

Article

Negotiations of Science and Religion in Nordic Institutions: An Ethnographic Approach

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Abstract: This article explores how two seemingly contradictory global trends—scientific rationality and religious expressiveness—intersect and are negotiated in people’s lives in Nordic countries. We focus on Finland and Sweden, both countries with reputations of being highly secular and modernized welfare states. The article draws on our multi-sited ethnography in Finland and Sweden, including interviews with health practitioners, academics, and students identifying as Lutheran, Orthodox, Muslim, or anthroposophic. Building on new institutionalist World Society Theory, the article asks whether individuals perceive any conflict at the intersection of “science” and “religion”, and how they negotiate such a relationship while working or studying in universities and health clinics, prime sites of global secularism and scientific rationality. Our findings attest to people’s creative artistry while managing their religious identifications in a secular, Nordic, organizational culture in which religion is often constructed as old-fashioned or irrelevant. We identify and discuss three widespread modes of negotiation by which people discursively manage and account for the relationship between science and religion in their working space: segregation, estrangement, and incorporation. Such surprising similarities point to the effects of global institutionalized secularism and scientific rationality that shape the negotiation of people’s religious and spiritual identities, while also illustrating how local context must be factored into future, empirical research on discourses of science and religion.

Keywords: science and religion; discourse; secularism; sociological institutionalism; World Society Theory; Nordic countries; multi-sited ethnography



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1. Introduction

Significant critical research has pointed out that the modern categories of science and religion are socially and historically construed notions that date back to early modern Europe (Ferngren 2002; Asad 2003; Beattie 2007; Harrison 2015). From initially pointing to compatible, personal attributes with Aquinas, *religio* and *scientia* shifted to become exteriorized as contesting systems of knowledge and beliefs (Harrison 2015, pp. 6–14). The perceived contest between science and religion intensified further in modernity (Evans and Evans 2008), as the domains became institutionalized. In our era of globalization, this perceived conflict has not only been institutionalized but has also diffused across much of the modern world, where religion is now perceived as belonging to the private sphere rather than to public life. Indeed, a growing body of sociological institutionalist research suggests that modern institutions such as courts, parliaments, corporations, hospitals, universities, and schools operate as prime sites of scientific rationality and global secularism, restricting religion to a highly personalized space (Lechner and Boli 2005; Meyer et al. 2009). At the

same time, though, the global New Age movement, urban religious revival, unprecedented migration, and religious fundamentalism are pushing religion back into the highly visible domain of societies (Casanova 1994; Berger 1999; Thomas 2007; Heelas 2009; Salmenniemi et al. 2020; Zaman 2019; Tiainen-Qadir 2020). As Thomas (2007) argues convincingly, these seemingly contradictory trends—global secularism supported by scientific rationality and public religious expressiveness—are *both* intrinsic to our era of globalization and are intensified in and around modern institutions. Modern, local organizations are founded on global “blueprints” (Meyer et al. 1997), and so carry and transmit world culture of secularism and scientific rationality.

This dual dynamic of these contradictory trends is clearly present in societies where secularism and scientific rationality are highly prevalent in public discourse, as in the Nordic countries of Finland, Sweden, Denmark, Iceland, and Norway. However, we know little about how individual actors who find themselves amid these trends negotiate the relationships between science and religion in these societies. It is one thing to note theoretically the existence of contradictory or dialectical trends informing the modern individual; it is another to map out how those trends are negotiated in the midst of institutions. We need much more information about how people of faith and spirituality-minded individuals actually negotiate the relationship between science and religion and manage their religious and spiritual identifications while working or studying in secular, modern institutions in different societies. Our article is an initial, bottom-up, ethnographic investigation into this negotiation in the context of Finland and Sweden.

Much of the previous research on science and religion has either attempted to illustrate the epistemological conflict between science and religion or resolve any “real” tensions or conflicts (for good overviews of this literature, see McGrath 2010; Stenmark 2001). Critical sociological research argues that we should move beyond the epistemological conflict narrative, instead producing accounts that incorporate specific cultural contexts and a “nuanced sociological imagination” (Catto et al. 2019, p. 8; Evans and Evans 2008; Kaden et al. 2017). Such studies are concerned with the much less studied, discursive aspect of whether and how people perceive such a tension and how they creatively evoke the public discourses surrounding science and religion to produce personal, multilayered, complex narratives (Kaden et al. 2017).

Our contribution to this growing body of scholarship is three-fold: empirical, theoretical, and methodological. First, much of the previous research has been dominated by studies in the Anglo-American context, focusing on creationists and evolutionists or abortion in the US, or around citizenship rights in the UK. Yet, as above, the dynamic between science and religion is expected to vary from social context to social context. In the Nordic countries, there is a lack of empirical research on how people see the relationship between science and religion, and whether similar issues are relevant there (Vuolanto et al. 2020). Our research, therefore, fills a gap in qualitatively rich descriptions of how individuals negotiate the relationship between science and religion in the understudied contexts of Finland and Sweden. Second, much of the existing scholarship suggests a strongly national framing of such perceptions, not focused on modern institutions like universities, hardly in a qualitative research design (although see notable exceptions in the US context: Ecklund 2010; Long 2011), and never comparatively at several institutions. By working with World Society Theory, which approaches modern institutions as global sites of scientific rationality, we tap into how worldwide institutional dynamics impact individual negotiation processes. Third, we propose here the innovative method of multi-sited ethnography to research science–religion discourses in multicultural contexts. Most World Society Theory and related research is conducted at a macro-sociological level and thus elides the discourses informing how the modern individual negotiates science and religion within institutions. This research is an initial, qualitative exploration that would make a case for a wider quantitative study and for analyzing such relationships in other organizations and countries.

Nordic countries are interesting cases in this respect since they are widely known for being highly secular and modernized (Pessi et al. 2009), post-Lutheran welfare states. Yet there too, these seemingly contradictory trends intersect in public space and individual lives as these societies become more multicultural than before and hence more aware of multiple religions, cultures, and values having to coexist (Furseth 2017; Furseth et al. 2018; Illman et al. 2017). Over the past few decades in particular, religion has come under conscious negotiation in Northern Europe. The stress is particularly evident in modern institutions such as parliaments, universities, hospitals, and schools. Nordic countries have seen hotly contested debates around the legitimacy of whether town hall can refuse the construction of a mosque in Helsinki, or whether parliamentarians need to greet each other by shaking hands in Norway and Sweden, or Denmark passing a law banning burkas. Public contests have also arisen on school curricula, or on whether faith-based healing can qualify for public subsidies. Such headline-grabbing conflicts are only the tip of a wide range of perceived tensions and negotiated relationships between science and religion in Nordic countries, about which we know little empirically.

In this article, we ask how modern institutions in Finland and Sweden affect the way in which people conceive of and deal with the science–religion discourse. How do individuals perceive their working environment in terms of their religious belonging, and do they perceive any tensions? Do they see any conflict between science and religion and, if so, how do they negotiate it? In the process, what happens to the nature of their religious and spiritual experience in and around these institutions? Thus, our article begins to unravel how scientists, students, and health practitioners who identify themselves with a certain religious or spiritual tradition negotiate the science–religion discourse in and around secular institutions while managing their religious and spiritual identifications.

