Confidence and Doubt
Juvenile Muslim life-worlds, religious orientation, Islamic theology and education

Harry Harun Behr[1]

"Religion bears the potential of attacking our children."

Prof. Dr. Sallie B King, Departmer

Introductory remarks

Looking at religious education in German public schools, a significant amount of concepts, research and publications seems to be at hand. This refers to the common primary and secondary levels. However, with regard to young Muslims in general, a shift in the perception of the matter is needed. Juvenile religious orientation is more intensely influenced by the moratorium between the playground and the work place. The trespassing of the threshold between childhood and life as the *real* enterprise is sketched by the vanishing points of two conflicting perceptions of the self and the world: On the one hand are the given *contingencies*, on the other hand are the imagined *certainties* of life and the promise to young people of their being able to play the leading part in their lives.

As regards the courses in Islamic religion within the architecture of schooling which are addressed to Muslim pupils, the situation seems to be improving. There are quite satisfying syllabus designs, textbooks, teacher training and sufficient methodological (didactical) concepts at hand. After nearly four decades of repeated reminders to the educational authorities[2] that Islamic courses are needed, most of them have come up with at least something. The debates about public schools as a player in the prevention against Islamist radicalization suggest some educated guesses about how to go on with a broader understanding of religious education. However, it seems that religion as a root discipline in the development of the person under the prospect of the formation of the *humanum* (*Bildung*) plays a minor role in comparison to the canon of the other core subjects at school. These predominantly aim at apprenticeship (*Ausbildung*). Teaching religion is not regarded as a central pattern of training in the material sense of entitlement and employability, at best with regard to soft skills.

Step by step, however, the usual assumptions are shifting towards an increased interest in questions of religiousness in general and in specific religions in particular. Teachers in the

---

[1] This publication is part of the LOEWE research programme on religious positioning, modalities and constellations in Jewish, Christian and Muslim contexts at the Goethe University Frankfurt, promoted by the Hesse Ministry of Science and Art.

[2] In Germany we are talking about 16 provinces which are independent from a national syllabus.

field of secondary education remark that they feel increasingly challenged by a decisive kind of neo-religious positioning of the young people they are in charge of in their classes. The situation demands from them a higher awareness towards questions of religion that is unfavourably linked to a widespread lack in proficiency in terms of a *functional* approach towards religion as a social pattern, or even as an academic issue. This deficiency especially touches the classroom discussions which deal with tenuous topics. They bear the potential to charge pupils with common emotions and religious bias. These are issues like friendship, sexuality and family planning. Other issues are the loyalty towards Islam as a feature of the in-group and getting along in a pluralistic society. Very often questions of acknowledgement, reputation and appreciation arise. Then the issue of social justice, the question of truth and the theory of cognition is touched upon. Above all, however, the following issues are under juvenile negotiation: gender, racism, migration, violence and peace, the East and the West, the Global North and the Global South, natural resources and a sustainable exposure, the basic distrust in the systems of regal power and the widespread disenchantment concerning one's own future.

The useful articles in this book pay service to the issue of religious instruction. This contribution must not be read as a response to them but as an additional commentary. The intention of my marginalia is to give insight into the findings about recent developments concerning the juvenile theological curiosity (*Jugendtheologie*) of young Muslims, based on preliminary empirical data we have collected.[3] The ideas conveyed here are rooted in interdisciplinary research and intersectional approaches, taking educational science and teacher training, youth and gender studies, Islamic theology as well as studies in migration and conflict resolution into consideration. The topic strongly correlates with the implications of transcultural and inter-religious learning.[4]

Targeting

Who are these juvenile Muslim target groups? What may be denoted as the religious positioning of young Muslims to some extent remains a construct which, of course, depends on the sample criteria of the empirical examination. At best, we can construe so-called *"Islamicities"* that diachronically run through the age groups. This term describes a set of visible and invisible markers affiliated with religion. They oscillate between the self-description as Muslims, on the one hand, and derogatory ascriptions on the other. These ascriptions are addressed to them as an alleged social cluster of people who somehow estrange themselves from social normality, being amenable to strange habits, disturbing beliefs and dangerous dispositions. Most likely, this is based on nothing more than the

---

[3] Kulaçatan, M., Behr, H. & Agai, B. (2017). Islamistische Radikalisierung im Rhein-Main-Gebiet. Ursachen und Gegenstrategien. In: Expertise Mediendienst Integration. Rat für Migration. Berlin: Rat für Migration. And: Kulaçatan, M. & Behr, H. (2016). Religious Orientation of Muslim Girls and Young Women between Particularism and Universalism. Frankfurter Zeitschrift für Islamisch-Theologische Studien, 3, 107-120.
[4] Behr, H. (2017). Interreligiosität als Kompetenzbereich des Islamischen Religionsunterrichts. In: Ucar, B. (Ed.), Hikma, Zeitschrift für Islamische Theologie und Religionspädagogik, 8 (1), 64-82.

preferential perspective of the dominant and authoritative segments of society who seem to be occupied with their Central European whiteness.

Such ideologies need to be dismantled since they carry the danger of mutual vilifications. Ultimately, this creates a paradigm of young Muslims in the classroom who are said to be in need of special correction in order to domesticize Islam as a foreign culture and as a set of alien life styles. What aggravates the discourse is their inability to stand up against the stultification of the debates. They are void of appropriate mental strategies and language skills to defend themselves or to enter the public discourse on eye level. Islamic religious instruction thus carries the notion of emancipation and empowerment.

