

Abstract

This dissertation explores the experiences of religious disaffiliation among Norwegian individuals who have left high-cost Christian Charismatic religiosity. Taking a qualitative, case-based approach, the study investigates how members of a digital community connected to *The Journey* podcast articulate, embody, and negotiate their disaffiliation experience. The empirical data is drawn from interviews with 26 informants, situated in a specific Norwegian case contextualized through cultural analysis, digital ethnography and a survey. The research offers rich, multidimensional insights into the tensions inherent in leaving a Charismatic faith tradition in a secular yet historically Protestant Christian society.

The overarching research question asks how Christian Charismatic disaffiliation is experienced by members of this community, and how these experiences contribute to scholarly understandings of the spaces between religion and non-religion. The analysis centers on how the ex-Charismatics negotiate issues of identity, language, emotion, and social relationships in the wake of their religious disengagement. The study advances the concept of *non/religious ambivalence* to capture the simultaneous presence of religious residue and rejection, secular conviction and existential uncertainty, as well as agency and passivity in the disaffiliation process. This is described in detail in the first article and developed in the second and third articles.

This dissertation consists of an extended introduction (kappe) and three published peer-reviewed journal articles. Each article develops an original conceptual contribution:

1. *Non/religious ambivalence*; identifying five distinct forms of ambivalent positioning and expressions.
2. *Phantoms of Faith*; describing embodied and affective residues of past religiosity.
3. *Translation-work*; analyzing how informants struggle to express their experiences through negotiating both secular and religious vocabularies.

The sum contribution of the three articles is both a theoretical and empirical rethinking of religious exit. The thesis shows that a disaffiliation process is not always linear and conclusive, nor is it entirely agentic. These informants both *do* disaffiliation and are *done* by disaffiliation. The findings challenge and nuance how previous literature relies on stage models in their understandings of disaffiliation. The thesis fills a gap in the literature where little attention has been given to experiences *within* and *between* the various stages in the disaffiliation processes.

The thesis offers a critical reading of established religious and secular binary categories. The material shows that many individuals remain in liminal and ambivalent states long after formal disconnection from religious milieus and institutions.

The methodological approach of the thesis is a combination of abductive analysis with life-story interviews emphasizing *thick description* and informant-led understandings of key concepts such as belief, doubt, identity, self, and religious experiences. Ethically, the study reflects deeply on the researcher's double positionality as an insider and outsider and on the sensitivities and normative implications involved in researching faith transitions.

This research makes several key contributions. Empirically, it fills a gap in the international disaffiliation literature by focusing on a Nordic Charismatic context, which is

underrepresented in current scholarship. Theoretically, it offers an examination of the (non)relation between two literatures: Lived Religion and disaffiliation studies. Finally, it intervenes in broader sociological debates on religious change, secularization, identity, and the privatization of belief and non-belief.

By investigating disaffiliation as a lived, embodied, and socially situated phenomenon, this thesis deepens our understanding of how religion (and non-religion) can be present but hidden in the grey areas and continues to matter, even in its absence—and why studying its transformations is crucial in increasingly pluralist and religiously complex societies.