This article is part of our larger research aimed at generating new knowledge about the relationship between scientific rationality and religion in people’s daily lives in modern societies. The qualitative study draws on our pilot, ethnographic project in Nordic countries that focuses on two prime sites of secular scientific rationality, universities and health clinics. Rich ethnographic data are the most suitable way to open a window into the lives of people, as well as into whether and how the global presence and dynamics of modern institutions enable or constrain their religious experiences and identities. In particular, we draw on our multi-sited fieldwork research in Finland and Sweden, including ethnographic interviews with 37 individuals. Our interlocutors are academics, health practitioners, and students, representing the dominant Lutheran religion, the minority religions of Orthodox Christianity and Islam, as well as the new spiritual movement of anthroposophy.

Our analysis shows that our study participants exhibit a creative agency in negotiating the science–religion discourse in their daily lives. We show that across these various traditions that people identify with, the nature of their work, and even their country of residence, there are surprising similarities in the ways in which they perceive their working environment and the place of religion in it. Moreover, there are striking similarities in the ways in which our interlocutors negotiate their religious and spiritual identities in Nordic settings. We identify and analyze three modes of such negotiation: segregation, estrangement, and incorporation. We suggest that these striking similarities in the perception of the environment and (often un-reflexive) negotiation can be tentatively interpreted as ways of managing globalized secularism, manifested in and around modern social institutions.

The article proceeds as follows. In the next section, we introduce our key theoretical approach that combines sociological institutionalist World Society Theory with a discursive approach to science and religion. In the following section, we build on this to identify our research method, multi-sited ethnography, along with its attendant ethical requirements. Next, we present our empirical findings regarding people’s perceptions of the secular, institutionalized environment that they work in, while in the subsequent sections, we present three modes by which they negotiate the science–religion discourse. The discussion section extrapolates the argument based on the empirical sections and opens avenues for further exploration.

2. Theory

The importance of institutions emerges from work in organizational studies, beginning with the seminal research of [Powell and DiMaggio \(1991\)](#) that highlighted remarkable and unexpected similarities in organizational trends of restructuring. New institutionalism was soon expanded to other fields of enquiry, including global sociology. This sociological line of institutionalism was developed by the Stanford School of Sociology, led by John W. Meyer, first on educational institutions ([Meyer and Rowan 1977](#)) and later on the nation state itself as an institution ([Meyer 1987](#); [Meyer et al. 1997](#)). The idea that the nation state is a constructed institution, legitimated by an institutionalized world culture, is a very powerful one, and led to the development of World Society Theory ([Krücken and Drori 2010](#)).

World Society Theory has been used to explain remarkable similarities in institutions all around the world, from mass education ([Meyer et al. 1992](#); [Schofer and Meyer 2005](#)) and university mission statements ([Mizrahi-Shtelman and Drori 2020](#)) to organizing global environmental protests ([Evans et al. 2020](#)) and beyond. Here, the term “institution” takes on a distinctly sociological flavor. Moving beyond merely “organizations”, sociological institutionalism defines institutions as structured patterns of behavior that give rise to social order and govern the behavior of individuals, such as higher education (not universities) or healthcare (not clinics). In that sense, even taken-for-granted values such as human rights ([Elliott 2007](#)), cultural conservation ([Elliott and Schmutz 2016](#)), environmentalism ([Hironaka 2014](#)), and scientization ([Drori and Meyer 2006](#)) are institutions. These institutions operate worldwide as blueprints for formulating local organizations, resulting in remarkable similarities in organizational principles around the world. Of course, the global model is always “domesticated” locally to some extent, and practice is never the same as principle ([Alasuutari and Qadir 2014](#)). Crucially, worldwide institutionalized scripts as expressed in organizations also shape the construction of individuals as agentic actors rationally moving in their social worlds ([Meyer 2010](#)). In particular, individuals come to see themselves as agentic actors of a certain sort, having both an instrumental rationalism and a subjective expressivism.

In this light, sociological institutionalism brings an entirely new insight into global processes and how they interact with local environments and individual actors ([Qadir 2016](#)). However, there has been remarkably little attention to religion in this line of thinking. George [Thomas \(2007\)](#) discusses the institutionalized character of religion worldwide in theoretical terms, and later focuses empirically on religious rights being contested on worldwide institutionalized grounds ([Thomas 2013](#)). While the global spread of scientization is a major emphasis of sociological institutionalism ([Drori et al. 2003](#)), this has never been combined with studies of religion. In particular, how people internalize different institutionalized scripts, such as the places of science and religion in life, remains an open question. Conflicting scripts are also generally ignored (although, see [Drori 2010](#); [Lechner 2000](#)). More to the point, the fact that people do, after all, manage to negotiate these conflicting scripts and live on has not been much studied. It is thus not at all clear how people negotiate these scripts on a daily basis, or precisely how modern, institutionalized organizations matter in this negotiation.

Our theoretical approach aligns with sociological institutionalism in that we approach higher education and healthcare in Nordic countries as expressions of world culture that posits scientific rationality and secularism as its core building blocks. However, complementing the mile-high perspective of World Society Theory, we are interested in the actual practices and discourses of actors “on the ground”, which are often obscured from view. In this vein, we connect to critical, sociological research on science and religion that explores how different actors—“science-and-religion actors”, social scientists, and “lay people”—discursively manage the relationship between science and religion ([Evans and Evans 2008](#); [Kaden et al. 2017](#); [Catto et al. 2019](#)). As an example, such research illustrates that when individuals evoke the public debate labels of “Intelligent Design”, “New Atheism”, or “Theistic Evolution”, they apply these terms beyond the logic and coherence that was intended by their creators, thus exhibiting agency and creativity in managing the science–religion discourses ([Kaden et al. 2017](#), p. 518). We are interested in

similar agency and creativity, but our gaze is on the actors who affiliate themselves both with secular institutions and a religious or spiritual tradition, and the possible tension that this intersection may generate.

Importantly, building our theoretical and methodological approach, we accept and embrace messiness and complexity to challenge the static, rigid notions of science and religion (Evans and Evans 2008, p. 101; Long 2011). As Long's ethnographic research among American creationist students illustrates, both students and, at times, faculty experience tension and anxiety when discussing evolution in their biology classes (Long 2011, pp. 95–106). The rejection of evolution by the creationist students in a campus environment often relates to the questions of identity, as well as existential and emotional comfort. Interestingly, outside of campus, many individuals simply forget about issues of biological evolution as it is irrelevant to their day-to-day lives (Long 2011, p. 170). In other words, institutional framing does affect the ways in which people negotiate the relationship between science and religion, and this negotiation is also necessarily a matter of feelings and experiences. Indeed, an important insight into discursive analysis is that people's narratives are informed and rooted in their embodied, daily experiences (Cerwonka and Malkki 2007). For instance, many of our interlocutors refer to how they *feel* in their work environment.

