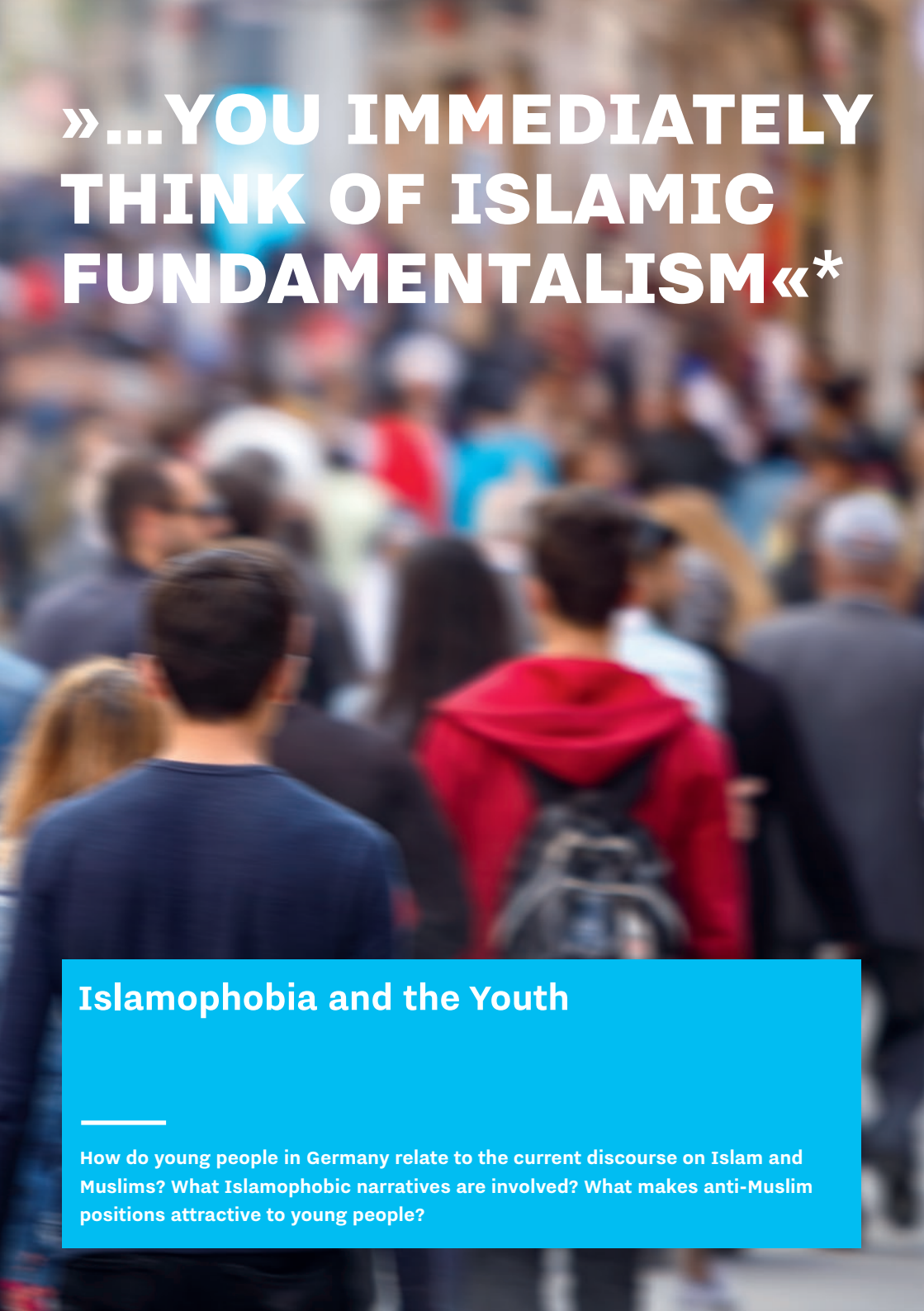
»...YOU IMMEDIATELY THINK OF ISLAMIC FUNDAMENTALISM«*



Islamophobia and the Youth

How do young people in Germany relate to the current discourse on Islam and Muslims? What Islamophobic narratives are involved? What makes anti-Muslim positions attractive to young people?

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*The title of the publication cites a statement by one of the young interviewees. The names and details of all interviewees have been anonymised.

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Islamophobia

What do we mean by Islamophobia?

In this publication we understand *Islamophobia* as prejudice and discrimination against Muslims on the basis of their faith, in association with categorisation of Muslims exclusively on the basis of their religious affiliation. Together with other terms such as anti-Muslim racism and anti-Muslimism, Islamophobia characterises the clear sharpening of negativity towards Islam and Muslims in public debates and political and media discourses in Germany and other European countries (Zick, Küpper and Hövermann 2011).

Islamophobia is prevalent across society and historically anchored in Europe (Attia 2009). The significance of these positions in public debate and the media has grown especially strongly during the past two decades. Defamatory anti-Muslim positions also play a growing role in political discussions about the role of migration in European societies. Increasingly vociferous right-wing populist discourses employ racist stereotypes, direct threats and discriminatory representations to divide society and privilege one section.

Islamophobia instrumentalises undifferentiated and prejudiced criticisms of Islam and Muslims, in order to further (ideological) interests. It may include agitation and violence against people, property and symbols.

(cf. Schneiders 2012, 10)

What do we know about Islamophobia?

As we know from international research on Islamophobia, anti-Muslim positions are found worldwide. Current studies in Europe reveal widespread anti-Muslim positions in all classes and age groups. Clear differences between eastern and western Germany are rooted in differences in political culture, media discourses, and the realities of migration.

Islamophobia or anti-Muslim racism?

The two terms for one and the same phenomenon each emphasise different aspects. As well as an aspect of fear, "Islamophobia" emphasises the significance of discrimination against Muslims as an ideology of inequality and a facet of group-focused enmity. It accentuates intersections with other forms of group-focused enmity such as antisemitism, anti-ziganism, sexism and homophobia (Zick and Klein 2014). The rejection of Islam and Muslims is understood as an aspect of concepts of unequal worth.

