



## **Guilt, Shame, Dishonour**

The role of emotions in  
the communication of Islamist  
social media actors

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By Meryem E. Tinç  
in cooperation with Niklas Brinkmöller,  
Meike Krämer, Luis Kreisel and Margareta Wetchy



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1. Introduction

There are a number of different ways, in which Islamist online actors try to convince followers of their world view. Online posts frequently make reference to socio-political developments which are then linked to recurring narratives in an attempt to make them more persuasive. However, it is not just the factual content element that is important here; persuasive communication strategies also involve an emotional angle.

This is the aspect which this publication seeks to address. Drawing on examples of online posts, its aim is to illustrate how the communication of Islamist online actors employs negative emotions or emotional appeals, focusing on the emotions of fear, guilt and shame, and the associated concept of dishonour. These emotions were selected based on impressions gained from the social media monitoring initiative *KN:IX plus*, during which the authors of this publication have consistently come across content which draws on these emotions. Equally, shame and guilt, in particular, are emotions which have not been investigated in this context in the research on radicalisation and extremism to the same extent as, say, anger or fear (cf. Groß et al. 2020, 274).

Preliminary observations show that the communication of Islamist online actors frequently appeals to 'negative' emotions. Examples include posts which describe menacing situations by referencing end-times scenarios<sup>1</sup> or positing sanctions in the afterlife. These sorts of scenarios can be avoided or individuals can protect themselves against the 'dangers' of hell by adhering to supposedly 'correct' Islamic practices, the posts suggest. Based on these impressions, this publication takes a closer look at the role of emotions in social media posts by Islamist actors. In particular, it discusses how concepts such as guilt, shame and dishonour are appealed to in relevant posts.

The connections between emotions and behaviour and the actual effect of the emotions appealed to are highly complex and an exhaustive discussion of these issues is beyond the scope of this publication. Instead, this publication seeks to highlight how relevant actors draw on emotions such as guilt or shame in their communication in order to elicit persuasive effects in their recipients by looking, among other things, at social media posts identified as part of the *KN:IX plus* monitoring initiative. By examining the potential impacts of such communication, this publication seeks to both facilitate an understanding of the communication strategy employed by these actors and provide an opportunity to develop approaches to dismantling or counteracting such messaging. It is therefore focused on using examples from social media to describe which emotions, specifically, this messaging is attempting to evoke and leverage. Further investigations might analyse the impact of the individual posts in terms of their specific receptive effects.

The first part of this publication establishes a definition of the term 'emotion' and provides a rough overview of possible connections between emotions, attitudes and behaviours. It also discusses fear, guilt, shame and dishonour from inter-disciplinary perspectives and defines these concepts so that they can be subsequently applied. The main body of the publication analyses selected social media posts with respect to the emotions appealed to or the conceptual references made to such emotions. This section shows the role which emotions play in persuasive communication and the emotion-alisation employed by the respective social media actors. The publication concludes with a summary of recommendations for tackling posts like these in practice.

1 For a detailed analysis of apocalyptic thinking in Islamist extremism, see Lakbiri, Assala. 2022. 'Apokalyptisches Denken im islamistischen Extremismus' [Apocalyptic Thinking in Islamist Extremism]. *KN:IX Impuls* #3. [https://kn-ix.de/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/KN\\_IX-Impuls-3\\_VPN.pdf](https://kn-ix.de/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/KN_IX-Impuls-3_VPN.pdf). (Last accessed 26/10/2023).

## 2. Emotions, behaviour and extremist communication

### 2.1 Understanding 'emotions'

Emotions are a complex and multi-faceted concept, for which there is no one accepted definition. The discourse on emotions is not the sole domain of the fields of psychology and neurobiology, with their insights into processes in the brain, or of individual experiences of emotions and associated behaviours. The social sciences, communication sciences, cultural studies and even philosophy also deal with social and cultural components of emotions. This publication also takes an inter-disciplinary approach in order to accommodate the complexity of this issue and so that the contributions made by these varied disciplines can be taken into account in the analysis of social media posts presented in Chapter 3. This chapter starts by presenting basic definitions of emotions. These definitions are followed by sub-chapters focusing on specific emotions and how they intersect with communication and behaviour, and the social and inter-personal dimensions of emotions.

According to the APA Dictionary of Psychology, emotions are "a complex reaction pattern, involving experiential, behavioral, and physiological elements, by which an individual attempts to deal with a personally significant matter or event" (APA Dictionary of Psychology 2018a). Most current definitions draw on an interaction between physiological reactions (e.g. pulse and blood pressure), a behavioural component (e.g. facial expressions and gestures) and a subjective experiential component (Dorsch, Lexikon der Psychologie n.d., b). They describe the so-called 'experiential component' as a feeling, differentiating it from the colloquially synonymous term 'emotion' (Dorsch, Lexikon der Psychologie n.d., b).<sup>2</sup> The differentiation between *primary* and *secondary emotions* is particularly beneficial for an analysis of the topic which this publication addresses.

*Primary emotions* are described as basic emotions which can be observed in new-borns, such that it can be assumed that we are born with at least some of them<sup>3</sup> (Dorsch, Lexikon der Psychologie n.d., c). Primary emotions include fear,<sup>4</sup> joy, interest, anger, disgust or surprise.

*Secondary emotions*, on the other hand, are characterised by their development during childhood, being complex in nature and "indicating a deeper understanding of the self and social relations" (Dorsch, Lexikon der Psychologie n.d., d) [our translation]. These secondary emotions include empathy, pride, guilt and shame. Social norms play a key role in the context of secondary emotions as they evolve, in part, from a comparison between reality and the norms asserted by the relevant peer group (see here Chapter 2.4).

### 2.2 Emotions, behaviour and persuasion

Both psychology and other disciplines have devoted decades of research and discussion to the connection between emotions and behaviour, producing a long list of hypotheses, models and theories. Fuchs describes the general function of emotions as follows: "emotions 'grab hold' of us in order to show us what is meaningful to us and what we should react to. They modify the field of relevance and values so that we can realign our goals and priorities" (Fuchs 2019, 97) [our translation]. Consequently, the author concludes that emotions can "[...] *be understood as interpretations of the meaningfulness of situations, experienced physically and motivating us to act accordingly*" (Fuchs 2019, 97) [original emphasis, our translation]. Lange et al. describe emotions from an evolutionary psychology perspective as "[...] conductors of the cognitive orchestra of adaptation" (Euler 2009; cited in Lange et al. 2019, 73) [our translation] which help the psyche to coordinate stimuli. The authors stress here that the psychological mechanisms at play "[...] do not in any way [lead] to strict patterns of behaviour which are expressed uniformly and independently of the influence of environmental conditions" (Lange et al. 2019, 76) [our

<sup>2</sup> A detailed discussion of the various definitions is beyond the scope of this section and would not be in any way beneficial. Regarding current concepts of emotions, see, for example, Müller, Christina K. and Lars Kuchinke. 2019. „Lassen sich Emotionen messen? Emotionskonzepte der Physiologie.“ [Can emotions be quantified? Concepts of emotion in physiology] In *Emotionen [Emotions]*, eds. Hermann Kappelhoff, Jan-Hendrick Bakels, Hauke Lehmann and Christina Schmitt, 65-72. Berlin: J.B. Metzler; and Lange, Benjamin P., Frank Schwab and Harald A. Euler. 2019. 'Emotionskonzepte der Evolutionspsychologie' [Concepts of Emotion in Evolutionary Psychology]. In *Emotionen [Emotions]*, eds. Hermann Kappelhoff, Jan-Hendrick Bakels, Hauke Lehmann and Christina Schmitt, 73-80. Berlin: J.B. Metzler.

<sup>3</sup> See here also: <https://dorsch.hogrefe.com/stichwort/basisemotionen> (Last accessed 24/11/2023).

<sup>4</sup> Fear and anxiety are to an extent described separately when defining or demarcating emotions. Here, anxiety is defined as a diffuse 'emotional state', characterised by physiological reactions (Dorsch, Lexikon der Psychologie n.d., a). Fear, on the other hand, represents its counterpart as a primary emotion and is characterised by the physiological reaction having a clear connection to an object/cause (Dorsch, Lexikon der Psychologie n.d., e). This detailed differentiation does not seem expedient for further analysis of the topic of this publication and the terms are therefore used synonymously in order to take into account the common everyday use of the terms.



translation]. Social contexts have had a significant impact on emotions and subsequent behaviour evolutionarily speaking as well. Graton and Mailliez similarly emphasise that there are complex physiological and cognitive mechanisms at play between emotions and the behaviours they trigger which have been little researched thus far (cf. Graton and Mailliez 2019, 4 f.). Karandashev describes emotions as "[...] a complex of *internal, short-lived and stimulating biopsychosocial reactions* which may contain mental or behavioural actions" (Karandashev 2023, 173) [original emphasis, our translation].

Despite such diversity of theories, there does appear to be a basic hypothesis that emotions can directly or indirectly influence and motivate behaviour. Moreover, it is possible for emotions to occur not just intrinsically or elicited by random stimuli and environmental conditions; they can also be triggered by relevant communication from others, e.g. in the form of appeals. A deliberate attempt to elicit emotions through communication in order to influence the views or behaviour of another person is a well-known strategy in *persuasive communication*. Persuasion is understood here as the "[...] process of shaping or changing views through the processing of a message" (Dorsch, Lexikon der Psychologie n.d., f) [our translation]. Miller (1980) describes *persuasive communication* as "[...] *any message that is intended to shape, reinforce, or change the responses of another, or others*" (Miller 1980, in: Stiff and Mongeau 2016, 4) [original emphasis]. According to Stiff and Mongeau, it is vital here that analyses of communication look at statements with a specific *intention* to change behaviour (e.g. propaganda). Without this caveat, there is a risk that all communication could be seen as 'persuasive communication' since it can be assumed that communication

in general is always connected to behaviour and behaviour modification (cf. Stiff and Mongeau 2016, 5).

It is almost impossible to measure empirically the concrete impact of individual communicative statements, especially in the context of the reception of social media content. For that reason, this publication seeks not to analyse the impact of specific posts on individual persons, but rather to map out the communicative message and strategy, with which the appeals to emotions are made. This mapping can then be used to discuss the potential consequences this type of communication could have on acceptance of its interpretations and arguments.

Investigations of emotions as a means of persuasive communication discuss both 'positive' and 'negative' emotions. The most common 'negative' emotion drawn on in order to influence people through communication is fear: "fear is by far the most common negative emotion that influence agents exploit" (Smith and Mackie 2007, 257). Exactly how people's attitudes and behaviour can be influenced by appealing to emotions such as fear is highly complex and depends on a number of factors. Smith and Mackie make particular reference to the fact that while anxiety or fear can motivate behaviour, it requires specific conditions: "Fear works, but only in the right dosage and in the right combination. Fear has to be motivating without being debilitating. It works only if the threatened outcome makes people feel vulnerable, and if the recommended change is both attainable and certain to bring relief." (Smith and Mackie 2007, 258). If the fear elicited by a 'persuasive appeal' is too great or



if it is unclear how to attain relief from the aversive state, then the fear has no motivating effect. For that reason, the fear-inducing messages which are most effective are those which simultaneously signpost a way out so that the recipient can avert the feared scenario (Smith and Mackie 2007, 257). The use of emotions such as fear to elicit behaviour modification is a strategy employed in a variety of different contexts and variations. Campaigns highlighting the harmfulness of smoking, for example, rely on linking the fear of the negative consequences of a behaviour to a clear path towards a modification in behaviour which can avert the negative scenario. (Smith and Mackie 2007, 257).

Other ('positive' and) 'negative' emotions also have an impact on people's behaviour and decision-making. Guilt, for example, can be just as effective when it comes to convincing people: "[...] moderate levels of guilt can activate connectedness or self-protection motives that make us more likely to accept and like products or ideas that provide solutions to that guilt" (Smith and Mackie 2007, 258). Emotions and emotionalisation are not only addressed in the context of marketing or health prevention as a way of making a certain behaviour more likely; they also play an important role in the communication of extremist actors.

