

"Islam" in Controversy and the Violation of Sacredness as a Trigger Point

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Abstract: While the principle of controversy is considered a normative criterion for democratic education, social controversies in general and Islam-related controversies in particular are ambivalent. They are emotionally charged, often touch on questions of identity and elude the control of pedagogical actors. This applies especially to Islam-related controversies, which only become controversial through their socio-political framing. Prayer rooms, headscarves, caricatures of Muhammad or the Middle East conflict are among the controversies that arise from demands for participation (e.g. praying in a secular space), conflicting interpretations, pressure to justify oneself, different degrees of concern, stereotyping and racism. The article is based on the results of the study "Der Islam" in der Kontroverse (*"Islam" in Controversy*), in the context of which group discussions with students, teachers and parents on Islam-related controversies were conducted. In the process, different controversies, trigger points, affects and types of discursive processing could be reconstructed. The article deals more specifically with a question that arose in the course of the interpretation: Do controversies related to Islam exhibit a particular normative structure as religious controversies? The article argues that the concept of a violation of sacredness, understood as an experience of profanation, allows for a better understanding of religious controversies. This thesis is defended on the basis of the interpretation of the empirical data and the reconstruction of three types of sacredness violation.

Keywords: controversial issues, Islam, school, racism, democracy, sacredness violation

Zusammenfassung: Während das Prinzip der Kontroversität als normatives Kriterium für demokratische Bildung gilt, sind gesellschaftliche Kontroversen im Allgemeinen und islambezogene Kontroversen im Besonderen ambivalent. Sie sind emotional aufgeladen, berühren häufig Identitätsfragen und entziehen sich der Kontrolle pädagogischer Akteure. Dies gilt insbesondere für islambezogene Kontroversen, die erst durch ihre gesellschaftspolitische Dimension zu Kontroversen werden. Gebetsräume, Kopftücher, Mohammed-Karikaturen oder der Nahostkonflikt sind unter anderem Kontroversen, die durch Partizipationsforderungen (z. B. Beten im säkularen Raum), konfligierende Deutungsmuster, Rechtfertigungsdruck, unterschiedliche Betroffenheiten sowie Stereotypisierungen und Rassismen zu Kontroversen werden. Der Beitrag bezieht sich auf die Ergebnisse der Studie „Der Islam“ in der Kontroverse, im Rahmen welcher Gruppendiskussionen mit Schüler:innen, Lehrpersonen und Eltern zu islambezogenen Kontroversen geführt wurden. Dabei konnten unterschiedliche Kontroversen, Triggerpunkte, Affekte sowie Typen der diskursiven Bearbeitung rekonstruiert werden. Der Beitrag beschäftigt sich spezifischer mit einer Frage, die sich im Laufe der Interpretation ergeben hat: Weisen islambezogene Kontroversen als religiöse Kontroversen eine besondere normative Struktur auf? Es wird die These vertreten, dass der Begriff der Sakralitätsverletzung, verstanden als eine Profanisierungserfahrung, ein besseres Verständnis religiöser Kontroversen ermöglicht. Diese These wird auf Grundlage der Interpretation des empirischen Datenmaterials und der Rekonstruktion dreier Typen der Sakralitätsverletzung verteidigt.

Schlagwörter: Kontroversität, Islam, Schule, Rassismus, Demokratie, Sakralitätsverletzung

1. Introduction

Sex education, the wearing of the hijab, the theory of evolution in biology, and the Middle East conflict are exemplary controversies determining discussion within and about schools, their content, and their ideological standpoint in Germany. The question of how to deal with these controversies relates to the limits and possibilities of public education and thus – according to Klaus Prange (2010) – reflects a central question of educational ethics. Against this background, a broad discourse has developed – both internationally and in the German-speaking world – in educational science (Drerup, Zulaica y Mugica & Yacek, 2021), political education (Frech, Geyer & Oberle, 2023), and specialized didactics (Herbst, Gärtner & Kläsener, 2023). In contrast to a didactical reflection on controversies, this article explores the polarization effects of Islam-related controversies in schools in North Rhine-Westphalia, which were investigated in the qualitative empirical project DIKo – "Der Islam" in der Kontroverse (*"Islam" in Controversy*), funded by the Ministry of Culture and Science of the State of North Rhine-Westphalia (MKW NRW) and the CoRE-NRW – 'Connecting Research on Extremism in North Rhine-Westphalia'-network.