The term "anti-Muslim racism", on the other hand, makes it clear that the devaluation of people categorised as Muslims "mingles religious differences, differentiations and positions with social, cultural, societal, political and other aspects" (Attia 2013). The concept of anti-Muslim racism also takes into account the processes of *othering* that identify Muslims as other or foreign. As the underlying basis of inequality and discrimination it also feeds directly into public narratives about Islam and Muslims (Shooman 2014).

Attia, Iman. 2013. Privilegien sichern, nationale Identität revitalisieren. Gesellschafts- und handlungstheoretische Dimensionen der Theorie des antimuslimischen Rassismus im Unterschied zu Modellen von Islamophobie und Islamfeindlichkeit. *Journal fur Psychologie* 21 (1), n.p. (online).
Attia, Iman. 2009. *Die „westliche Kultur" und ihr Anderes*. Bielefeld: transcript.
Schneiders, Thorsten Gerald. 2012. Einleitung. In *Verhärtete Fronten: Der schwere Weg zu einer vernünftigen Islamkritik*, ed. idem, 7–14. Wiesbaden: VS Verlag.
Shooman, Yasemin. 2014. *„… weil ihre Kultur so ist": Narrative des antimuslimischen Rassismus.* Bielefeld: transcript.
Zick, Andreas, Beate Küpper and Andreas Hövermann. 2011. *Die Abwertung der Anderen: Eine europäische Zustandsbeschreibung zu Intoleranz, Vorurteilen und Diskriminierung.* Berlin: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung.
Zick, Andreas, and Anna Klein, eds.2014. *Fragile Mitte – Feindselige Zustände: Rechtsextreme Einstellungen in Deutschland 2014* (ed. for Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung by Franziska Schröter). Bonn: Dietz.

Young People and the Islam Discourse

Young people are more open to diversity

Studies on prejudice and discrimination agree that young people today are more open towards phenomena of cultural and social pluralisation than adults and in particular older people (see Zick and Klein 2014). Young people have often grown up in a society characterised by diversity and migration, which to most of them is the natural state of affairs. In line with this, particular characteristics of group-focused enmity are significantly less prevalent among young people than in older groups.

It follows, then, that young people cannot necessarily be regarded as the central actors of exclusionary and racist discourses (which largely remained the case through the 1990s in connection with right-wing extremism in Germany).

Islamophobia and the youth

That said, it is also the case that Islamophobia currently represents the most prevalent ideology of unequal worth among young people (Zick and Klein 2014, 90ff.). So in a climate of a public debate characterised by Islamophobia, Islam and Muslims also function as a central motif of derogation and exclusion for young people.

Research into Islamophobia among young people can reveal the conditions under which practices of discrimination against Muslims emerge, and also identify strands of reflection and critique. We need to investigate both the effect of different aspects of the negative construction of Muslims as other and the effect of racism towards Muslims. We must seek the significance for young people of everyday experience, contact and debate with Islamophobia in the context of school (for example Karakağoşlu and Wojciechowicz 2017), in the media (Hafez 2010) and in everyday public interactions (Lingen-Ali 2012).

At the same time investigations of Islamophobia among young people can identify conditions conducive to reflection and critique of anti-Muslim stereotypes and strategies of solidarity applicable to those growing up in a society where migration is a fact of life. Ultimately, this can lead us to starting points for political education concepts on the issue of Islamophobia and for the preparation of anti-racist education materials.

Hafez, Kai. 2010. *Radicalism and Political Reform in the Islamic and Western Worlds.* Cambridge University Press.

Karakaşoğlu, Yasemin, and Anna A. Wojciechowicz. 2017. Muslim*innen als Bedrohungsfigur fur die Schule: Die Bedeutung des antimuslimischen Rassismus im pädagogischen Setting der Lehramtsausbildung. In *Rassismuskritik und Widerstandsformen*, ed. Karim Fereidooni and Meral El, 507 – 28. Wiesbaden: VS Verlag.

Lingen-Ali, Ulrike. 2012. ‚Islam' als Zuordnungs- und Differenzkategorie: Antimuslimische Ressentiments im Bereich von Bildung und Sozialer Arbeit. *Sozial Extra 36* (9 – 10): 24 – 27.

Zick, Andreas, and Anna Klein, eds. 2014. *Fragile Mitte – Feindselige Zustände: Rechtsextreme Einstellungen in Deutschland 2014* (ed for Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung by Franziska Schröter). Bonn: Dietz.

On the Study

Research question
How do young people relate to Islam and Muslims? What social and biographical vulnerabilities and protective factors can be identified in relation to anti-Muslim discourses?

Context
Data was gathered in 2017 and 2018 from young people in various general and vocational education contexts in urban and rural regions in the German state of North Rhine-Westphalia. The methods used were biographical interviews and a questionnaire survey.

Our investigation was structured in three phases. In the first phase twenty young people from different regions of the state were interviewed about their biographical narratives, their opinions on religion, migration and society in general, and their views on Islam and Muslims in particular. On the basis of the interviews we investigated three different phenomena concerning Islam: From the young people's statements on Islam and Muslims we extracted general perceptions and ideas (Islam discourse) and identified intersections with existing discourses (narratives of Islamophobia). Our usage of the concepts of topoi (see below) and narratives build on prior research on anti-Muslim racism (esp. Attia 2009; Shooman 2014). At the same time we explored the interviewees' positions towards prejudice and discrimination and whether they expressed solidarity and/or reflected on racism. Finally we asked how anti-Muslim attitudes and assertions are anchored in young people's experiences and lifeworlds and via which social networks and media practices they become biographically relevant (patterns of biographical anchoring).

In the second phase we conducted a questionnaire survey investigating attitudes to Islam and Muslims among approximately five hundred young people at general and vocational schools. The research encompassed the prevalence of anti-Muslim attitudes and their relationship to socio-structural conditions and lifeworld experiences. Here we were also particularly interested in the relationships and interactions between anti-Muslim attitudes and other ideologies of inequality.

The third step then focuses on developing starting points for curricular and extra-curricular education designed to prevent and combat Islamopho-

Attia, Iman. 2009. *Die „westliche Kultur" und ihr Anderes.* Bielefeld: transcript.
Shooman, Yasemin. 2014. *„… weil ihre Kultur so ist": Narrative des antimuslimischen Rassismus*. Bielefeld: transcript.

bia. This involves critically examining the underlying conditions, starting points and trajectories and exploring reflective and critical concepts from the anti-racist counter-discourse that also exists among young people.