### 2.3 Emotions in extremist communication

The actors which this publication looked at in its analysis of their posts are attempting to convince their followers of a certain way of life. They do this by employing a variety of strategies: in online posts, for example, they make frequent reference to current socio-political issues (such as the earthquakes in Syria and Turkey in spring 2023) which are meaningful for lots of people – including outside of the context of extremism. In their analysis of Islamist and far-right online campaigns, Fielitz and Kahl (2022, 290) specifically investigate the social media strategies behind such campaigns which serve, among other things, to construct "exclusive identities". Käsehage points to the way in which visual elements are utilised by extremist groups to mobilise followers (cf. Käsehage 2022). Another strategy employed by relevant online actors is to draw on recurring narratives. In her analysis of radicalisation narratives, Reinke de Buitrago notes that the strategic communication employed by Islamist and far-right social media actors contains narratives of victimisation and superiority (Reinke de Buitrago 2022, 56 ff.), leverages contradictions and creates new contexts (Reinke de Buitrago 2022, 62 ff.), and makes targeted use of drama and emotions (Reinke de Buitrago 2022, 66 ff.).

Regarding the utilisation of emotions, Reinke Buitrago's summary of the situation is that "Extremist narratives target emotions, are often framed emotionally, and/or appeal to emotions" (Reinke de Buitrago 2022, 55) [our translation]. Extremist actors also use visual elements here, adding an emotional charge to certain events in order to further their agenda. Through this dramatisation, they reinforce the impact of dichotomisation, contrasts and the eliciting of excitement and attention. According to the author, these actors appeal, on the one hand, to emotions such as fear, hate and outrage, while on the other emphasising closeness and belonging. Such powerful juxtaposition, which is also established through visual elements, can give viewers of such posts the impression that they must choose a 'side' (cf. Reinke de Buitrago 2022, 67).

The targeted use of fear is one of the "main strategies of persuasive communication" (Wiedl 2014, 22). Moreover, the use of appeals to 'negative' emotions is not unique to religious narratives or to actors engaged in religious extremism. Horror scenarios are also leveraged in other anti-democratic and anti-pluralistic scenes as a way of influencing and mobilising people. In far-right circles, for example, narratives regarding a supposed 'overforeignisation', a purported decay of the known order or an impending 'Day X'<sup>5</sup> are used to draw on people's fear or other negative emotions. Conspiracy theories present a wealth of imaginary fear-inducing scenarios<sup>6</sup> of people being poisoned by chemtrails, deliberately harmed by vaccinations or even oppressed by secretive elites.

In the context of (Islamist) extremism, the instrumentalisation of fear in order to exercise control or to compel desired behaviours is discussed, sometimes critically, under the concept of 'Angstpädagogik' (lit. 'fear-based pedagogy') (see, *inter alia*, Nordbruch 2020, 3; Nordbruch et al. 2014; Mansour 2015; Dantschke 2017; Logvinov 2017).<sup>7</sup> The term is sometimes used synonymously with 'poisonous pedagogy' (see,

5 See, for example, Quent, Matthias. 29.11.2019. '(No More) Waiting for Day X'. Federal Agency for Civic Education. <https://www.bpb.de/shop/zeitschriften/apuz/301136/nicht-mehr-warten-auf-den-tag-x/>. (Last accessed 09/11/2023).

6 Regarding apocalyptic thinking in conspiracy narratives, see, for example, Linden, Markus. 'Von der Endzeit zum Endkampf: Apokalyptik in Verschwörungserzählungen und 'Alternativmedien'' [From End Times to the Final Battle: Apocalypses in Conspiracy Narratives and "Alternative Media"]. In: Zentrum Liberale Moderne. 'Apokalypse Now What' [Apocalypse Now What]. [https://www.vielfalt-mediathek.de/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/Verschwoerungsmymen\\_Apokalypse-now-what.pdf](https://www.vielfalt-mediathek.de/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/Verschwoerungsmymen_Apokalypse-now-what.pdf). (Last accessed 09/11/2023, pp. 14-21).

for example, RISE 2021). There is no strict separation or any universally accepted definition of the term. It is found in both scientific and non-scientific publications, as well as in online content (some of which should be critically examined).<sup>8</sup> This term is not used in this publication. Nevertheless, in light of the observations made below, it feels expedient to note the instrumentalisation of fear which underlies both this concept and that of 'poisonous pedagogy' and which is used to elicit desired behaviours.

The instrumentalisation of uncertainty and fear in a religious context makes frequent reference to questions of life after death which even non-religious people will be familiar with (Nordbruch 2020, 1). The aim is to use horror scenarios that threaten those who do not conform in order to make the recipient feel pressured to act, thus fostering or eliciting the desired behaviour. The peer group whose values, beliefs and social acceptance seem relevant for the individual is central to establishing the norms which must be adhered to on pain of punishment. Reinke de Buitrago notes, for example, that *YouTube* videos made by actors from a variety of different extremist scenes attempt to erode existing norms and establish their own, with each narrative containing "strategies for establishing legitimacy, support and allegiance" (Reinke de Buitrago 2022, 49) [our translation]. In the case of Islamist narratives, frequent reference is made to an apparently mercilessly punitive God and to the threat of eternal torment in hell for those who deviate from the norms conveyed. This can potentially make those who accept these narratives and arguments feel pressured to act. Nordbruch describes the intention of social media actors as follows: "For the creators of *YouTube* channels from various religious spectra, it is about using emotional appeals to inculcate in their viewers a rigid religious practice and to make their faith the sole yardstick, by which they measure their own actions." (Nordbruch 2020, 1) [our translation].

7 Conceptually, 'Angstpädagogik' is similar to the 'poisonous pedagogy' which Katharina Rutschky (1977) coined in her publication of the same name and to "pedagogical concepts and methods which are considered authoritarian, disciplinary and harmful for children, with this type of child-rearing emphasising strict rules, punishment and control over children, often in a manner that is considered emotionally or physically harmful" (Stangl 2023) [our translation].

8 A *YouTube* search for the term returns a video by Irfan Peci (as the first result). Peci previously ran propaganda for *al-Qaeda*, was later involved in the Islamist scene as an informant and is now active in far-right and anti-Muslim circles (*Identitarian movement, Pax Europa*), see, for example.: <https://www.derstandard.de/story/2000144217802/sellner-und-ex-al-kaida-mann-planen-islamfeindliche-kundgebungen-in>. (Last accessed 24/11/2023).

Subsequently, the punitive, omnipresent God functions as a permanent control mechanism regarding the individual's conformity to the norms, a mechanism which continues to be effective even in the absence of the social control imposed by the presence of other persons.

Dantschke describes the instrumentalisation of fear in the context of 'Angstpädagogik' as follows: "Salafist preachers make young people permanently conscious of their mortality and link this to permanent intimidation, such that even the tiniest sin can completely destroy their presumably one chance at happiness. This form of Angstpädagogik is hugely effective and in a militant setting can eliminate any and all fear of death." (Dantschke 2017, 66) [our translation]. Wiedl also identifies 'guilt appeals', where people "[...] are held responsible for the negative consequences of an action or a failure to act [...]" (Wiedl 2014, 23) [our translation], as a common strategy in persuasive communication. Appeals to fear and guilt are a regular feature in the communication of Salafist preachers who attempt to "create [for their recipients] an emotional imbalance which can be remedied by behaving in a manner presented by the speaker" (Wiedl 2014, 22) [our translation]. Appeals of this nature have "high potential for activation" (ibid).

Alongside the primary emotion of fear, many other (secondary) emotions also play a role in the communication of Islamist social media actors. Based on impressions gathered as part of the *KN:IX plus* social media monitoring initiative, guilt and shame were also identified as relevant points of analysis and are outlined below based on inter-disciplinary perspectives. Chapter 3 then illustrates how these are utilised by drawing on social media posts as case studies.

### 2.4 Guilt, shame and dishonour – inter-disciplinary perspectives

Following on from the observations above on the significance of emotion in extremist online propaganda, this section looks in greater detail at two further (secondary) emotions – shame and guilt – with regards to their functions. Inter-disciplinary perspectives which also describe the link between guilt, shame and dishonour have been selected for this purpose. The aim of this section is to clarify and categorise concepts used in this publication in order that they can be used to analyse social media posts.

In psychology, shame is described as one of the secondary emotions "[...] which occurs when someone has the feeling that they have not fulfilled existing values, norms, rules or



requirements" (Dorsch, Lexikon der Psychologie n.d., g) [our translation]. Shame can therefore also be understood as "[...] fear of loss of social status" (Hosser et al. 2005, 228) [our translation]. Shame is also characterised by the willingness to make amends for (supposedly) wrong actions through certain behaviours or deeds (cf. APA Dictionary of Psychology 2018b). According to Groß and Neckel, shame is based on "[...] the human ability to see oneself through the eyes of others" and "[...] indicates that a social bond has become fragile" (Groß and Neckel 2020, 5) [our translation].

All of these aspects make quite clear the social components of feelings of shame. Parschick's definition elaborates on these components even further: "What is constitutive for shame is that a subject perceives a difference between their self-image and external image, following which they evaluate their entire self negatively by applying

the imagined or actual perception of others to themselves" (Parschick 2022, 364) [our translation]. Von Scheve summarises the consequences of a negative evaluation by others as follows: "Consequently shame – and equally being shamed – turns into a 'sense of worth', indicating whether and to what extent one's sense of value is under threat" (von Scheve 2022, 406) [our translation]. He adds that, "Shame is mostly understood here as a stabiliser of a given social position or of the order structure that is circumscribed by the same; there is an assumption here that the response to this emotion is to withdraw and adapt" (von Scheve 2022, 364) [our translation]. Shame can therefore "[...] lead to the adoption of the negative opinion held by others" and can occasionally contribute to persons subscribing to a "majority opinion". (von Scheve 2022, 369). Parschick, however, argues that in addition to the stabilising, "order-preserving" function (Parschick 2022, 37)

addressed here, shame may also have a positioning function. Consequently, shame can lead to a re-positioning of one's own standing as a result of reflection, and may even contribute to a questioning of power relations or social structures (cf. Parschick 2022, 370).

It can generally be inferred from Parschick's analysis, as described above, that shame is not 'just' an emotion experienced by an individual; it also has significant social consequences. Following Parschick, von Scheve writes that shame changes "[...] the power structures in social interactions [...]", with those who have been shamed also losing status (von Scheve 2022, 409) [our translation]. For von Scheve, the observation<sup>9</sup>, that even perceived social inferiority can, for its part, lead to shame is critical (cf. von Scheve 2022, 409). Kriner (2018) also builds on this observation in his analysis of feelings of shame and the use of such by (in his words) terrorist organisations. He writes that shame is a "universal emotion" (2018, 19) which all people around the world experience and which is therefore particularly effective for propaganda. At the same time, he notes that experiences of shame can have long-lasting consequences. Shame can be a broader feeling than the individual, inward-looking, self-reflecting emotion described in common definitions. According to Kriner, persons who experience shame regularly or over an extended period of time will no longer look inwards for the reasons for their shame, and instead will increasingly – and subconsciously – hold others responsible for their wrongdoings, i.e. they will externalise their shame (cf. Kriner 2018, 21). The author continues, "Moreover, shame-based narratives are powerful for pushing individuals toward accepting a new world-view, particularly if the social pain derived from non-conformity is amplified with a threat to an individual's safety, stemming from moral transgressions and norm violations" (Kriner 2018, 22).