However, our focus remains on science and religion as discourses, as we probe how these are construed, interpreted, and negotiated by people in institutional settings. We are concerned to find out what kind of artistry or creativity is manifested by religiously or spiritually identifying people in everyday life in and around secular organizations. The crucial point is that individuals somehow do manage to live their religion and negotiate the boundaries between religious sensibility and institutionalized secularism. People's artistry around secular organizations connotes the concept of "boundary work", now widespread in Science and Technology Studies (Gieryn 1999). There is an element of creative "boundary work" to people's everyday actions by which they constantly negotiate the distinction between science and other spheres of life, including lay knowledge, culture, and religion. This negotiation affects their understandings of both science and of religion (Burdett 2017), and our study shows how some of this plays out. As we noted earlier, our concern is not with particular organizations as such, but rather with what sociologists term "institutionalized organizations", i.e., organizations guided by structured, cultural patterns of externally legitimated scripts and models that govern their development and spread (Lechner and Boli 2005; Meyer et al. 2009).

3. Method and Data

As above, most sociological institutionalist research concentrates on the macro-sociological in a research design of diffusion. However, our aim is to probe how individuals make sense of global scripts of science and religion in localized, institutional settings. To do so, we rely on the method of multi-sited ethnography to open a window into how individuals agentically negotiate the science–religion relationship in their daily lives. The ethnographic method generally allows an in-depth perspective with its techniques of immersion and participant observation, best suited for articulating "taken-for-granted social routines, informal knowledge, and embodied practices" (Gupta and Ferguson 1997, p. 36). Multi-sited ethnography adapts ethnographic practices to more complex, dynamic objects of study, drawing on multiple sites of observation and cutting across dichotomies such as "local" and "global" (Falzon 2009; Marcus 1995, 1998, 2009).

Challenging the colonial legacy of Western anthropology that constructed and explored the Other, multi-sited ethnography shifts the focus to processes and phenomena in-between, across, and within "the realm of the already known" (Marcus 2009, p. 184). Religion is in many ways constructed as the Other in modern contexts of science-making, including in Sweden and Finland, where "some scholars of religion are taking atheism as a standpoint for studying and teaching comparative religion" (Mahlamäki 2012, p. 58). Our multi-sited ethnography makes a methodological shift by approaching religion as a

discursive object of research inquiry to be followed across strategic locations from churches, mosques, and individual homes as sites of embodied religiosity to universities and health clinics as sites of scientific rationality. Throughout our fieldwork, we immersed in various sites of research, including universities, health clinics, churches, mosques, and individuals' homes. Multi-sitedness also meant conducting fieldwork research in different sites of Finland and Sweden, unpacking the trajectories and accounts of people of faith and spiritually oriented individuals working or engaging in rational institutions.

The bulk of our data are in the form of ethnographic interviews with 37 individuals in 2018 and 2019. Our interlocutors are academics, students, and medical doctors of different ages and at various stages of their careers, representing varieties of scientific disciplines, including biology, history, astrophysics, physics, information and communication sciences, engineering, sociology, anthropology, religious studies, education sciences, literature studies, psychology, psychiatry, and other medical specialties (for instance, anesthesiology). They hold different positions, titles, and professions: professors, PhD candidates, (former) students, postdoctoral researchers, senior research fellows, university lecturers, medical doctors, psychiatrists, and nurses.

We interviewed people working at four universities in Finland and two in Sweden, as well as healthcare professionals who have worked at numerous sites in Finland and in Sweden. Two thirds of our interlocutors are women, and one third men. This gendered disposition mirrors abundant statistical and religious studies evidence that women are generally more consciously committed to religious and spiritual practices than men ([Gemzöe and Keinänen 2016](#); [Keinänen 2010](#); [Mahlamäki 2012](#)) (women typically number higher on all religiosity and spirituality indices in the European Values Survey—for instance, 84% of women believing in God vs. 73% of men (EVS Longitudinal Data File 1981–2008, available for online analysis)). Our interlocutors all identify as Muslim, Christian, or anthroposophic (as this term has been defined by [Hanegraaff 1998](#) or [Heelas 2009](#)). Some are committed to Lutheranism, which has been historically dominant in Finland and Sweden, while some associate with particular revivalist movements within the Lutheran Church, or with Pentecostalism. Others pursue their spiritual practices outside institutionalized religion, particularly in the case of anthroposophy, which fuses Buddhism, Hinduism, and Christianity with scientific empiricism. Our anthroposophic interlocutors are mainly practicing doctors who are committed to what anthroposophy founder Steiner termed “the art of soul”, combining biomedical with mind–body–spirit holistic approaches, herbs, and eurythmy. Our Muslim and Orthodox Christian interlocutors represent minority religions. However, it should be noted that Orthodoxy in Finland has been historically an indigenous religion and has legal status as a national church alongside the Evangelical Lutheran church.

We approach Finland and Sweden as multicultural societies. The specific nature of our sites of research further suggests a transnational anthropological stance ([Appadurai 1996](#); [Vertovec 2014](#)), as academic environments are relatively cosmopolitan. Moreover, 26 of our interlocutors were born and lived all their lives in Finland and Sweden, but even most of these have travelled extensively. The rest have moved to these countries from Eastern Europe, Middle East, or South Asia. Fieldwork research was conducted by all four co-authors of this paper, who have different language and cultural expertise. The interviews were conducted separately with each interlocutor, in Finnish, Swedish, English, or Russian language.

Being academics ourselves and having an established network of contacts with academics and doctors greatly facilitated our fieldwork research and access to our interlocutors, which we combined with a snowball method. However, locating such interlocutors was no small task, as scientists and doctors are rarely subjects of anthropological study themselves, especially when related to religion. Many of our interlocutors pointed to the sensitive nature of our ethnographic enterprise and were keen on finding more on our research ethics and theoretical framework.

Fully alive to this sensitivity, we followed best practices of research ethics, discussing our guidelines thoroughly in the team and tuning them in dialogue with our ethnographies at frequent, internal data seminars. All names, locations, and identifiable information have been anonymized with great care, and we do not refer to exact positions or locations. The identities of our interlocutors were not shared amongst ourselves in the same team or in our joint, anonymized, fieldwork diary. To ensure the anonymity of our interlocutors, we refer to their professions through four categories: SSH—social sciences and humanities, NS—natural sciences, TE—technology and engineering, and HCP—healthcare professionals.

Our ethnographic interviews took place as naturally occurring conversations, based on loosely formulated questions to help guide the discussion; our interlocutors themselves underlined or ignored specific themes, which we respected. In addition to career and life trajectory questions, our interview guide included such questions as: In which kinds of situations does religion come up or emerge in your workplace? It is often speculated that science and religion are not compatible or disagree with each other: what do you think about that? How has combining science and religion worked for you? Do you feel comfortable discussing religion at your workplace? Have you ever encountered some uncomfortable situations when talking of religion or your religious affiliation at work? How did you deal with it? What kinds of ethical situations have come up in the course of your work? Thus, following best ethnographic practices, we kept our conversation as open as possible. For instance, we did not ask direct questions regarding creationism or evolution, avoiding structuring and limiting our discussion on science and religion to the US public debate polarized frame. Instead, we observed if such themes would come up, if they were relevant for our interlocutors, and if so, developed them further.