We chose specifically to conduct this research in North Rhine-Westphalia[1], where Muslims, their religious practices and their symbols are a normal part of public life for most young people. From many prior investigations it is known that social relations between groups counteract rejection and racist stereotypes. In developing concepts for educational work in schools, we are especially interested in how young people arrive at anti-Muslim positions despite knowing that migration has become a fact of life and having diverse relevant personal experiences.

Year One (May 2017 – April 2018)

What are the contours of Islamophobia among young people?

→ Qualitative study analysing twenty biographical interviews with young people
→ Differentiated description of the Islam discourse and Islamophobia
→ Expert interviews with international researchers on Islamophobia

Findings
- Topoi of the Islam discourse
- Narratives of Islamophobia
- Young people's positions
- Biographical embedding

Year Two (May 2018 – April 2019)

How are Islamophobic attitudes of young people structured and what forms do they take?

→ Standardised questionnaire survey of approximately five hundred young people in secondary schools
→ Description of the structure and social conditions of Islamophobic attitudes
→ Islamophobia in the context of other attitude dimensions

Findings
- Characterisation of Islamophobia
- Identify interaction with other attitudes
- Identify social conditions

Year Three (May 2019 – April 2020)

What can schools do to counteract Islamophobia?

→ What can schools do to counteract Islamophobia?

Findings
Identify suitable approaches for educational work to prevent Islamophobia

[1] **North-Rhine Westphalia** is one of Germany's sixteen federal states. Each federal state is responsible for its own education policies. We assume that the results of our studies do not depend on the federal context, but did not test this.

Topoi of the Islam Discourse

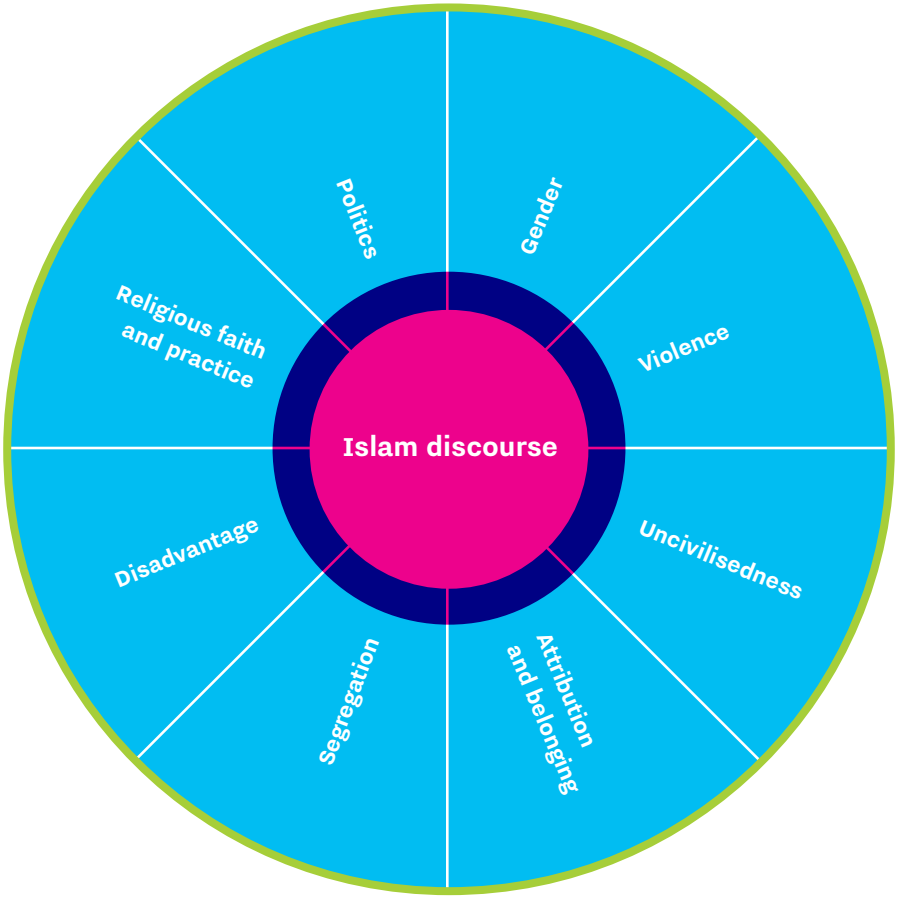
Our analyses of the young people's views on questions of migration and religion in general and Islam and Muslims in particular revolve around the eight topics named in the figure: gender, violence, uncivilisedness etc. We conceptualise these as topoi of the Islam discourse because all the statements on Islam and Muslims in Germany – from negative and openly racist to positive and reflexive – can be subsumed within them.

The young people's statements on Islam and Muslims map the public discourse about Islam. They include prejudiced and homogenising statements that reflect media images and societally transported stereotypes. At the same time the young people's discourse is strongly universalising, in the sense that it employs Muslim religion as an attribution for people constructed as "migration other" or "culturally foreign": differences within the category of Muslims – in lifestyles, religious practices and values – are ignored. Moreover, everyone to whom otherness is attributed tends to be regarded as a "Muslim" (Attia 2014).

The young people's statements also include critical perspectives on media representations and societal discrimination, as well as reflections on racism as a societal structure affecting Muslims. These reflective and critical treatments of phenomena of Islamophobia are also accompanied by solidarity effects: Muslims are part of the interviewees' lifeworlds, as friends, acquaintances and classmates.

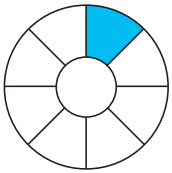
Attia, Iman. 2014. Rassismus (nicht) beim Namen nennen. *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte 64* (13 – 14): 8 – 14.
Mecheril, Paul. 2004. *Einführung in die Migrationspädagogik.* Weinheim and Basel: Beltz.

What do young people connect with Islam?
The eight topoi of the Islam discourse



The concept of the **"migration other"** is an aspect of the social construction of ethnic attributions, where migrants and their non-migrant counterparts exist "not in their own right but exclusively as *relational phenomena*" (Mecheril 2004, 24). In this sense the categorisation of people as "migration others" occurs from a position of privilege and serves to exclude them from society on the basis of attributed ethnic otherness.