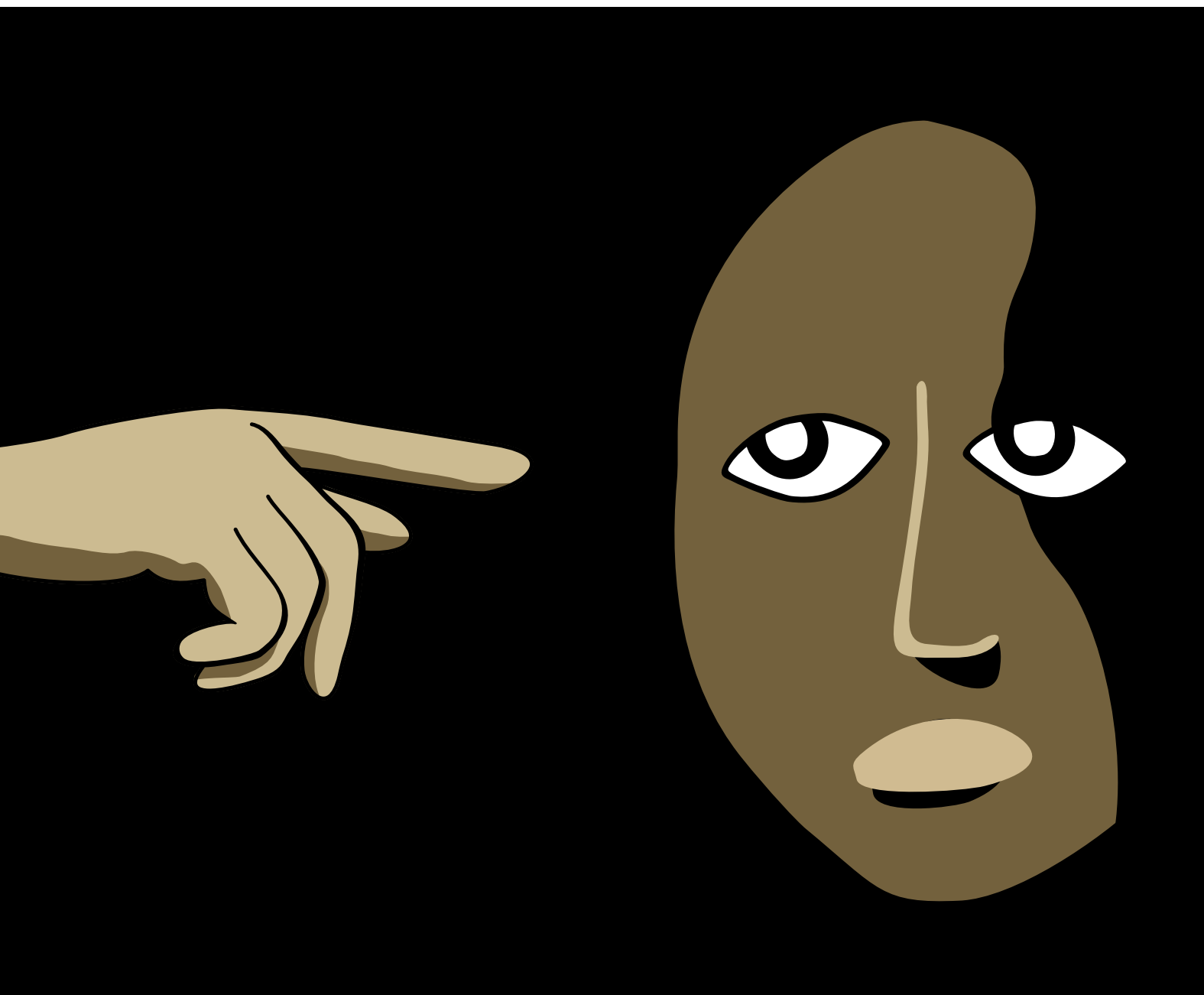
According to Kriner, shame may be particularly conducive to radicalisation when individuals measure their social value by their belongingness to a group, as is the goal of in-group vs out-group constructions in extremist communication, for example (cf. Kriner 2018, 22). In their paper on emotion and authoritarian-nationalist radicalisation narratives, Groß and Neckel (2020) cite the 'shame-rage spiral' theory which results in the following: "Instead of devaluing

the inner self, the enemy is devalued, which additionally strengthens the emotional bond to one's own group" (Groß and Neckel 2020, 5) [our translation]. Based on this hypothesis, they conclude that "collectively" experienced shame, in particular, can be transferred into anger and aggression – a phenomenon that can be leveraged for political mobilisation (cf. Groß and Neckel 2020, 5).

In addition to its meaning in criminal law, the concept of guilt – just like shame – is defined in psychology as one of the secondary emotions (cf. Dorsch, Lexikon der Psychologie n.d., d). In their discussion on feelings of guilt, Hosser et al. conclude that, "Feelings of guilt arise when a person has violated internalised social norms or expectations and this behaviour is judged by themselves or others as morally inadequate" (Hosser et al. 2005, 228) [our translation]. Therefore, feelings of guilt, just like shame, are "[...] moral emotions which occur when internalised norms are violated" (Hosser et al. 2005, 227) [our translation]. Philosophical approaches elaborate even more on the components of the moral and see feelings of guilt as being significantly linked to moral points of view: "Unlike [shame], it [the feeling of guilt] arises almost exclusively as a result of actions which the person is personally responsible for and only in special cases, such as the 'survivor's guilt' experienced by some victims of crimes or disasters, or in pathological forms, is it related to events, for which the person experiencing the feeling is not responsible" (Landweer 2019, 236) [our translation]. Landweer goes on to note that the existence of feelings of guilt implies that one or more persons has been harmed and that this frequently entails a pressure to make amends (cf. Landweer 2019, 236).

Shame and guilt are closely connected, especially when examined from the perspective of the social sciences, cultural studies and philosophy. According to Hosser et al., key differences between guilt and shame include the behavioural tendencies that accompany these feelings: feelings of shame tend to lead to withdrawal from social settings, while feelings of guilt appear to be more connected to "prosocial behaviour" (cf. Hosser et al. 2005, 227) [our translation]. Like shame, guilt can in principle also encourage prosocial behaviour. For example, if a person feels guilt, they might exhibit regret or attempt to make amends for their wrongdoing through deeds. Graton and Mailliez (2019) criticise this frequently established link between feelings of guilt and prosocial behaviour which might possibly be triggered by these feelings. In their view, the current literature produces overly inconsistent results concerning this link cf. Graton and Mailliez 2019, 1 ff.). Further studies also come

<sup>9</sup> Von Scheve refers in his article to the work of Sighard Neckel. 1991. 'Status und Scham. Zur symbolischen Reproduktion sozialer Ungleichheit' [Sighard Neckel: Status and Shame. On the symbolic reproduction of social inequality]. Frankfurt/New York: Campus Verlag.



to the conclusion that, for example, feelings of guilt do not always lead automatically to prosocial behaviour but can instead, in certain situations, also lead to reactance, and therefore not prosocial behaviour (cf. Graton and Mailliez 2019, 7). The authors also write that feelings of guilt do not necessarily occur only when norms are violated or others are harmed. In certain situations, guilt can also occur when *other persons* have transgressed norms or when it is triggered by learned behaviour (cf. Graton and Mailliez 2019, 6).

From a cultural anthropology perspective, and drawing on the works of Margret Mead and Ruth Benedict, Röttger-Rössler argues that while theories of so-called "shame cultures" and "guilt cultures" are controversial, the principal function of shame and guilt as social sanction mechanisms is largely accepted (Röttger-Rössler 2019, 231). More recent research in this area describes how shame has particular significance in hierarchical (social) structures. In response to this, Röttger-Rössler writes that, "As a force of social regulation, shame is generally regarded in these societies as positive and being highly sensitive to shame is considered a virtue" (Röttger-Rössler 2019, 232) [our translation]. In her paper, the author notes how emotions in general – and shame in particular – are evaluated differently across cultures, hence it can be assumed that such an evaluation can influence how emotions are experienced (cf. Röttger-Rössler 2019, 233). Röttger-Rössler's paper thus also highlights cultural components – of shame, for example – which must be taken into account in research into emotions by applying inter-disciplinary approaches.

With regards to the debate around the aforementioned concepts of "shame cultures" and "guilt cultures", Landweer interrogates the frequent "[...] identification of feelings of guilt with an 'internal', and therefore superior, entity and shame as an 'external' sanction focused on dishonour [...]" (Landweer 2019, 238) [our translation]. Despite the criticism of this hypothesis, shame, guilt and dishonour do appear to be related as concepts. Röttger-Rössler refers to anthropological literature on concepts of honour and dishonour, writing that these are frequently connected to shame. She argues that, "These studies show that in the societies examined, honour and dishonour are central socio-symbolic categories which are superior to all other social differentiations and divide people into two basic categories: honourable, respectable people and dishonourable, disgraced persons" (Röttger-Rössler 2019, 231) [our translation]. The loss of honour, which can also affect a group collectively (e.g. a family) and not just a person individually, leads to the status of dishonour.

Röttger-Rössler's overview of current studies in this field summarises shame, pride and dishonour as follows: "As relatively short-lasting, physically experienced, subjective feelings, shame and pride form the emotional correlates linked to the socio-symbolic categories of honour and dishonour" (Röttger-Rössler 2019, 232) [our translation]. Schloßberger sees shame and honour (in addition to pride) as concepts "[...] which point to the integrity and identity of people" (Schloßberger 2023, 461) [our translation].

Schloßberger describes honour from the perspective of moral philosophy as "[...] regard or recognition which is conferred on us as a result of certain accomplishments, abilities, properties, whereby we affirm this regard or recognition" (Schloßberger 2023, 462) [our translation]. The author emphasises that this recognition relates to aspects which are also meaningful for the individual themselves. He explains that, "The phenomena of pride, shame and honour are important for our moral behaviour because we might hurt others by breaking their pride because we might discourage them by shaming them or damaging their honour" (Schloßberger 2023, 462) [our translation]. Karandashev approaches the concept of honour as a "cultural phenomenon", defining it as follows: "Honour is the feeling of self-worth and the concept of the self as observed in one's own view and in the opinion of others" (Karandashev 2023, 249) [our translation]. He continues, "In honour cultures,<sup>10</sup> many emotional events are evaluated according to their social consequences with respect to honour (Karandashev 2023, 249) [our translation]. In cultural structures, in which honour is a central concept, the social context in which an individual acts, plays a key role in the evaluation of emotions. The understanding of honour differs greatly by language and cultural context (cf. Karandashev 2023, 252).

The social media posts described in the following section are analysed in light of the concepts discussed here.

<sup>10</sup> In cultural and social anthropology or in ethnology, for example, the term "cultures" (in the plural) is discussed critically, see, for example Sökefeld, Martin. 2001. „Der Kulturbegriff in der Ethnologie und im öffentlichen Diskurs - eine paradoxe Entwicklung?“ [The Concept of Culture in Ethnology and Public Discourse – A Paradoxical Trend?], In: ‚Fremde Kulturen‘ im Geographieunterricht. Analysen - Konzeptionen - Erfahrungen. Studien zur internationalen Schulbuchforschung [‘Foreign Cultures’ in Geography Teaching. Analyses – Concepts – Experiences. Studies on International Textbook Research], ed. Georg Stöber, Vol. 106, 119-137. Hanover: Hahn.

### 3. Guilt, shame and dishonour in social media posts by Islamist actors

This chapter discusses selected posts by Islamist actors with respect to their references to guilt, shame and dishonour. It addresses, among other things, the tightly interwoven concepts of fear and honour. All posts discussed come from publicly available accounts. *Instagram* stories which are analysed are always available for 24 hours only. These were archived by taking screenshots.<sup>11</sup>

#### 3.1 Fear

##### Case study 1

*YouTube* video posted by *Botschaft des Islam* [Message of Islam]<sup>12</sup> (Fig. 1). Here, a speaker off-screen describes the path people will follow on the Day of the Resurrection (*Yaum al-Qiyama* in Arabic) until they are stood before God and are

<sup>11</sup> When monitoring Islamist narratives on social media, channels are always analysed according to their academic or pedagogical relevance.

<sup>12</sup> <https://youtu.be/FZfpbB2x-E0?feature=shared>, 20/03/2022. (Last accessed 24/11/2023).

either admitted into heaven or sent to hell. The video thus addresses fundamental questions in the context of Islamic eschatology, i.e. teachings on life after death.

