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Mapping the Growth of the Nones in Spain: Dynamics, Diversity, and the Porous Boundaries of Non-Religion in the Postsecular Age

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Abstract: In recent years, the debate on non-religion has gained prominence in the sociology of religion, making it one of the most interesting areas for further reflection on (post)secularization. Drawing on the key works on the subject, this article adopts a postsecular, religion-related field, constructivist approach, with the main aim of understanding the diverse sector that is included within non-religion. This study uses a multimethod approach, focusing on the preliminary findings of a qualitative fieldwork on non-religion in Spain. The presentation and discussion of the results will be structured around two main axes: (a) an analysis of the growth of non-religion in Spain through three dynamics (irreligion, areligion, and hybridization) and (b) an exploration of the complexity and plurality of non-religion, paying particular attention to the blurred boundaries between religion and non-religion in the Spanish nones. Through both axes, the present research will challenge the idea that the rise of non-religion is merely a confirmation of 'religious decline' and seek to understand it as a nuanced process in which the redefinition of the religious and spiritual also plays an important role, with implications for the postsecular debate and discussions of secularization, social theory, and sociological analysis.

Keywords: non-religion; irreligion; secularization; Spain; postsecularity; religious pluralism; spiritual but not religious; culturalized religion; existential cultures

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1. Introduction: Rethinking Non-Religion in and from Spain

The theory of secularization has been a seminal concept in the social sciences, particularly in the field of sociology, where it has served as a foundational narrative for understanding the dynamics of religion in modernity. However, as the 20th century ended, the critique and nuancing of the theory of secularization began to gain prominence. A growing body of authors has noted that its assumptions regarding decline (Bruce 2002) or invisibilization (Luckmann 1973) have obscured the multifaceted religious dynamics and metamorphoses that occur in secularized contexts (see also Ruiz Andrés 2022b). Consequently, secularization has evolved into a paradigm (Tschannen 1991) and the analysis of religious and non-religious pluralism has gained a more prominent role in sociological studies (Berger 2016), connecting with the debate on postsecularization (Beaumont et al. 2020). This article adopts a postsecular perspective that does not categorically reject the core arguments of the secularization debate, but rather—following the most recent literature in this regard—tries to delve into the religious complexity of secular contexts (Furseth 2018). Thus, while we understand that some of the dynamics that have characterized the process of secularization in the debate are still relevant today—such as certain trends

of religious erosion (Casanova 1994), deinstitutionalization (Berger 1967), or individualization/subjectivism (Luhmann 2007)—others—for instance, the inexorable decline of religions within modernity or their privatization (Luckmann 1973)—must continue to be examined in the light of the constantly changing socioreligious landscape.

In this sense, religious decline and metamorphosis are not opposing phenomena. Ronald Inglehart (2020, p. 110) has observed a downfall in religiosity worldwide, based on data from the World Values Survey (WVS) from 2007 to 2019: 43 of the 49 countries included in the survey became less religious. Within the context of Western Europe, the proportion of non-religious individuals has tripled in the 21st century over the last three decades (Beider 2023, p. 2). A priori, these data seem to support the more classical versions of secularization as a steady loss of religion in parallel with the process of modernization. However, the socioreligious reality is more multifaceted and hybrid, and the non-religious sector not only reveals a certain "religious decline" but also participates in this ambiguity of contemporary socioreligious transformations (Blankholm 2022). Recent studies, such as Waite's (2022) and the findings of the Understanding Unbelief project (Bullivant et al. 2019), have revealed the plurality that constitutes nones; a diversity that frequently lies within the porous boundaries between secular and religious.

Despite the social relevance, sociological interest, and bibliographic advances on nones, this is still an open and debated topic (Saroglou 2014), with the need to explore the dynamics and multiple meanings and senses that help us understand the reality of non-religion in the different contexts of our world.

The aim of this article is to address the debate on nones in and from Spain. According to the findings of the Pew Research Center (2018), Spain is among the countries in Western Europe that have undergone the most rapid process of secularization. Indeed, while the number of nones was barely above 13% in the year 2000, it is now estimated that almost 40% of the adult population in Spain identifies as non-religious, a figure that rises to over 60% among younger demographics. However, despite the growing importance of this sector, there is a paucity of in-depth studies on the issue, in contrast to the progress of the debate in other contexts such as the United States (Bullivant 2022) and Canada (Thiessen and Wilkins-Laflamme 2020), England (Lee 2015), Scotland (Cotter 2020), and Latin America (Bravo Vega 2024; Da Costa et al. 2021). In Spain, there are already theoretical approaches that are beginning to create a fertile ground for research (Ruiz Andrés 2024; Uriarte 2017), on which—together with theoretical contributions on non-religion—this article is based.

2. Theoretical Approach to Non-Religion and Objectives of the Article

Prior to an examination of the socioreligious reality of Spain and the research conducted therein, it is first necessary to offer some brief theoretical notes on its conceptual framework. The present study is grounded in the ongoing discussion on non-religion, an area that, although it has antecedents in the work of Campbell (1977) and Mauss (1969), has undergone a significant period of vitality in recent decades, largely due to the contributions of scholars such as Zuckerman et al. (2016), Quack and Schuh (2017), Bullivant (2022), Blankholm (2022), Lois Lee (2015), Cotter (2020), and Thiessen and Wilkins-Laflamme (2020), among other authors.

Concurrent with this development of the debate, the use of the category "non-religion" (which also sometimes appears as "nonreligion") has become popular in sociology to refer to that sector of people who do not a priori self-identify as religious (*nones*). Accordingly, the present article also employs the term "non-religion" due to its numerous advantages, not only for facilitating dialogue with the state of the art but also for the study of socioreligious dynamics.

Firstly, non-religion provides a term to examine the reality of people who self-identify as such or who, due to the characteristics they display, are considered—socially/academically—to be beyond religion. Distinct from other concepts such as ir-religion, atheism, or agnosticism, which are more prevalent in societal discourse, the term "non-religion" facilitates the exploration of a vast array of positions that, while diverse, are interconnected by a shared externality and relationship with the religious variable. This comprehensive definition enables the consideration of a wide range of profiles, which, despite their heterogeneity, exhibit a degree of interconnectedness (Gray 2019). As Lois Lee (2016, p. 85) asserts:

> Phenomena with non-religious characteristics are diverse, and combine with religious, spiritual, and secular characteristics in numerous configurations. They can include forms of anticlerical protest; a- and nontheistic worldviews; the irreligious emotion experienced by someone performing a religious ritual from which they feel alienated; diverse forms of identification which may or may not be combined with other forms of non-religious belief and practice ('secular humanist' and 'spiritual but not religious' are both examples of non-religious identification, but each combines with different religious, spiritual, and nonreligious practices).

While the category "non-religion" engenders this broad perspective, recent research has also focused on the specification of the profiles, dynamics, and discursivities that constitute this emergent yet broad reality of non-religion (Cotter 2020; Thiessen and Wilkins-Laflamme 2020). This calls for further analysis of the complex make-up of this diverse sector in each of the contexts of our world, with a view to providing a clearer picture of non-religion.

Secondly, the discourse on non-religion offers a series of theoretical insights that facilitate understanding of this phenomenon, by virtue of the emphasis it places on the relational nature of the concept of religion. Rather than focusing on the definition of categories, the debate on non-religion introduces us to the relational dynamics of social reality. This prompts a range of inquiries, offering novel perspectives on rethinking the non-religious landscape in contemporary societies and further refining the discourse on secularization:

- Within the spectrum of functional or substantive approaches to religion (Giddens and Sutton 2021), the relational and discursive perspective (Cotter 2020) propounds a constructivist lens for exploring religion (Berger and Luckmann 1979). This outlook enables a nuanced understanding of non-religion, unbound by the constraints of a rigid and normative conception of the religious. Consequently, it facilitates an examination of the intricacies of religious and non-religious expressions in contemporary societies from the vantage point of the actors themselves. In this study, a constructivist approach has been adopted. This strategy places the construction of meaning at the center of the methodological inquiry. Furthermore, this methodological view enables the exploration of religion/non-religion within a sociohistorically contextualized framework, acknowledging the variability of meanings in relation to sociohistorical experiences and trajectories.
- Additionally, the relational/discursive perspective facilitates comprehension of non-religion as a religion-related field. This conception has been particularly advanced by Quack and Schuh (2017) based on Bourdieusian theory (see also Blankholm 2022). According to these authors, non-religion constitutes a field that is both external and yet intimately related to the religious (Quack and Schuh 2017, pp. 11–12). It is important to note that the relationship between non-religion and the religious field is not unidirectional; non-religion cannot be reduced to the negation of religion. While acknowledging the presence of a certain dialectical perspective to religion within non-religion, it is crucial to recognize the complexity and diversity of the interactions

between religion and non-religion. Non-religion cannot be confined to mere denial of religion; instead, it encompasses a wide spectrum of positions and interactions with the religious that are both dynamic and plural. Research has revealed the multiple non-religious positions towards the religious, but the challenge persists in comprehending this interaction in its multidimensionality (Blankholm 2022, pp. 6–7), which has implications for both the non-religious and the religious fields. Consequently, an approach to non-religion from a field approach must avoid a rigid understanding of the boundaries between the two spaces. As Bourdieu (2000, p. 104) observes, the religious field is undergoing a process of collapse and redefinition in contexts of secularization, giving rise to new agents. It is therefore crucial to acknowledge the multifaceted and sometimes ambiguous relationship between these two fields, which often intersect, resulting in actors of the non-religious sector also engaging in the processes of re-signification and transformation within the religious field.