This has resulted in a rich databank of fieldwork notes and transcribed interviews, which we analyzed together after anonymization. Interviews were understood discursively, meaning that we paid attention to how individuals positioned themselves and managed this kind of negotiation in a real-time conversation. Following established principles of ethnographic research (Alasuutari et al. 2008), our purpose is not to produce statistically significant distributions, but rather to identify the range of modes in which people express how they negotiate the science-religion interface in and around modern, Nordic organizations. Following classic ethnographic methods, we started analyzing data during fieldwork research to define our categories and refine our fieldwork questions (Cerwonka and Malkki 2007, p. 19). Once the data were collected, we followed the practice of “re-reading through the data” (Davies 2008, p. 246) and “moving back and forth between the data” (Vuorela 2006, p. 43) to define a set of categories that emerge from the data and classify discursive tactics which people evoke in managing the science–religion negotiation. We embraced the data in their richness and messiness, including our interlocutors’ narratives about their practices and past and present experiences to explore how they discursively construct their stories of negotiation, mapping different contexts and times. Our four members of the team translated some parts of the interviews into English to enable our in-depth discussions on the categorization. One of the team members, a scholar of multi-sited ethnography, proficient in all four languages in which interviews were conducted, analyzed and read through all the data to ensure consistency in the analysis. As ethnography is about a continuous dialogue between theory-building and fieldwork practice (Cerwonka and Malkki 2007, p. 20), all team members worked collaboratively to conduct the research, tuning their fieldwork research techniques throughout and discussing the pertinent aspects of the research.

4. Perception of the Secular Environment

Nordic countries have a reputation for being highly secular and modernized welfare states. In contrast to, for instance, North American society, personal issues of religion were traditionally brushed under the carpet in Northern Europe. Lutheran Christianity was the state religion in many cases and did not have to be loudly legitimated. However, radical social changes including the global economic downturn and massive migration (including

the wave of refugees) have placed secular and welfare-oriented institutions in the region under tremendous stress since the 1970s (naturally, “secular” is a complicated term and we do not disturb here the secular–religious boundary (c.f. Asad 2003; McCutcheon 1997); for our discursive purposes, it is enough to recognize that people generally mean something others broadly grasp when they use the category of “secular” and then to ask what use that category is put to). In addition to headline-grabbing conflicts, a myriad of barely documented contests are arising across the Nordic region. Even focusing on public conflicts in certain organizations misses the point that tensions are ever-present and inform how individuals engage in and around these organizations.

In this context, our research illustrates that tensions do exist when our interlocutors describe how they feel religion is perceived in their work and study environment. Individuals stumble on these tensions, pause, think, react spontaneously, and learn to navigate their environment. Despite differences in their religious and spiritual traditions or nature of work, our interviewees perceive their workspace in surprisingly similar light, revealing its modern, rationalist nature. This perception has naturally different forms and manifestations. Many tend to see secularism as a dominant cultural background in which religion is seen as a “private matter” and hence not talked about. As our interlocutor Sanna puts it:

Of course Finns are such that they do not talk about religion or faith issues that much . . . but there are also other issues about private life that one does not necessarily talk about, it might be a surprise to some that you also have family or you have a child and such things.
(SSH, in her 40s, Lutheran)

The secular nature of the surrounding environment is also noted by newcomers such as by a student who recently moved to Finland: “this topic has never been raised. It is not discussed at all, at all” (TE, in his 20s, Muslim). However, many of our interlocutors emphasize that “non-existence” of religion can be problematic. While there is some discussion of religion in abstract terms, academics’ own personal religious affiliation is more of a “taboo” topic. That is, personal religious identifications are typically not just put to one side, but rather “religious standpoints” are, in the words of our interlocutors, perceived as “strange and suspicious”. For instance, when asked how people talk about religion in her institute if it ever comes up, Minna notes:

They don’t talk about it. It doesn’t exist. Back in the day there was quite an interesting discussion when some people realized that there is a chapel in this campus . . . Some people were like, how could we have something like this in here, they were in panic . . . so even though they don’t have to walk close by it [the chapel], it made some people scared. In general, religious symbols here [at university] are seen as strange.
(SSH, in her 40s, Pentecostal)

Many interlocutors support the point that if religion does come up in the course of work, it is typically seen as “old-fashioned” or irrelevant, a “cultural relic”. Some of the university students whom we interviewed speak of “militant” attitudes towards religion, when peers feel “free to make fun of religion” and many teachers see religion as something “backward”. A social scientist student, Minna, talks of “double standards” with regard to “freedom of speech” and “freedom of science”. Another, newly graduated, social science student, Olga, says that there is a self-evident assumption at the university that religion is about “indoctrination”, “brainwashing”, and “poor, tired, dull women”. Literature studies student Inna notes that Christian readings may be ignored by teachers, even in cases when, for instance, classical authors of European literature intended them, such as *The Lamb* by William Blake. A teacher may choose to omit it altogether, as in Goethe’s *Faust*, even though it is part of the curriculum. Such attitudes may border on ridiculing religion as a domain of “superstition” and the “primitive”.

Alongside these two perceptions of the modern institutional environment—religion as “private” and as “vestige” of the past—some interlocutors note a stance of seeing religion as harmful and dangerous, associated with women’s oppression, fundamentalism, and violence. Our Muslim interlocutors in particular point to “misinformation”, “hostility”,

and “very tough” attitudes surrounding Islam in Finnish and Swedish organizations. Our two male Muslim interlocutors note that if their religious affiliations do come up in their workplace, in many instances, they feel that they have to “justify” it by distancing themselves from conservative or other groups within their traditions. One of our interlocutors from a Lutheran background has spent his entire career at university, and never talked of his religious affiliation with his colleagues (SSH, in his 70s, Lutheran). Despite different areas of research, our interviewees characterize their research environments in strikingly similar terms: natural sciences with “atheism” as a “fundamental ideology”, social sciences shaped by “Marxist atheism”, and humanities, where one may encounter openly “militant atheists”. The students’ narratives converge in that they emphasize “hostile” and “intolerant” attitudes towards religion, with almost no opportunity to discuss it constructively as a subject of research. Siiri recollects a particular moment in this regard:

One professor said that it is very good that the school system rescues children from religious homes. That by going to school they at least get a rational teaching. Something like this. I don't remember how s(he) exactly put it, but I remember that it hit me, and I was wondering how one could say it like this [laughing] . . . of course, there is another voice in me that accepts that it is true, I know some families from religious communities, whose children, indeed, in my opinion, benefited from going to a normal school. But this formulation which generalizes that children from all religious homes are to be rescued. I felt like “I am sorry I am here”. (SSH, in her 30s, Pentecostal)

Most of our interlocutors emphasize that in universities in general, there is more acceptance of non-religious spirituality, as well as Eastern practices of yoga and meditation. A social scientist, Hilja, voices a common sentiment when she notes that there is more acceptance of “Eastern faiths” and migrants’ religiosity in universities, more than of culturally “own” Lutheran Christianity: “for instance, in feminist research, there is lots of discussions defending Muslim women’s rights, but no one, no one defends Christian women’s rights . . . they are demanding that I deny my own religion but that I respect the religion of others” (SSH, in her 40s, Lutheran). Some medical doctors say that meditation, yoga, and mindfulness are being integrated into conventional medical practices but religion is more of a “taboo”: “it is okay to say that I am vegan, but not that I am fasting, it is fine to do yoga, but not to say that I go to the church” (HCP, in her 30s, Orthodox). Some talk of the contradictory signals they receive in their working environment: in a training seminar one can hear that it is okay to “pray with a patient [in a crisis situation]” but a “friend [nurse] who took a blood test and happened to pray with her patients, did receive a caution from the head nurse” (HCP, in her 60s, Lutheran).

