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ABSTRACT

This article compares discourses on religion and religious commitment of Muslim and Protestant background young people in the Finnish capital region. It is based on 12 interviews of 19 teenagers, which are analyzed following Fairclough's stages of discourse analysis. The analysis shows that the Muslim background youth position themselves as insiders, whereas most of the Protestant background youth distance themselves from religion, although not totally. The Protestant background youth position themselves as autonomous individuals somewhat consistently, whereas the Muslim background youth emphasize their autonomy only when talking about instructions given by the school. These differences are bound to affect classroom interaction.

KEYWORDS

Concept of religion;
religious commitment;
discursive studies;
adolescents

A DISCOURSE ANALYTIC APPROACH TO YOUNG PEOPLE'S CONCEPTIONS OF RELIGION

This article examines how Finnish teenagers talk about religion, religious commitment, and its formation. In this process, concepts like autonomy and authority are defined and contested. This article is based on the discourse analytic assumption that all conceptions are linguistic and socially constructed.¹ Thus, all we can know about young people's views is how they talk about them, that is, what discursive practices they adopt and how they use them. The study was conducted as part of a project aiming at a deeper understanding of how pupils of Lutheran and Islamic religious education (hence RE) view the subject and interpret the substance of the classes.

Different understandings of the concept of religion have been an object of interest in the last few decades. One reason for this is the growing awareness that religion does not mean the same in every context.² This is also a topic that should be taken into account in debates on different models of RE and the relevance of RE as a subject.

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This article also provides a cross-cultural perspective on the discourses of teenagers. If only Muslim or only Lutheran pupils' discourses were presented, one would easily be led to interpret the specific features as cultural, depending on Islamic or Protestant conceptions or home cultures. Given the comparative approach, an opportunity is provided to reflect on the influence of the age level of the pupils. How they use the discursive practices from their sociocultural environments reflects their capacities, which develop with age. It should be stressed that no monolithic Islamic culture is assumed to exist in the background of the Muslim pupils. However, their discourses may reflect their situation as a religious minority both in Finland and in the school, showing that they use or relate to dominant discourses both in their homes and in the wider community. In Finland, the majority of the population (72.9%) belongs to the Lutheran church.³ The proportion of Muslims is estimated as 1.3%.⁴

Apart from religion as such, this article also pays attention to the ways in which religious commitment is talked about. *Commitment* is a term that covers topics like religiousness and religious development when regarded as positioning in relationship to religion. At the same time, talking about these topics often includes positioning in relationship to religious authorities, family, and peers. These issues have been widely researched, and this article contributes to that research as well.

PREVIOUS RESEARCH

There is some Scandinavian research on young people's discourses on religion that can be compared to the Finnish case. Kerstin von Brömssen has compared the ways Swedish teenagers from different religious and nonreligious backgrounds talk about religion. She found that Muslim pupils talked about religion as something one was born into, which led them to assume that their ethnic Swedish peers were Christian. The Swedish interviewees, by contrast, saw religion as something that restricted their immigrant friends' lives and that they were not particularly interested in.⁵ In Anders Sjöborg's study, young people talking about religion constructed it as something connected with the Other, like people of the past or distant cultures. They also expressed the "need to relate to the cultural norm of individual integrity and autonomy". For religious young people, religion stood for an alternative to dominating ways of life in society.⁶

Karin Kittelman-Flensner (2015) has studied the ways religion is talked about within RE classes in Sweden. She found that the most prominent discourse was a secularist one that included different themes, such as an emphasis on science and individualism. Pupils very rarely positioned themselves as Christians in class, although they sometimes did so in private

conversations. Muslims, on the other hand, expressed their Muslim identity publicly on a number of occasions. Both Sjöborg⁷ and Kittelman-Flensner identified a discursive practice where Lutheran Christianity was connected to national culture unlike any other religion.⁸

Marie von der Lippe has interviewed Muslim, Christian, and nonreligious teenagers in Norway. Following Gerd Baumann, she distinguished between dominant and demotic discourses in the interviewees' speech. She shows how dominant discourses in the culture can be so powerful that although the interviewees try to use counter-discourses that are called demotic ("of the people") by von der Lippe, they end up using and reproducing dominant discourses, like talking about Muslims as terrorists or immigrants as a threat.⁹

The question concerning young immigrant background Muslims' religiosity is often to what extent they are allowed to choose their way of life. Jacobsen has objected to the dichotomization of individual choice and unreflective or forced conformity when talking about young Muslims in Europe. Instead, she has examined how young Norwegian Muslims talk about autonomy, intention, agency, and oppression.¹⁰

METHOD

This article follows Frans Wijzen in applying Fairclough's stages of analysis in interview data on religion-related issues.¹¹ These stages include linguistic practice (description), discursive practice (interpretation) and social practice (explanation). Description focuses on linguistic features like wordings and grammar, and interpretation tries to grasp what kind of sociocultural resources, like schemata and scripts, conceptions of persons, situations and things, are used. Explanation tries to establish the societal, institutional, and situational determinants that affect the resources or are reproduced through the discourse. This may include, for instance, constructing social identities or subject positions that define the frames within which people are able to act.¹²