Selected topoi of the Islam discourse: Gender



Gender models and assumptions about gender relations are deeply rooted in anti-Muslim racism. The images of the supposedly oppressed Muslim woman and the potentially violent Muslim man dominating her are omnipresent, especially in the media discourse and in debates about current events. They also surface in our interviews with young people.

The interviewees' typifications of traditional gender relations also reveal attributions of backwardness to Islam and Muslims. The dimensions distinguished in the topos of gender (see figure) paint a homogenising picture that places Muslims outside the moral order of society. This is associated with constructions of otherness that are linked to racist discourses. Heteronormativity and gender inequality in the German majority society – which extend into the interviewees' own lifeworlds – are ignored.

In some cases these images of Islam generate feelings of threat among our young interviewees, finding expression in fears of sexual violence and concerns over practices of moralisation and oppression. But the discussions of gender (relations) in Islam also feature occasions for critical reflection of media stereotypes and the homogenisation of Muslims. For example we found approval of values such as sexual modesty and dress codes.

The **topos of gender** comprises the following dimensions: the Muslim woman, the Muslim male, threat perception and gender discrimination. Here only the most frequently named dimensions are described.

The Muslim male
In the interviews the Muslim male is described as untrustworthy, aggressive and deviant.

"You can't discuss with them, all you get is cursing and stuff." (Tatjana)

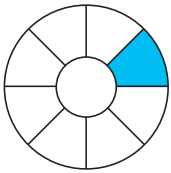
Threat perception
Young people express fear of male refugees, citing media reports, personal warnings and their own threat perceptions.

"Well it's really only men, often young, so there really is fear of being raped or whatever, and somehow I can understand that." (Alex)

Gender discrimination
In a sweeping generalisation, an unequal distribution of rights between men and women is attributed to Islam. Women in Muslim families are perceived as having restricted personal freedom.

"Yeah, that they are oppressed you know, that they have no opinion, that they have to stay home the whole time, yeah, that they become housewives." (Johanna)

Selected topoi of the Islam discourse: Violence



Threat scenarios are central to racist discourses and ideologies of hate[2], and the interviewees' statements draw various associations between Islam and violence. This again also involves gender relations, which are interpreted as violent.

Discussion of acts of violence in connection with Islamist terrorism and the participation of Muslims in armed conflicts such as the Middle East plays a crucial role is here. In both cases we find the same pattern of homogenisation and othering of Muslims (Cheema 2017): the involvement of individual Muslims in violence is treated as an expression of a general willingness to use violence. These images also generate fears among young people, where for example experiences of violence are portrayed in the media or threat scenarios are developed.

The ambivalence of the interviewed young people is expressed in particular in two dimensions, which we designate "legitimate self-defence" and "racism". On the one hand interviewees demand measures to control, punish or prevent violence they fear from Muslims; on the other they criticise the homogenising public and media representations of Muslims in connection with violence and recognise these as racism.

Cheema, Saba-Nur. 2017. Gleichzeitigkeiten: Antimuslimischer Rassismus und islamisierter Antisemitismus – Anforderungen an die Bildungsarbeit. *IDA NRW: Überblick 23* (4): 7–14.

[2] Such ideologies of hate are expressions of group-focused enmity. See Andreas Zick, Beate Küpper and Wilhelm Heitmeyer, "Prejudices and Group-Focused Enmity – A Socio-Functional Perspective", in Handbook of Prejudice, ed. Anton Pelinka, Karin Bischof and Karin Stögner, 273–302 (Amherst, NY: Cambria, 2010).

The **topos of violence** comprises the dimensions: patriarchal violence, terrorism, international conflicts, discussion of experiences of violence, legitimate self-defence and racism. Here only the most frequently named dimensions are described.

Patriarchal violence
This dimension comprises stereotypes about relations between men and women in Muslim communities. Social relations in Islam are perceived as being shaped by male violence and oppression.

"That, um, the Moslem fathers of the Moslem girls, well often they oppress their daughters. Or even here in Germany they try to marry their daughter off with some bloke she doesn't know at all, doesn't love at all." (Finn)

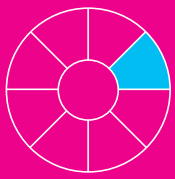
"Well we know don't we that IS is also sending its people along too, so it's at least my opinion that they are also coming in along these refugee routes, not only to Germany, but the rest of Europe too." (Alex)

Racism
The connection between Islam and Islamist terrorism is rejected as an oversimplification, attacks on refugee centres are condemned.

"Some of the people who get attacked are innocent. Even if someone from the refugee hostel has done something or done something wrong, the others didn't do it. So why do you punish them collectively by setting it on fire?" (Valentina)

Terrorism
Islam as a religion is regarded as the context for terrorist attacks, Islam and Islamism are conflated [3].

[3] Sslamism is also referred to as "Islamic fundamentalism" or "political Islam".

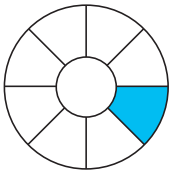


Valentina*

Valentina is twenty years old and lives with her mother in a city in the Ruhr region. She was born in St Petersburg and came to Germany with her parents when she was five. Her father, who had worked as a doctor in Russia, died shortly before she turned ten. She speaks Russian at home and sees herself as a Jew in the Modern Orthodox tradition. The rest of her family observes Jewish traditions but are not themselves religious. Valentina was brought up to be very ambitious and is now studying medicine. She spent eighteen months in Israel on a scholarship to study at a religious school. After university she plans to emigrate to Israel (make *Aliyah*). At university she also has female Muslim friends who wear the headscarf. But she does mention that she cannot speak about Israel with Muslims because she feels she would be pushed into a corner. She also exhibits an ambivalent relationship to Islam in the context of Israel and the Middle East conflict. In this context she conflates Islam with Islamism and uses the term “terrorists” for Muslims.

*Names, places and images have been anonymised.

Selected topoi of the Islam discourse: Uncivilisedness



The topos of uncivilisedness draws on the motif of backwardness, which is familiar from other racist discourses. Muslims and their beliefs and way of life are constructed as unmodern. At the same time it is demanded that they adapt culturally and linguistically and show gratefulness for acceptance and support.