The video begins with the reciting of part of the 78th Surah of the Quran in Arabic, with subtitles in German (min.: 0:03). This is accompanied by an image of a stylised planet (presumably earth), its surface seemingly on fire. A speaker then begins to repeat the previously recited Surah from the Quran in German to a backing track of celestial singing: "We have warned you of an imminent punishment. The Day every person will see the consequences of what their hands have done, and the disbelievers will cry, 'I wish I were dust.'" (min.: 0:33). At this point, a person walking alone along an empty road gradually comes into view. The angle is selected in such a way that the end of the road is not visible and the road is leading towards an orange horizon.

The speaker then describes the different stations a person will pass through which will contain "[...] awful and terrifying events [...]" (min.: 1:02). This is followed by examples intended to illustrate these horrors. For example, after death a person will encounter other people who "[...] have not a scrap of flesh left on their faces [...]" (min.: 1:11).

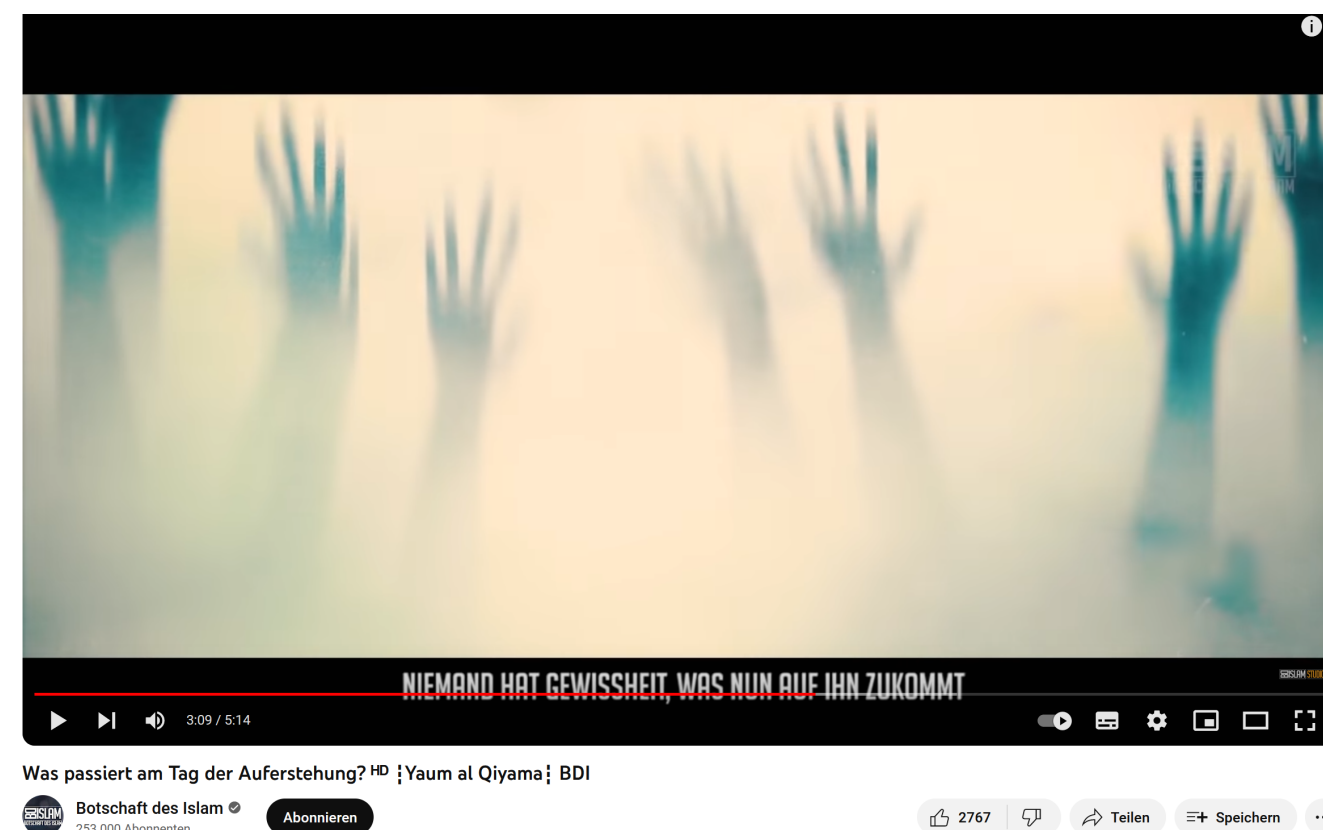


Fig. 1: *YouTube* video from *Botschaft des Islam* channel of 20/03/2022. 'Was passiert am Tag der Auferstehung?' <sup>HD</sup>. *Yaum al Qiyama* [What will happen on the Day of Resurrection? <sup>HD</sup>. *Yaum al Qiyama*].





The speaker follows up this description with a question addressed directly to the viewer: "Will you be among those who enjoy the protection of Allah on this day or will you wish for your own destruction, scared and alone?" (min.: 1:23). Here, the video contains images of a graveyard, clouds in the sky and a person crossing a snowy landscape alone.

The first station the speaker describes is called the "gathering place" where a person shall remain for 50,000 years until judgement (min.: 2:04). This person will be entirely alone in this vast, empty place, they will be naked and all their family members will turn their backs on them so as not to have any of the sins of the person waiting fall on them (min.: 2:10). This is accompanied by a silhouette of a person lit from behind, surrounded by fog, looking left and right with their head raised. The individual family members, all of whom are turning their backs, are listed individually by the speaker: "[...] your sister, your father, even your own mother will turn their back on you [...]" (min.: 2:23). This section ends with the remark that even prophets fear this day, followed by the question, "What state will we be in, if even they are scared?" (min.: 2:37).

"People will be scared, confused and devoid of any plan. No-one can know for certain what awaits them," continues the speaker (min.: 3:08). At this point, people will remember every one of their mistakes, "[...] every step towards *haram* [that which is prohibited], every forbidden touch, you will remember all your mistakes!" (min.: 3:34).

The speaker then quotes from the 79th and 20th Surahs of the Quran which are said to describe the fear, lowliness and godliness of this day (min.: 3:53). The speaker then addresses the viewer directly, asking them to imagine "[...] [standing there] naked and exposed, [...] debased and cast out. Confused and afraid, you await the judgement that will condemn you to blessedness or condemnation" (min.: 4:03). This direct appeal continues, commenting that there is no way of escaping the events described and no place to hide from them (min.: 4:19). "So be prepared!" the speaker urges (min.: 4:27). He continues, "Strive for the satisfaction and forgiveness of Allah so that you may seek shelter on this day under the shade of Allah." (min.: 4:29).

The speaker remarks that a decision is taken at the previously described station, the gathering place, as to whether the next stations will be easier or harder to pass through (min.: 4:43). For those who experience problems at this station, the situation will get harder and harder "[...] and the fear in your heart will continue to grow." (min.: 4:47). Here, an image is shown of four people as dark outlines against a blazing fire.

The video ends with the question asked at the start: "Will you be among those who enjoy the protection of Allah on this day or will you wish for your own destruction, scared and alone?" (min.: 4:57). Several skulls are shown during the video, lying on the ground of an indeterminate landscape.

According to most sources, there is consensus (cf. Günter 2016, 113) in Islamic eschatology, i.e. teachings on the last days (Sauter 1988, 192), regarding the stations of Judgement Day, the Day of Resurrection, the Day of Reckoning and the path to paradise or hell which the video describes. However, in his video this actor primarily describes explicit and extremely terrifying scenarios which are emphasised visually by a collage of menacing scenes. The visual material, which the anonymous channel *Botschaft des Islam* uses to produce the video, is freely available online (cf. Hänig and Hartwig 2021, 14).

Consequently, the actor creates a bleak and menacing atmosphere through a combination of celestial voices in the background, frightening scenarios described in explicit terms and illustrated with images, and speaking as if reciting epic poetry. The actor uses various metaphors (e.g. "then he shall dissolve like melted silver", min.: 03:04) and easy-to-understand language. By appealing to emotions such as fear and uncertainty, and integrating specific audio-visual effects, he is attempting to bring people round to his position. At more than five minutes long, the video focuses primarily on the suffering which people who are not safe under the "shade of Allah" will experience. According to the video, this suffering is so great that even one's own destruction is more desirable. Viewers must therefore choose between devastating suffering or the protection of Allah and prepare themselves during this life. In this video, the actor utilises fear, e.g. of pain, uncertainty, loneliness and loss of connection, specifically to offer vague approaches to avoiding these frightening scenarios, such as "be prepared!".

In addition to general themes from Islamic eschatology, such as resurrection after death and the Day of Reckoning, the actor embellishes his script with explicit descriptions of frightening scenarios which lend the theological description of the afterlife a dystopian and apocalyptic atmosphere. A clear differentiation is made between "the good" and "the bad": the "good" will be fearful but will ultimately attain salvation, while the suffering of the "bad" will begin with the resurrection itself. This frightening scenario can be avoided by "being prepared" and asking "for forgiveness". The statements made by the actor in the video range from general descriptions to personal appeals: "Where will you stand? Will you be protected?". This again creates a personal connection between the viewer and the previous descriptions, and enables them to identify with them. The personal connection makes the horror scenario more real and tangible. At the same time, the actor offers a way out in the video for those who wish to avert this horror scenario.

This way out consists of living piously and according to the rules, and asking Allah for forgiveness.

## Case study 2

Figure 2 shows an *Instagram* story posted by the @dawah\_berliner\_schwester channel<sup>13</sup> which in turn is a screenshot of the @kauthar\_dawah channel. Because of the profile name and profile image, it is not clear who is behind this profile but it must be assumed that there is at least one actor involved. There is a drawing of a woman wearing a headscarf and carrying a pile of presents. Visible above is the caption "Happy Birthday!!" The overlaid text condemns the custom of celebrating birthdays which is interpreted as praying to the *nafs* (Arabic for 'self', also 'breath, soul'), remarking that those who bow to Allah observe only two religious celebrations a year.



Fig. 2: Instagram story posted by @dawah\_berliner\_schwester account on 13/02/2023

<sup>13</sup> [https://www.instagram.com/dawah\\_berliner\\_schwester/](https://www.instagram.com/dawah_berliner_schwester/), 13/02/2023. (Last accessed 24/11/2023).



This post is most likely aimed at mothers since in the text the actor references child-rearing and pregnancy. There is a description of a number of different events which could occur if a birthday is celebrated. Firstly, the actor makes references to punishments in the afterlife, being outside of the *ummah* (Muslim community) on the Day of Reckoning, and being condemned to hell. Secondly, the celebrating of birthdays also has long-term consequences for the children of these women in this life because they are being raised to be "*nafs* worshippers". The term "*nafs* worshippers" indicates a hedonistic lifestyle. *Nafs* is often understood as the depraved ego that is driven by desire and which must be suppressed or brought under control. Its connection to the concept of 'worshippers' is a reference to the concept of the *shirk* which describes the worshipping of persons or things besides Allah (also: polytheism), which is considered one of the greatest sins in Islam (see Islam-ist: 'shirk').

In order to protect one's child against this sinfulness, it is necessary to raise the child to be *mu'minun* (Arabic for 'faithful'), which precludes the celebrating of birthdays. If we consider mothers to be the targets of this post, then they are being taught that breaching this rule (letting children celebrate birthdays) will result in their children being excluded from their social peer group (here, the *ummah*) in this life and potentially punished with hell in the next. Adopting the interpretation suggested creates for the reader a fear of causing enormous suffering to their own child or doing them long-term damage – in this life and the next.

In her post, the actor relies on religiously motivated assertions which are not backed up by any sources or quotes ("999 to hell – 1 to paradise", Fig. 2). Taking these figures literally, the chances of getting into paradise are already slim but behaving in a way that violates the norms guarantees hell. It therefore seems that the only way to avoid this frightening scenario is to ensure absolute conformity with the norms and to raise one's children in the same way – even at the expense of social participation. The rhetoric in the appeal is instructive ("understand this") and appeals directly to the target audience using words like "madame" and an illustration of a smiling woman wearing a hijab and holding presents – an allusion to the 'sin' of celebrating birthdays.