Wijzen conducts each of these stages separately, but in my analysis the stages are intertwined. Sometimes analysis of linguistic practice precedes wider analysis of discursive practice (i.e., analysis of vocabulary paves the way for the interpretation of meanings). On the other hand, sometimes vocabulary provides keys for detecting the positions the speaker is constructing (i.e., social practice). Fairclough emphasizes the societal and institutional determinants, and his examples are mostly from mass media and other public or official language use.¹³ Like in Wijzen's study mostly, my data is from private and confidential interviews. In them, societal power is

present primarily in the form of dominant discourses and negotiations of social identities and with authorities.

DATA

This article is based on 12 interviews with 19 interviewees, who participated in a research project with a focus on pupil perspective on RE at school. The study took place in a lower secondary school where approximately one third of the pupils had another mother tongue than Finnish. The interviews were conducted mostly as pair interviews in order to make the situation more relaxed for the pupils. Twelve interviewees attended Islamic RE, but in the Lutheran RE class only five were willing to be interviewed. Thus a pilot interview with two Lutheran pupils from another school was included in the data.

All of the Muslim interviewees had at least one parent who was born abroad, mostly in Somalia, but some had roots in Bangladesh, Morocco, and Iraq. Among the Lutheran RE pupils there was one pupil whose parents were born abroad and who belonged to an international charismatic Christian community instead of Lutheran church.

RESULTS

Religion

Defining *religion* as primarily beliefs or rituals is a notion that is characteristic of modern Christianity but does not do justice to many other experiences of religion in the world.¹⁴ Instead, in Islam the word that is usually translated “religion” is *din*, referring to a complete way of life and obedience to it.¹⁵ This was reflected in the young people’s interviews.

In all the interviews with the Muslim background pupils, religion was talked about as rules or restrictions at least on some occasions. In the following, Khalima A. and Naado respond to my question what does religion mean to them:

Khalima A.: (quietly) “Almost everything.”

Naado: (quietly) “Quite a lot.”

Khalima A.: (a bit louder) “Like our occupation, they have to be like approved by religion...”

[...]

Naado: “All your life has to be approved...”

K: “You have to dress according to religion, you have to behave according to your religion, everything, all our life is about religion.” (M1¹⁶.)

In the first excerpt there are actually two discursive practices. Khalima A.’s and Naado’s first reaction to my question about religion’s significance is “everything”. Then they start to list restrictions that religion imposes on them. One linguistic feature is worth noticing: Khalima A. uses quite formal vocabulary and structures (“approved by”, “according to”). She pronounces especially “according to” very carefully.¹⁷ Another nonverbal feature in their talk is the sudden lowering of their voices when they begin answering my question. The girls seem to resort to the most important discursive resources where religion is concerned: they express its all-encompassing nature and the various rules that affect their decisions. They also associate it with their lives, thus presenting themselves as committed Muslims, which can be regarded as a social practice. This is strengthened by the non-verbal features and more formal language used: it also gives the signal that religion is something special and venerable.

Religion was also talked about as a personal faith:

Zahra: “Because I believe in God and I have believed since I can remember [...] my Finnish friends [...] often say, like, hey, nothing proves that God exists so why do you [plural form, Muslims?] believe in it and so, so I am often like [...] for instance if I am one day without praying or doing anything, worshipping God, I start to feel weird, [...] so I have to remember God at least during the day.” (M3)

Zahra here talks about religion using personal, emotional vocabulary, but also formal language like “worship” occurs. She uses the discursive practice of tying religion to her life history and emotions. She starts to describe an encounter, a situation where her “Finnish” friends challenge her and other Muslims’ faith with rationalist speech. After this description, Zahra returns to using emotional discourse. Later in the interview, Zahra again addresses the debate about the existence of God and uses more rationalistic discursive practices. Here, however, she describes herself as a person who because of her life history cannot help believing in God, in other words she keeps to an emotional discourse. In the social level she defines herself as an outsider of the group of “the Finnish”, and in this extract the difference between the Finns and her own reference group is in believing in God and practicing faith.

Whereas Zahra talked about her personal beliefs in an emotional way, the only occasions where other Muslim participants talked about religion as beliefs was linked with religion as restrictions (M1, M2, M4). This discursive practice, namely, touched upon the Last Judgement:

Yusuf: “So it’s that kind of thing that it’s almost always in my mind. (vividly) I know what is after death. First comes the end of the world. Then we go before God. Then God asks what bad and what good we have done.”

[...]

Mehdi: (loudly) “I am scared that I don’t get to Paradise! Because we have done such bad things, for instance I’ve got an earring, he’s got an earring.” (laughs)

[...]