Another critical question is whether the competences in favour of Muslim empowerment are welcomed on the side of the German societal majority. Are public schools in general ready to understand integration not as the debt of a religious, cultural or ethnical minority which is expected to adjust to the common habits of the majority, but as the duty of *both* of them to approach each other instead? Do teachers still understand the difference of the familiar and the unfamiliar as the statuary boundary lines between putative social clusters or the colour of the skin? Or rather have they come to terms with a broader understanding of diversity that is made up of a more dynamic understanding, looking at the various conditions of people within their social situations? One of our young interviewees reminded me of the rhetorical flush of the "Angries" (the Angry Young Men as a group of writers who expressed their disillusionment with traditional British society in the 1950's). When he was asked about his experience with inclusive pedagogy that has become so fashionable among experts in schooling recently, he expressed his disappointment with central features of modernity, pinpointing the Enlightenment, secularism and capitalism as an enterprise of elitism:

> "Inclusion? Integration? What the heck are you talking about? As a young Muslim in public schools I faced incremental exclusion and expulsion from the feeding troughs of the middle class. Such is camouflaged by the portrayal of integration as an allegedly new demand. This is ridiculous. The demand for assimilation has replaced integration that never was. You know, I can slip into the role of the Noble Savage. It could be the zone of comfort if we darkies were stupid enough. But even if we totally assimilated to the expectations of our surroundings, it would still feed our alienation since these expectations remain degrading. My grandparents belonged to the first generation of Muslims who migrated to Germany. They would not talk about integration. It was not expected of them because they were not expected to stay. My parents, the second generation, would naturally manage integration as a precondition of living together although they kept being confronted with indifference. We, the third generation, now face the increased demand to integrate ourselves although we are more integrated than quite a few of our native German fellows. We are now the generation who face adverse conditions by being labelled as a Muslim out-group. We are about to lose the normal standards of daily life and social security. We are under pressure, your inclusionism threatens us."

Whatever direction Islamic religious courses in secondary schools may take between spiritual instruction and non-confessional information, between teaching religion or teaching *about* religion, it has to pick up these patterns if it wants to reach the young Muslim students' hearts and minds.

This article provides the opportunity, the method and the motive to come to an exchange with relevant reference to juvenile biography, religious orientation, education and a possible mandate for Islamic religious instruction. The theological grammar of it remains *dialogical* since it is rooted in a deeper structure than the phenotypic emanations of confessional systems. Teaching a specific religion in the public sphere touches upon general questions of either affiliation or indifference towards the religious sphere within the secular realm of post-modern civil society.[5] The issue of dialogue points to the outward different religious systems as well as to the intra-religious dynamics which triggers more questions about life-world orientation among young Muslims: How tolerant is Islam vis-à-vis its urgent reformulation especially if the outcome is regarded as dissident thought among Muslims? And what will happen if Muslim critical thought, for example the critique of domination, of capitalism or of asylum policy, is being regarded as deviant from the German public opinion?

Young Muslims in school are set in an ambivalent situation. On the one hand, they interact as pupils, which is a social role they *take*. On the other hand, they interact in terms of a role they are about to *take over*, dissociating themselves from their social authorities and at the same time loosening their spiritual bonds with them, looking for a more convincing brand of *islamicity*. The patterns of religious orientation and positioning can take an existential spin, rotating between expecting to be held off and holding on to the unexpected. This affects religion in terms of its dimension of social relation, especially the parents: How and why do they embrace Islam? What does this have to do with juvenile life-world orientation? How does this affect secondary education as a phase of initiation towards the active self-formation and the acquisition of understanding the world? Can religious instruction, which is Islamic instruction in the case given, unfold the potential of providing significant orientation for them?

Two key questions

The juvenile age scope within the sample of our pre-test studies broadly covers the age cohort of those who attend school at the secondary education level, usually for about three years. There are already some studies about dialogical theology[6] and theology with a special focus on the youth age[7] as well as on primary education.[8] Such approaches to some extent are reminiscent of the Philosophy for Children Project P4C[9] with reference to the research methodology and the criterial mapping. From our preliminary material, two central questions of juvenile spiritual life-world orientation have immanently (inferentially) emerged. The first

---

[5] Behr: H. (2017). The third scheme between secularism and religion. Approaches to universal and pluriform pragmatism within Islamic theology and education. In: SOCIETY Social Science and Modern Society, 55, DOI 10.1007/s12115-017-0163-4.

[6] The Hamburg ReDi-project of the AWR Akademie der Weltreligionen, see https://www.awr.uni-hamburg.de/forschung/redi-projekt.html [07.07.2017].

[7] Schlag, Th. & Schweitzer, F. (Eds.). (2012). Jugendtheologie. Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Theologie.

[8] Ulfat, F. (2017). Die Selbstrelationierung muslimischer Kinder zu Gott. Paderborn: Schöningh.

[9] Worley, P. (2015). 40 lessons to get children thinking: Philosophical thought adventures across the curriculum. London: Bloomsbury Publishing.

is *Do I count?*, and the second is *Whom can I trust?*. Both questions are fundamental and existential. They include the core criticism of whether religion really works. Transferred to the framework of religious instruction, they give shape to a fundamental doubt about whether religious instruction can be believed in and whether the instructors can be trusted. These two questions, though not touching upon *religion* in the strict sense of the word, are related to the intellectual, spiritual, social and existential scheme. Therefore they are deeply *religious* in the broader sense of the word.

Key patterns of spiritual life-world orientation

Picking up on these two questions and widening their understanding by using exmanent (referential) questions, four key patterns of juvenile spiritual orientation with a feasible signature of contrast between them can be described:

I want to learn to understand!

With regard to Islam, this expands the notional syllabus of religious instruction in terms of teaching religion, demanding a higher rate of background knowledge in the shape of religious science instead of spiritual instruction only:

> "I don't have to know what Islam is. To learn it I can go to the mosque and ask an Imam. I want to understand how Islam works, what religion does to people and what they do with it. I want to be able to shape my religion and determine my intensity and pace if I want to go on with it – or abandon it."

I want to share and participate!