The first section identifies the ambivalence of Islam-related controversies and concretizes the research questions (Section 2). A presentation of the research design follows, including the methodological considerations of interweaving the documentary method and the trigger point classification in the context of the affect sociology. In this context, a thesis is developed that the violation of sacredness can be identified as a specific trigger point arising from the discussion of religion-related controversies (Section 3). This term will be empirically typified according to the patterns of difference between sacredness and normality that can be reconstructed from the data (Section 4). The article concludes with a summary of the considerations and their pedagogical significance (Section 5).

2. The ambivalence of Islam-related controversies in schools

The relevance of religion in the German school contexts is controversial. Schools in Germany have a secular status and the state has an obligation to maintain ideological neutrality. Despite the institutionalized implementation of religious education and the establishment of Islamic education over the last ten years (in North Rhine-Westphalia), questions about visible religious references and rituals nevertheless lead to conflicts and controversies (Stein, et al., 2024), or their answers are sought in court, e. g. in relation to the presence of crosses in the classroom and praying as a religious ritual in public schools. The presence of such conflicts can be attributed to the social significance of religion, which tends to increase among Muslim youth¹, due to the immigration of Muslim and Christian Orthodox youths – who exhibit an above-average level of religiosity (Kenar, Zimmer & Stein, 2020) – and the fact that Germany is a migrant society characterized by religious diversification (Karaçaoğlu & Klinkhammer, 2016, p. 298). This diversification refers not only to the presence of different religious groups but also a diversity of beliefs and practices within those religious groups. For example, empirical evidence shows a high diversity of religious attitudes, ways of acting and thinking among Muslim youths (Gennerich, 2016, p. 204).²

The subject construction in the wider DIKo study refers to Islam-related controversies that are part of the socially formed discourse on Islam (Kalwa, 2020). The discourse on Islam is itself heterogeneous, conflictual and polarized due to the spectrum of social experience in which it is embedded. The September 11 attack on the World Trade Centre in New York in 2001; the activities of the National Socialist Underground in Germany; the Syrian war and the founding of Islamic State; and most recently

¹ According to the Shell Study (Schneekloth & Albert, 2024), 79% of young Muslims say that faith in God is highly relevant to them – 38% of Catholics and 35% of Protestants.

² Phenomena such as belonging without commitment are often ignored here (Kamçili-Yildiz, 2021).

the October 7 Hamas attack on Israel in 2023, the subsequent events and the resulting war in Gaza and Lebanon. These are just a few eclectically selected events that have influenced the discourse on Islam. Against this backdrop, talking about 'Islam' is polarized both publicly and academically. The discourse on Islam oscillates between a mostly polarizing to racist critique of Islam (Bielefeldt, 2011) and a racist critique of the discourse on Islam. Discrimination and racism theory approaches not only partially ignore the problems of extremist religious interpretations or turn them into epiphenomena of experiences of racism, but also only deal to a limited extent with anti-Semitism, racism, gender discrimination, homophobia, etc. in Islamic contexts. At the same time, critical perspectives of Islam run the risk of marginalizing racist and discriminatory experiences and structures, reproducing socially widespread stereotypes (Pollack & Müller, 2013) and becoming compatible with the identity politics of extreme right-wing and right-wing populist movements (Pickel & Öztürk, 2022; Attia, Häusler & Shooman, 2014). Ethically, this polarity is addressed – for example – with the discourse ethical '3P' model (Pauschalisierung, Perspektiven, Pluralismus), referring to sweeping generalizations, perspectives, and pluralization (UEM, 2023, pp. 38–40; Cheema, 2020). However, this problem of dualism exists not only at an ethical level. At an empirical level, these types of exclusions barely do justice to social developments in their inner interconnectedness and dynamics (Wohlrab-Sahr & Tezcan, 2022, p. 9). Therefore, an empirical study must explore the phenomenon from multiple perspectives. For this reason, Islam-related controversies can be differentiated according to the following three aspects:

1. **Democracy:** In reference to the integration paradox (El-Mafaalani, 2020), controversies and conflicts signal demands for participation. Controversies arise in places where friction occurs and conflicting needs are articulated. They are therefore an indication of democratization in the super-diverse migration society (Pickel & Pickel, 2023). In specific terms, the institutionalization processes of Islamic customs in Europe and in schools can usually be reconstructed beneath the attention threshold of public opinion formation. Perhaps the most prominent examples are the establishment of Islamic religious education, the acceptance of burkinis in swimming lessons, the rules on leave of absence in schools for religious holidays, or different practices to comply with halal rules in daycare centers and school canteens. Even though some of these controversies have been repeatedly discussed, they remain controversial, e. g. religious education as the domestication of the Muslim self (Dreier, 2022) or the ongoing conflict over the presence of pork in schools (Tezcan, 2019).
2. **Resentment:** Controversies reproduce stereotypes and racism. Controversies are polarized, open up "we-they arenas", generate collectivization phenomena, and manifest representational structures (UEM, 2023). Latent or manifest stereotypes that are widespread in society are embedded in Islam-related controversies. Muslim masculinity and the generalized assumption of discrimination against women in Islam are typical stereotypes, likewise the association of a higher tendency towards violence and the notion of parallel societies (Kaddor, Karabulut & Pfaff, 2021). Furthermore, the reference to controversy can prevent the problematization of discrimination and racism, especially if reference is made to neutrality and the legitimacy of an unlimited plurality of opinions, reflecting the notion that "all opinions must be heard" (Gindi, 2024, p. 9). Tolerance and openness – as they are focused on at this point – rarely question the power relations and hierarchical order that exist between the range of perspectives.
3. **Agitation:** Islam-related controversies offer an opportunity structure for political agitation due to their polarization structure. Nationalist and Islamist movements use controversies for the purpose of mobilization (Kiefer & Mücke, 2023). Thus, controversies about eating habits, education, sexual self-determination, confrontational religious manifestations, or adolescent religiously coded disciplinary practices ("Sharia police") are accessible for simplifying polarization strategies and political mobilization. In particular, the interplay of polarization rhetorics, authoritarian attitudes, and experiences of exclusion are basic conditions for radicalization processes, according to the

EMRA study (Pfundmair, 2024). In the aftermath of October 7, 2023, and the resulting narrow and complicated discourse flows, Islamist movements are cultivating a narrative of resistance that specifically addresses the feelings of young Muslims (KN:IX, 2023).

In these three perspectives, affects and emotions constitute the context of social interaction, whether outrage at injustice, anger at restriction of freedom (religious freedom), fear of losing control, or a feeling of anomie when ideas of normality are threatened. These controversies share in common the fact that discourses and affects cannot be separated from each other and together they produce social figurations (we-arenas). The research desideratum addressed by the DIKo project is to investigate the trigger points based on which controversies are evoked. For this purpose, group discussions were conducted in different schools, whereby a methodological model was developed based on a knowledge and affect-sociological reconstruction of discourse organizations (Przyborski, 2004; Diefenbach 2022) and trigger points (Mau, Lux & Westheuser, 2023). In this context, the thesis is formulated that trigger points can be traced in religion-related controversies, which can, at times, be interpreted as violations of sacredness. It is argued that experiences of profanation, in which the sacred is normalized, act as trigger points that allow for a differentiated approach to religion-related controversies. The assumption, which remains unproven at this juncture, is that these trigger points exert an influence on religious worldviews in general, with Islam-related controversies serving as illustrative cases of this social mechanism. The subsequent examination of Islamic modes of thinking and behavior is shaped by the existing state of research concerning Islam-related controversies.

3. Empirical reconstruction of controversies in the discourse on Islam and religion-related trigger points

The qualitative empirical reconstruction of Islam-related controversies was carried out using a group discussion method adapted to this research interest. Two phases of group discussions were held at four schools (N = 76) at one-week intervals. The first phase of group discussion, referred to as the controversy discussion, was conducted between teachers, parents, and students (aged 14 and above) in a heterogeneous group. The controversy discussion is a hybrid format combining a problem-centered interview using a case vignette as a stimulus for discussion (Witzel, 2000) with a group discussion with narrative questions (Bohnsack, 1996). The case vignette used in this study referred to the minute's silence on the occasion of the murder of teacher Samuel Paty in 2020 in France, who had used Muhammad caricatures to discuss freedom of expression in school. The second phase of group discussion was a classic group discussion. The groups were homogeneous in terms of status, with separate discussions held for students, parents, and teachers.

Using the documentary method (Bohnsack, 2014; 2020), the empirical reconstruction of controversial discussion patterns and their discourse organizations (Przyborski, 2004, p. 95) revealed a specific structure, in which affects and discourses are interwoven (for more on the relationship between the documentary method and sociology of affects see Diefenbach, 2022). The outraged rejection of an identification, the quiet unease of shame and hurt in confrontation with a violation of norms – which is met with laughter or enthusiastic counter-speech – and the fear of being accused of racism or the relief of experiencing solidarity are just some of the emotions affected in controversies.