Yusuf: “Well, it is not about an earring but bigger things that one has done.” (M2)

These boys, especially Yusuf, did not present themselves as particularly committed Muslims in the interview. On the contrary, Yusuf was often critical about religious restrictions. But when I asked about images of religion they had, Yusuf started to talk about the Last Judgement and Mehdi followed him. Mehdi’s loud voice and his small laugh at the end indicate that he is not totally serious. This kind of mixing seriousness and fun was a very frequent discursive practice in their interview. The boys are familiar with the discursive practices on the Last Judgement and use them from an insider’s position. Yusuf seems to adopt a position of a person who is able to explain the Islamic faith to an outsider. He does not let Mehdi distract him totally but makes sure at the end of the excerpt that Islam is not depicted as a religion where men go to Hell because they wear earrings.

Eschatological preoccupation was also identified as a main theme in Iprgrave’s study on Muslim children.¹⁸ The discursive practice of connecting the restrictions and the Last Judgement in deed seems to have power over Mehdi and Yusuf and restrict their willingness to break the rules. Still, the rules are negotiable, at least for Yusuf, who defines earrings as insignificant in the face of the Last Judgement.

The Protestant background pupils talked about religion as restrictions only when talking about other people. A similar discourse in every interview, however, was religion as rituals. In the following Heikki answers my question on discussing religion at home.

Heikki: “That has not been discussed so much, in fact. That I have not been told to go to church on Sundays or anything. [...] But we do celebrate. Easter and Christmas and other things. I guess it has not been a subject of discussion more than that.” (P3)

Talking about religion, for Heikki, would mean requirements, for instance, going to church. This, in fact, could be regarded as a rule or restriction, and for Heikki this was a discursive practice he knew, but that was not part of his family life. However, he does not position himself and his family totally outside of the religions like the ethnic Swedish interviewees of the same age of von Brömssen.¹⁹ He recognized, however, that talking about Christian festivals could be understood as discussing religion.

Religion as faith was a discursive practice used by two Lutheran interviewees (P1, P4), but Kaisla and Anna challenged it with a discourse of religion as belonging when asked if they would call themselves Christians:

Kaisla: “Yes, I am, I still belong to church.”

Anna: “Well, in principle yes I am Christian. (pause) In principle. But ’cause I don’t believe in God I don’t know then, how it like [...] describes me correctly, the word Christian. Although I was baptized and I belong to church.”

Kaisla: “If I was asked, then I would say so.”

[...]

R: “But this contradiction doesn’t mean that you wouldn’t like to say so if you were asked.”

Anna: “No.”

Kaisla: “I do belong to church, don’t I?” (P5)

Anna balances between discourses of religion as faith and religion as belonging, and the latter seems to win in the end. Kaisla, however, is consistent in talking about religion as belonging. Thus they participate in the social practice of drawing the boundaries of Christianity by belonging and being baptized. The frequency of this practice in Finland has not been investigated as such, but ecclesiastical surveys show that it is over two times more common to consider oneself as Lutheran than believe in God as taught by Christianity.²⁰ It is worth noticing that the girls avoid the using terms like “proper Christian”. Instead, defining Christianity by belonging provides room for many types of membership. What it means to the girls personally or what agencies it creates, remains obscure.

Olli and Heikki talked about religion as nonharmful on more than one occasions. Here are two examples:

Olli: “My parents are a bit like me like that it [religion] is not anything so important but there is no harm either in going there [to church] and so on.” (P1)

Heikki: “It [religion] hasn’t caused very many quarrels as far as I can see, [for example] what religion you adhere to and such like. So I guess it doesn’t do much harm.” (P3)

Both boys position themselves as tolerant towards religion, but Olli positions himself more like an insider than Heikki. “There is no harm” is here a discursive practice with which they argue for their position without associating specific positive features to religion, which in turn would make their position more committed to religion.

The discourses on religion differ between the two groups. The biggest similarity between them are the most frequent discourses in each group: religion as restrictions for the Muslims and religion as rituals for the Lutherans. This probably reflects the more general notion of religion in those two groups: Islam is often seen as a way of life, as noted in the beginning of this section, and in secular Lutheran Finland the role of religion is most vital in calendar and liminal rites, although also in private prayer.²¹ The two groups differ the most in positioning themselves in relation to religion. The Muslims mostly talk from an insider's perspective whereas the Lutheran pupils have different strategies to distance themselves from religion without cutting the relationship altogether, as expressions like "no harm" or "belonging instead of believing" suggest. These positions will be elaborated in the following sections.

The Formation of Religious Commitment

It has been noted that within the study of religions, religious identities have been seen as achieved, which reflects a Protestant notion according to which adolescence is an important stage when an individual decides whether he/she accepts the religion in which he/she has been raised. This notion, however, ignores much that is embodied in childhood. Conversely, in other religions identities are more seen as ascribed and stable.²²

According to Islam, every child is born Muslim and without sin. However, an individual needs both innate comprehension and knowledge of God's will in order to remain on the right path. From adolescence on, a Muslim is responsible for following the Islamic way of life as a token of obedience to God.²³ In the Finnish Lutheran Church, the practice of arranging confirmation schools for 15-year-olds underlines the need for a shift from childhood's faith to a more mature one. Up to 84.2% of young people aged 15 attend the confirmation schools of Lutheran parishes and organizations.²⁴ At the time of this research, the Protestant background interviewees belonging to the Lutheran church had at least started their confirmation schools, which gave a special opportunity to reflect on their relationship to the Lutheran church.