Thirdly, the nones are also to be understood from a substantive (non-subtractive) perspective (Cotter 2020), i.e., non-religion is not reduced to denial or to its relationship with religion, nor to its multiple relationships with the religious field, but rather a whole series of secular worldviews[1] and existential cultures also coexist in it (Lee 2015; Ruiz Andrés 2024). In accordance with the hermeneutic metaphor of the "field", the non-religious field is not only associated with the religious field but is also permeated by other logics. As Beyer (2021, p. 21) pertinently observes, the potential pitfall of this assertion is the risk of concluding that, since all reality that is not religious is non-religious, the boundaries of the object of study may become indistinct. As a result, some authors have opted to incorporate the religion/non-religion debate within the broader category of Worldview Studies (Taves 2020; Murphy et al. 2023). However, from the standpoint adopted in this article, the postsecular framework allows for compatibility between placing non-religion at the center of the study—without the need to subsume it within other disciplines—and observing all those realities beyond any kind of relationship with religion that define non-religion. This is arguably one of the most significant challenges currently facing research in this area: namely, the necessity to comprehend non-religion beyond the confines of religion (Beyer 2021, p. 26), as Abby Day (2010) eloquently articulated, the necessity to study beliefs without being encumbered by the interrogation of religious questions.

In summary, non-religion is a theoretical category that refers to the group of actors who share a common self-identification as non-religious (using various terms for so doing) but who differ in the discourses and positions in which their relationship with the religious field is constructed. Non-religion is not confined to a dialectical relationship with the religious field (Lee 2015, p. 33) but also encompasses a plurality of interactions between religion and non-religion, including its potential role in the redefinition of the religious field, the presence of elements from other fields of the social structure and even radical indifference towards any religious question, which could be read as the exit of any logics of the religious field.

This perspective provides two keys for analysis: on the one hand, the need to comprehend the significance of macro dynamics (such as the growth of non-religion) from the perspective of the actors (micro-level). Secondly, the advantage of the inductive approach to the study of non-religion, since—as opposed to the deductive approach—it facilitates a more detailed understanding of the multiple relationships between religion, non-religion, and other fields by analyzing the diverse experiences and discourses of the actors.

The present article is founded upon this theoretical basis, and its objectives are twofold. The first objective is to present an in-depth study of non-religious individuals in Spain. This study is expected to enhance the theoretical understanding of nones from diverse global contexts and concurrently stimulate discourse on non-religion in Spain.

In line with the theme raised by the special issue "Religion and the Public Sphere: Revisiting the Boundaries of Theory and Practice in a Postsecular Age", the second objective of this article is to consider in parallel the reality of the nones in Spain and the porous boundaries between theory and practice, as explored in the debate on postsecularization. This involves both maintaining the analytical validity of the category of secularization and continuing the endeavor to critique and nuance it from a postsecular perspective.

As argued in other works (Ruiz Andrés 2022c; Sajir and Ruiz Andrés 2025), and in accordance with the observations of the relevant academic literature (Turner 2010), this article adopts a notion of postsecularization which, whilst firmly rooted in the debate on social theory, has implications for the sociological and sociohistorical analysis of religious landscapes in the contemporary context (Casula 2015). The present study therefore understands "the postsecular" not to imply the irremediable decline of religions, as the latest versions of the "classical" theory of secularization maintained (Bruce 2002). Postsecularization does also not signify the end of secularization, as the former is inextricably linked to the latter (Beaumont et al. 2020, p. 15). Instead, the term denotes a novel perspective, or 'postsecular consciousness' (Habermas 2008, p. 172), which aims to comprehend the intricate socioreligious dynamics that occur within contexts of secularization, "where secular and non-secular principles—beyond others—circulate simultaneously through social relations" (Beaumont et al. 2020, p. 2).

This postsecular approach challenges conventional thinking on the implications of secularization by taking pluralism as the main consequence of the process. It also poses the challenge of rethinking socioreligious reality to rediscover sociological trends and sociohistorical trajectories that are more complex than those sometimes contemplated by secularization theory. The postsecular perspective is intimately connected to the subject of this analysis—the growth of nones in Spain—as it encourages us to analyze the increase in *nones* not as a mere confirmation of religious decline but rather as a social space to trace the complex relationships between the sacred and the secular, religion and non-religion, as well as to explore its internal diversity, which is also an essential part of the pluralism inherent in postsecular contexts (Beriain 2012). At the same time, the study of non-religion in contexts such as Spain complements the discussion on postsecularization, given that it favors a better understanding of the religious and non-religious *superdiversity* (Becci 2018) that make up societies that have undergone the processes of secularization.

- Subsequent to the delineation of the theoretical approach (2), the ensuing section will present the research work and the methodology employed (3). Thereafter, the results and the discussion will be articulated in two axes of questions that will guide Section 4: What are the main trends that contribute to the growth of nones in Spain? How do these dynamics shape the reality and identity of non-religious individuals, and how do non-religious individuals, in turn, influence these dynamics? How is the pluralism of nones expressed, particularly regarding different attitudes towards the religious and the spiritual? What is the role of cultural religious/spiritual dimensions in conforming this diversity within the non-religious sector?

3. Researching Non-Religion in Spain: Sources and Methods

This article builds upon ongoing research investigating non-religion in Spain, focusing on exploring its genealogy, ontology, and typology (Portier 2020). While extensive literature exists on Spanish secularization (Pérez-Agote 2012; Ruiz Andrés 2022b), comparative perspectives between the process of secularization in Spain and other contexts (Díaz de Rada and Gil-Gimeno 2023), the historical sociology of atheism and anticlericalism (Navarra Ordoño 2019; De la Cueva and Montero 2007), religious culturalization (Astor et al. 2023), political–religious mobilization (García Martín and Perugorría 2024), religious

pluralism (Salguero and Hejazi 2020) and its challenges for inclusive governance (Sajir 2023), the experiences of Spanish "nones"—a significantly growing segment—remain largely unexplored.

This research employs a multimethod approach, centered around in-depth interviews with individuals who self-identify as non-religious. Participants were recruited through convenience sampling and snowballing techniques (Silverman 2020, pp. 62–63; Esposito and Evans-Winters 2022, p. 77), enabling access to a diverse range of non-religious perspectives, including spiritual, anticlerical, atheist, indifferent, and areligious individuals[2]. The sample also follows a typological design to capture a diverse range of voices by incorporating a series of key variables considered crucial for understanding non-religion in Spain:

- Regional variation, prioritizing the representation of the regions [*Comunidades Autónomas*] with high non-religious populations, including Madrid, Catalonia, and the Basque Country.
- Socialization trajectory, encompassing both "nonverts" (those who have transitioned from religious to non-religious positions) and "cradle nones" (those raised without religious affiliation), thereby facilitating an examination of potential differences between these groups as highlighted in the extant literature (Bullivant 2022).
- Religious pluralism, incorporating non-religious individuals from religious traditions beyond Catholicism to investigate the growing diversity within the non-religious population. This subsample is being developed in collaboration with Dr. Zakaria Sajir (University of Salamanca, Spain), with whom previous research has been conducted (Ruiz Andrés and Sajir 2023).
- Generational differences, paying close attention to intergenerational variations in non-religious perspectives, considering both the intensity and content of non-religion as identified in previous research (Pérez-Agote 2012).
- Other sociodemographic factors such as gender, the differences between rural and urban areas, social class, and educational level, which significantly shape socioreligious realities.