However, in clinics, taking religion into account can be seen as attending to the needs of patients from religious backgrounds. Many of our Lutheran interlocutors point out they can be openly Christian in their working place, and they easily identify other Christians among their colleagues. Some are connected with the Finnish Association of Christian Medical Doctors. Our Muslim interlocutor, Aisha, also notes that her healthcare organization is intentionally open to different worldviews and religions, and once a month, they have a practice of pausing for a couple of minutes during their meetings to think of their colleagues’ worldviews, religious convictions, and ways of thinking. However, there is a difference with regard to anthroposophic doctors who work in an environment where anthroposophy, according to them, is often seen as an unscientific medical practice, more of a “sect” that fuses religion, New Age, and science.

Most of our interlocutors insist that they themselves do not see any conflict between religious and scientific worldviews but say it is the secularist culture that generates such a dichotomy. As Juho puts it: “it [science-religion divide] is really linked to a larger secularization discourse. But we don’t have to operate within it, this is not where I operate” (SSH, in his 50s, Lutheran). Some critiqued the title of our research project as reproducing the science–religion dichotomy, even if the two terms are considered discursively. This is an interesting finding in itself as it points out that individuals may reject essentialized discursive notions of “science” and “religion”. Some of our interlocutors

explain that science and religion describe the same reality in different languages. Others see that secularism has been historically and methodologically useful against “dogmatic” interpretations, and science and religion are indeed very different spheres of knowledge, so different that they cannot be compared or disagree with each other. Still others find parallels between “logics” of religion and science: “God can never be fully known and so is science an endless process of (re)discovery . . . Religion means freedom to think . . . [Thinking is] a gift from God . . . [Only] unhealthy religion sets limits for reflection” (SSH, in her 40s, Pentecostal).

Many operate with an inclusive notion of religion and emphasize the importance of cross-cultural sharing across different religions. In fact, as we discuss below, for some people, interreligious communication becomes a way to incorporate religion into their work environments. Some scientists say that they shun both militant atheism and militant religious expressiveness. On the one hand, some point out that they share more in common with open-minded secular humanists than with a person from their own religion but with a narrow and rigid view. On the other hand, some recall that they found the “most fanatic religious people” in the face of their very “militant atheistic” colleagues (SSH, in her 40s, Orthodox).

Individuals who have worked in different places in the country and around the world also emphasize that the context, personal relations, and a particular organization do matter somewhat. Our interlocutor Elena notes that based on her many years of experience in academia, she is convinced that “a lot depends on the organization, how large it is, on the faculty structure, and the time” (SSH, in her 70s, Orthodox). Other interlocutors also notice that those university environments that host theological faculties and have a strong tradition of humanities might be more capable of incorporating “perennial”, philosophical, and historical understandings of religion, and, therefore, offer a more welcoming space for those with different religious and spiritual affiliations. In contrast, as Erkki notices, the “anti-religious”, “leftist” tradition of his university enhances religion as an “avoided” subject or one that can only be talked of in a “ridiculing manner” (SSH, in his 40s, Lutheran).

5. Modes of Negotiation

Our ethnographic research reveals three modes by which our interlocutors negotiate the science–religion interface as they relate it in their discussions or as we observe it in the sites of research. These are not necessarily strategic modes, although our research participants sometimes do consciously reflect on them. However, more often, these modes are felt responses or, in terms of the later Wittgenstein, a way for people to “go on” in their secular environment. In many cases, these modes are not mutually exclusive. In describing each mode, we illustrate the variations by giving quotes from the interviews, not as evidence adduced for the explanations but to exemplify the analysis.

5.1. Segregation

The mode of segregation illustrates our interlocutors’ intuitive and spontaneous efforts to maintain a demarcation between their professional and religious lives. We distinguish between and discuss here three variations within this mode: socially performative segregation between professional and religious lives, methodological segregation between science and religion, and internal ethical dilemmas. The social dimension manifests in some individuals’ attempts to hide their religious affiliation at their work or study place. They point out that they are hesitant to talk about their own religion out of fear of being ridiculed—for instance, at being socially active in the church. This is how a student in social sciences describes her experiences, forcing her to segregate her studies and religious life:

I knew the university would be liberal but didn't think it would be so intolerant . . . I feel religious when I go home, but here [at the university] I hide it. It's like I lead a double life . . . Everyone [including me] frames religion differently from other identities . . . One teacher started laughing at the Church when I mentioned it, so I had to laugh along. (SSH, in her 20s, Lutheran)

Many of our interlocutors, either students now or recollecting their student experiences, mention such a “double life”, saying that at some point, they preferred to “remain silent” about their religious affiliation at university out of fear of being “labelled” as Christian fundamentalists or simply because religion was seen as outdated. Olga emphasizes that in the university, there has been no room for discussing religion in a constructive, engaging manner (SSH, in her 30s, Orthodox).

Some scholars among our interlocutors, including PhD candidates, junior and senior researchers, as well as some medical doctors, readily recognize the dominance of a secular culture and learn to navigate within this normative culture by maintaining a demarcation between their working and religious lives in their social communication with their colleagues. They simply do not bring religion up in their interaction: “Being a successful researcher means that you must act the role of rational actor, you must appear as rational . . . Finland is a very secular country, and I'm supposed to act the role of a rational actor” (SSH, in her 40s, Lutheran). Male, Muslim researchers whom we interviewed stress that they have to hide their religious background since Islam is associated with fundamentalism and radicalization, also among academics. Being openly Muslim, they say, could endanger their research careers. One interlocutor claims of being victimized for his racial and religious profile at his organization:

I never talk about spiritual matters in the University. I am already under the microscope because of my [Muslim-sounding] name! If I was to discuss how I lived my faith like the intersection between Islam and Buddhism it would really jeopardize my position. Even if I hear someone else discussing something about religion, I just stay quiet. (NS, in his 60s, Muslim)

For him, being religious means strictly separating out his religious practice from his work life, but yet processing his work experiences in a religious framework of meaning for himself. Likewise, a Muslim medical doctor says that although she has never hidden her religious affiliation at her workplace, she would not rush to tell people she was Muslim.

Anna, an Orthodox Christian by faith, says that she would “never discuss” religion with her colleagues, as she would “feel uncomfortable” knowing that “atheism is a fundamental ideology” in natural sciences: “the way people talked and commented, I understood that it was better not to go public [with religion] in the community [of my sub-field in natural sciences]. People don't like it” (NS, in her 30s, Orthodox). Now, when she is doing her second PhD in engineering sciences, Anna says that she feels a little less pressure but mentions that she is not exposing her Orthodox background there either. Anna follows Orthodox practice of wearing a cross, but makes sure that it would not be easily identifiable as Christian. She intentionally chooses to wear a special, encircled cross that she believes people would perceive of as a fashionable Finnish “Kalevala” jewelry rather than as a cross, even though she points out that it is “a copy” of a medieval Christian cross found in some excavations.