### Summary

Both examples use frightening scenarios to convey their messages. The ultimate and final punishment of hell is a theme in both. The actors clearly require their followers to be familiar with the norms and values of the relevant in-group or deliberately focus primarily on creating fear and uncertainty. The second example illustrates a close connection between fear and guilt by suggesting that whether a child is raised to be a "*nafs* worshipper" or "*mu'minun*" is down to the mother and whether she behaves in accordance with the norms. In addition to the threat of divine punishment, which also alludes to the image of a selective and punitive God, exclusion from the faith community, the *ummah*, also plays a role in both examples. The actors assume the role of an indoctrinator, with the actor in the second post also presenting her personal view (rejecting the celebration of birthdays).

Interacting with the actors is difficult due to the features of the platforms and formats such as those used for the YouTube video and the Instagram story analysed above. On one side is the content creator who takes on an instructive function and uses frightening scenarios and accusations to elicit an emotional response, while on the other are the followers who consume the content. Comments can be left for the actors via the comment functions on YouTube and the comment and direct messaging functions on Instagram, but the nature and quality of the communication is at the sole discretion of the actors.

### 3.2 Guilt

#### Case study 1

In this Instagram story (Fig. 3),<sup>14</sup> which was shared by Abdelhamid around the time of the earthquake in Turkey and Syria and makes reference to this event, the actor makes a general appeal to Muslims. He wants the "[...] afflictions and hardships of the Muslims [...]" to lead to the realisation that there are good intentions behind "preachers" such as him criticising what they see as 'incorrectly' worn hijabs and dance videos posted by Muslims.

They are doing it for the good of the Muslim community and in order to restore the honour bestowed by God. He

<sup>14</sup> [https://www.instagram.com/abdelhamid\\_offiziell/](https://www.instagram.com/abdelhamid_offiziell/), 07/02/2023. (Last accessed 24/11/2023).

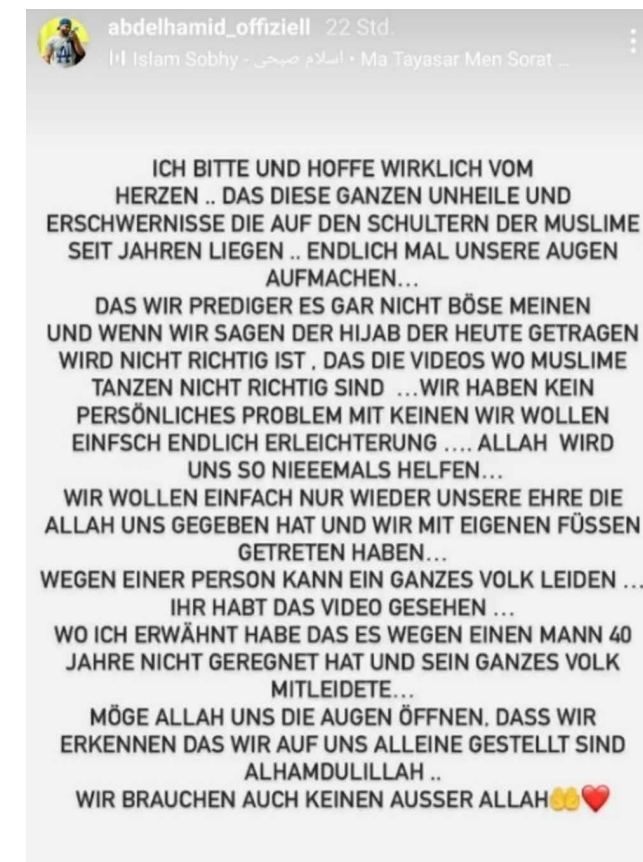


Fig. 3: Instagram story posted by @abdelhamid\_offiziell account on 07/02/2023

sees his own role in this as that of a reproving but well-intentioned person of authority in matters of faith, emphasising the fact that he "means no harm" and instead wants "relief finally" for the community. He uses the 'We' form in his text and relates his stance to a collective of "preachers" who, in his account, would likely advocate a similar view.

The 'incorrect' wearing of the hijab and dance videos posted by Muslims are described as problematic behaviours which in some cases could mean that Allah will "never help" Muslims in this state. Considered in the context of the devastating earthquake in Turkey and Syria, the vague accusation made by the actor in this video is of an existential nature. He thus establishes a causal connection between the 'sins' mentioned in the post and global crises which the persons being addressed have no connection to in reality. By connecting individual behaviours which are purported to be (partially) to blame for an awful disaster, responsibility or guilt is apportioned to individual persons. At the same time, the guilt of the collective (several persons behaving contrary to the norms) cannot be redeemed individually by changes in the behaviour of the individual. Following this logic, the individual shares responsibility for the suffering

of the *ummah* whenever they behave contrary to the norms, while at the same time they are unable to prevent or bring an end to the (global) suffering single-handedly by conforming to the norms. In this interpretation, the consumers of this Instagram post have no option but to adapt their behaviour to the maxims of the in-group, unless they wish to be responsible for the suffering of the *ummah*.

The post appears to be addressed to all Muslim followers but the transgressive behaviour that is mentioned relates predominantly to Muslim women as the hijab is worn by women. Just like the reference to the hijab, the mention of dancing also has physical elements. Consequently, both actions have an external impact which affects the entire *ummah*. Abdelhamid mentions in this context that "we" only wish to restore the "honour [...]" which we have trampled over".

If this honour is violated, God will react immediately and Muslims will be punished in this life. According to this understanding, God is responding in dialogue to 'sins' of the individual by imposing punishment on the entire body of the *ummah*. Abdelhamid assumes that God will take the 'sins' he has identified in his post as an opportunity to punish entire peoples – though it was not just Muslims who were victims of the aforementioned earthquake, for example. At the same time, there is enormous room for interpretation as the norm of the in-group, for example, is not defined in concrete terms in this post. What would be a 'correct' hijab in Abdelhamid's view or what sort of appearance and behaviour would be in accordance with the desired values is not described in this story. If one reverses the logic that 'the sins of individuals cause collective suffering', this would mean that conforming to the norms will result in the well-being of all Muslims. The message conveyed in this Instagram story is frightening and accusatory, especially towards those defined by Abdelhamid as sinners.

Although the actor addresses concrete 'wrongdoings', his address is aimed at the collective in general. With his appeals to guilt, he is attempting to motivate followers to act in a certain way or to convince them of certain attitudes. According to Hosser, feelings of guilt occur when actions which contravene "[...] social norms or expectations [...]" are "[...] judged to be morally inadequate [...]" by oneself or others (Hosser 2005, 228) [our translation]. The ability to judge actions requires "social yardsticks" as premises which can be used to evaluate actions (ibid). As a "social emotion", feelings of guilt can encourage "prosocial" behaviour through regret or a compulsion to make amends (cf. Haldimann 2021) [our translation]. Abdelhamid judg-

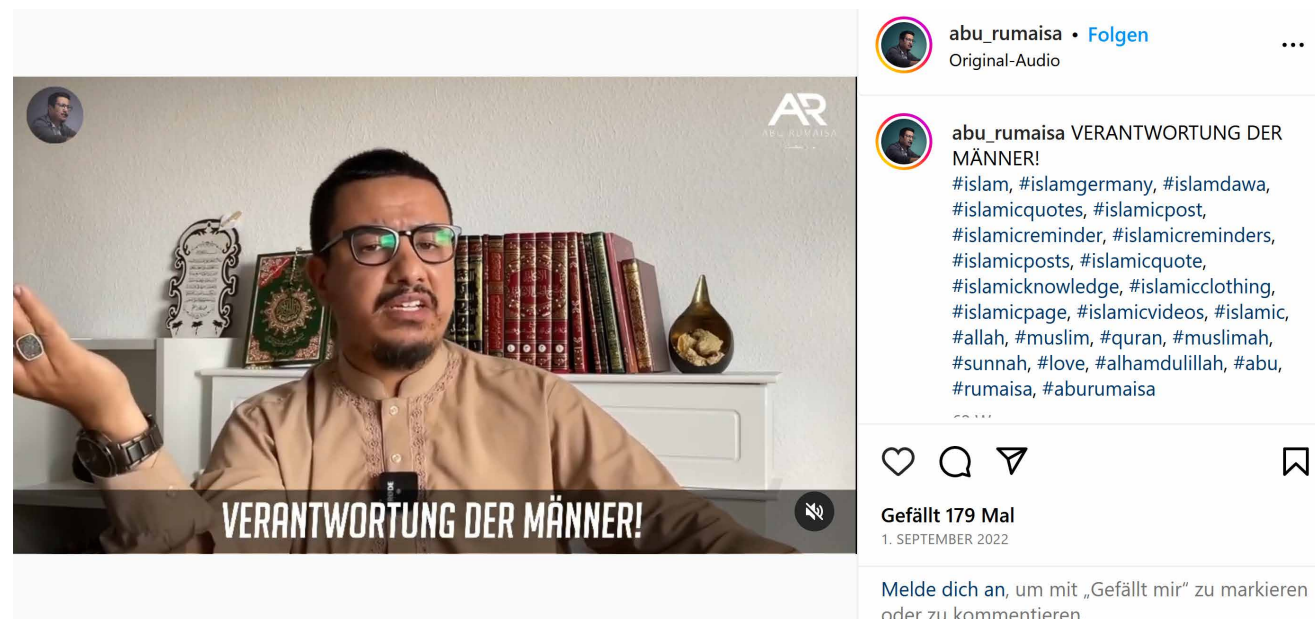


Fig. 4: Instagram video posted by @abu\_rumaisa account on 01/09/2022

es the acts mentioned in the post as incorrect behaviour and evaluates these based on the norms and values of the *ummah* as he interprets them. In doing so, he creates a pressure to act in order to modify the behaviour of the recipients, though without specifying for the target audience what this would look like in detail. Following the logic of the *Instagram* post, the only way to make amends for the guilt of possibly bearing some of the responsibility for the earthquake is for the *ummah* to feel compelled to urge one another (primarily women) to act in accordance with the norms or to adapt their own behaviour to these values. The post does not present any comprehensive or exhaustive code of conduct which would guarantee redemption or similar, while at the same time both behaviours (dance videos and wearing the hijab 'incorrectly') are presented as being problematic and connected directly to the absence of divine help or assistance.

### Case study 2

A different but similar form of blame connected to the behaviour or actions of others can be found in a video posted by Islamist preacher *Abu Rumaisa* (Fig. 4).<sup>15</sup>

The core message in *Abu Rumaisa's* video is, "You men, fathers, brothers, husbands, you share responsibility for these women acting this way, for them not covering them-

selves correctly!" (from min.: 00:01). Because men do not possess "jealousy" and "masculinity" (min.: 00:18), women are not dressing according to the rules of the in-group: "[...] that women cover their hair,<sup>16</sup> wear sports jackets, tight tops, tight trousers, [...] and high heels, they use perfume and make-up" (min.: 00:46). It is the duty of the close relatives of these women to discipline them and force on them clothing that conforms to the in-group: "You must bear this pride, bear your masculinity and tell your women: you must not dress this way" (min.: 1:16).

This section of the video is aimed at Muslim men, not the women *Abu Rumaisa* is talking about. In his appeal, *Abu Rumaisa* connects 'being masculine' to the characteristic of 'jealousy' which he understands here as a right to decide on the clothing worn by a man's wife, sister, daughter or grand-daughter. This jealousy entitles men to deny their family, their wives the ability to decide on their own external appearance.

According to *Abu Rumaisa's* logic, the woman is the object of the man's guilt. The actor follows this apportioning of blame with the solution: "It is therefore your responsibility to lead your daughters, your sisters, your wives to the true hijab, perhaps by learning together the verses that explain the hijab as a duty" (min.: 02:00). If the man manages to make amends for this guilt, argues

the video, and compels the woman to 'cover herself correctly' (something the video does not explain in more detail), this will result in tangible rewards for the man and will lead to his 'masculinity': "If you are walking along the street with your wife and she has covered herself correctly, people will say, 'Look, she is covered that way because of how he behaves'" (min.: 1:33).