To date, 22 in-depth interviews have been conducted. Following Waite's (2022) typology of "nones", these interviewees can be categorized as follows: 7 spiritual nones, 5 campaigning atheists (of which 3 are active members of atheist or secularist associations), and 10 tolerant nones. Notably, within this group of tolerant nones, 3 interviewees identify as cultural Christians, and 1 participates in religious rites such as processions, aligning with the concept of "ritual atheists" (Zuckerman et al. 2016). Despite the potential offered by this sample, it also has limitations, mainly due to the fact that it is still made up of a modest number of respondents compared with the subject under study, as well as the difficulties in accessing certain profiles included in the typological design, especially those who declare themselves non-religious but have a non-Catholic religious background.

Data analysis employs two qualitative approaches: content analysis, to explore the expression of non-religion, and discourse analysis (Esposito and Evans-Winters 2022, pp. 142–43), to examine the construction of non-religious identities and worldviews, considering the meanings associated with religion and spirituality, the sociohistorical context of the interviewees, and the presence of other worldview elements (existential cultures). Both the interview guide and the data coding process (Taylor et al. 2016) are structured around four key axes:

- Personal trajectory: evolution of the individual's relationship with religion, including the role of religious socialization, its influence on their life trajectory, and significant religious or non-religious milestones.

- Attitude toward religion: interviewee's position and assessment of religion, considering its multidimensionality (Glock 1971) and analyzing potential processes of re-signification of religious and spiritual elements.
- Non-religious identity: meaning and significance of non-religious self-identification for the interviewee.
- Secular worldviews: other worldviews and existential cultures (Lee 2015) that shape the interviewee's non-religious perspective, including their values, ideologies, and identities beyond religion.

The qualitative analysis is complemented by two additional methods: Firstly, an ethnography (comprising both participant and digital observation) aims to explore three different yet significant (online-offline) spaces to comprehend the multidimensionality of non-religion in Spain: (a) institutions and associations in Spain that display a marked secularist (*Europa Laica*), irreligious or atheist character (*Unión de Ateos y Librepensadores*), (b) media and publishers that devote special attention to non-religion, (c) spaces and platforms of alternative worldviews (existential cultures) where the potential participation of non-religious people is detected, such as Death Cafés or spaces for burial in nature. This ethnography provides valuable information that complements the interviews. While the interviews mainly show us the reality of nones in non-institutional settings, the ethnography allows us to delve into the activist, associative, and organized dimension of nones, which despite their minority presence within the non-religious sector, have significant media impact, with a wide range of proposals both online and offline.

Secondly, a descriptive quantitative methodology is employed with the aim of presenting a panoramic and diachronic vision of non-religion in Spain and contextualizing the results obtained in the qualitative work. The primary sources utilized in this regard are drawn from the Spanish Centre for Sociological Research (Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas, CIS), particularly its barometer, a monthly study that encompasses exclusive inquiries pertaining to religious identification and practice among Spanish nationals. Furthermore, the three studies conducted by this center within the framework of the International Social Survey Programme (ISSP) are incorporated, which offer a more comprehensive perspective by including individuals residing (not only nationals) within the Spanish territory, in addition to a more extensive questionnaire on religion (CIS 1998, 2008, 2017). Auxiliary quantitative sources have also been consulted, including the Pew Research report (2018) on Christianity in Western Europe, which includes Spain in its study, and the Report of the Observatory of Religious Pluralism in Spain (2013).

The present paper is principally based on the findings of 22 in-depth interviews and quantitative–descriptive research. The results will be presented in the course of the discussion, which will be structured around two ideas: firstly, to offer a presentation of the main dynamics underlying the growth of non-religion, taking into account the data and the experiences of the actors, and secondly, to consider the question of the plurality of non-religion, paying particular attention to the porous boundaries between religion and non-religion.

4. Discussion: From the Dynamics for Understanding the Growth of Non-Religion in Spain to the Blurred Boundaries Between Religion and Non-Religion

As noted at the outset, the number of nones in Spain has significantly increased since the early 21st century. In 2000, 12.5% of the population self-identified as non-religious (comprising 3.5% "atheists" [*ateo*] and 9% "non-believers" [*no creyente*]) (CIS 2000). By 2024, this figure had risen to 40.9% (12.1% "agnostics", [*agnóstico*] 12.7% "indifferent/non-believers", [*indiferente, no creyente*] and 16.1% "atheists" [*ateo*]) (CIS 2024). As we shall see,

there are already difficulties in tracing the evolution of subtypes in the nones. Whereas, in 2000, there were two options for the non-religious, in the questionnaire for 2024, there are three, which makes it difficult to reconstruct the evolution of the different subtypes that make up the non-religious. However, one thing is certain when comparing the figures between 2000 and 2024: the total number of people in Spain who identify themselves as non-religious has tripled during the two first decades of the 21st century.

The 2024 CIS Barometer provides valuable insights into the characteristics of this growing non-religious population. Consistent with findings from other studies (Zuckerman et al. 2016; Bréchon 2020), significant disparities exist across various demographic groups. A "typical" non-religious individual in Spain can be characterized as follows[3]:

- Gender: predominantly male (45.1%) compared with women (37.1%), exceeding the national average of 40.9%.
- Age: concentrated among younger cohorts, with 58.1% of 18–24-year-olds identifying as non-religious, compared with just 15% of those aged 75 and over.
- Region: highly concentrated in certain regions, notably Catalonia (53.5%), Navarre (47.6%), the Valencian Community (44.4%), the Basque Country (44.3%), and Madrid (44.1%), all exceeding the national average (40.9%).
- Education: More prevalent among individuals with higher levels of education. While 18% of those with no education identify as non-religious, this figure rises to 53% among those with higher education.
- Political vote: more likely to vote for left-wing and regionalist/separatist parties. While only 15% of PP (center-right) voters and 25% of Vox (far-right) voters identify as non-religious, this figure rises to 48.2% among PSOE (social democracy) voters and 83.9% among Sumar (left-wing) voters.

Despite its relevance for contextualizing nones in Spain, this characterization of non-religious individuals in blocs has the potential to become a simplification that obscures the complexity of their multifaceted identities. To develop a comprehensive understanding of the nuances of nones' identity in Spain, it is imperative to explore their internal plurality through an examination of the predominant dynamics in the growth of non-religion in Spain that facilitate the exploration of this phenomenon.

4.1. Three Dynamics for Understanding Non-Religion in Spain

As noted earlier, as the non-religious population has grown, CIS barometer surveys have included more nuanced categories, as evident in the differences between the 2000 and 2024 CIS. Furthermore, the three CIS surveys conducted within the framework of the International Social Survey Program (ISSP) also exhibit variations in response options[4]. Despite these methodological challenges in charting the evolution of non-religion in Spain, an analysis of other available data and qualitative findings reveals three key dynamics shaping the growth of non-religion in Spain: the expansion of (superficial) irreligion (Section 4.1.1), the increase in religious void (areligion) (Section 4.1.2), and hybridization (Section 4.1.3).

4.1.1. The Expansion of (Superficial) Irreligion

In Spain, not only has the percentage of individuals who self-identify as non-religious increased, but statistical evidence also indicates that Spanish society has become more irreligious in recent years. I understand irreligion as that actor, discursivity, or stance in which the rejection of the religious occupies a central place in its worldview. Thus, irreligion is part of non-religion, although non-religion exceeds the limits of irreligion. Between 2008 and 2017, the number of people who identified as "extremely non-religious" grew from 3% to 10%. This trend is even more pronounced among non-religious people: In 1998,

13% of non-religious individuals and 30.2% of atheists described themselves as "extremely non-religious". By 2008, these figures had risen to 22.7% and 33.6%, respectively. In 2017, nearly one-third of non-religious individuals (30.1%) identified as extremely non-religious.

This pattern is also reflected in survey questions regarding opinions on religion. For instance, agreement with the statement 'religions are more a source of conflict than of peace' increased from 16.6% in 1998 to 25.7% in 2017, showing a less favorable assessment of the social role of religion.