During the evaluation, particular attention was given to self-guided discussions, identified in the transcripts (N = 23), that demonstrated high levels of engagement and interaction (Przyborski, 2004, p. 52). These discussions were characterized by rapid, successive interactions, frequent mutual interruptions, and the presence of contrasting or oppositional patterns of interpretation. Thus, within the documentary reconstruction, highly emotional and passionate passages were identified and traced back to their origins – the initial proposition (Przyborski, 2004, p. 62) in which the orientation and the

construction of difference was first articulated. Each passage was then systematically examined as an interaction move, focusing on the positive orientation horizon and the negative counter-horizon (Przyborski, 2004, p. 56), on the discourse structure, and the ways in which constructions of difference were formed. Throughout this process, different modes of negotiating implicit or conjunctive knowledge (Bohnsack, Nentwig-Gesemann & Nohl, 2013, p. 12) and of discourse organization emerged. One of the phenomena that can be observed in the analysis is that controversial discussions arise when participants are provoked by a particular word, code, metaphor, or other stimuli, and they respond with interactive gestures that connect them to the source of the trigger, such as the Middle East conflict (Zulaica y Mugica, Jacoby & Aydogan, 2025). This corresponds to a common implicit conflict knowledge that can be typified.

The classification of trigger points by Mau et al. (2023, p. 276) has proven to be a productive approach for the decoding of these interactions and reconstructing the organization of discussions. This classification enables us to understand why "we-they arenas" are opened at specific points in communication. Trigger points are defined as discursive phenomena in which participants experience a breach of their social expectations of egalitarianism, normality, autonomy and control in relation to an issue, an articulation or a positioning and react to this in an emotionalized manner, producing polarization effects. In the context of Islam-related controversies, our research yielded insights into the various types of controversies, triggers, conceptions of normality, and constructions of difference. These controversies pertained to critical issues such as violence, gender, and rituality (Zulaica y Mugica, Jacobi & Aydogan, 2026).

During the analysis phase of the study, however, several new questions emerged, prompting further investigation. Can specific religious trigger points be identified? Does the religion have a social grammar with specific sacred feelings? In the following exploration, an attempt is made to trace the specific nature of religion-related controversies using the concept of the violation of sacredness. The thesis pursued in this article is that a violation of sacredness is an experience of profanation in which the difference between the sacred and the normal is abolished. The violation comprises the break with a sacred meaning.

What can be understood by a sacred meaning? In terms of the phenomenology of religion, Rudolf Otto (2004 [1917]) refers to the "numinous" as the nucleus of the religious, which encompasses the experience of a radically foreign power - the "mysterium tremendum" (p. 13). This sacred feeling is regarded sociologically by Durkheim (2020 [1912]) – or more recently by Joas (2019a) – as constituting society, insofar as it is a double relationship. The emotional attachment to and respect for the greatness of the sacred is based on an experience that constitutes self-understanding. This experience conveys an understanding of "worthiness" (Zink, 2024, p. 204) that creates a commitment to values: a foundation. In this sense, Joas (2019a) writes of the sacrality of the person or integrity and follows on from Durkheim's idea that sacred feelings are collective feelings that can be directed towards the individual in the course of secularization processes. A constitutive distance between the feeling subject and the superior counterpart is immanent to the sacred sense, which is expressed in the feeling of sublimity (Zink, 2024, p. 205). In the sacred, this distance consists precisely in the transcendence of the normal and thus demands worship, devotion, and subordination. However, it can also be articulated in a sensual-erotic form as the love of the unattainable (Zink, 2024, p. 205).

From the perspective of Riis and Woodhead (2010), the difference between the sacred and the normal is a fundamental characteristic of religious emotional regimes, namely a specific socially structured cultivation of emotionality and discursivity. According to this argument, religious emotional regimes are dependent on the imagination of a higher order that transcends the mundane everyday lifeworld (Hebrik, 2024, pp. 146–147). In the tradition of phenomenological sociology, this connection can be

sharpened insofar as – following Schütz and Luckmann (2017) – the world is based on the naturalization of reality in the sense of a "constancy of world structure" (p. 72). The world is therefore normal because it is characterized by the unchanging nature of the self-evident. The "and so forth" (Schütz & Luckmann, 2017, p. 72) and the "I can always do it again" (Schütz & Luckmann, 2017, p. 73) are attitudes of everyday life that make up the sphere of the normal. The break with the normal is therefore a break with a traditional structure of the expected. The violation of sacredness is a violation of an alternative structure (Joas, 2019b, p. 19), which is accompanied by "a secure sense of the presence of a stronger force" (Joas, 2019a, p. 93).