The Muslim interviewees talked about becoming a Muslim in terms of being born and early socialization:

Khalima A.: "We were born to Muslims. If my Mom weren't a Muslim, we weren't Muslims either." (M1)

Musa: "I remember always, when I was just little, my father always took me with him to the mosque." (M4)

Zahra: “I’ve got to have a scarf always, so that’s probably because I was brought up since I was small to have a scarf all the time, so I think it’s just better than that I was suddenly at fifteen told that you’ve got to wear a scarf every day from now on.” (M3)

The Islamic notion that every child is born Muslim was brought up in two interviews (M4, M5), though Khalima A. states that if her mother were not a Muslim she and her siblings would not be Muslims. Zahra talks about wearing a scarf as something embodied, and Musa connects the mosque to his early religious socialization. Some (M1, M4) talked about Quranic school when asked about religious upbringing at home.

Some of the Protestant background pupils talked in a similar manner:

Olli: “[I’ve become a Christian] through parents, since they’ve been baptized, too, and so that [...] mostly that. [...] Since I couldn’t before that, ’cause when I was baptized, I don’t remember anything about it and I couldn’t say anything since I couldn’t talk properly. [...] But I guess I wouldn’t have objected to it then, now that I think about it.” (P1)

Laura: “It may be because when you live with Mom, like she is really excited to celebrate Christmas and she waits for it so you always get the kind of good feeling there, you get into it.” (P2)

For the Protestant background youth, the religious community only played a role in Niilo’s and Susanna’s case. Niilo had earlier attended the Lutheran parish children’s choir and mentioned this as part of his religious upbringing (P1). When I asked Susanna, whose family belonged to a charismatic congregation, how she had become a Christian, she replied,

Susanna: “In our congregation there are these, children’s, small groups. They’re like, we have been taught about God. And I mean I was not the only one there, also my pals, so that... we all believed together.” (P4)

Susanna was preparing for her baptism at the time of the interview, but here she associates her becoming a Christian with her childhood and the congregation. There she had received instruction on religion but also had peers with the same experience. It is, however, worth noting that Susanna uses the past tense, “we all believed together”. A little later she says: “but I guess I began to believe for real somewhere round 12 years” (P4). Belief created by peers and simple instruction was something that belonged to the past and was replaced by personal faith, a more “real” faith. This probably reflects the discursive practices of a charismatic congregation. Besides this, Susanna often reflected that she was not “yet” able to believe in everything that was “in the Bible.” Thus she communicated her problems with her faith but the word *yet* kept her committed to the faith, hopeful that

someday she would be able to believe fully. The idea that childhood was religiously different was also repeated by some other interviewees.

The Muslim background pupils did not make a difference between their faith as children or now, as young people. Naado was the only interviewee who spontaneously referred to the Islamic idea that adolescents should start to live according to Islam:

Naado: “That’s why, do you know, when I’ll be 15, I will, I have now started to pray ‘cause, usually I pray only three or four times a day, now I pray usually five times a day, ‘cause, do you know, I want to be a good Muslim and I want God to be proud of me when I die, you know.” (M1)

That Naado talks about change in practice, not in faith, corresponds to the Islamic, not Christian, discursive practices. It is, however, interesting that the other Muslims did not talk about this. There seems to be a perspective that the most urgent need to observe Islamic way of life is for adults with their family.²⁵ Mehdi refers to it in this research (M2). A discourse that postpones the beginning of full observance to the future enables young people to position themselves as Muslims and yet have a relaxed relationship towards Islamic rules.

Naado also accounted for some changes in other people’s religiosity during the shift from childhood to adulthood:

Naado: “If your Mom and Dad [are] Jews and Mom and Dad are Christian or atheists, or Buddhists, you normally take the religion what they are, you know, ‘cause they teach you, ‘yeah this is right’, but when you are adult, people normally change religion, for instance many Christians become atheists, many Muslims become atheists, or not so many, d’oh,²⁶ but like many Christians become Muslims, [...] they change religion. When they are adults.” (M1)

Naado, whose mother had converted to Islam, draws here a picture where people believe in what they are taught to believe in their childhood but may change or abandon their religion when they are adults. This discursive practice helps to make sense of her mother’s and possibly other people’s decisions. However, Naado takes care to describe Islam as a faith where this does not take place as often as in other faiths, and changing her religion was not an option for Naado.

When we discussed a suitable age for deciding about one’s religion, many IRE pupils suggested 12, 15 or 18, ages that appear in the Finnish Act of Religious Freedom.²⁷ Mohamed referred to the age of 15 as marking adulthood according to Islam (M7). However, these ages did not have much personal significance for the participants. All the Muslims rejected the idea that they would reconsider their religious affiliation:

Amin: “It’s at 12, isn’t it? Like I’ve been told that you can decide, according to the law.”