In their work, some scholars find that segregation between science and religion is academically and methodologically useful. For instance, natural sciences scholar Igor says that there is “perennial and deep understanding” of religion in humanities and social sciences anyhow, and it is the task of those fields to engage with it. For him, segregation between science and religion had to do with differences across disciplines (NS in his 40s, Orthodox). Mikko expresses a similar thought, claiming that “sociology and biology have nothing to do with religion”, and “one does not have to be affective” while doing research (SSH, in his 70s, Lutheran). He also maintains that he has “no problem with scientific worldviews related to big bang theory or evolution” as it is not related to the mystery of

God: “Why do we have to assign any attributes to God. We know nothing about God”. Historian, Maria, who recently moved to Sweden, emphasizes that “the secular atmosphere suits me [her] quite well” as it gives the opportunity to study and teach Christianity like any other religion, without “preaching” (SSH, in her 40s, Orthodox). On the other hand, she notes that she is new to a secular Nordic environment and was unpleasantly disturbed by the “hostility” of students when she presented her material on St. Mary of Egypt: “for me she was like a model of a woman who could be so free and even become spiritual, etcetera. And I could see that the students couldn’t really take it as a good thing, that you’re a woman and you’re religious. I mean they were so angry at her that she became religious”.

Some of our interlocutors, especially medical doctors, have to deal with moral and ethical dilemmas while working in secular spaces. They criticize the modern, biomedical, and instrumental approach to a human being, including excessive use of antibiotics, vaccinations, or hormone treatments. For instance, Kristi, an anthroposophic doctor notices that she is “very concerned about different side-effects and co-effects of medication”, “the pharmaceutical companies trying to gain profit”, and that “medical research is filled with commercial interest” (HCP, in his 60s, anthroposophic).

Some of the doctors who we interviewed emphasize that the questions of abortion or suicide may pose ethical dilemmas. Often, they have to segregate between their own religious understanding of the self and the professionally legitimized one. For example, Ivana describes a case when she had to remain silent due to her professional, psychiatric ethics but doubted the diagnosis and treatment:

There was also once a situation . . . I was working in [city C], and there was another colleague with me, an older woman, a psychiatrist from [another region R], an atheist. Here comes a patient, a woman, who says—we were admitting her together—“I never believed in God. Never. I am now 50 . . . and one year ago I started hearing prayers. Prayers, prayers, prayers. So, I decided to get baptized. Now I go to the church”. My opinion was: “Does it disturb you? If not, then keep hearing your prayers”. But I can’t say that. Maybe it has come to her from above that she came to God at this age. But you understand, that woman, the psychiatrist, she is an atheist. She said: “She is psychotic. It is a psychosis . . . sound hallucination.” Sometimes I think . . . why do you have to cure it, if it does not disturb you? (HCP, in her 30s, Orthodox)

Another Orthodox psychiatrist, reflecting on a case, illustrates how medical practitioners in Nordic countries are faced with moral dilemmas contrasting their faith with institutional rules:

Perhaps it is a naïve thought, but I find myself thinking sometimes what if the son of God is born again, and he is delivered to a psychiatric clinic because he is mad thinking of himself as the son of God, would I recognize him [laughing]? Or would I prescribe him antipsychotics? (HCP, his 50s, Orthodox)

5.2. Estrangement

The mode of estrangement manifests in our interlocutors’ efforts to personally withdraw either from religion or from science. This mode often operates on dichotomies, as is evident in discursive demarcations between “them” and “us”, researchers vs. Christians, or religious people vs. anthroposophists, etc. In many ways, this mode operates on the normative premises of a secular culture. We discuss here three variations of this mode: withdrawal from science or religion, temporary estrangement from religion, and distancing from religion.

In some cases, “social pressure” at university caused some students among interlocutors to withdraw from science or religion. Tired of “militant” and “hostile” attitudes, some have refrained from their religious practices for the time being. However, the reaction can be the opposite. Inna says that the university left her with a sense of “suffocation”, where she felt “isolated” like a “dissident”: “they [“postmodern” teachers] say that they accept different interpretations, why don’t they even want to listen to alternative interpretations?”

(SSH, in her 30s, Orthodox). She recalls a number of instances when she had wanted to offer a Christian interpretation but was not allowed to speak. Inna eventually distanced herself from the world of science after successfully graduating from the university.

Some of our interlocutors mention that they went through dichotomist thinking in their youth. For instance, Anna mentions that when she was younger, she was trying to choose between “hurrah-atheists” and “hurrah-Orthodox”, equally rigid and “loud” in their claims. At some point, she felt that she had nothing to do with religion and was completely estranged from it. Some years later, she realized that she did not belong to either of those “hurrah” camps (TE in her 30s, Orthodox). Some other interlocutors talk of estrangement from their religious traditions as part of their “youth revolution”. Matti refers to this stage as part of normal maturing: “a sense of contradiction came with puberty . . . all teenage things came together, and I thought that I didn’t believe in God and this kind of stuff” (SSH, in his 50s, Lutheran). Evgenia also notes that there is a time in life when “you doubt things, you doubt science, you doubt religion, you doubt family, you doubt lots of thing. So, everybody has their revolution. It does not matter that you are in an Orthodox society, Christian family, or whatever . . . it does not matter at all” (TE, in her 50s, Orthodox).

In these cases, temporal estrangement was a stage in life. However, it could also express itself in a temporal doubt in a particular situation at work, as, for instance, expressed by Eeva, a psychiatrist:

A patient comes to the “head doctor” . . . and says: “I see angels”. Why not see angels? Maybe it has been given to him that he sees angels. They lock him in the clinic and start treating him so that he would stop seeing angels. First, I started pushing back: “Why do you treat him? Maybe he indeed sees angels? Maybe it has been given to him to see angles?” But now, I have this kind of opinion, maybe they have already broken me, that a person should not see anything supernatural that other people can’t see. (HPC, in her 30s, Orthodox)

Among our interlocutors, the mode of estrangement seems to be more explicit among anthroposophic doctors. Most of them do not want to be associated with religion and theosophy, although they refer to the works of esotericist Rudolf Steiner, who founded anthroposophy at the beginning of the 20th century by drawing on theosophy with its fusion of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Christian mysticism and combining it with scientific empiricism (Hanegraaff 1998; Heelas 2009). In this sense, our interlocutors describe anthroposophy in practice as informed by Christianity and Eastern spiritualities. For instance, they recognize the existence of the spiritual realm, which is accessible through the senses, body, and intellect, as well as draw on the idea of reincarnation and the effects of past lives on people’s health. They recognize the possibilities of sensing and interacting with this invisible reality.

Our anthroposophic interlocutors understand this interaction in scientific terms. They emphasize the “scientific” nature of their practice, and repeatedly stress that anthroposophic doctors have medical degrees. For instance, Kristi discursively draws a difference between anthroposophy and religion, in which “you believe in God”, “pray to God”, and “do not test anything” (HCP, in her 60s, anthroposophic). Thus, there is a certain discursive vision of religion that informs their particular mode of estrangement. According to this understanding, religion is associated with hierarchies, dogma, blind and unreflective belief in God, as opposed to anthroposophy where “you are testing everything”:

One can of course simplify the situation and ask the question “how much religion is there actually in anthroposophic medicine?” Because that is just what always is in the newspaper headlines. Anthroposophists are seen as a sect, or in this vein. And my answer to this is that anthroposophic medicine has nothing to do with religion. Full stop! . . . For the reincarnation idea in the way it is described and developed within anthroposophical texts, and the one who has written about this is Rudolf Steiner, it is not at all thought of

as a religious concept even though it is also discussed in religious contexts . . . So I do not want to discuss much about it. (HCP, in his 60s, anthroposophic)

This quote illustrates well that public representation of anthroposophy and its association with pseudo-medicine among professionals affects their negotiation of science and religion. In distinguishing between “religion” and anthroposophy—including with terms such as reincarnation—our anthroposophic interlocutor is operating largely with a dominant, secular understanding of religion, which denies its experiential and vernacular element.