However, this growing irreligion within the broader category of non-religion in Spain, which is also observed in the ongoing fieldwork, is not incompatible with the fact that the interviewees included in the present study—even those who have more negative views towards religion—consider themselves tolerant towards religion or frequently express respect for religious people and even a positive view of certain aspects of religiosity or spirituality. Thus, the interviewees tend to display a very critical stance towards religion, particularly its institutional dimension, and at the same time respect for religious people, as emphasized by two young men in their thirties included in this study, Joan [E8] and Tomás [E14]. Consequently, some interviewees—despite their irreligious perspective—could be categorized as "tolerant nones" rather than "campaign atheists", according to Hanna Waite's (2022) terminology.

Moreover, opposition to religion tends to occupy a peripheral role in the worldview of many interviewees. They often avoid adopting strong labels, expressing doubt or hesitancy when asked to specify their non-religious identity [Ainhoa, E5]. Instead, they prefer to define themselves through their activities (e.g., studies, profession, hobbies), values, or personal traits (e.g., "I am respectful, curious") rather than through opposition to religion. Following the observations of Zuckerman et al. (2016, p. 94), who distinguish between "superficial" and "deep 'irreligion", or Thiessen and Wilkins-Laflamme's (2020, pp. 78–79) categorization of "involved seculars" and "inactive nonbelievers", we observe a growing prevalence of "inactive" and "superficial". Furthermore, these individuals often adopt a 'humble' stance, recognizing the provisional nature of answers to existential questions, rather than displaying absolute faith in reason or science [Jaime, E2].

This dynamic is evident in the disparity between irreligious and secularist associations in Spain, and the increase in non-religion. At this point, it is necessary to emphasize that my study has included interviews with prominent members of secularist associations (*Europa Laica*) [Eduardo, E15] and atheist organizations (*Unión de Ateos y Librepensadores* and *Ateus de Catalunya* [Jordi, E18], and *Ateneu Eclèctic i Liberal d'Ateus i Agnòstics* [Francesc, E21]), which allow me to delve deeper into the reality of these social spaces. While the number, visibility, and presence of irreligious associations have grown since the early 21st century (Torres Macías 2021), as illustrated by the 2009 atheist bus campaign—carried out in Spain by the *Unión de Ateos y Librepensadores* following the example of Humanist UK in the United Kingdom—, interviewees from these associations highlight their difficulties to attract members, particularly younger ones. For instance, Eduardo [E15], an active member of *Europa Laica*—a secularist [*laicista*] association founded in 2001 whose objective "is to achieve the secularity of the state and its institutions"[5]—observed that "the younger generation is not in these associations", while Jordi, a leader of prominent atheist organizations, described the history of these organizations as "a failure" [E18]. To understand this lack of engagement, these statements can be contextualized with previous qualitative studies, such as that of Pérez-Agote (2012), which revealed differences between classic forms of irreligion in working-class neighborhoods in Madrid (characterized by strong anti-clericalism) and groups of public university young students, where irreligion manifests in more nuanced ways.

4.1.2. Non-Religion as an Increasing Religious Void (Areligion)?

The analysis of the statistical data and the results of the qualitative work also lead to another interesting dynamic for understanding non-religion in Spain: together with irreligion, in recent decades areligion has become consolidated in Spain, i.e. the absence, the void of religion (Díaz Salazar 1994). Both irreligion and areligion fall under the umbrella of non-religion and are not incompatible with each other: irreligion refers more to a (negative) position towards religion, while areligion refers to the absence of religion (Lee 2015)—either of religious feeling (religiosity) or of knowledge of the symbolic and cultural codes of religions—which may be associated with indifference towards all religious matters. In this respect, a significant increase in the proportion of the Spanish population who self-identify as "neither religious nor spiritual" has been observed in the two most recent CIS studies conducted within the framework of the ISSP. The figure increased from 21.7% in 2008 to 30.2% in 2017 of the total Spanish population (CIS 2017).

To understand the rise of areligion, we must consider significant changes in socialization. Primary socialization—a foundational process with far-reaching implications for religious identity—has shifted dramatically. During the first half of the 20th century, secularization in Spain took place within a Catholic cultural framework, which largely determined the processes of socialization. This can be clearly seen in how—despite the progress of the secularization process—issues such as self-identification as Catholic or participation in rites such as religious marriage or baptisms continued to show very high figures until the end of the 20th century. In 2000, 76% of all marriages in Spain were still performed according to the Catholic rite (a figure that by 2022 had plummeted to 19% (Leguina and Macarrón 2023). Between 1998 and 2018, Herranz-de-Rafael and Fernández-Prados (2024) point out that Spain experienced a decline in religious socialization factors, such as parental religiosity and religious practices in childhood, with profound impacts on the sustainability of the Catholic culture that until recently had accompanied the process of secularization. Proof of this are the clear generational differences in terms of religious socialization: in 2018, only 2.3% of people over 65 stated that they had not received religious education, compared with 14.3% of young people. Furthermore, in 2013, 61% of Spaniards under 35 did not express their intention to provide their children with a religious education (Observatory of Religious Pluralism in Spain 2013). This trend is reflected in the interviews that comprise this study. While those over 50 years old often recount some level of Catholic socialization, younger participants frequently report weak or non-religious upbringing, which means that even those who have had some contact with Catholicism have neither considered themselves believers nor felt part of the religious community For example, Andrés explains, "Yes, I was baptized and had my first communion, but religion never played an important role in my upbringing" [E1]. Although he thinks that Catholicism forms an essential part of Spanish identity, he is unfamiliar with the main tenets of this religion and declares that he has never developed a religious attitude.

Non-religious socialization (and to a certain extent also very weak religious socialization, which in many cases—as we saw in the previous testimony—results in similar outcomes) appears to be a key factor in shaping religiosity/spirituality, as confirmed by studies linking religious socialization to differences between "non-religious without spiritual beliefs" and "spiritual non-religious" individuals (Bullivant 2022; Beider 2023). Moreover, the decline of religious socialization contributes to a phenomenon described in Spain as Catholic exculturation (Pérez-Agote 2014), which can be interpreted as a process of de-Christianization. This trend, closely linked to the declining importance of religion in socialization, is evident in the disengagement from (and in many cases ignorance of) the cultural and symbolic universe of Catholicism among the younger generations. For instance, Inés, a young student from Madrid, recounts, "When I was a child, I remember

visiting a church at the Valle de los Caídos and feeling indifferent, not knowing who the statues of Mary and Jesus represented. I had no idea who these people were" [E20]. Most interviewees did not receive an anti-religious education but rather one in which religion was entirely absent. However, this absence of religious education does not imply a lack of interest in the topic. Many participants described developing curiosity about religion later in life through secondary socialization.

Despite the evidence on non-religious socialization pointing towards a more intense consolidation of the "exit from religion" in secularized societies, such as Spain, the qualitative work also raises a question. Indeed, it could be argued that this life trajectory further away from religion also explains the emergence of a new perspective on religion in Spain, which could be described as more exculturated but also more genuine to the religion. Such a phenomenon could be interpreted as the consolidation of a postsecular approach to religion in Spain, a shift from the historical paradigm characterized by the enduring struggle between Catholicism and secularism (Díaz Salazar 2007, p. 9). It is noteworthy that among the older interviewees, there is a more negative view of religion, which they also connect to their socialization processes and the intense weight of the religious factor in them, sometimes valued as a negative experience [Francesc, E21]. As Jordi, who has previously been identified as the current leader of an atheist association, declared: "I was surrounded by a deeply religious environment. While this may appear to be a favorable circumstance for the church, it has proven to be disadvantageous for them: I knew them well from the inside" [E18]. Carmen also points out that she had a strong religious upbringing, her mother's family being "ultra-religious, Christian, Catholic and Apostolic" [E7]. In contrast, among the youngest, surrounded by a paucity of knowledge regarding religion, a mixture of distance, indifference, and curiosity about religions can be observed [Joan, E8; Inés, E20].

4.1.3. On the Porous Boundaries Between Religion and Non-Religion: The Hybrid Nones

So far, we have observed that the growth of non-religion in Spanish society can be understood through two key dynamics: the expansion of a more superficial form of irreligion and the consolidation of areligion, particularly through the process of exculturation, most evident among younger generations.

Alongside these trends, data from the CIS (2008, 2017) studies within the ISSP framework highlight a third dynamic crucial for understanding Spain's socioreligious context and, more specifically, the reality of nones: hybridization. This refers to the blurring of boundaries between the secular and the sacred, between belief and belonging, and between religion and non-religion.

