

2. Experiences

Transitioning questions (10-15 minutes)

Convey knowledge about the topic

3. Focus

Key questions (20-30 minutes)

Probing and/or going over checklist

4. Recap

Summary (1-2 minutes)

Clarification

1) Framing

Information about the project: This interview is part of my thesis work at MF, Norwegian School of Theology on the topic of beliefs and practice of religion in the everyday life of high school students in Oslo, Norway. I wish to talk to students with different backgrounds to explore this topic.

Informed consent:

The purpose of this interview is as a part of an academic thesis and will be treated with strict confidentiality and anonymity. Names will be altered so that to avoid identification. If for some reason you choose to disrupt the interview or later withdraw from the study you can do so at any time.

Ask if interviewee has any questions or wants further clarification.

Inform about the recording and consent of recording.

Start tape.

2) Experience

What does faith or your religion/worldview mean to you in your everyday life?

How does this look like in practice?

Probe along the direction the interviewee chooses.

How do you observe religion in your school?

What can you tell me about symbols of any religion/worldview, like a cross, hijab, t-shirt with a message, etc..? Do you ever wear something like that in your school?

Why/why not?

Are there other markers that could indicate a students religion?

Probe if not answered: Does ethnicity or skin-colour seem to reveal anything about religious views?

3) Focus

How does religious activities in your school (like prayer, the Christian Union, debates, etc) look like? Do you wish you could join something like that for your religion? Who do you know participating in gatherings like that in your school?

How would you describe you class?

What kind of religions are represented in your class?

How would you describe the religiosity of your fellow students?

Probe: Could you expand upon that?

Do you have (close) friends that are religious? What kind of religions?

Probe: How do you think that would make you feel if you were the only one in your class/school with a certain religion/worldview in your school? (Would it be easier or more difficult)

Are there certain aspects of your faith/worldview which are either suitable or unsuitable to express or practice in public?

How do you relate to the idea of religion being a public or private matter?

Do you think that there are aspects of others faith that should be kept private?

Why is that?

How important is it for you that:

-your beliefs are visible for others in the school?

-you can share your faith with others?

Are there any classroom situations where you feel it´s likely or unlikely for you to bring up your beliefs?

How does your teacher relate to religion?

Are you aware of your teachers religion?

How do you feel about that? (Is that good or bad in your opinion?)

How do you relate to peer pressure in regard to faith and world views?

From teachers, students, culture?

Why do you think you feel this way?

Would you assume others with same or other religions feel the same, or is it different from each religion/worldview?

What do you think the majority in your school thinks about practicing belief in the everyday life?

What do you think others feel about you and your religious practice?

What do you think is the majority religion or life stance in your school?

Why?

What does the expression religious neutrality mean do you?

How does this apply to your school?

What does the expression worldview open («livssyns-åpen» phrase coined by NOU) mean to you?

How does this apply to your school?

What do you think should be the schools role in securing religious freedom for the students?

4) Recap

Thank you for an interesting conversation. Anything else you wanted to add or any questions you wanted to raise?