R: “According to the law. What do you think about it?”

Amiin: “Quite a good age, because then [...] you have a bit more thoughts.”

Musa: “You like understand more about the world.”

R: “Yes. Have you decided yourselves?”

Amiin: “Yes, I will stay Muslim.”

Musa: “Well, I’d like to be a Muslim. Or I mean I’ve always been one [...]”

Amiin: “I guess I’ll stay Muslim.” (M4)

My question leads the boys to find suitable discourses to provide an answer. They know the law and know that it is appropriate to refer to maturity when deciding about one’s religion. These may be described as dominant discourses. However, they talk about Islam in terms of self-evidence.

Of the Protestant background young people, Olli and Niilo resorted to similar strategies:

R: “Why would that [15 or 18] be a good age?”

(pause)

Olli: “I don’t know.”

Niilo: “That like at 18 your parents aren’t any more like [...] like, responsible for you what you do and so on, so it’s your own decision then.”

R: “Mm. Do you think that you will be thinking things over, before that?”

Niilo: “I don’t think so.”

Olli: (whispering) “Me neither.”

R: “Mm. So your decision has been [...]”

Niilo: “Mm. Stays the same.” (P1)

The pause before Olli’s first answer indicates that the boys were not used to justifying the ages 15 or 18, they just rephrased what they knew about the law. Niilo, like Amiin and Musa, then uses the discursive practice of connecting maturity and religious independence, but neither Olli nor Niilo have the intention to change their religious affiliation.

Besides Niilo, Olli, and Susanna, other Protestant background interviewees identified themselves more as spiritual seekers. These interviewees did not want to set specific ages for deciding about their religion:

Anna: “When you really know what you believe in, or of course you don’t necessarily know even at your thirties, but anyway... If you know already at 12 that ‘I believe’, like, what is it, ‘in Hinduism’, so be my guest.” (P5)

Laura: “I don’t think there is any age classification. In my view you could like, when you feel like it, then somehow decide or something. In my view like, when you are ready to decide or something.”

R: “Are you ready yourself?”

Laura: “I don’t know (laughs), I think it’s good like this and, you never know when you’re older, if it’s going to change.” (P2)

Whereas those who talked about the law implied that the possibility of deciding about one’s religion was for others, as they had already decided about theirs, Laura and Anna would have restricted their own position as religious seekers if they had set a definite age when decisions should be made.

It is, however, worth noticing that Heikki and Laura expected, or perhaps even hoped, that confirmation school would make them more Christian. Heikki, for instance, after the discussion on how his child’s belief had turned into rationalist scepticism, concluded as follows:

Heikki: “Let’s see after the confirmation school, how it is, how much it will ... ” (P3)

Laura, for her part, responded to my question how the first confirmation school classes had been:

Laura: “Well I am kind of excited about it, I expect that it will be nice, that I will like it, and then I could go to church more often.” (P2)

It is fairly common among Finnish youth to regard confirmation school as a pleasant experience.²⁸ Heikki and Laura, however, seem to expect that they will find something to attach themselves to: Laura says this explicitly and Heikki implies it by making his comment in an occasion where he has talked about lost belief and a sense of belonging. Their positions as seekers are thus characterized by an openness to commitment in the near future.

The Muslim background pupils seemed to regard their religious socialization process as something that had already taken place in early childhood. Some Protestant background pupils talked about their religious paths in similar ways whereas others positioned themselves as seekers or talked about different phases in their lives. My question about the age when one could decide about one’s religion was intended to provoke some talk about adolescence or the impact of parents. Partly it did, but partly it just

revealed how aware the pupils were about the law and its justification. Religious seekers refused the idea that religious identity should be bound to a specific age.

Authority and Autonomy

To find out the participants' discourses about authorities like teachers or parents, I asked them how they reacted to instructions concerning ways of life at home and at school. In this section I pay attention to the discursive practices with which social practices are justified. Sometimes they are not justified but presented as self-evident. This may reveal that some social practices are so hegemonic that no further justification is needed.²⁹ There were some examples of this in the interviews.

When talking about instructions at school, the discursive practices in both groups were quite similar:

Hakim: "I want to listen to them. [...] Because at some stage I am going to, will need those, things." (M6)

Samira: "If the teacher gives kind of instructions, how to live, so I don't, kind of... this is like my life, I can do what I want." (M5)

Mohamed: "I don't like it. Like if I was taught to live badly or..."

R: "To live badly?"

Mohamed: "Somehow or how they want to [live] themselves." (M7)

Olli: "[...] so it will help me a lot when I get into working life and so on." (P1)

Heikki: "Depends a bit on the things they say. [...] They may give good instructions but also bad ones may appear. [...] That might happen in some school but I don't believe that it's like that here." (P3.)