The concept of religious emotional regimes in turn demonstrates that different constellations of affects, emotions and discourses can be described, in which the sacred sense is produced and habitualized in the context of social practices and rituals (Von Scheven & Berg, 2018, pp. 40–42). Following this argument, religious emotional regimes or rather the affective-discursive registers³ of violations of sacredness can be located at the frontier between normality and the sacred. According to Mau et al. (2023, pp. 253–260), the difference compared with the normality violation lies precisely in this frontier description and refers neither to the intensity of the feelings experienced nor to a normative prioritization of the sacred. While this is not a normative theory, the concept of the sacred is preferred to that of transcendence (Knoblauch, 2004) because the normative semantics allow for the conceptualizing of the conflicting nature of the trigger points.

In the subsequent stage of the analysis, the violation of sacredness as a trigger point is further elucidated and differentiated. To achieve this, a specific controversy from the empirical research material is addressed: The prohibition of images.

4. The violation of sacredness as a trigger point and its types

The complexity of the violation of sacredness as a trigger point is exemplified in the collected transcripts (23 in total) resulting from the group discussions. From these, three differentiated violations of sacredness emerge and thus three religious discursive-affective regimes can be investigated. The selection of passages and the typification of the violation of sacredness are based on a comparative procedure (Bohnsack, 2020, pp. 112–114), using the criterion of maximal and minimal contrast. That is to say, the demand is for theoretical saturation (Bohnsack et al., 2013, p. 279) rather than empirical representation. The typology that has been developed is still to be understood as a heuristic that requires further differentiation and saturation efforts in the future research process. Furthermore, in the interpretation, the figure of the violation of sacredness will be reconstructed. This does not imply, however, that the social situation is documented in its totality. Other dimensions of the respective, complex social situations receive less attention. Significant factors such as power relations and intersectional, postcolonial inequalities are addressed in the following interpretations, but they are not the focus. The reason for this is not that these factors are unimportant – quite the opposite – but rather that a certain cut has to be made – a cut by which something is made visible, and knowledge is produced.

At the center of the selected passages is the relationship between Islam, images, and caricatures. This relationship is a topos that appeared repeatedly throughout our group discussions. Several thematic layers held importance here. The controversy discussions were opened with a case vignette on caricatures of Muhammad. These were discussed in the group formats a) in terms of a religiously based ban on images, b) as discriminatory depictions, and c) as unequal treatment in relation to Jews when it comes to unequal sensitivity to discrimination. This topos was also thematically addressed in the

³ The term affective-discursive register is intended to emphasize the connection between affects and discourses.

context of the discussion on religious didactic tasks in Christian religious education, particularly regarding the task of drawing God.⁴

Theologically, it is not possible to speak of a general prohibition of images in Islam (Naef, 2007). There is no passage on this in the Qur'an. References for the problematization of images trace back to four different hadiths⁵, which allow different interpretations, e. g. worship of figurines or visualization as vitalization of entities and claiming divine authority. In general, reference can be made to a rich history of plural image cultures in countries influenced by Islam, which also include images of Muhammad. At this point, neither a theological nor a discourse-analytical or racial-critical discussion of the so-called Muhammad caricatures can be undertaken (UEM, 2023). In the following reconstruction, while differentiating between sacredness and normality, three frontier descriptions between sacredness and normality can be distinguished: 4.1 sacredness in translation, 4.2 sacredness as a theological difference to normality, and 4.3 sanctification of the normal.

4.1 Sacredness in translation

The depiction of Muhammad is usually discussed within the discursive framework of a paradox between freedom of religion and freedom of expression (Berg & Ural, 2019), whereby respect for freedom of religion is interpreted in the research discourse as protection against the affront to religious feelings. This protection is understood as protection against both anti-Muslim, racist references – in contrast to the presumed (hypostatized) sensitivity to anti-Semitism – and the injury of religious feelings. In this context, sacred feelings are sacred in the sense that the Muhammad caricature is interpreted as an injury to the imaginary ideal or higher order constituting the world view and self-image. Emotion is a dimension of the physical that translates the experience of the sacred into a secular, comprehensible classification system. The violation, as an ethically relevant fact of moral respect – which can be connected to the secular orientation pattern of negative freedom or freedom rights of a liberal society –, can be understood as a translation of the sacred into the realm of the normal. It becomes a violation of personal integrity that can be translated into normative horizons such as respect for the dignity of the individual or the prohibition of discrimination. The discourse presupposes a difference between a religious and a political sphere in which comprehensibility is established through translation.