Value distinctions are salient here: modernity and tradition, the West and the rest, first and third world, Occident and Orient. In post-colonial studies these are regarded as the basis for the sense of superiority of those living in the Global North (Said 1978; Hall 1992). The myth of Western modernity thus legitimises global relations of exploitation, and also social inequalities where for example Muslims experience discrimination when looking for work and housing.

Hall, Stuart. 1992. The West and the Rest: Discourse and Power. In *Formations of Modernity,* ed. Stuart Hall and Bram Gieben, 275 – 331. Cambridge, UK: Polity.
Said, Edward W. 1978. *Orientalism.* New York: Pantheon.

The **topos of uncivilisedness** comprises the dimensions: assimilation, deviance, backwardness, modernity and language. Here only the most frequently named dimensions are described.

Assimilation
Muslims, especially young men, are accused of flouting society's moral order and refusing to integrate. They are expected to conform.

"Well we let the refugees come in here and then they can't even behave themselves and then they put on such a show." (Cathy)

Deviance
This dimension attributes deviant behaviours to Muslims. Interviewees often reported these in emotional terms – but had seldom experienced them themselves.

"You already notice that with all the foreigners don't you. Well you mostly hear them talking loudly when they're still ten metres away or so." (Cathy)

Backwardness
Here we find attributions of traditionality and unmodernity. The interviewees' statements comprise vague fears, worries and emotions.

"That's not prejudice or whatever, but they always have you know well no idea. I always have in my mind that foreigners never come alone." (Finn)

Language
Linguistic differences concerning Muslims are mentioned, as well as the broader question of linguistic diversity altogether.

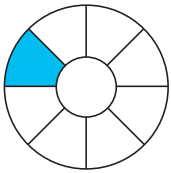
"And some of them, they've been here in Germany for twenty years and still can't speak a single word of German." (Johanna)

Alex*

Alex is eighteen years old and lives near Cologne with his parents, both of whom work. He has an older brother who has already moved out. He got good school-leaving qualifications (Abitur) and is currently training as a bank clerk. His circle of friends is small, which he attributes to the superficiality of friendships. He played football but had to give it up after “bad luck with injuries” and because of his work commitments. Alex has little contact with migrants and doubts that Islam belongs to Germany. He conflates Muslims with refugees and Turks and frequently uses statements from the right-wing populist spectrum. He describes refugees as “blokes who don’t make room, who have no manners and no decency”. Nevertheless Alex also emphasises that he has positive feelings towards minorities too. For example he would have no objection to having a Muslim girlfriend, because “it doesn’t matter where she comes from”.

*Names, places and images have been anonymised.

Selected topoi of the Islam discourse: Religious faith and practice



Perceptions of Muslims as fundamentally pious and religious are deeply rooted in the discourse about Islam and Muslims. This is associated with images of Koran-believing Muslims constantly praying and fasting. For example many interviewees were aware of religious practices, requirements and prohibitions that Muslims have to follow or observe. Despite many of the interviewees tending to be critical of Islam, they frequently used the Arabic terms for Islamic concepts and greetings. Some were also capable of identifying the different currents within Islam. In other words, for most of the interviewed young people it is natural to accept different belief systems and to differentiate between Muslims and Islamists. The topos reflects the ambivalence in the statements of many of the young people, who regard the religion of Islam both positively and negatively.

Kaddor, Lamya. 2015. *Zum Töten bereit.* Munich: Piper.
Rohe, Matthias. 2011. *Das islamische Recht.* Munich: C. H. Beck.

Dimensions

The **topos of religion** comprises the dimensions: fear of "Islamisation", interpretation, understanding of belief, political Islam, and requirements and prohibitions. Here we describe only the most frequently mentioned dimensions.

Fear of "Islamisation"

In this dimension Islam is constructed as a religion that seeks to subjugate German society and makes the interviewee's own lifeworld foreign to them.

"Yeah, then they shouldn't have let any Muslims into the country to start with, because its getting more and more, in our country, because now let's say if a Muslim has kids with another Muslim then they make another Muslim, then there are more and more and then there's no point keeping the others out, even if it gets even more." (Dave)

Interpretation

This dimension concerns different interpretations of religious texts and practices. Differences between Muslims and their religious understandings are also reflected.

"Most of them, for example the more religious Turks, are strong supporters of Erdoğan." (Valentina)

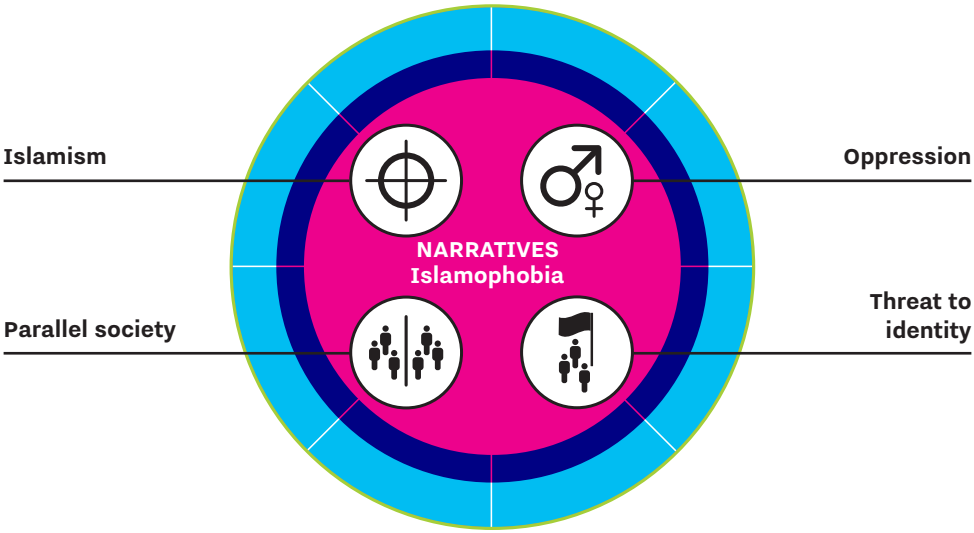
"The thing is for me it's not these Moslems, for me it's the Moslems who fuck up, they aren't Moslems to me. Moslems are the ones who believe in the Koran and live according to their religion." (Finn)

Political Islam

This dimension comprises statements asserting that political Islam condones violence and practices terrorism. The imputation that Islam and Islamism are the same thing is typical for this dimension.