5.3. Incorporation

The mode of incorporation refers to our interlocutors’ more or less harmonious ways of integrating their faith and spirituality in their work. Similar to other modes, it can take different shapes and dimensions, although it is typically a more mature response to putting religion and spirituality to creative use in work. Again, individual artistry is pertinent to such negotiation. We discuss here three variations within this mode: religion as resource at work, subtle incorporation, and incorporation through interreligious communication.

The first variation is especially evident among the health practitioners whom we interviewed, in particular among Lutheran doctors who are openly religious. One of our interlocutors says she sees “a great opportunity to practice faith at the workplace,” in that “they are doing the Christian work to help other people, similar to social work of the church” (HCP, in her 50s, Lutheran). Among our research participants, most doctors from different backgrounds underline the agentic and “powerful” nature of prayer, which helps them deal with difficult situations at work but can also be a resource for their patients. Some claim that being a Christian helps them to attend to the needs of their patients: religion gives meaning to their medical practice in treating patients with “care” and “compassion”, irrespective of their religious or non-religious background. Eliina puts it in this way:

To me this ethical thinking, it is so much from the childhood home and the Christian value system. And also how I have been doing my work as a doctor, though I have never been kind of a loud Christian. All the time, I am looking from the point of view of the most vulnerable and this comes from my childhood home legacy. (HCP, in her 60s, Lutheran)

However, it becomes clear in the interview that this has been quite a long journey for Eliina before she started feeling comfortable and confident to rely on her knowledge and sense of religion in her medical practice. Initially, she maintained a clear segregation, thinking that her “spirituality and social activities” have nothing to do with her work (although she always prayed to attend to her patients, no matter how difficult, with “love”). She recalls one instance when her mother, having seen her work, compared it with that of a deacon, to which she angrily replied that it was “purely a doctor’s work”. Soon, Eliina became known in her congregation, and patients started asking her about spiritual matters and to give references to some Christian therapists. At first, she was somewhat hesitant about this because she thought that the issue of faith could not be a selection criterion for a therapist. However, over time, she changed her mind, saying that in some cases, religion helps her to understand the patient’s situation, speak the same spiritual language, and even to know some hymns. It has to do with finding “a sounding board for one’s ideas” and in this way, it is artificial to say that spiritual issues must be separated from the care of the patient. In fact, according to Eliina, religion can rather naturally belong to the issues discussed at a doctor’s office.

Some Orthodox, Muslim, and anthroposophic doctors among our interlocutors have also succeeded in incorporating their religious views into their work ethics. It is primarily expressed in seeing a human being beyond biomedical and instrumental approaches which objectify and pathologize an individual as a passive recipient of medical cure. Niina sees a person as more than a physical body but a “spiritual being” who has her own history, “own free will” and “willpower” to deal with an illness. In doing so, she establishes a connection

to a “spiritual Christ” and a spiritual freedom (HCP, in her 60s, anthroposophist). This is how Pertti emphasizes the importance of a holistic approach to a patient:

There is an association on holistic medical knowledge . . . and I have sometimes participated. There is an interest to look at a human being beyond physics or just as a patient of psychiatry. But perhaps as a person who also has resources and some of these resources may come from faith. So, I see, and, of course, there is research about this . . . religion as resource for mental health. (HCP, in his 50s, Orthodox)

He also points out that “faith gives him courage” to take a stance in certain ethical questions—for instance, whether undocumented people should receive the same medical care. His answer is an affirmative “yes” as they are created “in the image of God as much as us”. For him, professional ethics and faith point in the same direction. Pertti treats his patients with full respect and is genuinely interested in their own stories and narratives, which, for him, carry a certain message about their entire situation and condition. He is careful in prescribing dosages for psychotic drugs as “the purpose is not to remove all the symptoms” which are also part of what it means to be a human. “God created us all different”, and it is important for a society to accept a certain amount of difference, nor is the purpose of psychiatry to make “similar”, “zombie-like” people out of “all of us”.

Our interlocutor Maria notes that in the university, disciplines such as religious studies allow for studying sources and texts that open up new perspectives on one’s own and other traditions. In some cases, our interlocutors say that they can be more “open” about their religious affiliations; however, this is mostly where work is integrated with theology. Some note that their “religious sensitivity” helped them in some research projects, while others find that postcolonial theories seem to enable integration of one’s own positioning and religious background into theoretical analysis and discussions.

Alongside this articulated incorporation at a workplace, there is also a subtler variation incorporating religion in work and work relationships. Some academics mention that immersion in their own religious tradition enables their thinking, seeing things in different ways, and thus enhancing their academic work in indirect ways. For instance, Dimitri establishes a connection between Orthodox mysticism and the birth of the concept:

Rational thinking begins only after when there is already a crystalized algorithm, some kind of a scheme. Prior to its emergence, all this is very creative, many things, which are unexplainable, why they come, and from where they come, why it is this concept, and why it emerged. But when there is a concept, and you can test it, then it is rational, and it is easier. The birth of the concept is irrational. (TE, in his 30s, Orthodox)

Our interviewees from Lutheran, Orthodox, and Pentecostal backgrounds point out that religious practices such as praying, attending church services, or Friday prayers enable them to deal with difficult work situations, keeping their own “soul in peace” or giving a “sense of bliss” and “calmness”. For instance, Matti notices that being in faith or “spiritually re-born” means that all decisions are taken in very different ways, including career choices, in which “wisdom and understanding” are achieved due to the presence and communion with God (SSH, in his 60s, Lutheran). Another interlocutor, Anastasiya, argues that “living in faith” affects one’s entire being, the way one carries her “religiosity internally”, without pronouncedly demonstrating a religious affiliation (HCP, in her 40s, Orthodox). Some of our interlocutors emphasize that people around “sense” the way you are and may respond with kindness. However, in most cases, sensing becomes a certain subtle way to incorporate people’s faith in their workplace. Many of our interlocutors say that they have learnt to “sense” their working environment and see whom they could discuss religion with and be more open about their religious inclination; it may happen after a seminar discussion, during a lecture, or a coffee break.

Such a sensibility is also often expressed through finding and bonding with people of other faiths than their own. Some of our interlocutors are convinced that there is a shared metaphysical truth that unites all religious traditions and see their own tradition in this context. For instance, our Muslim interlocutors emphasized a commonality between

different religious traditions, especially Abrahamic faiths, saying that they have the “same origin” and the “same God”. One convert to Islam says that he could easily have become a Jew or a Christian, but Islam came closest in capturing his attitude and he had friends in this tradition (SSH, in his 40s, Muslim). He says that in his working environment, he “monitors” the atmosphere and knows some of his colleagues who are “religious”, “religiously sensitive”, or “religiously awake”, and with whom he can discuss religion in a constructive way. Anna also mentions that all her friends at her workplace are from Muslim and Lutheran backgrounds, and she can be open about her religious affiliation and discuss religion only with them (TE, in her 30s, Orthodox).