This notion points to the deepening uncertainty regarding the future. As was depicted above, young Muslims tend to lose their confidence that they will be successful in life. Being exposed as a minority group that is expected to queue from behind, they fear being deprived of their opportunities. They measure success according to the standards which are exhibited by the members of their environmental authorities: prosperity, health, vertical and horizontal mobility and autonomy. The question is, however, to what extent these members can be regarded as supporters. In many cases, the parental support will not suffice to bring about better marks and thereby the promise of a better life. In addition to this, the majority of the teachers have internalized selection and allocation as the syntax of the German school system, diverting their supportive attention away from pupils with dark hair and with Turkish or Arabic as their mother tongue and German as their second language. Both the teachers and the family tend to talk the kids out of the idea of striving for higher school degrees, warning them

of the jeopardy of the excessive demands this brings about: You will fail if you want to climb; you better stay low; you are not German enough to succeed.[10]

This fatal combination of structural distrust is measured as a fundamental and comprehensive refusal of the appreciation of the whole person and not of the particular ratio of missing learning skills. The effect, not only on the pupils' self-confidence, but also on their further learning habits, is terrible. The existential concussion of the self-image lingers deep and long within their souls. This goes along with the risk of losing a whole generation to the uncertain dynamics of precarious segments of society. At the same time, the entailed loss of intelligence poses a threat to the welfare of this country. To put the question the other way round: If Germany continues to vandalize its own constitutional, cultural and social values of tolerance and solidarity by the drastic shift towards folkish and identitarian sensitivities, it will not prosper. In the eyes of young Muslims, Islam's potential is questioned as to whether it supports them or stands in their way. Especially Muslim youngsters are responsive to the luring rhetoric of Muslim radicals who provide them with the prospect of being approved and accepted members of their respective alternative networks, implementing an increased amount of disobedience towards the system.

I want to be accepted and appreciated!

Compared to what was mentioned above, this item has a more emotional and less of a calculating notion of its own, referring to both friendship and trust on the one side, versus publicity and reputation on the other. Especially racist and bullying offences and their devastating effects reveal the amount of possible victimization in this segment of possible identitarian orientation of the Muslim or nationalist brand. One can imagine what happens if this is combined with the perception of being structurally and incidentally discriminated against as Muslims, as well as being reinforced by the impression of the perceived inadequacy of their own body (see below). Above all, this bears an even stronger implication for Muslim girls who from time to time might face double discrimination. At first they feel exposed as Muslims within society, and additionally they feel being set back as girls within their Muslim in-group.

I want to do it my way!

The Muslim target group who is in the focus of this treatise does not differ from their other peers as regards their hope for standing on their own, whatever parental provision they actually still depend on. This is the normal paradigm of growth, but it leads to the question of how these patterns relate to religious orientation. Especially with regard to the aspect of knowledge and understanding, young Muslims would tend to address their search for *self-efficacy* and their natural reluctance against *heteronomy* towards Islam as their obvious

---

[10] Klovert, H. (2017) Warum Schüler türkischer Herkunft schlecht abschneiden. Available at: http://www.spiegel.de/lebenundlernen/schule/integration-warum-schueler-tuerkischer-herkunft-schlecht-abschneiden-a-1152964.html [13.07.2017].

referential set of symbols and interpretations in the spiritual sense. They need not be outspokenly religious or orthopraxically assessed to do so. In most of our cases it initially is the impression of going through times of crises that maneuvres them into sudden religious declension (which may disturb their parents, sensing ideological rigidity). The common key patterns discussed in the preceding section contain a maximum risk of juvenile vulnerability. Here religion, especially if close at hand and not skilfully educated, may bring about both risks and chances: the risk of losing oneself, and the chance to find oneself. This is the instant which inspired my revered colleague Sallie B. King to express her concern during a conference we shared: "Religion bears the potential of attacking our children."

Key patterns of religious identities

At the moment, *identity* is still an auxiliary term in relation to the perception of the personal self and the world, its constellations, spiritual orientation and religious positioning. In relation to the aspect of growth and social reputation, young Muslims who are socially framed as depicted above, would work on a far-reaching shift towards what they regard as a prominent feature of their personality: *authenticity* and *sincerity*. Both have popped up as the actual schemes behind their sometimes enervating pubertal boasting about *honour*. This shift has an enormous normative impact when it comes to negotiating the difference between *opinion* and *attitude* as well as the one between *speech* and *action*. It can be exhausting for teachers of the secondary level to cope with the maximal amount of juvenile Muslim opinion, fired by their endocrine machinery. This refers to both boys and girls, based on the least possible amount of experience, foresight and knowledge. Still they search for answers when turning to religion. This leads to further central items of religious dynamics in terms of juvenile identity.

Physical integrity

This refers to the aspects of the comprehensive juvenile vulnerability mentioned above. The mazes of spiritual life-world orientation can be echoed by corresponding somatic statuses that are not always easy to integrate into the standard repertoire of pediatric expertise. The following idea is still linked to a binary understanding (this needs further empirical investigation), but imagine the boys' primordial focus on the shape of their biceps and abdominal six-pack or the girls' frustration when staring in desperation and anger at their faces and hair in the mirror. Another facet of physical orientation that is related to the issue of gender identity is the fatherly role model. A significant number of young radicals complain that their fathers were either absent or conflictive (in most cases the fathers were the ones to break away and to virtually disappear).