Two specific hybridization profiles, which find correlates with Davie's (2006) discussion of *belongers not believers* and *believers not belongers*, are particularly relevant to understanding the changing socioreligious landscape in Spain: people who consider themselves religious but not spiritual, and spiritual non-religious people. Statistical evidence from 2008 to 2017 (Table 1) reveals a 3.1% decrease in the former group, reflecting the ongoing process of exculturation. Conversely, the latter group has grown modestly (+2.1%), although this growth is smaller than that observed among those who are neither religious nor spiritual. Despite these shifts, three points are worth emphasizing. First, hybridization emerges as the dominant dynamic shaping Spain's socioreligious landscape. Nearly half of the Spanish population (49.9%) falls into one of these hybrid profiles as a result of combining "religious but not spiritual" and "spiritual but not religious". Within the non-religious sector, hybridization plays an essential role, with more than a third (37%) of non-religious individuals believing in "a higher power or spiritual force in the universe", while 39% report believing they have "a soul" in addition to their physical. This highlights

the importance of "believing without belonging" within the non-religious sector (Díaz de Rada and Gil-Gimeno 2023).

Table 1. Definition of the spirituality and/or religiosity of the person interviewed (% of total respondents) (CIS 2008, 2017).

Definition of Spirituality/Religiosity	2008	2017
I am a follower of a religion and I consider myself a spiritual person, interested in the sacred or the supernatural	20.1	15.9
I am a follower of a religion, but I do not consider myself a spiritual person interested in the sacred or the supernatural	36.2	33.1
I am not a follower of any religion, but I consider myself a spiritual person interested in the sacred or the supernatural	14.7	16.8
I am not a follower of any religion and I do not consider myself a spiritual person interested in the sacred or the supernatural	21.7	30.2
I cannot choose	6.3	3.1
NA	1.1	0.9

Second, although the growth of the spiritual but not religious population between 2008 and 2017 is modest overall, it is far more pronounced among younger generations (Figure 1). This generational trend is complemented by a shift in spiritual orientation during adulthood (see also Figure 1). While 2007 data show a clear decline in spirituality as age increases, the 2017 data reveal a resurgence of spirituality among individuals aged 45–54. This trend aligns with studies on unaffiliated spiritualities, which often see middle-aged adults as their primary participants (Cornejo Valle and Blázquez Rodríguez 2024).

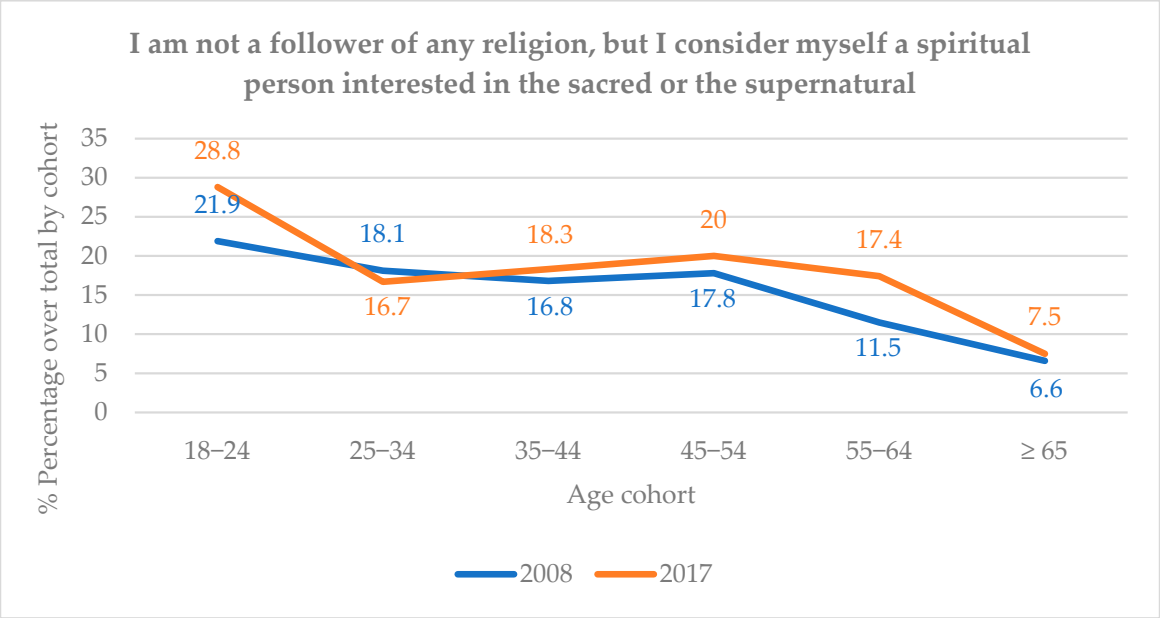


Figure 1. Change between 2008 and 2017 in responses to the question "I am not a follower of any religion, but I consider myself interested in the sacred/supernatural" (percentage of the respondents by age cohort) (CIS 2008, 2017).

Third, while the "religious but not spiritual" group has declined, it remains the most chosen hybrid identity in 2017. This demonstrates the enduring influence of cultural–religious elements in Spain, even as exculturation progresses. This also finds concomitances with other contexts (Mauritsen et al. 2023) such as Ireland, where an accelerated and recent

process of secularization that is leading to "leaving Catholicism" is compatible with the presence of aspects of this religion when defining cultural or national identities (Turpin 2020). For many Spaniards, cultural understandings of religion, particularly Catholicism, continue to hold significant sway, not only in spiritual but also in identity and cultural domains. This underscores the continued relevance of religious traditions as cultural markers (Mauritsen et al. 2023), even among those who do not actively engage with religion and nones.

The present qualitative exploration also adds depth to these statistical insights, revealing the nuanced ways in which hybridization characterizes both the broader Spanish socioreligious landscape and the experiences of non-religious individuals. Several interviewees expressed frustration with fixed categories such as atheist, agnostic, or non-believer, considering them outdated or overly rigid. Faced with a reality of the nones that is often ambiguous in the rejections and acceptances of religion (Smith 2011), the formulation of quantitative questionnaires continues to focus on the denial of religious beliefs in defining realities such as atheism[6], which can generate rejection by respondents when choosing these categories because they consider them a reduction of their worldview. Carmen, for instance, noted that "these concepts are old-fashioned" [E7]. For others, terms such as spiritual and atheist, which are traditionally seen as oppositional, coexist harmoniously. Ainhoa describes herself as a "spiritual atheist" [E5], Jaime identifies as "agnostic with a desire for spirituality" [E2], and Jesús states he is "rationally agnostic, spiritually Christian" [E9]. While these responses may appear paradoxical, they reflect the flexibility with which individuals redefine these categories to suit their lived experiences.

The discrepancy between theoretical frameworks and social realities signifies that conventional labels, such as "atheist" or "agnostic", frequently fall short of capturing the intricacies of non-religious identities. The interviewees' responses, though seemingly contradictory (e.g., atheist and spiritual; agnostic and Christian), underscore the fact that terms like "atheist" or "agnostic" can hold divergent connotations for individuals. The qualitative findings demonstrate that these categories are not uniformly interpreted in actual practice (*lived non-religion*); rather, they are infused with novel meanings and experiences by the individual, thereby challenging their interpretation at a quantitative level.

To conclude this third dynamic, it can be posited that it is ultimately the subject—both self-identified religious and non-religious individuals—who imbues their worldview with meaning. In this late modernity, the dynamics of hybridization (Latour 1993) occupy a fundamental place in the composition of social reality, including in the non-religious sector, as is explored in more detail in the following section.

4.2. Culturally Religious Nones and Spiritual Nones: Two Ideal Types for Exploring the Complex Boundaries Between Religion and Non-Religion

Both the data on "religious not spiritual" and "spiritual not religious", as well as the interviews conducted, reveal two key elements where the boundaries between the religious and the secular become blurred: the interpretation of religion from a cultural perspective and spirituality disconnected from religious affiliation. Based on the qualitative exploration and theoretical framework that underpin the present study, it is proposed that two ideal types particularly embody this hybridization: *culturally religious nones* and *spiritual but not religious nones*. In this section, we explore these types to further investigate the fluid boundaries between religion and non-religion in the context of the growing nones in Spain.

4.2.1. Culturally Religious Nones

In societies like Spain, the process of mass secularization is relatively recent (Ruiz Andrés 2022b). Historically, religion has played a dominant role, deeply intertwined with culture and identity (Álvarez Junco 2001). As highlighted in the previous section,

while the erosion of Catholic culture is especially pronounced among younger generations, Catholicism continues to exert a significant influence on Spanish traditions and culture, as well as on local, regional, and national identities. As Inés, a young student from Madrid, points out [E20], even with a non-religious upbringing, "sooner or later, you end up finding yourself with religion, and it raises questions".