Narratives of Islamophobia and Their Lifeworld Anchoring

The negative views on Islam and Muslims mentioned by the young interviewees can be categorised into four narratives. Here, we understand narratives as modes of ordering knowledge that combine widespread stereotypes, patterns of argument and figures of thought, as well as concepts and symbols, into a relatable story (Keller 2011). The narratives of Islamophobia (see also Shooman 2014) described in the following aggregate public assumptions that homogenise Islam and Muslims and their institutions, and present them as a danger to society.



The narrative of oppression is closely related to the topoi of gender and violence. It describes the stereotype that Muslim men oppress women and deny them their rights. The narrative of oppression is also associated with patriarchal models of masculinity, dominance and willingness to use violence.

The narrative of threat to identity relates above all to the topoi of uncivilisedness and politics. Generalising prejudices about the behaviour and appearance of Muslims play a central role. The narrative also encompasses the motif of mass immigration of refugees and the belief that the German authorities have supposedly capitulated to migration movements.

The narrative of Islamism relates in the first place to the topoi of violence and of religious faith and practice. It centres on generalising prejudices about Muslims' willingness to use violence and the legitimisation of violence by religious sources. Fear of a posited Islamisation of the non-Muslim majority society also plays a role here.

The narrative of a parallel society refers in particular to the topoi of segregation and of attribution and belonging. The discussion of segregation concentrates on demands for integration, which is understood as the sole responsibility of immigrants (and subsequent generations). In terms of attributions, Muslims are presented as immutably different in terms of belonging and nationality. The attributed characteristics are foregrounded and their bearers reduced to them.

Keller, Reiner. 2011. *Wissenssoziologische Diskursanalyse: Grundlegung eines Forschungsprogramms.* Wiesbaden: VS Verlag.

Shooman, Yasemin. 2014. *„… weil ihre Kultur so ist": Narrative des antimuslimischen Rassismus.* Bielefeld: transcript.

So how do anti-Muslim narratives and arguments gain traction among young people? We found two dominant patterns in our analyses of the interview data:

a) Proxies
In some of the biographies personal contacts (significant others) exert major influence on attitudes to Islam and Muslims. Here interviewees' anti-Muslim attitudes rest on people close to them who have negative positions on Islam and vouch for these on the basis of personal experience. Alternatively, personal contact to individual Muslims may substitute for Islam. In the latter case, by distancing themselves from Islam young people indirectly also distance themselves from these people and their views.

b) Collective history
In other biographies belonging to a social group – such as a religion or ethnicity – plays an important role in identity formation. The historical relations to Islam that are communicated together with the particular form of belonging are clearly differentiating and associated with threat perceptions. Belonging to the collective is associated with broader conflicts with Muslims.


Biographical anchoring
Representation of Islamophobia
Proxies
Significant others refer to Islam
Collective history
Belonging to a social group

Tatjana's moral superiority

"Sorry, I'd rather die than convert to Islam."

Tatjana* is twenty years old and lives with her parents in a small town near Bielefeld. Her sister is one year older and has already moved out. Tatjana lived for a year in Latin America, where her mother grew up. She was brought up to be ambitious and is now working to complete her school-leaving qualifications at a vocational college. Her mother belongs to a small Protestant denomination and raised Tatjana according to strict religious rules. The values her mother impresses on her include a rigid sexual morality, a prohibition on alcohol and a particular gender role. Outside of school Tatjana has no contact with Muslims. She expresses very critical opinions about them, believes that women who wear the headscarf are oppressed, and complains about the uncivilised behaviour of Muslim men.

The function of proxies: Tatjana's mother as moral instance and behavioural restriction

In Tatjana's biography her mother stands for a traditional gender role and clear moral values. Tatjana resists her mother's restrictions and finds ways to subvert rules and prohibitions, yet accepts the fundamental religious rules and their moral precepts. The idea that gender roles are even more restrictive in Islam allows Tatjana to regard her mother's religion as modern and progressive and at the same time – via the homogenising image of violent and uncivilised Muslim males – find an aspect of protectiveness in the moral values and behavioural rules.

*Names, places and images have been anonymised.

“I’m a class rep and if something needs sorting, I’m liable to speak out. And then they sometimes say whoa Tatjana, just shut your gob, nobody’s interested in that. And I think to myself aren’t I allowed to say anything as a woman? What’s your problem?”

“As long as they don’t, well, you can’t do this and you can’t do that and no I’m not coming to your house if you have pork in the fridge. I think then that would really bug me and at some point I would just let the contact drop.”

“I simply don’t understand why people want to convince everyone in the world that there is only one true religion and that – just because it’s about another religion – that one has to hurt people, that even, it’s more or less murder.”

“And they were all really shouting. And at some point there are always well the Moslems and the others. And then they are, with them, you always have to do it their way and anything else is wrong. They are always saying, alcohol is har-am and this is haram and that is haram.”

Cathy and “Germanness”

“... and Germany isn’t the country it used to be any more”

Cathy* is twenty years old and lives with her parents, her younger sister, her older sister with her own small family, and her grandmother in a small town near Bielefeld. She has lower secondary school qualification, has completed training as a care assistant and is now doing further school qualifications. She says she has only one best friend, as well as one other female friend she sees occasionally. She has a boyfriend who has been unemployed for years. Except at school, Cathy has no contact with migrants. She has a problematic understanding of immigration, Islam and refugees. She justifies violence against refugees, speaks negatively about Islam and feels that her identity is increasingly threatened by immigration.

Collective history: “Germanness” as identity marker

Cathy’s lifeworld is closely tied to Germany: The family never takes foreign holidays, prefers to buy local (German) products and rejects pluralisation and migration. Cathy’s friends are all people she regards as “German” and she avoids social contact with those in her class who she sees as migrants. Cathy’s historical knowledge is limited; German history and the Holocaust are a taboo. When she makes statements critical of migration, she cites her parents and media reports. Change through pluralisation threatens her ideas about Germany and “Germanness”.