Selected quotations from the collected data illustrate practices of translating sacrality:

Nairobi⁶: Yes, so freedom of opinion for me is where I cross the line, where I hurt others. That's where freedom of opinion ends for me. I can't say EVERYTHING. If I hurt a group, feelings, that's where freedom of speech stops for me. (No. 19, ll. 543–545)⁷

This passage is taken from a controversial discussion in which there is an oppositional organization of discourse that triggers the participants differently depending on their position. While Vancouver – a Muslim teacher – perceives the criticism of Samuel Paty for having provoked Muslims by using the caricatures of Muhammad as a violation of normality, Nairobi – as a mother who is also Muslim – resorts to a formulation based on Kant's categorical imperative to articulate the violation of sacredness as a transgression of the other person's freedom.

⁴ Religious education initiatives such as "Selfie of God" show that this aesthetic exploration of an individual's understanding of faith is a broad didactic practice that leads to conflicts in religious education.

⁵ Hadiths are collections of sayings, actions, and approvals (or disapprovals) of the Prophet Muhammad.

⁶ The names of participants have been changed for anonymity.

⁷ Excerpts from the transcripts are translations by the authors.

In the form of a discursive treatment, a similar translation is performed by the student Salzburg in a controversy discussion, attempting to synthesize the offensive provocation of the Muhammad caricatures with the communicative methods of a political public sphere.

Salzburg: Yes, I think, as I said, that you could also do it without showing it. Or, for example, maybe there are other caricatures to take, where someone isn't drawn in a bad light or brought together with some kind of violence. And, for example, maybe to cover up the face, the face or something that makes this person, I say. Because there are also a lot of caricatures on the internet that even Muslims post. But they show, for example, prophets, but then the face is covered. And then it's no longer this FORBIDDEN thing, but only the body is shown, which is also completely covered, and that's different. You can talk about it, for example, or you can say in class, yes, there are these and these caricatures on the internet where they depict this and that. What's your opinion on that? You don't necessarily have to show it. (No. 08, ll. 935–946)

When asked by a Christian teacher how the distinction between freedom of religion and freedom of opinion should be understood, Salzburg – a Muslim student – tries to define the problem. In his description of the problem, the prohibition of images as a sacred dictum becomes a frame of reference. The practices of political opinion-forming and caricatural confrontation with complex social phenomena are integrated into the religious self-image. By leaving out the face, he refers to representational practices from Islamic countries and transfers them into a secular, political space. In doing so, a responsive, self-reflexive reference is made to the orientation framework of the teacher Mumbai, based on the secular difference between the religious and political spheres.

4.2 Sacredness as a theological difference to normality

As an expression of the violation of sacredness, a theological explanation of the difference to normality can be understood, provided by the Muslim mother Venice:

Venice: [...] So no prophet is somehow (.) shown as an image. What he looks like. You shouldn't, because you shouldn't make a picture of God, you shouldn't make a picture of a prophet, so that it doesn't go in one direction or another, like Jesus, for example. He is portrayed as white, European and so on / but did he really look like that? (.) That is also discussed, this Eurocentric, ne, (.) s/ image. And that should be avoided. That's how the theologians interpret it, the Islamic theologians. It's better not to depict the prophets. This is also not done over the centuries. This is always the ONE thing. That prophets are not portrayed. [...] (No. 09, ll. 218–226)

The violation of sacredness here lies in the particularization of God and refers to the sin of idolatry, in which the relationship with God and thus a sacred entity is restricted. "This is always the ONE" refers to a worldview-constituting principle that would also be common to all monotheistic religions. It is therefore not only a typical principle of Islam but rather one that characterizes the religious relationship based on distance to a higher power and order. Here, the divine charisma – the sacredness – is extended to prophets and simultaneously homogenized. A ban on images becomes a dogma and the violation of sacredness a violation of the religious relationship with God or a prophet as a sacred entity.

The depiction of the prophet or God additionally exceeds the limits of human authority as it invades the realm of the divine power of creation (Yaşaroğlu, 2016), which is Islamically understood as an attribute of God, namely the ability to create out of nothing and give form. In this context, Venice expresses her discomfort with this practice by critically questioning the portrayal of Jesus in Christianity. This points to the underlying challenge of adequately capturing the divine through human means. Representations that cross this boundary could be interpreted as a symbolic appropriation of divine creative power.