Culturally religious nones are characterized by a lack of religious identification or belief (unbelief/disbelief) while maintaining a cultural and/or identity-based connection to religion (Mauritsen et al. 2023; Kasselstrand 2015). Specifically, they relate to Catholicism, given its historical weight in Spain. Unlike "belongers not believers" or "religious not spiritual", the interviewees do not self-identify as Catholics. Instead, they are nones who acknowledge being culturally religious in interviews. More accurately, they could be described as "neither belongers nor believers but culturally religious".

This cultural connection to religion manifests in three distinct ways, which can overlap or appear separately:

- In some cases, like that of Andrés [E1], Catholicism is associated with a broader notion of civilization. From his point of view, the way of life and worldview in countries like Spain are inextricably linked to Catholicism. Although non-religious, he advocates for defending Spain's Christian character, often opposing the arrival of other religious traditions, such as Islam. In Spain there are platforms and spaces—particularly online—that disseminate this perspective, often based on the concept of "Catholic atheism" by the philosopher Gustavo Bueno (2007)[7]. This approach aligns with the 37% of Spaniards who, according to Pew Research Center (2018), view Islam as incompatible with Spain's national values and—as happens in other contexts—this cultural–identitarian vision of religion has potential political implications, coming to the fore in the discourse of the radical right (Joppke 2018; Forlenza 2018).
- Other interviewees acknowledge Catholicism as a fundamental part of their worldview due to its historical and cultural significance in their lives and Spain's history. These individuals do not adopt an ideological stance, nor do they identify as believers. While they remain critical of the Church, they value Catholicism's cultural, social, and spiritual contributions to society as can be seen in the testimonies of Francesco [E3] and Jesús [E9].
- Another form of cultural connection is participation in religious events without identifying as religious or holding religious beliefs. This profile aligns with what Zuckerman et al. 2016) call "ritual atheists." Due to Spain's history, many traditions and folklore remain deeply tied to Catholicism. Events like pilgrimages and processions, including Holy Week in cities like Seville, serve as both religious rites and total social events (Moreno 2008). Non-religious participants cite cultural, familial, aesthetic, or social reasons for their involvement. For example, José described Holy Week in Andalusia as transcending religion: "It is not only a religious act but also a ceremonial, congregational, social, and artistic act" [E17]. His testimony shows how the mixture between the transversal nature of these events and the subjectivism inherent to the contemporary socioreligious landscape allows each participant to interpret and experience religious rites "in their own way".

4.2.2. Spiritual Nones

In contrast to the case of culturally religious nones, spiritual nones do not necessarily embody a sense of disbelief; rather, their position is characterized by a clear demarcation of their identity as being outside the confines of institutionalized religion (non-religion). This stance is founded on the premise that the rejection of religious identification does not necessarily entail the dismissal of the spiritual search.

The amalgamation of rejection of religion (or at least certain aspects of it) and the adoption of a spiritual stance is evident among the subjects interviewed in this study. Teresa, a young woman born in Madrid in 2000, aligns with the prevalent narrative of irreligion, emphasizing in her interview that the Church functions as a "business" [E6]. Ainhoa, born in 1991 and from Bilbao, states that although she no longer harbors animosity towards the Church, God and the Church have always been distinct entities for her [E5].

However, all the spiritual nones that I have interviewed not only discuss this rejection of Catholicism but also demonstrate in their statements how, from a certain point in their lives—which may be earlier or later—they discover another way of living, which they link to the concept of spirituality. The prevailing narrative suggests that a confluence of factors, including a general sense of discontent with various aspects of life and the emergence of existential inquiries for which religions have been left unanswered, has prompted these individuals to seek answers within the domain of spirituality. This notion is further elaborated during the fieldwork when the interviewees juxtapose their spiritual quest with their "malaises of immanence" (Taylor 2014, pp. 29–30): Teresa discusses how dance, interpreted from a spiritual perspective, serves as a means of alleviating the daily stresses and negativities that accumulate [E6]. In the case of Rocío, a nurse, when reflecting on her spiritual quest, she underscores the profound impact of two seminal events on her journey: her divorce and her professional experiences during the period of the pandemic in a Madrid hospital, where she confronted death daily [E10].

Nevertheless, despite the presence of certain similarities, particularly regarding their openness to the spiritual, there are also significant differences between the subjects of this study. In this respect, it is interesting to read the information from the interviews in light of the conclusions of the report by Mónica Cornejo Valle and Blázquez Rodríguez (2024), in which a sample of more than 700 spiritual services not linked to a denomination in the Community of Madrid was analyzed, making a notable contribution to the understanding of unaffiliated spiritualities in Spain.

Firstly, and following the findings of the aforementioned work, among the interviewees, we can distinguish between people with a more secular understanding of the spiritual—that is to say, who observe spirituality as a resource for well-being [Ainhoa, E5], as aesthetic contemplation [Jaime, E2], or as a part of an existential culture in which spirituality is not a primary feature—and others who develop a spiritual worldview structured mainly around the idea of forces and energies. As Cornejo Valle and Blázquez Rodríguez (2024) observe, in the sphere of unaffiliated spiritualities, there prevails a monistic understanding of reality, organized around the concept of energy. In the present study, this is exemplified by Montse, who, while asserting an absence of religious affiliation, concomitantly emphasizes a predilection for "beliefs in energies, nature, and a myriad of other phenomena" [E12].

In analyzing the responses provided by the interviewees, it is evident that the concept of spirituality is frequently characterized by a blend of psychological and natural elements, thereby engendering a holistic and interconnected comprehension of the cosmos. Nature occupies a central position in this regard, becoming one of the quintessential spaces of resonance (Rosa 2019), as has also been observed in other studies (Hancock 2024; Banham 2024). For instance, when questioned about his own spirituality, Jaime observes that "in the United States, in a natural park, I began to examine the rocks and experienced a sensation that they possessed spirits, that they were animated" [E2]. However, when considering the embodiment of this spirituality, a diverse array of practices, symbolic resources, and concepts from various traditions emerge. During my research for this study, I came across references to practices such as Kizomba, yoga, moon rituals, and even drugs. A salient observation is the pragmatic nature of these practices, wherein efficacious rites

and practices are selected regardless of their traditional origins, resulting in the eclecticism that characterizes unaffiliated spiritualities (Cornejo Valle and Blázquez Rodríguez 2024).

A third difference between the interviewees pertains to the significance attributed to this spirituality. In some cases, the spiritual notions of the interviewees occupy a very peripheral position in their lives [Ainhoa, E5], almost verging on irrelevance and only used to indicate a vague openness to the spiritual dimension. However, in other cases, spirituality constitutes a central space in the existence of the interviewees [Luna, E11].

In summary, the exploration of the two ideal types (Weber [1922] 2014) presented through qualitative work—culturally religious nones and spiritual nones—allows us to understand the non-religious landscape in Spain with greater nuance. Together with the consolidation of areligion and irreligion, there is a hybridization that defines both the religious and non-religious sectors. Consequently, these two profiles, termed 'hybrid', facilitate an exploration of the reality experienced by a significant segment of nones, whose perceptions of religion and non-religion, secular and sacred, are characterized by fluid boundaries. These individuals self-identify as non-religious and perceive themselves as residing outside the confines of religion, at least in its institutional form. However, they simultaneously demonstrate that a considerable proportion of nones do not occupy a strictly "outside" position within the religious field. Instead, they inhabit a middle ground, a "secular paradox" (Blankholm 2022), in which the rejection of religion may actually entail a religious/re-signification, thereby situating them as actors within the religious field rather than as outsiders.

5. Conclusions

In the present article, the primary conclusions of an ongoing research project on nones in Spain are presented. The objectives of this article were twofold: firstly, to provide a pioneering overview of the growth of nones in Spain through an in-depth qualitative study; secondly, to offer an analysis in which—following the reflections of the main studies on the subject and the invitation of this special issue to adopt a postsecular perspective on the socioreligious dynamics of contemporary societies—we explore the complexity and diversity of non-religion, as well as the ambiguity of the boundaries between religion and secularity that are revealed in this sector.