In this view, the dressing of the women in the family is an external act directed by the man and is, in *Abu Rumaisa's* words, linked closely to the success of 'being masculine', rather than being superficially defined by any religious dogma. According to this logic, the more covered the women, the 'prouder' and 'more masculine' the man. At the same time, the video preacher argues that the appearance of the woman determines the status of the man in the in-group: "She does it so that she can make him proud. She does it so that she can bring him honour." (min.: 1:55). *Abu Rumaisa* is thus simultaneously connecting the now visible heteronomy of the woman to his understanding of 'honour'.

As mentioned in Chapter 2.4, honour as a "cultural phenomenon" can be understood as a "feeling of self-worth" and as a "[...] concept of the self as observed in one's own view and in the opinion of others" (Karandashev 2023, 249) [our translation]. It is not just the regard for one's self that is relevant for a feeling of honour here, but also recognition by the social group. How the emotion is evaluated by the individual depends on how much relevance is assigned to the consequences of events within the social group (including the family; cf. *ibid*).

In the case of *Abu Rumaisa's* scenario where the man who has lost power over women is to blame for this situation, regaining honour means regaining control over the 'object of his guilt'. The result of this, *Abu Rumaisa* explains, is that the man will achieve recognition within the social group and will be capable of feeling pride. By simultaneously presenting the solution, *Abu Rumaisa* provides the key to alleviating this situation: the man can absolve himself of this guilt by modifying his behaviour, in this case by instructing the woman in how to behave, which in turn will reward him with an improvement in his social status.



<sup>15</sup> <https://www.instagram.com/reel/Ch-X8H0s6xH/>, 01/09/2022. (Last accessed 24/11/2023).

<sup>16</sup> The actor means "that women cover their hair and (editor's comment: yet still) ..."



## Summary

Both posts discussed here exhibit elements of persuasive communication. The targeted invoking of specific scenarios is intended to make viewers of the posts feel guilty and – in order to escape these negative emotions – to convince them of certain statements or attitudes. Both actors mention the 'incorrect wearing' of the hijab as a cause of the guilt weighing on their followers. In fact, according to *Abdelhamid*, the entire *ummah* has been forced to suffer for the wrongdoings of women – hence they must feel even more guilt. Specific solutions are presented for freeing oneself of these feelings of guilt: the supposedly correct wearing of the hijab by women. The conclusion that women can influence the situation of the *ummah* or the status of the man through their clothing makes them a scapegoat who appears simultaneously powerful (women = influence) and powerless (women = submission). This attitude forms the basis of misogynistic<sup>17</sup> narratives which essentialise women as a potential object of guilt, while at the same time holding them responsible for the honour of their *ummah* or their family. The aim is to convince followers to heed the warnings of the actors and to discipline or shame women if they do not stick to the 'normative rules'.

Both actors use their posts to elicit a modification in behaviour with the promise of religiously substantiated rewards. Failure to follow the rules threatens to bring about horror scenarios: the suffering of the *ummah* in the case of *Abdelhamid*, or loss of status within the religious community – and in the eyes of God – in the case of *Abu Rumaisa*. Here, the 'preachers' take on the role of indoctrinators, presenting themselves at the same time as messengers informing their followers of how they can 'make amends'.

## 3.3 Shame

### Case study 1

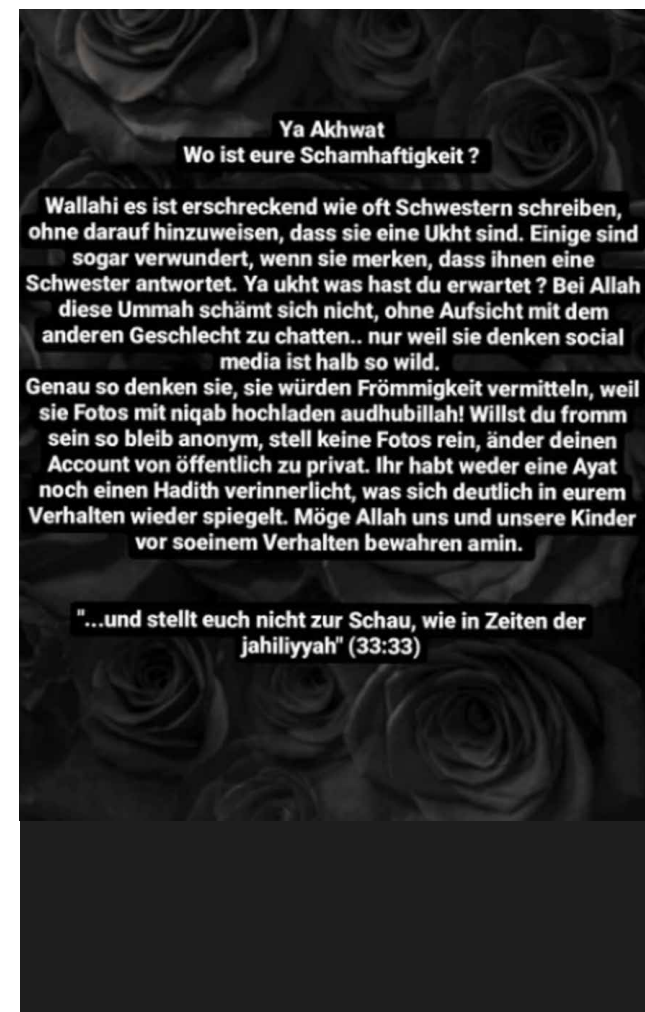


Fig. 5: Instagram story posted by @berlin\_dawah account on 25/09/2023

The Instagram story<sup>18</sup> posted by this actor (Fig. 5) – likely a man due to the use of the name *Abu Musa* in the profile – complains about a lack of "modesty" among "sisters" because he is receiving messages from women "[...] without any indication that they are an *ukht* [Arabic for 'sister']". This actor is of the opinion that those who chat "with the opposite sex" and "without supervision" feel, incorrectly, 'no shame'. The actor also accuses women who wear the *niqab* (Arabic for 'full-face veil') of acting contrary to the rules of behaviour for women by posting photos of themselves wearing the *niqab* on social media,

rather than displaying "piety". According to the author, these rules include anonymity, not uploading any photos and setting one's account to private. In his direct appeal to the *akhawat* (Arabic for 'sisters'), he accuses these women of not understanding the Islamic sources such as *ayat* (Quranic verses) and *hadith* (proclamations of the Prophet Muhammad), which is why they are behaving contrary to the rules. He backs up his claim by quoting part of the 33rd Surah, Verse 33, suggesting that the *akhawat* should not 'display themselves', as women did in the pre-Islamic period, "the *jahiliyyah*" (Arabic for 'Time of Ignorance').

The verse, which is cited in parts of the Instagram story, was passed down in the context of the following narration (here in Dr Mustafa Khattab's English translation): "Settle [alt: Abide] in your homes, and do not display yourselves as women did in the days of pre-Islamic ignorance. Establish prayer, pay alms-tax, and obey Allah and His Messenger. [...]" (cf. <https://quran.com/al-ahزاب?startingVerse=33>). The method of using only parts of quotes and verses or citing such out of context for one's own narrative, and thereby appearing to legitimise such religiously, is widespread in posts from Islamist channels (cf. Kimmel et al. 2018, 25). In his Instagram story, the actor uses part of a significantly longer verse, without contextualising it, in order to convince the *akhawat* to make themselves de facto 'invisible' on social media so as not to fall into the state of *jahiliyyah* – a state, in which they would no longer belong to the religion. By doing this, the actor also intimates that those women who are visible on social media and who interact with "the other sex" are in a state of *jahiliyyah*.

In order to further illustrate this degradation, the actor uses keywords such as "modesty", "*wallahi*" (Arabic for 'Swearing to Allah'), "alarming" or "*audhubillah*" (Arabic, roughly translates to 'I seek refuge in Allah'). The combination of these words with the statements which the actor is making serve to strengthen the shaming of those he is denouncing. "Modesty" is presented here by the actor as a characteristic which ought to be internalised. Röttger-Rössler notes that in hierarchical social groups, shame possesses "the power to regulate society" and is thus considered a "virtue" (2019, 232; see Chapter 2.4. in this publication). By doing this, the actor illustrates his own apparent emotional response to the "rule-breaking" of the "*akhawat*", while also significantly distancing himself from such religiously. The supplication "May Allah keep us and our children safe from such behaviour" connotes the "behaviour" of the "sisters" which the actor disapproves of as something which one must personally protect children against. It is also suggested that

there is a singular interpretation of "modesty" which implies an 'invisibility' or 'passiveness' of women on social media.

Experiences of being degraded can cause feelings of shame, especially if such rejection is aimed at a person in her entirety (cf. Haldimann 2021). Because the actor condemns in his post the visibility of women on social media as such and because the appeal is directed towards the *akhawat*, i.e. 'sisters' in general, the accusation being brought by the actor in this example is open to interpretation. Feeling shame does not require any guilt, i.e. the emotion can occur without having done anything 'wrong'. The "self" is seen through "the eyes of the other", which in turn entails "social anxiety" over being excluded from a social group (cf. Groß et al. 2022, 79) [our translation]. The shaming exhibited in this example could relate to any woman who feels that this post is aimed at them and invites viewers to personally call out any such 'wrongdoings' they observe in other women. Moreover, by singling out the 'sisters', the actor establishes a dichotomy between those who see themselves as 'sinners' according to the appeal made in the post and those who consider themselves 'non-sinners' or persons who must 'admonish' others. According to the narrative of the actor, the only way to escape this degradation is to cease acting contrary to the rules and to submit oneself to the normative order of the in-group. If, however, the "*akhawat*" do not display "modesty" – understood here as a positive characteristic – this will result in a shaming that supposedly has religious legitimacy.

<sup>17</sup> 'Misogyny' comes from the Ancient Greek and means 'hatred of women'. This attitude implies that women are, in principle, inferior to men and must therefore be degraded (cf. Schmincke 2018, p. 29).

<sup>18</sup> [https://www.instagram.com/berlin\\_dawah/](https://www.instagram.com/berlin_dawah/), 25/09/2023. (Last accessed 24/11/2023).



## Case study 2

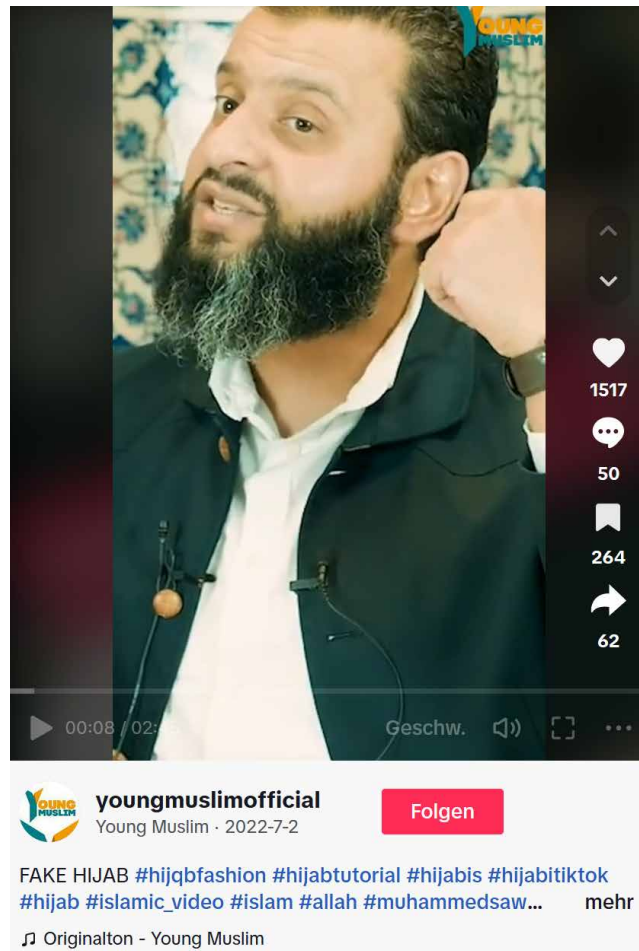


Fig. 6: TikTok video posted by @youngmuslimofficial account on 02/07/2022

This TikTok video,<sup>19</sup> posted on the *Young Muslim* channel (Fig. 6) on 02/07/2022, tackles what the speaker interprets as the correct religious behaviour of women with respect to their external appearance and their use of social media. The video is based on a juxtaposition of women who strive for a dress and lifestyle that is supposedly modest and conforms to religious commandments and proscriptions, and women who disregard these rules, thereby "poisoning" the *ummah*.