4.3 Sanctification of the normal

The sanctification of the normal is based on the social expectation horizon of coherence of lifeworld and religious rules. This ritualized dimension of religion – which El-Menouar (2014) also calls "orthopraxis" (p. 68) in relation to Islam – is intended to constitute the perceptible reality in which the actors can learn to experience themselves as religious. In this case, the violation is not so much at the level of an individual emotional correlate that can be translated into a vocabulary of freedom, nor is it the breaking of the rule as such that is at the heart of the violation. It is the rule that has not become reality that is manifested in the violation. "The world should be completely sanctified" (Tezcan, 2019, p. 91), reflecting a sacred morality in which rules are not understood as norms in the form of rationally justifiable obligations but as self-evident forms of behavior of a second nature (Bertram, 2020), enabling communication and relationship with God as a performance of ritual lifestyle.

The violation of sacredness can also lie in a conflicting set of regulations in which people claim divine authority. This triggers feelings of outrage at the presumption but also fear of possible seduction by a non-sacred and therefore false reality. In this context, a statement by a Muslim pupil that co-education and thus the presence of female students in school is weakening his faith becomes plausible.

A passage in which this structure is shown in relation to the relationship between images and religion is taken from a transcript of a group discussion of pupils. In this passage, the student Glasgow sees herself as a representative of Muslim students. At various points in the group discussion, she brings in examples showing articulations, classroom interactions or structures that need to be problematized from her relevance system.

Glasgow: Right now in Q1, in Christian religion, it was really Catholic, uh ca/ a topic came up recently that the STUDENTS / Well, I think teachers also should themselves / believe / It doesn't matter whether I believe in a religion or not, I still have to show respect for the rules of this religion. And in our Catholic uh religion lessons, the topic came up, so the assignment was: "Draw God."

Manila: // Oha.

Toronto: Holy shit. (No. 16, ll. 705–712)

In this propositional interaction move, the student gives the example of a task to visualize the individual image of God in Catholic religious education. Dramaturgically, the statement "Draw God" – formulated in direct speech – forms the climax of the statement, preceded by the insertion that the "teachers" must "show respect for the rules of this religion." The determinative article is evident in this imperative formulation. The interpretation would suggest that the demand for respect refers to the Islamic religion, as this respect is decoupled from the belief in a religion, "whether I believe in a religion or not." The binding nature of religious rules is thus not only set for the religious community but for all people regardless of their individual attitudes and beliefs. This can be seen as a further indication of the sanctification of the normal, in which non-Muslim people must also ensure coherence between the lifeworld and religion.

The lack of understanding concerning the "Draw God" task is accompanied by the unfulfilled expectation of religious sensitivity on the part of the Christian teacher, whose name the student does not want to mention at first because she feels emotionally attached to them. This hesitation also illustrates the relevance of the trigger point, which can also be described as an "unreasonable demand of behavior" because autonomy is enshrined in the authority relationship between the teacher and student. The students must behave in accordance with this task, and they cannot simply ignore it.

Glasgow: And // MANY were of the opinion: "No, we won't do it, because it's not allowed." And I don't know, I, I only heard from my friends what they said to the teacher. I haven't spoken to anyone else. My friend said that she said to the teacher: "In our religion, it's haram to draw God. We're not allowed / So, it's not allowed, it's a sin." // And if you're like that /

Toronto: In Christianity too.

Glasgow: And then she was like, "NO, it's allowed, feel free to do it." Or she also said: "Yes, write points of criticism on / out of your religion." And they meant what I had just said to them. After all, they are in this faith BECAUSE they are convinced that it is the truth. And they said the same thing to the teacher. Like: "Oh, there are definitely points of criticism with Islam." So I was also just like: "Okay, I'm not so sure." (No. 16, ll. 713–725)

In the elaboration of the example, Glasgow explains the reactions of her friends to this request. They explain to the teacher that this task is "haram". She quotes the statement, "No, we won't do it because it's not allowed" which is contrasted antithetically with the teacher's supposed statement: "NO, it's allowed, feel free to do it." The statement enacts an arrogation of legislative power that simultaneously presupposes a divine position. The violation here is therefore the presumption of divine authority. However, the addition "feel free to do it" creates a contrast to the harsh "No." The pedagogically connoted "feel free" takes on the form of a seduction because the normative obligation of divine rules is lowered. Following Tezcan (2019), a "seduction" (p. 76) is realized here, as an emotional logic that he sees as a characteristic of a fundamentalist religiosity in contrast to a pragmatic one, namely a "seduction" in which the other appears as a potential danger to one's own salvation. In a further attempt by the teacher to address the conflict in terms of religious didactics, she focuses on reflecting on the prohibition of images formulated by the students by asking them to list points of criticism concerning religion. However, the call to translate religious normativity is contrasted with an exclusivist understanding of truth, "BECAUSE they are convinced that it is the truth." The conceptual transformation of religious normativity is thus declared to be unnecessary and even incomprehensible.