Evgenia stresses that a “comparative approach” was important for her: “I found out that similar people, or in different places of the world, in different times found out something that was very spiritual and very true. I always had this feeling that Orthodoxy is something very deep and I still have it. Very, very deep” (TE, in her 50s, Orthodox). She also mentions that she mostly discusses religion at work with people who are religious themselves, and often from other traditions. Maria mentions that she was “converted” back to Greek Orthodoxy by her colleagues from a Catholic background (elsewhere in Europe), who were very well-immersed in studies of Asian religions and had many years of experience in meditation and Zen (SSH, in her 40s, Orthodox). She says that when she was working in some research environments with “militant atheistic colleagues”, it was natural to bond with people from other religious backgrounds to counter these militant attitudes. Some of our interlocutors emphasize that they could apprehend and understand better their own tradition through a continuous social and academic dialogue with their colleagues from other faiths and traditions. These examples illustrate that interreligious communication can be seen as a way to incorporate one’s faith and a reaction to the globalized secularism.

6. Discussion and Conclusions

In this article, we set out to explore how our research participants—scientists, students, and health practitioners in Nordic institutions—negotiate the relationship between “science” and “religion”, what goes into the construction of these terms, and whether conflicts or tension arise at their intersection. We wanted to probe what we can say about specific institutional dynamics in the process of negotiating global scripts of scientific rationality and religious expressiveness in the Nordic context. Our focus was on individuals who identify themselves as religious or spiritual and, therefore, the intersection between “science” and “religion” directly related to their experience.

Most of our interviewees bear quite a similar perception of the environment in modern, Nordic organizations as replete with a world culture of secularism and high scientific rationality. In most cases, our study participants do not perceive a conflict between “science” and “religion” per se. Rather, the tension arises when our interlocutors perceive and sense that “religion” is construed as “old-fashioned”, “irrelevant”, or “harmful” in their work environments. In other words, it appears that the tension occurs at the intersection of the personal with the institutional. There is a subtle boundary between how some of our interlocutors construct “religion” as a system of knowledge and practices that is fully compatible with “science”, and how they in fact rely on their lived experience of faith and religion, reminiscent of what Harrison terms an inner disposition (Harrison 2015, p. 14). These different modes of religion coexist in their narratives and discursive strategies.

Some natural scientists are not even aware of the perceived polarity in social sciences, thinking that such “natural” secularism only takes place in their field and not in the social sciences. Yet, all social scientists whom we interviewed were fully aware of a secular university culture and constructed a polarity between “science” and “religion” in their field. Some consciously refuse to “operate” in this framework. Others welcome the secular academic environment that allows for a useful methodological demarcation and provides more openness in discussions across religions. Thus, similarly to recent studies in critical sociology, we find complex, multilayered narratives on the science and religion discourse

that go beyond the perceived dichotomy (Evans and Evans 2008; Kaden et al. 2017; Catto et al. 2019).

Irrespective of whether the dominance of the secular culture is assessed in positive or negative terms (or both), it is precisely around rationalized, institutionalized organizations that the demarcation and polarization between scientific and religious values are concentrated in the Nordic institutions we studied. Modern Finnish and Swedish organizations are replete with what Weber termed instrumental rationality: ends dominating means, bureaucratic logic, efficiency, and authority of empirical sciences. In their daily operations, these organizations demarcate the boundary of what is to be considered scientific and rational. This secular culture appears in our study to often be in tension with discourses of religious belonging, which are characterized by an emphasis on means not just ends, on emotionalism, and on aesthetic expressionism. Many of our interlocutors are faced on a daily basis with this tension, which often goes unnoticed as media attention spotlights “big” questions of religion and politics.

Moreover, there are striking and interesting similarities in the perception of the modern environment across disciplines, nationalities, and religious/spiritual traditions that require further investigation. Notably, we find tremendous similarities across Finland and Sweden, as well as between the two. This is a significant departure from most studies that emphasize national cultures of perception, and our study makes a case for locating the tension between science and religion at a global, institutional level. From this standpoint, national debates are culturally toned instances of a broader, modern, global fault line in perception. This finding supports the broad World Society Theory perspective of worldwide cultural scripts shaping local organizations with regard to discourses of science and religion (and their tensions). Our research strengthens this literature by adding highly localized, empirical evidence from the understudied Nordic context and showing how individuals in this context negotiate the discursive relationship.

However, we have also found an interesting difference, namely the virtual absence of discussions on evolution and creationism that we see dominating US public debates (Long 2011). This can be partly explained by the fact that the matters of religion have been traditionally considered a private matter in Nordic countries, and the polarization takes a less explicit and more subtle character. In our limited dataset, women in modern Nordic institutional settings appear to negotiate the science–religion relationship in a more self-conscious manner, wanting to resolve perceived tensions, while men seem to tend to find it easier to segregate their personal and “official” lives. These findings are tentative at this stage, and further investigation is needed into the intersection of global trends with local actions through more representative, stratified datasets. Our methodological innovation offers a way forward for such future research into an anthropology of the world as a single place. Complementing a macro-picture of world culture in world society, multi-sited ethnography has shown a way to build a rich picture of how global trends intersect with local actions and individual formations.

With this bottom-up approach, we identify three modes by which such individuals negotiate the science–religion relationship amid a secular environment: (1) segregation, manifested in demarcation between professional and religious/spiritual lives; (2) estrangement, accomplished by withdrawal from science or distancing from religion, and (3) incorporation, which signifies explicit and subtle forms of integration of faith/spirituality in their work environment and methods. Again, these are not necessarily self-conscious strategies that people cognitively deploy, but rather “felt” ways of being in these environments, and they are not mutually exclusive. That is, people move discursively and practically in between these modes. It is precisely in this wavering that we see the interplay of tensions in modern, institutionalized life, but also a space for artistry and vernacular responses. We identified a number of variations in each of these modes. Of course, further quantitative and qualitative research is needed to explore these variations and their significance, as well as their prevalence in other contexts beyond the Nordic.

Our findings also indicate that the perception of this tension significantly impacts how religiously or spiritually oriented research participants conceive of their faithful praxis. Faced with constructions of religion as backward, irrelevant, or even harmful in Nordic institutional contexts, such people shape their own engagement with faith. Eeva's remarks on being "broken" are echoed by some, while Eliina's strategy of exploring Christian values is another option. In some cases, people maintain their faith in creative and subtle ways and some even feel that their faith is strengthened in a secular environment such as a Nordic university. In this sense, world cultural scripts of science and religion in their respective "magisteriums" are, indeed, tremendously important but are not diffused everywhere *in toto*. Rather, these scripts are themselves reformed in the process of creative engagement.

Sociological institutionalism offers broad and useful insights into global cultural scripts of the interplay between scientific rationality and religious expressiveness informing local organizations. Our research has shown that these insights need to be further contextualized in organizational settings and approached from the bottom up to discover how this interplay affects the constitution of individuals and their engagement with faith. In particular, our research findings indicate the need for more representative empirical research into how people negotiate the discursive relationship between science and religion in Nordic institutional contexts generally and beyond.

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