The video begins with a description of the *jilbab*,<sup>20</sup> the purpose of which the speaker explains as, "*Jilbab* means

you do not attract anyone's gaze, you do not show your allure. You do not display yourself! Like women did [...] before the time of Islam." (min.: 0:01). Women who wear a headscarf, which the speaker describes as a "symbol of Allah" (min.: 0:16), but also make-up are "[...] clothed, but naked [...]" (min.: 0:18) and are thus debasing the "symbol of Allah" (min.: 0:14). Consequently, women who wear make-up and show themselves wearing the headscarf on social media are "poisoning the *ummah*" (min.: 0:45). The speaker emphasises that he is not appealing to "sisters" who have just conquered their *nafs* and have only just started to wear the headscarf; he would "roll out the red carpet" for these women (min.: 0:41). Women who wear the headscarf and make-up and who are active on social media, on the other hand, are "[...] poisoning this *ummah* [...]" (min.: 0:45). Again, the speaker emphasises, in a raised voice, that his words are aimed at those women who do wear the headscarf and who are or ought to be "a prime example for us" (min.: 1:02) but who are dragging 'his religion' through the mud. "Resulullah (s.a.w.)<sup>21</sup> will call you 'fake! Allah will not set eyes on you out because you [are] damned." (min.: 1:06).

At this point, the speaker ends his direct appeal and shifts to justifying the prescriptions for the dress and behaviour of women by citing the sexualisation of female attributes in society. The speaker mentions a specific example: "Did you not set up this 0180 hotline where women prettify their voice [...] and men become aroused? Did we invent that? No, that comes from you!" (min.: 1:36). By doing this, the speaker is seeking to frame any and all religious prescriptions regarding women's dress as a method of protecting them against sexualisation by (western) society. The speaker illustrates this with a story, in which Aisha, the wife of the Prophet Muhammad, places a stone in her mouth to speak in order to remove the supposed allure from her voice (min.: 1:20). The speaker then juxtaposes this example by adopting an artificially high voice in an attempt to mimic the tone of social media influencers (min.: 1:54). He continues that if his own daughter were to exhibit the behaviour he is criticising, he would personally denounce her when he stands before God on the Day of Reckoning (min.: 2:00). Fathers who wish to save their daughters from this fate should present the wives of the Prophet to them as role models (min.: 2:20). He concludes the video with the explanation that the women on social media are concerned with self-image, followers

19 [https://www.tiktok.com/@youngmuslimofficial/video/7115706748882799878?is\\_from\\_webapp=1&web\\_id=7227011225409242650](https://www.tiktok.com/@youngmuslimofficial/video/7115706748882799878?is_from_webapp=1&web_id=7227011225409242650), 02/07/2022. (Last accessed 24/11/2023).

20 The *jilbab* refers to women's clothing which covers the body fully and hides physical features.

21 This means the Prophet Muhammad. "s.a.w." (an acronym for *salla-lahu alayhi wa-sallam*) means the blessing which many Muslims express after saying the name of Muhammad. In English, this phrase means 'May God bless him and grant him peace!'



and fame (min.: 2:27). "And then they say, 'Thank you to my followers!' You thank your followers? We thank only Allah!" (min.: 2:39).

As is the case in the previous example, this post also directly addresses women. The actor behind *Young Muslim* depicts two sides which he ascribes different assessments to: on the one side are those women who post themselves on social media with an 'incorrect' hijab, thereby "poisoning" the entire *ummah*. Similarly to the first example, these women are compared to the women of the pre-Islamic period. By making references to *jahiliyyah*, actors from the Islamist spectrum insinuate that these views or attitudes run contrary to their interpretation of Islam, meaning that such behaviour is 'un-Islamic'.

The notion that a woman covering herself is a distinguishing feature of Islam becomes emotionally charged in this video, in that the actor considers an 'incorrect' covering to be a 'betrayal' of both his personal religiosity and the entire *ummah*. In doing so, the actor transfers responsibility for the prosperity or decline of the in-group to Muslim women, to such an extent that, according to the actor, the Prophet Muhammad himself would describe these women as "fake" and God would cast them out and curse them. Here, the actor uses colloquial language and terms that will appeal to younger viewers ("fake", "won't set eyes on you!") to equate his own obvious attitude with that of the Prophet Muhammad and God. Regarding language with youth appeal, Kimmel et al. write in a paper on propaganda strategies utilised by online

Salafists, "By employing youth-speak, Salafist actors convey a close affinity with the life-worlds of young people, making it easier for them to identify with the ideology." (2018, 34) [our translation]. *Young Muslim* uses his assertions to draw specific reference to the Day of Reckoning, prophesying that on this day, the women he is appealing to will be met with divine punishment and contempt from the Prophet Muhammad.

In his video, the actor juxtaposes two groups of women which he himself has defined: one group, which he holds in extremely high regard, is made up of those women who have recently decided to start wearing a hijab and are still in the learning process. The other is made up of those women who wear the hijab but also put on make-up and dress in a way that 'highlights their physical features'. *Young Muslim* thus portrays two opposing sides, one of whom is regarded favourably while the other is met with disgust. Through this public and collective shaming, the actor draws a line between those who are being shamed and those who are doing the shaming. It would seem that in order to avoid falling into the former group, it is necessary to distance oneself so as not to succumb to moral decay. In concrete terms, however, this shaming only affects women. According to the logic of the actor, those women who fall under the first category no longer have the right to belong to the in-group and will be punished in the afterlife.

For viewers, this could create the impression that they must 'join' one of the two opposing sides (cf. Reinke de Buitrago 2022, 67). According to von Scheve, this sham-

ing, which in this case is being done by the actor in question, acts as a "sense of worth", against which the subject of the shaming measures their self-image (cf. 2022, 406). Given the collective address used in the video, it is not clear for individual consumers whether the shaming applies to them personally. It is this ambiguity in the appeal that can be used to stoke the 'social anxiety' of being excluded from the in-group (cf. Groß et al. 2022, 79) – both in this life and the next. An act of shaming that is explicitly intended to create shame in one's counterpart can thus "facilitate social control" within the in-group (ibid). Groß et al. continue, "Shame therefore acquires an important social function in the forming of collective identities and in ensuring conformity with group norms [...]" (ibid) [our translation]. In the video, the actor speaks, in particular, of a perceived violation (by women) of group norms and uses the mechanisms described here to create a sense of shame and degrade these women.

It seems that it is essential for the actor not only to evoke a feeling of shame in the women he is addressing, but to bring the collective of followers over to his side as well. He shows this in the nature of his appeal in the video too. While in the first part he specifically addresses every woman who identifies with his accusations by using the second-person "you", in the following section he addresses fathers, telling them how they can protect their daughters against such behaviour. This form of address also indicates the actor's fundamental understanding of roles. The actor ostracises women because of their 'transgressive' behaviour, while at the same time holding fathers – i.e. men – responsible for raising their daughters in compliance with the norms. While the actor himself criticises the sexualisation of women within the majority of society and distances himself from such, he himself uses sexist narratives.<sup>22</sup>

It is also true that sexist views include the belief that a certain appearance and behaviour is the norm for each gender respectively and that violation of these norms will have negative consequences. (ibid). According to this definition, the line of argument put forward by the actor in this video could also be categorised as sexist.

<sup>22</sup> The Federal Agency for Civic Education defines sexism as, "Sexism is a form of discrimination. Sexism means degrading, harming, oppressing or treating unfairly any person or group of persons on the grounds of their sex or gender. Sexism is also the view that there is a hierarchy of genders. For example, the view that men are worth more than women." (Meyer et al. 2022. „Sexismus“ [Sexism]) [our translation].

By accusing women of damaging "the symbol of Allah" and "his religion", not only is he addressing the women themselves, he is also emphasising the harm or ignominy being caused to the collective. The in-group is therefore encouraged to adopt a similar position to that of the actor and to condemn transgressive behaviour or the transgressors themselves.

### Summary

In the examples selected here, male actors call out (Muslim) women in videos or text posts on account of their supposedly inappropriate behaviour. The two posts presented here revolve around condemning the visibility of women and refer to their clothing or their behaviour which the actors present as 'breaking the rules'. Both actors initially address women directly, thereby initiating an apparent dialogue in their communication. Since they do not mention any names or specific women, it is left up to the followers to decide who this 'angry sermon' is aimed at. This empty space gives followers the option to either feel that the posts are addressing them personally or to 'select' other people who must be criticised accordingly. The actors present themselves as religious authorities, preaching or making denunciations in the name of God. If a consumer accepts this self-appointment, then it seems plausible that the statements made by the respective actors are of relevance for the in-group. In this way, too, both actors construct 'sides' which one must choose between, with one side being the side which the actor and, in his interpretation, God and the Prophet Muhammad repudiate.

It is beyond the scope of this publication to say how far followers believe themselves to be the target of the actors' words and develop feelings of shame. However, the emotional charge behind the negative keywords utilised here (e.g. "audhubillah", "soiling", "poisoning") and the mechanisms used to appeal to consumers suggest that the actors are deeply concerned with appealing to or trigger just such emotions. These two examples can help mark the differences between the terms modesty, shaming and shame: 'modesty', which (for women) has positive associations with being 'correctly' covered, refraining from social media activities and largely being invisible, is the normative yardstick of the in-group which the actors use to appraise or degrade women; 'shaming' is the act of condemning a lack of 'modesty' in women; and 'shame' is the emotion that can be evoked by the act of 'shaming' as a response to the post if the degrading external image posited by the actors is adopted as a negative self-image.



Fig. 7: YouTube video posted by @RealitaetIslam channel on 12/03/2023

### 3.4 Dishonour

'Dishonour' is not an emotion like 'guilt' or 'shame', rather it is understood in social and cultural anthropology as a concept, according to which people in societies are categorised as respected or "dishonourable" (Röttger-Rössler 2019, 231) [our translation]. Röttger-Rössler argues that the opposite of 'dishonour' is 'honour' which can be lost by acting contrary to the norms (ibid; see also Chapter 2.4. in this publication). Here, 'dishonour' should be understood as a category of public and targeted degradation within the in-group on social media.

#### Case study 1

This YouTube video from *Realität Islam* [Reality Islam] (Fig. 7)<sup>23</sup> discusses a news report concerning a teacher of Islamic religious studies from Vienna who took off her headscarf because it was perceived as a symbol of "political Islam". In the article, the teacher distances herself from certain tenets, such as strict rules on clothing for women, and admits feeling alienated by religious commandments and proscriptions.

<sup>23</sup> [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JBR5-YyMqKU&list=PLhFqB\\_L5woUFE\\_KPae\\_U1xrFI6PMNTCKU&index=39](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JBR5-YyMqKU&list=PLhFqB_L5woUFE_KPae_U1xrFI6PMNTCKU&index=39), 12/03/2023. (Last accessed 24/11/2023).

The *Realität Islam* speaker introduces the video with a brief description of the case of the teacher, emphasising that the public statements made by the teacher regarding this case are what ultimately prompted him to comment on the case publicly (min.: 0:02). After this introduction, the speaker moves on to addressing the teacher directly and by name. He claims that the publication of this article has made him and many Muslims upset (min.: 0:11). The speaker further asserts that it could be gleaned from the article that the teacher was "pressured" into her decision (min.: 0:25). The speaker then infers from this assumption that the teacher did not make an independent decision and was instead the victim of an "assimilation agenda". This agenda arises from "non-Islamic reformist ideas", such as self-determination, whereas the religion demands the maximum possible observance of commandments and proscriptions (min.: 0:54). Ideas such as self-determination will "sneak into the Muslim community through the back door, unnoticed" as part of the "assimilation agenda" and ultimately pose a concrete danger to the doctrine of the religion (min.: 1:31). The teacher's decision is then framed as her surrendering and caving in to the pressure of this "assimilation agenda" (min.: 2:27). Finally, the speaker employs a thought experiment in an attempt to suggest that if there were no "demonisation" of Islam in politics and the media, then this teacher would likely have



continued wearing her headscarf: "So the reason is not your headscarf, it is the furore surrounding it" (min.: 3:47).