*Names, places and images have been anonymised.

“That the woman probably shouldn’t go to work and then only the man earns the money and the woman should stay at home then shouldn’t she and take care of the housework.”

“You already notice that with all the foreigners don’t you. Well you mostly hear them talking loudly when they’re still ten metres away or so.”

“Because of that yeah the refugees also bring lots of terrorists here with them and then IS can like also spread itself around better and that’s why more attacks happen then.”

“You also want Germany to remain Germany, but somehow it’s not really properly Germany any more, because of all the foreigners, all the refugees that come here like.”

Forms of Positioning: Othering, Reflection, Solidarity

Young people adopt discursive positions on Islam in connection with their own experiences. For all the young people we interviewed this involves some form of differentiation, where Muslims are constructed as social "others" to whom they attribute particular types of behaviour, lifestyles and values that they understand as different to their own practices. They other Islam and Muslims by attributing attributes that enable a (negative) distinction and a classification as "other". And by creating the "other", they themselves automatically become part of an equally fictitious in-group. The distinction between a communitising "us" and an excluded "them" (in this case Muslims) is described as "othering" in racism-critical research.

In terms of social power relations, those who do the othering are the powerful. Their social position remains unaffected, while those who are othered are denied membership of the in-group. These social distinctions have social consequences, where people's identities are questioned, their way of life denigrated or their rights curtailed. Here the young interviewees are reproducing established social orders: "The historical analysis of Orientalism as an othering process reveals that 'Islam' and 'the West' emerged as essentially dichotomous cultures, supplying a specific knowledge to which subjects relate, with which they (have to) grapple, and which has been institutionalised and materialised over the course of centuries" (translated from Attia 2013, 24).

The young people we interviewed use us/them distinctions in relation to very different topics (see Topoi) and frames of understanding (see Narratives). These distinctions form the basis for all other negative references to Islam, as the following examples illustrate:

- On the basis of his parents' experiences and interpretations, Alex sees all refugees as uncivilised, ungrateful Muslims. ("I gathered a lot about this from my parents' work. They had the whole corridor full of refugees who wanted money and were rude and cursing. How disrespectful they are, and the threats my parents received too. From people who had lost everything they had and should really be glad to be getting anything at all.")
- On the basis of the restrictions and moral code she is expected to obey herself, Tatjana makes sweeping judgements about patriarchal gender relations among Muslims. ("It seems to me that the women really do have to stay at home. And they only move out when they marry. And then the father makes the decisions and otherwise the husband. And they aren't allowed to make their own decisions.")
- In her limited regional lifeworld Melanie treats citizenship as the central criterion for belonging and social relations. ("Well being German and a German passport and you speak German; you speak only German and, like, what you learn at school. Your mother tongue is German, your family comes from Germany, you live here, you go to school here, you feel German.").

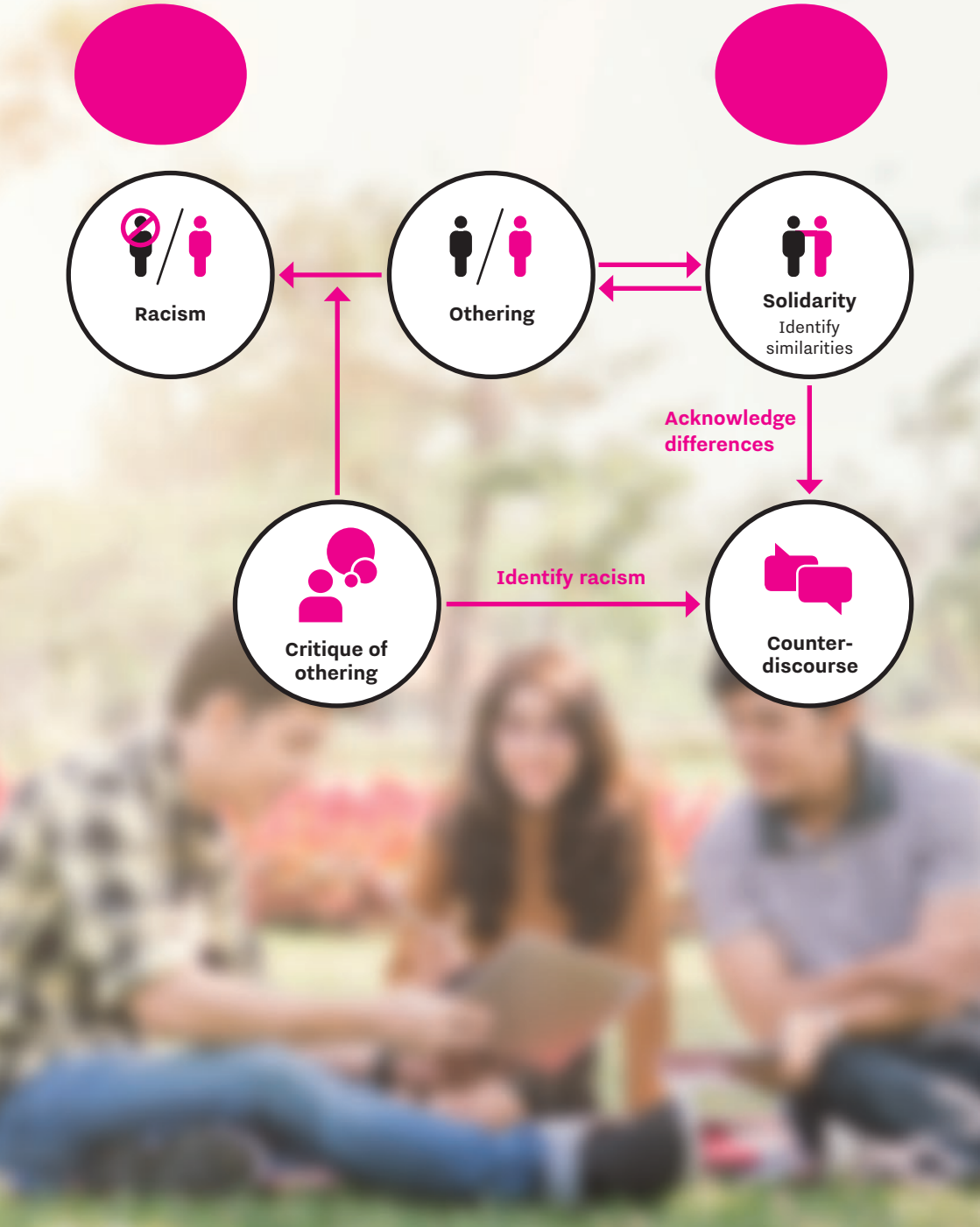
At the same time, our interview data shows that young people do also reflect on and reject racist distinctions. We describe these two forms of critical positioning towards the ruling discourse on Islam and Muslims as the "practice of solidarity" and the "practice of reflection".