To this end, three dynamics were explored during the discussion (irreligion, areligion, and hybridization)—which also allowed us to talk about other overlapping trends (religious socialization, atheist activism, superficial irreligion, exculturation)—that give us a more precise picture of the main tendencies behind the rise of nones. Similarly, and although we have explored the blurred boundaries of non-religion throughout the paper—problematizing the meaning of irreligion and areligion—it is in the hybridization—and through the presentation of two ideal types, culturally religious nones, and spiritual nones—that we have examined in detail the porous boundaries between religion and non-religion, which, according to the literature, are found in two particularly crucial areas, culture, and spirituality.

In addition to having fulfilled the proposed objectives, at this concluding moment, it is pertinent to point out four key ideas that this article has highlighted and that constitute both themes for further deepening the debate on non-religion (both at the theoretical level and in Spain) and lines from which to rethink the questions of the special issue in which this article is framed.

First, subjectivism is a reality present in all socioreligious dynamics, including the nones (Zuckerman et al. 2016), which means that categories such as non-religion must be approached with sufficient nuance to reflect this diversity of tendencies and positions. The trends studied (areligion, irreligion, and hybridization) cannot be understood without this

variable of subjectivism, which makes any attempt to draw up ideal types a limited exercise and should be seen as a first approach to understanding the plurality of non-religion. From this perspective, we can also understand the discrepancy between the categories we continue to use to deal with non-religious reality (atheist, agnostic, non-believer) and the identities of the actors, which are more fluid, subjective, and dynamic. In this respect, it is necessary to continue exploring—both in the field and theoretically—what it means to be a none in the sociohistorical reality of different contexts, and to further research the different significations and expressions of non-religion.

Second, this paper has emphasized an ideal type of non-religious person that has been scarcely explored in the Spanish academic literature: the culturally religious none, which connects with the more developed reflection on this subject in other contexts (Mauritsen et al. 2023; Kasselstrand 2015). Although it certainly seems that "spiritual but not religious" is statistically gaining ground among the younger sectors, the importance of the cultural understanding of the religious remains crucial in shaping the hybrid reality. In this respect, it is necessary to analyze the impact of the process of exculturation on this cultural hybridization, leaving open the question of whether this vanishing of the Catholic cultural background will cause the cultural religious dimension to lose the transversal nature that it still retains in societies such as Spain and be more clearly incorporated into the phenomenon of polarization, as observed in the declarations of some of our interviewees and in the utilization of the cultural–religious discursivities in Spanish political debate (Cordero 2014; Ruiz Andrés 2022a). Or, on the contrary, if exculturation does not necessarily mean the end of the transversality of this cultural–religious factor, it may lead to a broader process of re-signification of the Catholic cultural roots that underlie events, traditions, and identities. Similarly, special attention should be paid to the impact of the decline of religious socialization on non-religious spirituality, as studies from other contexts point out (Beider 2023).

Thirdly, the dynamics highlighted in this paper (irreligion, areligion, and hybridization) show us how the non-religious sector comprises at least three positions regarding the religious field: dialectic (irreligion), exit (areligion) and reconfiguration (hybridization). These three dynamics raise the question of whether we find in non-religion both the emergence of a non-religious field and the involvement of some of these sectors in the reconfiguration of the religious field in contexts of advanced secularity. This would mean complementing the study of the non-religious field with a joint analysis of the profound transformations of the religious field, understanding that some non-religious people are paradoxically actors in this evolving religious field.

All the lines proposed in these conclusions leave a question in the air: are these contradictions of the nones just an intermediate phase that will lead to greater secularization or, on the contrary, are we dealing above all with a metamorphosis of the religious in advanced modernity? This is undoubtedly an inquiry that, rather than being answered, constitutes a line to be traced as future events unfold. This study posits that in contemporary Spain, both processes–religious reconfiguration and the acceleration of secularisation–are occurring simultaneously.

Likewise, all these lines highlighted in the conclusions link the Spanish case to other contexts in our world. Although the present article has constantly kept an eye on other scenarios, this comparative perspective deserves further research as it will not only allow us to better connect the Spanish case with the experiences of other countries but will also contribute to a greater knowledge of nones at the global level.

Finally, this article reveals the importance of the dialogue between the postsecular debate and research on non-religion, as well as the path to future research from the exchange between both discussions.

On the one hand, the postsecular perspective allows us to understand the transformations experienced by the non-religious sector within the broader macro-context of postsecularization, in which—to return to the quote included in the theoretical section—"secular and non-secular principles—beyond others—circulate simultaneously through social relations" (Beaumont et al. 2020, p. 2). Thus, non-religion constitutes neither the culmination of a linear theory of secularization nor an exception within contemporary societies but rather becomes a privileged space for studying the socioreligious dynamics of secular contexts. The fact that two of the trends of hybridization (culturalization and spirituality) can be applied to the study of both religious and non-religious profiles points in this direction and makes us wonder whether, paradoxically, a significant part of the dynamics of socioreligious transformation in this context is being experienced in a sector identified a priori as non-religious.

On the other hand, the analysis of non-religion also contributes to the ongoing reflection on postsecularization. The Habermasian commitment to the debate, which has been the pivotal axis of the discussion, emerged twenty years ago in response to the inadequacies in the dialogue between secularity and religions (Habermas 2006). Two decades later, the study of non-religion reveals that the boundaries between the two sides (religions and secularity) are porous and that the postsecular effort to understand religions from plurality needs to be extended to the non-religious sector, which often continues to be subsumed within the broader category of the "secular" (Cotter 2020). Consequently, the nones are not merely "the other" in interaction with religions, but rather, they are an essential piece in the puzzle of contemporary socioreligious transformations and crucial actors for the necessary dialogue between all the convictions that pave the way from the postsecular consciousness in sociological analyses towards the achievement of a postsecular society.

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Data Availability Statement: Publicly available datasets and information from reports were analyzed in this study. These data can be found in the sources listed below: https://www.cis.es/detalle-ficha-estudio?origen=estudio&idEstudio=1290; https://www.cis.es/es/detalle-ficha-estudio?idEstudio=1375; https://www.cis.es/detalle-ficha-estudio?origen=estudio&idEstudio=10382; https://www.cis.es/detalle-ficha-estudio?origen=estudio&idEstudio=14366; https://www.cis.es/ca/detalle-ficha-estudio?idEstudio=14828; https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2018/05/29/being-christian-in-western-europe/; https://observatorioreligion.es/upload/74/95/II_Encuesta_sobre_opiniones_y_actitudes_de_los_espanoles_ante_la_dimension_cotidiana_de_la_religiosidad_y_su_gestion_publica.pdf (accessed on 25 January 2025).

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Appendix A

Table A1. Participants in the qualitative research project on non-religion Spain.

Reference Code	Name (Anonymized)	Brief Description	Date
E1	Andrés	Male, born in Ciudad Real in 1991. Resident in Madrid (Spain)	1 November 2023
E2	Jaime	Male, born in Madrid in 1987. Resident in Madrid (Spain)	15 November 2023
E3	Francesco	Male, born in Turin (Italy) in June 1979. Resident in Madrid (Spain)	22 November 2023
E4	Wei	Male, born in Madrid in 2000. Resident in Madrid (Spain)	29 November 2023
E5	Ainhoa	Female, born in Bilbao in 1991. Resident in Pamplona (Spain)	5 December 2023
E6	Teresa	Female, born in Madrid in 2000. Resident in Madrid (Spain)	8 December 2023
E7	Carmen	Female, born in Palencia in 1957. Resident in Palencia (Spain)	16 December 2023
E8	Joan	Male, born in Tarragona in 1992. Resident in Barcelona (Spain).	22 December 2023
E9	Jesús	Male, born in Torrejón de Ardoz in 1999. Resident in Torrejón de Ardoz (Spain).	15 January 2024
E10	Rocío	Female, born in a village in Segovia in 1982. Resident in Madrid (Spain)	25 January 2024
E11	Luna	Female, born in Sabadell (Barcelona) in 1987. She lives in a village in the province of Barcelona (Spain).	29 January 2024
E12	Montse	Female, born in Barcelona in 1989. She lives in a village in Catalonia (Spain).	26 February 2024
E13	Nabil	Male, born in Comunidad Valenciana in 1995. He lives in Comunidad Valenciana (Spain).	19 April 2024
E14	Tomás	Male, born in Murcia in 1989. Resident in Madrid, (Spain)	9 October 2024
E15	Eduardo	Male, born in Valencia in 1950. Resident in Valencia (Spain)	14 October 2024
E16	Rubén	Male, born in 1982 in the region of Murcia. Resident in Murcia (Spain)	24 October 2024
E17	José	Male, born in Seville in 2002. He lives in a town of the province of Seville (Spain).	3 December 2024
E18	Jordi	Male, born in Barcelona in 1947. Resident in Barcelona	11 December 2024
E19	Ana	Woman, born in a municipality of Asturias in 1968. Resident in Madrid	18 December 2024
E20	Inés	Female, born in Madrid in 2002. Resident in Madrid.	15 January 2025
E21	Francesc	Male, born in Barcelona in 1952. Resident in a village in Catalonia	29 January 2025
E22	Paula	Female, born in Madrid in 2002. Resident in Madrid.	4 February 2025

Appendix B

Table A2. Religiosity of respondent * sex of respondent (CIS 2024).