When it comes to the question of healing the breaches, and this does not refer to the osseous apparatus, the boundaries between the physical and the psychical domains may become permeable, opening the gates for religion to step in. In the innate correspondence of the

spiritual (Arabic *rūḥī*)[11] and bodily (*ǧasadī*) elements of the regularly practised prayer, to name one example, lies one of the facets of Islam that can be very convincing to young people. It brings about the impression of a ritualized strong bond – if not necessarily with God or with the surrounding people (in this case prayer is predominantly a practice that serves social reassurance), then at least with oneself (in this case it helps to heal the breach in terms of fragmented physical and psychical identities[12]). The juvenile quest for strong bonds can lead to unlucky subsidiary ties with social clusters that develop a matrix of reassurance of their own, based on bad conduct, criminal mindedness, sexualized rituals and defragmented identities. The same could be witnessed when looking at the marauding gangs of young men of Russian or Maghrebian origin, harassing women and men (!) during the New Year's Eve events in 2015 in Cologne and in the previous years in Berlin. Such gangs are likely to offer a subsidiary but deluding family-like membership to a network that in the end increases the bruises and the vulnerability instead of settling things. In the short term, it even feigns a safe haven in economic terms, allegedly supporting the quest for self-efficacy. But in the long term such a false homeland leads to criminal minds and conduct to maintaining at least the *illusion* of societal appreciation and participation. Young people will have great difficulties decoding the rhetoric of it, especially when such structures are disguised as *Islam*.

Subcultural affiliation

To turn one's attention to religion may coincide with a change in lifestyle. This refers to visible markers of belonging at first, but not solely. Many parents of Muslim daughters – as well as their teachers – have experienced how the girls overnight put on their headscarf (or take it off) and *at the same time* decide to obey the regulations of a vegan diet. What needs to be explained here is that the latter has the stronger spiritual impact compared to the hijab matter. Both go hand in hand with the impression of explorative behaviour, trying out the fitting of one's imagined personality to the reactions of the parents. Every shift in juvenile expressionism concerning music and fashion, peer-group orientation, the consumption of food (or its refusal, looking at the vulnerability of girls especially) and social habits may be loaded with religious (or at least near religious) concepts, narratives and rituals. Their (in the theological sense) erratic syntax and semantics is most probably deplored by the Imams, particularly when they allude to the realms of demons, magical thinking, fatalism, astrology, reincarnation and the phenomena of nearly narcissistic self-occupation. Aside from the harmful implications, the spheres of juvenile explorative behaviour of the self and the world, though sometimes concealed, bear the potential of religious reform, turning the switch from Islam in terms of cultural *transmission* to Islam in terms of religious *progression*. Thus, the patterns of social identity can be transformed into more consciously and courageously chosen alternatives of how and with whom to arrange one's peer affiliations.[13] Here young Muslims

---

[11] Some Arabic expressions are displayed in brackets, applying DMG (Deutsche Morgenländische Gesellschaft / German Oriental Society) mode of transcription into the Latin alphabet.

[12] See Soeffner, H.-G. (Ed.). (2010). Unsichere Zeiten. Herausforderungen gesellschaftlicher Transformationen. Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften.

[13] This refers mainly to the urban and less to the rural setting since the urban containers offer more options of getting away from the social eye.

are in search of living their lives at *eye-level to others* (the Koran uses the word *sawā'in* to express this), seeking help from people (*ittabaᶜa, chasing them* as the Koran puts it) who can provide them with the language that enables them to express what they perceive, feel, think, believe, hope for, love and hate.

Critical mind

In the case given, this sheds light on the comprehensive juvenile criticism and image of global justice which appear as prominent items from the interviews. It describes a conglomerate of dismissive inputs as one prominent feature in our empirical data. What is meant by this, is a fundamental opposition in the face of structures and people which to some extent represent regal authority: the school, the parents, the Imams, the teachers, the police, the bus-driver, the media, the government, those up there, the Germans … and for the girls and younger women the supremacy of adult male seniority. When the conversation comes to this point, it mostly touches the issue of negotiating authority in the light of the autonomy and heteronomy of the juvenile self. Most interestingly, the Koran treats the issue of healthy disobedience with regard to Luqmān and his son, a wise man appearing in chapter 31, verses 12 to 19. The cliff-hanging dynamics of the religious orientation and positioning of young Meccans who followed Muhammad despite being prohibited to do so by their parents had been a primary issue in the early days of Islam emerging as a religion (from about 610 to 620 CE).

Young Muslims today are in a different situation, of course. Nevertheless, radical voices would sometimes try to convince them of living in the same situation as Muhammad and his followers did, being suppressed by an unbelieving societal majority that is hostile towards Islam and suggesting *fighting spirit* (*ǧihād*), at least on the level of empowerment and self-defence:

> "You are not being discriminated against because you are a Turk or an Arab, but because you are Muslim."

Educated religious instruction must refer to a basic grammar of negotiating three forms of authority here. They can be derived from the Koran and its prophetic narratives: the regal *legitimacy* of the system and its authoritarian structures (*sulṭa*), the debate and the better *argument* (*ḥujja*) and the normative power of one's personal *conscience* (*istiqāma*). When I raise the question of what exactly defines the better argument, my young dialogue partners would mention things like true responsibility, obedience towards what is proper and good, and most importantly, a better life for everyone. The innate competition between the welfare of the individual and the welfare of the collective (the equilibration of which is called *istiṣlāḥ* in Islamic theology) pushes them straight towards their critique of *false* system and rule. Here the classical schools of Salafi thought of the nineteenth century CE and their criticism against imperialism and colonialism still bear their fruits for contemporary Islamic thought and, of course, for juvenile criticism. The recourse to the primary times of Islam is one of the central issues of the diverse movements of the post-modern Islamic awakening (*al-ṣaḥwa al-islāmiya*).

With regard to the fundamental discomfort, it is necessary for the development of the society in terms of *discourse* as a collective and individual state of mind, given that our target groups who are under discussion here are not only able and willing to participate in this discourse but also to give shape to it.[14] At the moment, it seems, young Muslims are more or less bystanders who feel excluded. This leads to the other side which has darker implications: Feeling unable and unwelcome to interfere bears the risk of evoking spiritual and structural aglossia just when it would be important to reach out to them and listen to them. As a result of this speechlessness, an escalated form of radical thought that is justified by fundamental criticism might arise. Sometimes even a minor cognitive and emotional conflict can trigger the escalation scheme, starting with the *awareness* (*Something is wrong!*, very often regarding issues of social justice), followed by the *awakening* (*Someone should do something!*), followed by the *appeal* addressed to specific persons (*Do something!*), then if not answered adequately followed by the *accusation* (*Why don't you do something?*), this being followed by the *judgement* (*You are guilty!*), by the *demonization* (*You are bad!*) and finally by the *latency* of violence.