On the one hand, Tezcan's (2019) differentiation between pragmatic and fundamentalist religiosity is productive in reconstructing this emotional logic. On the other hand, however, it is too binary to do justice to the violation of sacredness at hand. Although the passage reveals an orientation framework that points to an exclusivist religiosity (Dehn, 2017), this implies a hegemonic dimension towards other world views and thus also reveals anti-pluralist tendencies. This can be interpreted – for example – as a phenomenon of adolescent resistance, which can be addressed by Islamic legalist movements from a marginalized social position within a dominant secular and Christian order (El-Mafaalani, 2014). The teacher's call for a reflexive distancing of one's own worldview can also be perceived as colonial in the hierarchical order of the school class, in which a justification structure is performed in relation to Islamic worldviews. However, the binary nature of these schemas of pragmatism and fundamentalism obscures the fact that a heterogeneity of Islamic ways of thinking and acting can be described in which the emphasis on the conventional dimension of religion is not necessarily associated with a regressive devaluation of non-Muslims.

5. Concluding considerations

In general, the assumption that controversy is a characteristic of democratic education is countered by the fact that Islam-related controversies in particular are ambivalent and their discussion (e. g. Middle East conflict) is highly demanding in terms of subject area and didactics (Zulaica y Mugica & Wigger, 2024). It is important to note that religious questions and controversies are perceived by a number of students as being of great significance to their identity and search for meaning. As demonstrated in the study *Heiße Eisen (Hot potatoes)* in a Christian context, the discussion of these controversies offers significant potential for learning (Sterck-Degueldre, 2019, p. 107). However, the distinction between inner-Islamic-theological and political-social controversies, which are highly emotionally charged and associated with trigger points, is artificial. The process of attaining a discursive understanding in this context is often impeded by the affective imprinting of discursive content, which is predominantly influenced by prevailing social discourses. The ability to embrace the perspectives of others and to convey one's own ideas of normativity in the sense of uncertainty, described by Mehmet Tuna as a

constructive approach to navigating controversy (Tuna, 2021, p. 55), is remarkably presuppositional in this environment, given the inherent challenge of maintaining a duality of affects and cognition. The results of the study can be used in this sense for self-reflection on one's own trigger points and constructions of difference and taking on the perspective of colleagues and students. The arguments for differentiating this level of reflection formulated in this article can be summarized as follows:

1. The dynamics of controversies in group discussions can be reconstructed using the empirical discourse theory, in which Mau et al.'s (2023) trigger point classification is methodically linked with the documentary method and expanded in terms of affect sociology (for a review of the trigger point classification from an affect-sociological standpoint, see Diefenbach, 2024).
2. The heterogeneous constellation of status groups in the controversy discussions also demonstrate that trigger points in discussions are produced positionally and dynamically and must be decoded accordingly (see section 4.1).
3. The concept of the violation of sacredness as a further trigger point, in addition to the trigger point study according to Mau et al. (2023), enables a step towards better understanding controversies and trigger points in religion-related controversies. The central argument in favor of such an addition is that it is possible to trace the patterns of difference in the relationship between sacredness and normality – which are suppressed in normality violations, for example.

Finally, it should be emphasized that the concept of the violation of sacredness does not claim to develop a normative theory of the sacred. In a democratic and super-diverse migration society, it would also be problematic if a violation of sacredness was to be used as the ultimate justification for normative claims. However, one problem – not only of religious education but also educational theory – is that pedagogical calls for reflection take place in a hegemonic social order, and that Islamic religiosity occurring in Western secular regimes is embedded in a security narrative – in reference to Amir-Moazami (2022) – and is inspected according to its potential danger. Nevertheless, the openness and decentering of one's own worldview-specific assumptions as a reflexive positionality (Ulfat, 2023, p. 140) is a basis for processes of democratic decision-making and for peaceful coexistence. In this context, the concept of the violation of sacredness offers a starting point for exploring communicative encounters and for the differentiation of problematic forms of controversy.

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