It was common to both recognize the benefit of instructions but also the right to freedom of choice and the need for critical evaluation of them when talking about instructions given at school. These may be called discourses of future benefit (Hakim, Olli), autonomy (Samira) and critical evaluation (Mohamed, Heikki).

However, among Protestant background pupils (but not among Muslim background pupils) some (P2, P3) used the discourse of autonomy when talking about instructions at home:

Laura: "I might well say that I don't want to live in just that way, I want to live differently and I think then my view should be respected, 'cause it's about my life anyway." (P2)

Some Lutheran interviewees (P2, P3, P5) justified on the basis of autonomy that parents should not provide religious nurture to their children without the children's consent:

Anna: "If the child wants that [religion] is taught at home so be it. But it shouldn't be like forced." (P5)

Most of the Protestant background pupils used the discourse of autonomy quite consistently. The discourse of future benefit competed with it, but the discourse of autonomy dominated.

In contrast, the Muslim background pupils' use of the discourse of autonomy was limited even when talking about religious education at school. In the following excerpt the interviewees change their discursive practice quite suddenly when we are talking about instructions on life in IRE lessons:

Musa: "You can give hints, do this, do that..."

Amiin: "...but then again if you are forced then it starts to irritate ... but if you want to do so, then it's a bit easier."

[...]

R: "Yes, yes. Well how should one talk about Islamic rules in lessons?"

Amiin: "Like, how that's done or something like that."

Musa: "Islamic rules are a bit different because [...] All the Muslims probably obey them because [...] everybody like fears Allah because [...] He can do anything. [...] So if you don't obey them, you know that you just end up bad." [Both the boys continue describing the fate of the disobedient.] (M4)

When I introduce the subject the boys seem to view it as part of school and continue with the same discursive practice that they employed when talking about instructions on life at school in general, the discourse of autonomy. Then, when I use the term *Islamic rules* they change into another discursive practice, relying on religious observance.

Among the Muslim interviewees, Yusuf was the keenest to talk about freedom of choice. For instance, here he first uses the discourse of benefit but then returns quickly to defending autonomy. The question is about instructions at school about one's way of life:

Yusuf: "That would be very good, really. But then doesn't each person have a life of his own and live like he/she wants? Why do they teach him/her how, how, how one should live?" (M2)

Only Yusuf criticized the restrictions of the Islamic way of life:

Then I have this pal, his Dad is a kind of, do you know what a shaykh [elder, religious authority] is? [...] When he goes home, he changes clothes under the

stairs. [...] That is the kind [of behaviour] I don't like at all, like Dad or Mom doesn't allow [him to choose his own clothing]. [...] Like you should have kind of your own [...] privacy, your own life, so that parents can't interfere. I can't tell Mom to use the scarf. It's her own life. (M2)

However, this emphasis on autonomy had its limits. First, when Yusuf talked about the wishes of his mother, he presented obeying them as self-evident.

Yusuf: "But yes my Mom really lets me do what I want. You know we are Muslims..."

Mehdi: "Except drink [alcohol]."

Yusuf: "Well okay, of course you mustn't drink, then I may use earrings although Muslims normally don't use earrings." (M2)

Yusuf: "If I don't fast, my Mom will shout at me more than ever in my life, because Mom has like, you have to respect Islam, that this is only once a year that you fast 30 days. [...] I mean it's like, Mom has given us our own [...] that do what you want but always remember religion first." (M2)

Yusuf describes his mother as ideal because she does not require him to obey all Islamic restrictions, but simultaneously justifies certain rules simply because she has said so. The discourse of autonomy is strong in Yusuf's speech, but his loyalty to his mother challenges it.

Another challenge to autonomy in Yusuf's speech is the discursive practice emphasizing the decline concerning Islamic practice, a discursive practice employed by some other Muslim boys as well (M4, M6). In the following excerpt we are discussing Islam in today's Finland:

Mehdi: "All the time new rules keep appearing!"

[...]

R: "What kind of rules?"

Mehdi: "For example, that you don't have to use a scarf anymore."

[...]

Yusuf: "It is not about the Quran... The Quran is the same. But they just think of new rules of their own."

Mehdi: "The people add [things]!"

Yusuf: "The people add their own rules from their heads."

R: "So that it is what it means, modern times."

Yusuf: “Yea. ’Cause the Quran hasn’t changed at all, stayed the same. There isn’t a New or an Old Testament.”

[...]

Yusuf: “Of course it’s a bad thing, [...] not the way that you mustn’t use the scarf any more, you haven’t got to use the scarf any more. The women may do what they want, the men may do what they want ... ” (M2)

Mehdi introduces the idea of decline here, but Yusuf shows that he masters the discursive practice well when he refers to the Christian’s Old and New Testament. He blames both women and men for doing what they want, which conflicts with his normal emphasis on autonomy. Yusuf has probably absorbed this discursive practice in his sociocultural resources. It also must have a function for him, at least it helps him construct a position to judge people who do not follow Islamic practice.

Naado, for her part, also uses the discourse of autonomy, but in a very different way.