The latter stages afford educated justifications, often in the shape of radically religious or at least hyper-rational whisperings, to minimize the mental and spiritual violation of the self since the appeal most often is addressed to beloved inhabitants of their closest social surroundings. These stages need not necessarily be understood as a diachronic escalation-ladder but more as variable features of communication which are dependent on the social situation and the role it affords. This is why, at the same time, one may receive very moderate and very radical views from one and the same person who conveys the impression of being mentally disintegrated (one of the facets of the fragmentation mentioned above). Here the fascination for violence is lurking. Violence may take its own turn and unfold its own evil dynamics that do not need educated justification any more. This could recently be seen and heard in an interview with a young hooded hooligan who during the Hamburg G20 summit had burned cars, smashed windows and plundered a supermarket: "I was at home watching TV, then I saw what was going on downtown, so I put on all my black garb and rushed over there to have fun. It was an incredible experience of ultimate freedom. I felt I was above the law, as if I had unlimited powers. I could have done anything." This is reminiscent of Bakunin's *The robbers are the heroes*, conveying the idea that anarchy allows for the amount of violence that, at least from a Hegelian viewpoint, is necessary to unroll the powers of nature and destiny that help to establish a new order.[15]

An additional item of the cosmic identity is *humor*. My interviewees point to that fact when talking about their interpretation of smartness: being cool, not taking everything too seriously, and above all not taking oneself too seriously (the staged seriousness is one of their main objections against the neo-Salafist propaganda of the long beards). They willingly open up

---

[14] This is the reason why Asad understands *Islam* less in terms of formal religion in the Western sense (as the diametrical opposite to secularism) but as a cumulative tradition that is rooted in discourse: Asad, T.: Formations of the Secular. Stanford University Press: Stanford, California, USA 2003.
[15] Bakunin, M. (2005). Statism and Anarchy. Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

their hearts and minds to the religious instructor if he or she is able to provide them with reasonable answers to their questions, mixed with a healthy amount of subtleness and irony. The almost explosive increase of funny YouTube clips transforming Islamic topics into intelligent and witty formats is proof of a development that sidesteps the established religious institutions, the mosques and their personnel.[16]

Cosmic homeland

The patterns of social and physical identity mentioned so far allude to a kind of formative impact of *imagination* that has been underrated so far.[17] I am talking about the common desire of feeling integrated into a system of higher *cosmic order*. When looking at the juvenile age, achieving this kind of reintegration of personal fragmentation turns out to be one of the most challenging tasks of growing up. Translated into the context of religion, this may have to do with concepts of Cosmotheism by which some of them try to overcome the stringent demarcation-lines between the formal religious systems. Conditions such as I experienced during my school-time in Jakarta beginning in 1979, namely friends of mine who were both Buddhist adherents of Catholicism or Confucian adepts of Islam at the same time (which is what Erich Fromm, looking at the Asian brands of religiousness, used to call *paradox logic*), seem to have vanished from the spiritual menu-chart once and for all. Instead, the neo-conservative withdrawal into the narrowness and over-obedience towards retro emanations of identitarian religion defined by cultural exclusion seems to have taken over. Hence, the increase of hijabs on my university campus does not necessarily indicate an increase in spirituality or religiousness. It may very well be read as the expression of a spiritual crisis and the juvenile attempt to overcome it at least on the *symbolic* level. The same applies to juvenile radicalization when understood as symbolic behaviour.

To keep up with this more or less cosmic challenge, the spiritual elements of juvenile explorative conduct are short-circuited with facets of *ludic* behaviour. The schemes of game and play allow for the negotiation between *taking* and *making* a social role which largely remains void of social sanctions. From there new and more radical formations of Islam can emerge. This kind of *doing religion* can differ from the maybe more settled domestic habits in practising religion and at the same time worrying the parents. The ludic patterns also connect to the realms of the juvenile aesthetical, spiritual, and sensual openness towards the world. The willingness to search and allow for experiences that have been unknown so far is often hastily disclaimed by the religious authorities. Personal experience as a foundation of contemporary didactical concepts in religious education, however, is difficult to be carried out. A good deal of the religious experiences my interviewees talk about here does not follow the visible and established grammar of formal religion, which is why it mostly remains undetected. In the case of Islamist radicalization it may remain covert until it's too late for

---

[16] There was a time in Indonesia in the late 1980's favouring funny and witty sermons during the Friday prayers – no God's blessing without at least one laugh. This was dismissed soon, not because of the objection that laughter in the mosque was identified as indecent behaviour but as the signature of fundamental opposition against President Suharto's despotic regime.

[17] The concept of imagination was described in the works of Jerome Singer and Carl Gustav Jung.

parental prevention or upgraded forms of intervention. Latest research has shown that the time span for radicalization can speed up in 18 to 24 months, especially in the case of so called self-radicalization which is restricted to the virtual segments of social communication.

Basic educational concepts

The empirical findings of patterns with the signature of centrality allow for some conceptual approach towards religion as a topic within *general* education, as well as *religious* education in the strict sense of the word. Above all, the differentiation between religion (or better *religiousness*) in the shape of a more functional understanding on the one side and religion (or better *theology*) in the shape of a substantial body of teachings, institutions and traditions is necessary. Otherwise the emanations of juvenile spiritual orientation and religious positioning could be overwhelmed by the confessional bias and a good deal of preoccupation concerning objective truth. This is the reason why a recent empirical investigation with focus on religious positioning offered two simplified parameters of juvenile religiosity. The first was said to be oriented towards *obedience* and the second steering towards *criticism* – mentioning interview excerpts mainly given by young Muslims in the first case and *exclusively* protestant voices (with some minor Catholic exceptions) in the latter. However, this has nothing to do with juvenile theology but with the white-collar preoccupation of exclusively Christian and non-migrant researchers who are members of what critical intersectional research would describe as the *dominant society*. The researchers projected their positive prejudices of Christianity as the supposed *religion of the heart and mind* against Islam as the alleged *religion of the law* in their negative view. It was as if they were searching to understand marine life world, staring at the selection of fish they had put in the bowl.