Solidarity is based on acknowledgement of similarities in aspects such as living conditions, social position, values and way of life. The basis for this is often the interviewee's own religious experience or personal relationships with Muslims, as the following examples illustrate:

- → Valentina sees parallels to the rites of Islam in her own Jewish religious practice. ("Now and then I ask myself: 'How is that with you then? Do you have this or that' So yes, we do talk to each other. I found it interesting, especially like 'oh, you have sadaqah [voluntary charity]? That's what we call it too!' I certainly found that amusing.")
- → Johanna believes that the decisions of her female Muslim friend at university are free and independent (for example to wear the headscarf or express opinions). ("Well my friend wears a headscarf too and yeah she has her own opinions.")

Practices of **reflection** expose anti-Muslim stereotypes and racist distinctions and homogenisations. This may occurs through critical processing of media reporting about Muslims, political and ethical rejection of prejudice, discrimination, and racist violence, or also in light of interviewees' own experiences of racism:

- → Valentina has herself experienced anti-Jewish racism and is highly sensitive to pejorative and homogenising perspectives on religious practices. ("Many people don't seem to want to believe it, but I believe that most of them here wear the headscarf by choice.")
- → Finn's background of supporting human rights and humanist values leads him to a critical stance towards media reporting that treats Islamist violence as an expression of Islam or encourages sensationalism about refugees. ("I can't understand people who are against foreigners. It doesn't matter what country I come from. It doesn't matter what religion I believe in. It doesn't matter what I look like. In the end I'm just human too and every human is equal.").


Racism
Othering
Solidarity
Identify similarities
Acknowledge differences
Critique of othering
Identify racism
Counter-discourse

The Next Steps

How widespread are different attitudes towards Islam among young people? For which groups are anti-Muslim positions especially accessible? How are anti-Muslim ideologies related to other ideologies of degradation? In which groups is there sensitivity concerning racism and discrimination?

We investigated these questions in the second phase of our project, for which we conducted a questionnaire survey with a sample of five hundred secondary school students. The questionnaire used existing instruments for measuring Islamophobia as well as items developed from the statements gathered in the interviews. We took the narratives described in this publication as the starting point for investigating the dissemination of anti-Muslim attitudes.

At the same time, with an eye to the third phase of the project (work on educational concepts) we wanted to know which social conditions promote processes of recognition, criticism of racism, and solidarity with Muslims. To that end we investigated not only Islamophobia but also openness towards Islam and Muslims and the capacity to criticise racism. We also included socio-demographic indicators such as age and gender as well as everyday factors such as contact with Muslims

The survey generated knowledge about the prevalence of Islamophobia and other ideologies of inequality among young people, about relevant social factors, and also about critical positioning towards Islamophobia. This created the basis for preparing pedagogical concepts for preventing and reducing Islamophobia. The survey and its results are described in a separate publication: “Yes to Muslims, No to Islam?”.

Questionnaire survey

→ Approx. 500 young people
→ Secondary schools
→ Urban and rural regions in the German state of North Rhine-Westphalia

Islamophobia

→ Narratives of Islamophobia
→ Other ideologies of inequality
→ Criticism of racism

Social factors

→ Socio-demographic factors
(including gender, age, education)
→ Lifeworld factors
(including social networks, experience with Muslims, own religious practice)

The questionnaire survey was conducted in collaboration with the Institute for Interdisciplinary Research on Conflict and Violence (IKG) at Bielefeld University, which has a long record of research on the phenomena of group-focused enmity. Andreas Zick supervised and Olga Janzen worked on the project.

Universität Bielefeld

IKG Institut für interdisziplinäre Konflikt- und Gewaltforschung

Starting Points for Educational Interventions

Islamophobia as an ideology of inequality endangers social cohesion and presents a challenge to society as a whole. Political education offers one possible route for combating the acceptance of anti-Muslim positions among young people. The findings described in this publication supply relevant starting points:

The central themes, concepts and interpretations of the narratives of Islamophobia found among young people draw principally on the broader public discourse on Islam and Muslims. Reflection on media-communicated stereotypes is therefore a good place to start. A critical pedagogical treatment of the media representations of Islam and Muslims creates a suitable opening for racism-critical education work.

Our interviews also show that young people in societies where migration is a fact of life know Islam and Muslims from their lifeworld. They belong to their social networks. This familiarity permits young people to recognise homogenising and stereotyped representations. In light of their experiences, they reject this practice and are able to identify it as prejudice and discrimination. Thus objective and differentiated discussion about Islam and Muslims in school – for example in the form of spaces of encounter with Muslims and their practices – can offer another opening for pedagogical targeting and prevention of anti-Muslim tendencies.

Personal relationships represent an opening for **solidarity with Muslims,** with the heterogeneous groups of young people found in schools and youth work creating opportunities. It should be noted, however, that segregation of lifeworlds and schools (even in urban centres characterised by migration) may prevent that kind of everyday contact. Another basis for solidarity consists in the recognition of commonalities: in religious practice, in life situations, and in age-typical problems and challenges.

According to our initial findings, **critical reflection on types of racism** also benefits from objective knowledge and values. Schools can contribute by communicating the values of universal human rights and empathy with Muslims, responses to ideologies of hate and group-focused-enmity must also be learned. Young people need to be able to handle questions of diversity in a secular democratic state; schools and youth work should create the spaces they need.

This type of education demands qualified teaching staff and youth workers and suitable conditions. Criticism of racism and human rights education are therefore important components of teacher training. At the same time institutions themselves must open up and recognise Muslim faith practices as social normality.

Further information (in German):

www.islam-feindlichkeit.de

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