Naado: “Everybody says that God hates people, different people or the like. First, I don’t, God doesn’t hate anybody, but if you want to [...] do some *haram* [forbidden] things, do, ’cause God gave you brains [...]! He lets people decide what they do with their lives. So if you want to believe in God or you don’t want to believe in God it’s all the same to Him. God doesn’t benefit from whether we are believers or not.” (M1)

Here Naado defends Islam against a discourse according to which Islam condemns people who are different. It is not clear who “everybody” is to whom this discourse is attributed. Naado uses the discourse of autonomy where people are free to choose the right or the wrong thing. But choosing wrong is not without consequences. Thus, this discursive practice could be described as sanctioned autonomy. However, the practice allows Naado to present Islam in terms of autonomy, which is highly valued among her peers at school, as has been shown above.

In general, the Muslim background pupils justified the authority of their parents through sanctions and close relationship (M1), future benefits (M1, M3, M4, M6), or self-evident respect (M1, M2, M5, M7). Regarding school instruction they used both the discourses of autonomy and future benefit, just like the Protestant background pupils did when talking about both school and parents. The prevalence of the discourse of autonomy is evident, but the analysis of the Muslim pupils’ speech shows that competing discourses, for instance that of religious observance or the self-evidence of respecting parents, were stronger among their discursive practices than their Protestant peers. This shows that in their social reality the parents had the position to guide their lives, but the school not so much.

CONCLUSION

Interviewing 19 young people does not provide a representative sample of young people's discursive practices in Finland. However, they provide a glance at some discursive practices in the local community. Many discourses portrayed here can also be identified in broader national and international debates as well, and the study provides examples of how Finnish teenagers use them and how these discursive practices compete with each other in young people's speech. Thus, the discursive practices are not entirely individual but are based on sociocultural resources and also provide evidence about those resources.

The comparison between the Muslim and Protestant background youth shows that there are some differences and some common features among their discursive practices. The Muslim pupils positioned themselves as insiders, whereas most of the Protestant pupils distanced themselves from religion, although not totally. This difference probably has an effect on how Muslim and Protestant pupils perceive RE provided by school.

The interviewed Protestant background teenagers recognized the role of religion more in their lives than their Swedish peers.³⁰ They both acknowledged the religious aspect of festivals like Christmas and used discursive practices that expressed openness or partial commitment to a religion. These practices they had probably learnt at home but possibly also within school's religious education.

When talking about the formation of religious commitment, the two groups of youth did not differ from each other drastically. Both referred to early socialization and informed choice, although only some Protestant background participants said they still had not made up their minds, and only Muslim background participants talked about being born into Islam.

As to the authorities, the Protestant background young people used the discourse of autonomy somewhat consistently, whereas most Muslim background young people used it only when talking about instructions given by the school. The authority of the family was thus more imperative for the Muslims than the Protestants. In general, obedience toward Islamic way of life was very little challenged in their talk. A couple of discursive practices, namely, defining some issues as small and postponing full observance of Islamic way of life to a later stage, provided ways to negotiate the rules.

There was something defensive in the use of the discourse of autonomy by the Muslim youth. Naado stressed that there is no compulsion in Islam, in Yusuf's talk there was a constant pendulum between autonomy and religious observance, and Mohamed seemed to have reservations toward the way of life taught by the school. It reveals the struggle of the religious minority youth, defending one's own way of life by adopting dominant

discourses. The discourse of autonomy is probably employed widely within the Islamic communities in Finland, like in other European Muslim communities.³¹ Thus, the young people knew ways to use it as a tool of resistance.

The common features suggest that there are some typical discursive practices for adolescents. One of them is talking about religion in very concrete terms, like religious rituals or rules concerning daily life. Second, there is some tendency toward discursive practices that draw very sharp lines between what is acceptable and non-acceptable. An example of this is Naado's use of a sanctioned version of the discourse of autonomy. Admittedly, however, some young people avoided this by stressing everybody's freedom of choice and their own tolerance. Third, the young people often provide answers as self-evident and without further arguments. In some cases, this can be interpreted as a sign of hegemonic practices. In the case of adolescents, it may also be explained by a lack of resources: the teenagers have not yet learnt the discursive practices with which certain things are generally argued for.

Cross-cultural approach provides a nuanced picture on differences between discursive and social practices among ethnic and religious groups, but it may also reveal similarities. Dichotomies may thus be avoided. The role of religious education and Lutheran confirmation schools in fostering discourses favourable to religion in Finland could be studied further, and comparative research between Finland and other Nordic countries might provide more insight into the phenomenon.

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Notes

1. Norman Fairclough, *Language and Power*. 2nd ed. (Harlow: Pearson Education, 2001), 19, 22.
2. E.g. Teemu Taira, "Making Space for Discursive Study in Religious Studies". *Religion* 43, no. 1 (2013): 40–41.
3. Statistics Finland. "Population": 2015. http://www.stat.fi/tup/suoluk/suoluk_vaesto_en.html (accessed January 28, 2016).
4. Tuomas Martikainen interviewed in the newspaper *Aamulehti*, 21 November 2015.
5. Kerstin von Brömssen, *Tolkningar, förhandlingar och tystnader. Elevers tal om religion I det mångkulturella och postkoloniala rummet* (Göteborg University, 2004).
6. Anders Sjöborg, "One Needs to Be Free': Making Sense of Young People's Talk about Religion in Multicultural Sweden". *Journal of Religious Education* 63, no. 2–3 (2015): 117–128.
7. *ibid.*, 6–7.