Three systemic tensions

The difference of substantial and functional approaches to religion is one of the most prominent aspects when teaching religion with reference to the above-mentioned juvenile indicative of *I want to understand*. With regard to the design of syllabus, school-book and teacher-training, this entails three fundamental patterns of the theological, social and psychological spheres. At first, the tension between *tradition and situation* alludes to the logic of normative power. Tradition may not be simplified as something statuary which is rooted in the non-comprising attitude of the clerical staff. Tradition rather unfolds its dynamic aspects when understood as *cumulative* tradition. The situation an individual lives in, on the other hand, not only points to the normative performance of the social condition but also to the persistence of the given constellations. Therefore, religious traditions that are believed not to be the state of the art any more can most surprisingly unfold a long forgotten impact. To give an example: Surely there is quite some demand to discuss gender issues in the context of the Koran, its male-dominated interpretation, the feminist quest for rereading the Holy Scripture considering gender-equality and the surge of young Muslim women and girls who are trying to overcome the patriarchal supremacy within their families and their social surroundings. At the same time, the liberal levels of the upper middle-class Muslim families in oriental

metropolises like Cairo tend to return to arranged marriages not because their parents would demand it, but because the girls want it – they appreciate romantic love but prefer security first when the love affair turns out to be ambitious. Even the most conflictive religious positions may use the same verses in the codes and canons of the tradition. Here religious education has the duty to clarify the respective strategies of argumentation in order to render the algorithms of religious rhetoric transparent. This leads to the tension between *text and mind*, which is the tension between the literal and the transliteral (see below) understanding of the Holy Text, alluding to the state of mind and the intention of the interpreter at eye level with the innate significance of the material text itself. The third tension is the one between the *subject and the collective*. It refers to the juvenile individual and its expectation to do things *my own way* vis-à-vis the collective and conjured convictions of what *the right way* to do things would be.

Ways and means

To deal with matters *the right way* has to do with religious ascriptions as to the assumed destinations of things. The Koran talks about ways and means in different ways. One example is mentioned in chapter 5, verse 48. Here the Arabic expression *širᶜa wa minhāǧ*[18] refers to religion in a general understanding of a *set of symbols* (*Symbolbestand*) and religious procedures. To have something at hand that permits it to be called *religion* in the material sense of the word affords such a recognizable set of symbols (teachings), a formalized framework (community) and the individual (believer). Another text in the Koran refers to the social scheme with special reference to refugees. The expression in chapter 4, verse 99 (*ḥīlatan wa … sabīla*; power/plan/strength and way – or just *ways and means*) admonishes those who live in security and prosperity to provide those who have lost everything with the choice of whether they want to stay or to push on immediately.

These two examples shed light on how the religious lyrics of life not only refer to the coordinates of vision, morale and hope but are linked to the metaphor of the path in the spiritual and aesthetical sense. The literary figuration of the path not only alludes to one's destination but has its own entitlement as a narrative of life with regard to the juvenile subject and the social situation and mental condition one lives in. For young people, the path of life at the same time unfolds as a promising and hardly manageable amalgam of options and their contingencies that lie ahead. As a transposition into syllabus design, one of the most recent drafts for teaching Islam in public schools at the secondary level (the Hesse core curricula) has tried to translate this into terms of educational motives, competences and methods. These include the hermeneutical approach towards the religious heritage in the shape of collective tradition (the following Arabic terms refer to concepts within Islamic anthropology). The competences aim at strengthening the personal reasoning (*taḥkīm*) on the basis of reliable religious information (*taᶜlīm*), at the capability of leading oneself to answerable targets (*tazkiya*) and to a sustainable religious positioning of the self (*tasāwin*), at the facilitation of

---

[18] Muhammad Asad translates this by *law and a way of life*, Yusuf Ali by *law and an open way* and Marmaduke Picktall by *divine law and a traced out way*.

the trust in oneself and in God (*tawakkul*), at the exercise of attentiveness towards oneself, towards other human beings, towards God and towards the big and small things in God's creation (*taqwā*), at the readiness to social understanding (*tafāhum*), agreement and solidarity (*taḍāmun*), at the ability to get along with others and their differences and to practise tolerance as appreciation (*tasāmuḥ al-tabāyun*) and at the education of language skills with regard to religious expressiveness and social discourse (*kalāma, bayān*).

In addition to this, the Koran unfolds a surprising diversity of metaphors of the path of life (the brackets indicate exemplary chapters and verses in the Koran). The following words show this variety: *maṣīr* (4:97) reminds of the Exodus narrative and gives the hard rock connotation of plight; *milla* (6:161) points to the idea of picking up a trail from the past and continuing on it to the future; *ṣirāt* (1:6) strengthens the anagogical aspect of one's personal salvation which lies ahead; *sabīl* (61:4) describes the necessity to strive for good goals in social solidarity; *širᶜa* (5:48) denotes the methods and strategies; and *saᶜī* (92:4) describes the personal pace in terms of the intensity of religious life-styles.