	Man	Woman	Total
Practicing Catholic	13.8	21.5	17.8
Non-practicing Catholic	35.4	37.7	36.6
Believer of another religion	3.9	2.5	3.2
Agnostic (neither denies nor excludes the existence of God)	14.4	10	12.1
Indifferent, non-believer	12.7	12.7	12.7
Atheist (denies the existence of God)	18	14.4	16.1
N.C.	1.8	1.3	1.5
(N)	1938	2069	4007
Total non-religion	45.1	37.1	40.9

Table A3. Religiosity of the interviewee by age (%) (CIS 2024).

	18–24	25–34	35–44	45–54	55–64	65–74	75 y +	Total
Practicing Catholic	7.6	6.5	12.3	13.4	20	21.1	42.5	17.8
Non-practicing Catholic	29.7	28.1	31.6	40	39.3	44	39.4	36.6
Believer of another religion	3.9	6	3.7	3.4	2.5	1.9	1	3.2
Agnostic (neither denies nor excludes the existence of God)	20.4	13.4	12.6	12.8	12.6	10.4	5	12.1
Indifferent, non-believer	13.5	17.1	14.7	12.8	12.9	10.1	7.3	12.7
Atheist (denies the existence of God)	24.2	27.7	23.3	16.5	10.5	10.6	3.2	16.1
N.C.	0.8	1.1	1.7	1.1	2.2	1.9	1.6	1.5
(N)	330	487	686	785	689	511	520	4007
Total non-religion	58.1	58.2	50.6	42.1	36	31.1	15.5	40.9

Table A4. Religiosity interviewee, by Comunidad Autónoma (%) (CIS 2024).

	Andalucía	**Aragon**	**Asturias (Principality of)**	**Balears (Illes)**	**Canary Islands**	**Cantabria**	**Castilla-La Mancha**	**Castilla y León**	**Catalonia**
Practicing Catholic	19.2	17.1	22	15.8	16.5	15.1	28.2	24.4	9.1
Non-practicing Catholic	39.9	36.1	35.8	36.8	42.8	29.6	35.5	38.8	31.4
Believer of another religion	2.4	6.6	2.4	13.9	2.3	0	4.7	0.5	4.1
Agnostic (neither denies nor excludes the existence of God)	10.5	19.4	6.3	7.5	9.6	10.3	10.2	8	16.1
Indifferent, non-believer	11.2	9.3	15	7	12.2	28.5	5.7	10.4	14.9
Atheist (denies the existence of God)	14.3	11.5	18	17.6	15.8	13.6	11.2	17.4	22.5
N.C.	2.5	0	0.4	1.5	0.7	2.8	4.5	0.4	2
(N)	740	103	89	142	196	58	230	236	561

	Valencian Community	Extremadura	Galicia	Madrid (Community of)	Murcia (Region of)	Navarra (Comunidad Foral de)	Basque Country	Rioja (La)	Ceuta (Autonomous City of)	Melilla (Autonomous City of)	Total
Practicing Catholic	14.5	27.7	14.6	15	22.2	25	24.1	21.2	23.9	18.4	17.8
Non-practicing Catholic	37.7	38.8	40.2	37.3	33.3	22.5	29.8	42.9	21.6	39.1	36.6
Believer of another religion	2.7	0.5	2.3	2.8	4.7	0.8	1.2	0.4	21.1	20.9	3.2
Agnostic (neither denies nor excludes the existence of God)	11.3	17.1	10.2	14.2	10.5	14.7	15.8	15.9	0	4	12.1
Indifferent, non-believer	14.9	7.2	18	12.8	10.8	13.8	15	11.7	29.1	10	12.7
Atheist (denies the existence of God)	18.2	8.2	13	17.1	17.7	19.1	13.5	7.9	4.2	7.6	16.1
N.C.	0.7	0.6	1.6	0.6	0.7	4.1	0.5	0	0	0	1.5
(N)	405	123	261	437	123	60	204	31	4	5	4007

Table A5. Religiosity of respondent by studies level (%) (CIS 2024).

	No Formal Education	Primary	Secondary 1st Stage	Secondary 2nd Stage	F.P.	University	Others	N.C.	Total
Practicing Catholic	18.2	41.2	18.9	12.5	10	15.2	0	28.2	17.8
Non-practicing Catholic	54.7	35.2	40.6	36.5	38.4	28.7	63.5	33.2	36.6
Believer of another religion	5.8	2.6	3.6	2.6	4.9	2	0	0	3.2
Agnostic (neither denies nor excludes the existence of God)	0	7.1	10.2	15.7	11.6	16.5	0	0	12.1
Indifferent, non-believer	15	5.5	10.2	13.6	15.4	15.2	36.5	21.1	12.7
Atheist (denies the existence of God)	3	4.9	15.2	18.1	18.7	21.3	0	0	16.1
N.C.	3.3	3.4	1.3	1	0.9	1.1	0	17.5	1.5
(N)	184	383	1153	636	535	1084	11	22	4007
Total non-religion	18	17.5	35.6	47.4	45.7	53			40.9

Table A6. Respondent's religiosity by party vote in the 2023 general election (%) (CIS 2024).

	PP	PSOE	VOX	Add	ERC	Junts	EH Bildu	EAJ-PNV	Other Matches	Null+ White	Did Not Vote	No Conditions for Voting	N.R+ N.C.	Total
Practicing Catholic	35.3	11.1	22.1	3	7	16.8	0	37.6	9.8	13.1	14.1	8	27.2	17.8
Non-practicing Catholic	47.8	37.9	46.5	11.8	36.7	33.9	17.8	28.7	28.8	34	34.1	37	38.8	36.6
Believer of another religion	0.7	2.2	5.7	1.1	0	1.8	7.3	0	6.6	5.1	7.5	5.8	1.4	3.2
Agnostic (neither denies nor excludes the existence of God)	4.2	16	7.5	19.3	19.9	11	32.4	15.7	13	23	10	21.3	9.3	12.1
Indifferent, non-believer	5.3	15.2	11.1	17.3	12.5	12.2	18	9.8	14.5	10.6	16.5	7.9	10.8	12.7
Atheist (denies the existence of God)	5.5	17	6.9	47.3	22.7	24.4	24.5	8.2	25.5	12.9	14.1	16.6	9.2	16.1
N.C.	1.3	0.6	0.2	0.3	1.2	0	0	0	1.8	1.3	3.8	3.5	3.4	1.5
(N)	747	1036	327	397	46	53	34	27	139	118	643	60	380	4007
Total non-religion	15	48.2	25.2	83.9	55.1	47.6	74.9	33.7	53	46.5	40.6	45.8		40.9

Notes

1 Based on Lee's (2015, p. 85) definition of secularity "as a turn away from religion so that the religious becomes a secondary concern".

2 More information on the sociodemographic data of the interviewees can be found in Appendix A. To refer to the content of the interviews throughout the article, I will use the anonymized name and/or interview code that is given in Table A1.

3 More details on the data in Tables A2–A6 are included in Appendix B.

4 While in 1998 and 2008 the CIS-ISSP survey allowed the choice of responses "no religion" and "atheist", in 2017, these were reduced to "no religion".

5 Cf. Available online: https://laicismo.org/quienes-somos/ (accessed on 21 January 2025).

6 In the case of the CIS studies, which constitute a fundamental source for this article, alongside the option "*ateo*" [atheist], CIS includes the following clarification of the word in the questionnaire: *niegan la existencia de Dios* [they deny the existence of God].

7 It is interesting to note that Gustavo Bueno was honorary president of DENAES [*Defensa de la Nación Española*, "Defence of the Spanish Nation"], which was founded—among others—by Santiago Abascal, leader of the far-right party Vox in Spain. See https://nacionespanola.org/actualidad/fallece-el-filosofo-gustavo-bueno/ (accessed on 25 January 2025).

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