8. Karin Kittelman-Flensner, *Religious Education in Contemporary Pluralistic Sweden* (Göteborg University, 2015).
9. Marie von der Lippe, "Young People's Talk about Religion and Diversity: A Qualitative Study of Norwegian Students aged 13–15". *British Journal of Religious Education* 33, no. 20 (2011): 127–142.
10. Christine M. Jacobsen, *Islamic Traditions and Muslim Youth in Norway* (Leiden: Brill, 2011).
11. Frans Wijzen, "'There Are Radical Muslims and Normal Muslims': An Analysis of the Discourse on Islamic Extremism". *Religion* 43, no. 1 (2013): 70–88.
12. Fairclough, *Language*, 91–136.
13. Wijzen, "There Are"; Norman Fairclough, *Discourse and Social Change* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), 231.
14. Talal Asad. *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam*. (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 48, 53–54, 78–79.
15. "Din". In *The Oxford Dictionary of Islam*. edited by John L. Esposito. Oxford Islamic Studies Online, <http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t125/e541> (accessed 22 June 2016).
16. The interviews with Muslim background youth: M + number of the interview; the interviews with Protestant background youth: P + number of the interview. The interviews have been translated from Finnish into English by the author. The names are pseudonyms, partly chosen by the interviewees themselves. R = researcher.
17. In the Finnish language there are relatively big pronunciation differences between everyday and standard language.
18. Julia Ippgrave, "Issues in the Delivery of Religious Education to Muslim Pupils: Perspectives from the Classroom". *British Journal of Religious Education* 21, no. 3 (1999): 149.
19. von Brömssen, *Tolkningar*, 266–294.
20. *Community, Participation, and Faith: Contemporary Challenges of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland*. (Tampere: Church Research Institute, 2013), 33–36.
21. *ibid.*, 41–43.
22. Lynn Davidman, "The New Voluntarism and the Case of Unsynagogued Jews". In *Everyday Religion: Observing Modern Religious Lives*, edited by N. T. Ammerman (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2007), 51–67.
23. Amjad Hussain, "Islamic Education: Why Is There a Need for It?" *Journal of Beliefs and Values* 25, no. 3 (2004): 318–319.
24. *Kirkon tilastollinen vuosikirja 2014 / Statistisk årsbok för kyrkan 2014* [Statistical Yearbook of the Church 2014]. 2015. Helsinki: Kirkkohallitus. [http://sakasti.evl.fi/sakasti.nsf/0/8A75CE045AD09FE4C22577AE00256611/\\$FILE/Kirkon_tilastollinen_vuosikirja_2014.pdf](http://sakasti.evl.fi/sakasti.nsf/0/8A75CE045AD09FE4C22577AE00256611/$FILE/Kirkon_tilastollinen_vuosikirja_2014.pdf) (accessed 16 January 2016).
25. Anuleena Kimanen, "Measuring Confessionality by the Outcomes? Islamic Religious Education in the Finnish School System" *British Journal of Religious Education* 38, no. 3 (2016): 274; Jonas Otterbeck, *Samtidsislam: Unga Muslimer i Malmö och Köpenhamn* [Contemporary Islam: Young Muslims in Malmö and Copenhagen] (Stockholm: Carlsson Bokförlag, 2010), 71, 78, 169–172; Louise Ryan, "Islam Does Not Change: Young People Narrating Negotiations of Religion and Identity". *Journal of Youth Studies* 17, no. 4 (2014): 458.
26. Naado used English colloquial expressions frequently in her speech. *D'oh* is an interjection used having said something foolish.
27. *Uskonnonvapauslaki 6.6.2003/453* [Act of Religious Freedom]. <http://www.finlex.fi/fi/laki/ajantasa/2003/20030453> (accessed 19 November 2016).

28. Kati Niemelä, *Does Confirmation Training Really Matter? A Longitudinal Study of the Quality and Effectiveness of Confirmation Training in Finland* (Tampere: Church Research Institute, 2008), 53, 63, 80–81.
29. Arja Jokinen, Kirsi Juhila & Eero Suominen, *Diskurssianalyysin aakkoset* [The ABC of Discourse Analysis] (Tampere: Vastapaino, 1993), 90.
30. von Brömssen, *Tolkningar*, 266–294; Kittelman-Flensner, *Religious Education*, 107–152; Sjöborg ”One needs”, 6–7.
31. Jacobsen, *Islamic Traditions*, 44–46; Otterbeck, *Samtidsislam*, 65, 197; Ryan “Islam Does Not”, 452–453.