The different senses of the Scripture

The metaphors of the path explained in the preceding chapter allude to the juvenile perception of being on the way. This perception does influence the personal images of the future and the preferred religious narratives between rehearsal, narration, explication, interpretation, argumentation and critique. This is the reason why even those who have never been acquainted with the Holy Book and its narratives would most willingly turn to it in order to grasp ideas that might help them get through challenging conditions.[19] Such different dispositions of decoding narratives lead to the necessity of systematically teaching easy hermeneutical and exegetical approaches to the Koran.[20] For example, following chapter 2, verse 102, the Koran tells the story of the two Babylonian angels Hārūt and Mārūt:

The *literal* sense remains allegiant to the material text, following the wording and spelling and turning every exegesis of the Koran into a philological adventure. In this sense, Hārūt and Mārūt are the real names of real angels that really appeared sometime in early human history. They were sent to teach the inhabitants of the city and to test their belief (angels are angels). Actually this arena of literal readings reflects the primary and sole Koranic understanding of

---

[19] I have witnessed this with regard to young Muslim women who seek advice concerning abortion. The institutions that offer counselling here are unable to cope with the helpless efforts of these women to find a justification within Islamic tradition in favour of abortion which eases their confused hearts. Here female Muslim theologians are desperately needed

[20] See Behr, H. (2013). Islamischer Religionsunterricht in der Kollegstufe. In: van der Velden, F., Behr, H. & Haussmann, W. (Hg.): Gemeinsam das Licht aus der Nische holen. Kompetenzorientierung im christlichen und islamischen Religionsunterricht der Kollegstufe (pp. 17-40). Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht. And: Behr, H. (2011). Yusuf oder Joseph? Eine Probe dialogischer Didaktik in der Lehrerbildung. In: van der Velden, F. (Hg.), Die heiligen Schriften des anderen im Unterricht. Bibel und Koran im christlichen und islamischen Religionsunterricht einsetzen (pp. 221-242). Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht. And: Behr, H. (2011). Mit dem Vaterunser in den Islamunterricht. In: van der Velden, F. (Hg.), Die heiligen Schriften des anderen im Unterricht. Bibel und Koran im christlichen und islamischen Religionsunterricht einsetzen (pp. 83-101). Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.

most of the Muslims I have come to know, at least of the vast majority of my Muslim students. To fluidize this mental clotting is the challenging part of my teaching profession at the university.

The *allegorical* sense looks at the literary figuration which is enclosed within the text. Here Hārūt and Mārūt can be compared to other dual personifications like Cain and Abel. These indicate conflicting powers within the human soul and the necessity to assess the options of action according to their expectable results. It contains the tension between experience, interest and anticipation. Here angels can be understood as human dispositions and conditions.

The *epical* sense focuses on additional narrative information from other sources like the Bible or late ancient literature. The Koranic term for narration is *qaṣaṣ* (see 12:1-3), which depicts *truth* instead of *reality*, a differentiation most of the pupils have trouble understanding. Narration, other than the empirical world, draws its reliability not from measurable or objectifiable patterns but from *plausibility* which derives not from the precise rehearsal of the narration but from its *varieties* (*mutašābihan mathānī*; 39:23). As regards Hārūt and Mārūt, 1 Moses 6, 2-4, the Epistle of Jude 6, the Second Epistle of Peter 2, 3, the Books of Enoch or the Midrash Akbir deliver similar stories. Here angels are characters.

The *critical* sense looks at historical, cultural, social and other background information that might help to illuminate the understanding of a text. It is part of the critical and thus secular approach to the religious scheme. It is important to know that the critical approach is not the antithesis of belief since especially Judaism, Christianity and Islam pass their innate disposition of religious critique as an integral part of their scriptural heritage. In Islam, secular criticism is not the contrary of theology, it is part of it – theology is not necessarily religious, and religion does not need to be theological. The seven Zoroastrian ethical emanations (Amesha Spenta) mention Haurvatāt as a figure for *truthfulness* or *wholeness* and Ameretāt for a *long life* or *immortality*. In this view, the philological figuration of Hārūt and Mārūt remind us that different images of angels may have a cultural, areal, historical, social, psychological and spiritual origin and grammar of their own.

The *intentional* sense follows ethical implications, not asking about the intention of text and author but of the interpreter instead. This reading supports the normative power of the given situation vis-à-vis the actual situation. With regard to getting hold of one's own life, of one's religion and of one's future, the dialectical relationship between the text of the Koran and the juvenile access to its content (the tension between text and mind has been explained above) is a major challenge of teaching Islam to young Muslims. Here Hārūt and Mārūt stand for the good and bad, the divine and evil dispositions of human beings. Angels can be understood as an expression for the hand of man who is able to create either hell or paradise here on earth.

The *typological* sense is interested in the generalization. Singular and particular events or figures carry the potential of general and universal meaning. Hārūt and Mārūt represent angels as such, and angels represent the hand of a God who gets involved and interferes in man's actions.

The *anagogical* sense is oriented towards the individual hope for God and for the hereafter as a true reality. It focuses on the promise of eternal peace and the personal confidence in not being left alone or dismissed by God. This is a spiritual dimension which may be emotionally present though difficult to put into spoken or written words. The anagogical sense may correspond to the mystic elements of religious experience. Here angels represent the promise of individual salvation.

The *lyrical* sense corresponds to the dimension of aesthetical sentience. As regards the Koran, it may appear on the level of performed religion, for example the reading of the Arabic Koran following the traditional rules of artful recitation (*taǧwīd*) during Ramadan or whenever one feels the spiritual urge to do so. In this sense angels are lyrical figures who contribute to the personal escapist sensation which is not in need of even near rational explanation. On this level angels may even be addressed as personalized images of reality who settle in a person's physical habitat – it is the familiarity and intimacy that counts. Especially children can easily find their approaches to this through magical thinking as an integral part of their developmental psychology. During their juvenile growth, they will construct subsidiary constructions for this but will not give it up easily.

Some recommendations

Going through the different aspects of this contribution, some critical remarks as to dominant society, schooling and the questionable standards of teacher training have been made. Also the training of the Imams in the mosque needs special attention but is not the focus here. As a summary, some general recommendations shall be made with focus on the secondary and vocational level and on the issues of the juvenile target groups that are discussed here.

Religion must not only be understood as the realm of theology, formalized teachings, ethical principles, religious institution and regular instruction but also as a functional and often covert set of societal, spiritual, intellectual and aesthetical patterns. It is up to comprehensive research within general education to understand its impact on juvenile life-world orientation. This needs to be integrated into the general teacher training as well as increasing the teachers' awareness of all kinds of racism, gender bias, degrading rhetoric, anti-religious prejudice, islamophobia, cultural and ethnical essentialism.

Juvenile critique and imagination correlate to highly individualized processes of religious orientation and positioning. Therefore safe spaces need to be offered to Muslims girls and boys to practice how they express their creeds, convictions, hopes and fears. Even temporary non-coeducational formats should be taken into consideration especially regarding the precarious topics (which are often dethematized topics) discussed here. Such spaces would help young Muslims to find and explore their language skills which are needed to express spiritual convictions, emotions, hopes and fears as well as to defend themselves against incriminating religious, sexual and racialist bias and harassment they face not only from outright rightist and identitarian groups but from persons within their everyday surroundings,

for example the teachers. Here it is necessary to delegitimatize the penetrant Islamization of the common social and psychological deep grammar. The present *othering* intends to ascribe deviant behaviour to migrants and Muslims as a putative trait of their alien personality.

Integration as a political agenda must not be confused with assimilation. Integration must be based on an understanding of identity that is not defined by cultural and identitarian exclusivism but by the art of being at the same time close to the other without dissolving oneself. Tolerance must not be understood as toleration but should be taught as the art of appreciation. Both integration and tolerance help to restore the greatest possible amount of normality in a situation that is sensed as contingent and menacing. Therefore it is necessary to elucidate the religious narratives, terms, relations and contexts of items that are liable to misuse by rigid and radical demagogy. Late ancient concepts, to name *šarīʿa* (teaching of norms and methodology) or *ǧihād* (struggle) as two examples, must be translated into useful mental frames and be freed from their hostile takeover by either radical neo-Salafist or anti-Islamic rhetoric, both enhancing their unanimous misinterpretation as *Islamic Penal Law* or *Holy War*.

A binding culture of mutual understanding must be taught and exercised at all levels of school education. This includes the deconstruction of ideological meta-identities and the negotiation of the future standards of living together in the framework of Germany as a democratic constitutional state. This includes religions and religiousness, irrespective of Jewish, Christian, Muslim or other theistic, pantheistic, transtheistic, nontheistic or atheistic creeds and confessions. To achieve this, more religious science and philosophy needs to be thematized not only within the framework of religious instruction but also outside from it. However, confessional religious instruction as a regular subject in public schools needs to be saved and further developed as an unalterable standard.

Bibliography

- Asad, Talal: Formations of the Secular. Stanford University Press: Stanford, California, USA 2003
- Bakunin, M. (2005). *Statism and Anarchy. Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Behr, H. (2011). Yusuf oder Joseph? Eine Probe dialogischer Didaktik in der Lehrerbildung. In: van der Velden, F. (Hg.), *Die heiligen Schriften des anderen im Unterricht. Bibel und Koran im christlichen und islamischen Religionsunterricht einsetzen* (pp. 221-242). Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.
- Behr, H. (2011). Mit dem Vaterunser in den Islamunterricht. In: van der Velden, F. (Hg.), *Die heiligen Schriften des anderen im Unterricht. Bibel und Koran im christlichen und islamischen Religionsunterricht einsetzen* (pp. 83-101). Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.
- Behr, H. (2013). Islamischer Religionsunterricht in der Kollegstufe. In: van der Velden, F., Behr, H. & Haussmann, W. (Hg.): *Gemeinsam das Licht aus der Nische holen. Kompetenzorientierung im christlichen und islamischen Religionsunterricht der Kollegstufe* (pp. 17-40). Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.

- Behr, H. (2017). Interreligiosität als Kompetenzbereich des Islamischen Religionsunterrichts. In: Ucar, B. (Ed.), *Hikma, Zeitschrift für Islamische Theologie und Religionspädagogik, 8* (1), 64-82.
- Behr: H. (2017). The third scheme between secularism and religion. Approaches to universal and pluriform pragmatism within Islamic theology and education. In: *SOCIETY Social Science And Modern Society*, *55*, DOI 10.1007/s12115-017-0163-4.
- Kulaçatan, M., Behr, H. & Agai, B. (2017). Islamistische Radikalisierung im Rhein-Main-Gebiet. Ursachen und Gegenstrategien. In: *Expertise Mediendienst Integration. Rat für Migration*. Berlin: Rat für Migration.
- Kulaçatan, M. & Behr, H. (2016). Religious Orientation of Muslim Girls and Young Women between Particularism and Universalism. *Frankfurter Zeitschrift für Islamisch-Theologische Studien, 3*, 107-120.
- Klovert, H. (2017) Warum Schüler türkischer Herkunft schlecht abschneiden. Available at: http://www.spiegel.de/lebenundlernen/schule/integration-warum-schueler-tuerkischer-herkunft-schlecht-abschneiden-a-1152964.html [13.07.2017].
- Schlag, Th. & Schweitzer, F. (Eds.). (2012). *Jugendtheologie.* Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Theologie.
- Soeffner, H.-G. (Ed.). (2010). *Unsichere Zeiten. Herausforderungen gesellschaftlicher Transformationen.* Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften.
- The Hamburg ReDi-project of the AWR Akademie der Weltreligionen, see https://www.awr.uni-hamburg.de/forschung/redi-projekt.html [07.07.2017].
- Ulfat, F. (2017). *Die Selbstrelationierung muslimischer Kinder zu Gott.* Paderborn: Schöningh.
- Worley, P. (2015). *40 lessons to get children thinking: Philosophical thought adventures across the curriculum.* London: Bloomsbury Publishing.