After applying the universal framing of *Hizb ut-Tahrir*-aligned channels such as *Realität Islam* to the case of the teacher (Baron 2021; min.: 4:00), the speaker remarks that the teacher will be held to account by God for taking off her headscarf. He adds that what the teacher's decision is doing to the Muslim community is also important (min.: 4:35). He describes the 'damage' caused to women in the 'Muslim community' as follows: "[...] think about what you are doing to all your covered sisters. [...] But now you are just another one of those who are increasing the pressure on our sisters [...]" And: "[...] you are among those who are further intensifying the Islamophobic narratives, making public life harder for our sisters." (min.: 4:41). The teacher broke down, the speaker claims, because of the pressure and the suffering, which is why she distanced herself from her Muslim identity, but this decision will only intensify her own suffering. The video ends with the speaker expressing his wish that the teacher in question receive guidance<sup>24</sup> and calling on viewers to stand firm in the face of the pressure of the "assimilation agenda" (min.: 5:45).

For the actors, the publication of the story of a Muslim woman was enough to prompt them to upload an opinion on the story to *YouTube*. In doing so, the actors behind *Realität Islam* are making the case of the teacher taking off her headscarf politically charged. The speaker in this video uses the keyword "assimilation agenda" which is frequently employed by the channel. This line of argument, frequently utilised by *Hizb ut-Tahrir*-aligned channels, is described by Brinkmöller and Wetchy as the imagining "of state coercion to give up one's 'true Muslim identity' in favour of an officially installed 'reformist Islam' or 'assimilation agenda'" (2023, 8) [our translation]. The actor depicts the "assimilation agenda" as being in opposition to the in-group of the 'true Muslim community'. By claiming that taking off one's headscarf is a consequence of the "assimilation agenda", the actor places the teacher, as a Muslim woman, on the side of the 'enemies' – in this case 'the West'. Thus, this example also constructs two opposing, irreconcilable sides, giving the impression that followers must choose one or the other.

24 'Guidance' ('*hidāyah*' in Arabic) is a central concept within Islamic theology and is mentioned several times in the Quran. It is an expression of the need to be 'guided to the right path', i.e. to lead a life according to Islamic morals and the rules of Islam in order to please God. The opposite of 'guidance' is 'misguidance' ('*dalāla*' in Arabic).

Extremist communication is most "[...] meaningful and relevant [...]" (Struck et al. 2022, 176) for recipients when it relates to their own lived reality and personal perceptions (based on previous experience, for example). Actors can use extremist language online to load the in-group with positive and the out-group with negative associations for recipients. The out-group can be declared an enemy of the in-group through the use of segregation language (Williams et al. 2022, 1; 11).<sup>25</sup> In the example presented here, the speaker uses his "statement" to build a picture of an enemy (the state) who wants to adapt the identity of the "Muslim community" in its faith and its practice to its own norms and values by imposing "reforms". The actor uses keywords like "assimilation agenda" or "non-Islamic reformist ideas" time and again in the video to give his accusation against a single individual meaning for the collective of recipients.

After all, the alleged "assimilation agenda", which the actor claims is highly effective (the teacher removed her headscarf because of the "assimilation agenda"), affects the entire "Muslim community". It thus seems legitimate for the actor to criticise the teacher for her individual decision publicly, in front of the collective, since his statements also convey the message that the "Muslim community" will be made to suffer the consequences of this decision.

In an article on language use, Girnth argues in a section on 'The vocabulary of ideology' that, "The vocabulary of ideology encompasses labels for the values and thought patterns underlying a political grouping or society, e.g. freedom, justice or peace." (Girnth 2010) [our translation]. He goes on to say that the use of certain keywords serves to increase the impact of a narrative. Narratives are politicised through the use of a "vocabulary of ideology" which uses keywords to reinforce its own position, while simultaneously denigrating the opposing side. These keywords are emotionally charge for the in-group and have "enormous persuasive potential" (Girnth 2010) [our translation]. While Girnth does not describe extremist language specifically, his description of the function of keywords is very much relevant in the context of the politicising approach employed in the example in question. The keywords used in the *Realität Islam* video can be understood as a "vocabulary of ideology" because they situate the accusation against the teacher in a persuasive manner for the collective.

25 For a detailed analysis of the communication of Islamist online actors with regards to the 'media' as an enemy, see Brinkmöller and Wetchy (2023): <https://kn-ix.de/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Violence-Prevention-Network-Schriftenreihe-Heft-12-1.pdf>. (Last accessed 24/11/2023).

In addition to the politicisation of his opinion, the actor gives his narrative of the Muslim teacher – who has 'betrayed' her in-group for the "assimilation agenda" – a connotation of religious judgement and pivots from political speaker for the in-group to 'preacher'. The teacher must defend her 'misdeed' before God and should be given guidance. With his conclusions and exclusionary vocabulary, the actor clearly marks out the teacher as an opponent of his ideology. Unlike the examples in the previous chapter, viewers are left in no doubt here as to who the accusation is being brought against – the defendant has been clearly identified and placed in the stocks.

## Case study 2

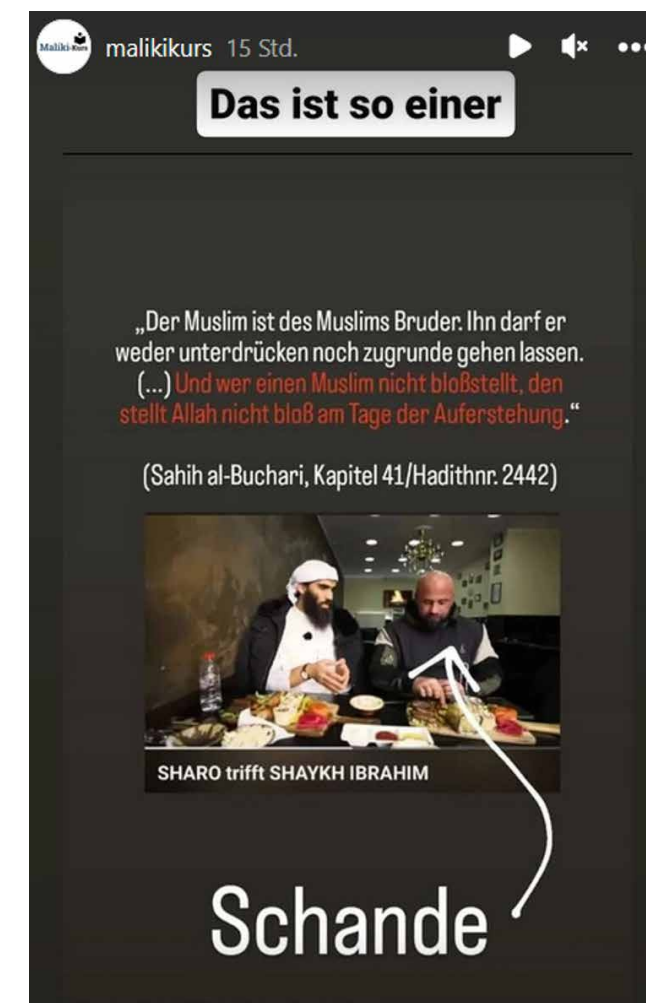


Fig. 8: Instagram story posted by @malikikurs channel on 05/02/2023

This screenshot<sup>26</sup> (Fig. 8) is of an *Instagram* story posted by @malikikurs on 05/02/2023. In the centre of the post is a screenshot from an interview which YouTuber *Sharo45* con-

26 <https://www.instagram.com/malikikurs/>, 05/02/2023. (Last accessed 24/11/2023).

ducted with Salafist *TikTok* preacher *Ibrahim al-Azzazi*.<sup>27</sup> In this excerpt, *Sharo45* and *al-Azzazi* are sat next to one another in an interview setting. Above the screenshot is a quote from the *hadith* which reads, "A Muslim is a brother of another Muslim, So he should not oppress him, nor should he hand him over to an oppressor. (...) And whoever screened a Muslim, Allah will screen him on the Day of Resurrection." Above the *hadith*, at the top of the post, is the text "One of them lot". Beneath the screenshot is the word "Dishonour". There is an arrow leading from this word to the screenshot from the interview, pointing at *Sharo45*.

The *Instagram* story is part of a wide debate on social media, in which chef *Sharo*, who came to fame through his social media channels, talks to Salafist preacher *al-Azzazi*. In their conversation, *Sharo* asks *Ibrahim al-Azzazi* questions on topics such as statements he has made on social media, the title of "sheikh" and whether *al-Azzazi* would classify himself as an "extreme Muslim". *Sharo* concedes that *al-Azzazi* has good intentions but criticises the manner, in which he spreads his messages and interrogates him on certain topics. *Sharo* also comments that he feels *al-Azzazi's* social media content is "putting people off Islam". Numerous followers and other creators reacted to the conversation between *Sharo* and *al-Azzazi* in comments, videos and social media posts. *Sharo* came in for fierce criticism for the questions he asked *al-Azzazi*. One of the posts which reacted to this interview emotionally is the example presented here.

The actor in this example (Fig. 8) uses his story to position himself in the social media debate, bestowing on *Sharo*, who also identifies as Muslim, the title "dishonour". Combined with the *hadith* above the screenshot of the two men, not only is this actor judging *Sharo* within the debate in question as someone who cannot be relied on, he also views him as someone who has violated religious values. The first part of the *hadith* relates how Muslims must not oppress or harm one another. The second part states that Muslims should not screen one another.

With the *hadith*, the author in this example is implying that *Sharo* has screened *al-Azzazi* and that this could lead to consequences in the afterlife.

27 <https://youtu.be/q9K5MdJCHAE?feature=shared>, 30/01/2023. (Last accessed 24/11/2023).



The OED defines "dishonour" as "the withholding of the tokens of esteem, respect, or reverence due to a person" and "a state of shame or disgrace; ignominy, indignity" (2023). According to Röttger-Rössler, cultures differ in what they consider to be "dishonourable", i.e. leading to a state of "dishonour". Apart from behaviour which runs contrary to the in-group norm, another crucial factor in falling into a state of "dishonour" is the harming of others through "provocative, injurious behaviour" (cf. 2019, 231) [our translation]. By referring to *Sharo* using by the term "dishonour", the actor in this example is lowering his status in the in-group to that of a dishonourable person. The actor is thus marking out *Sharo* as someone who has lost his right to be an honourable member of the in-group on account of his public criticism of *al-Azzazi*.

### Summary

While the examples of fear, shame and guilt address the 'guilty' as a group of 'offenders', the examples analysed here use specific names and images. By being named directly, the targets are singled out as "dishonourable, disgraced persons" (Röttger-Rössler 2019, 231) [our translation]. In the first example (Fig. 7), the speaker goes so far as to classify the teacher as an enemy of the in-group. In the second example (Fig. 8), the actor uses dramatic elements, like the combination of a screenshot from the video he is commenting on, the *hadith*, which he uses to degrade *Sharo* without any theological context, and the keyword "Dishonour" in black and white with the arrow pointing to *Sharo*. Unlike the video examined in the first case study

in this chapter, in which the actor from *Realität Islam* describes his position at length, in this example it is enough to combine the keyword "Dishonour" with the visual effects to describe *Sharo* to the consumers as "dishonourable".

Social media provides the opportunity to reach thousands of people worldwide through digital content. Denouncing specific people or pillorying them publicly highlights for the in-group regardless of time and space that these people are 'excommunicated' members or belong to the opposing side. This sort of pillorying is most effective for an in-group due to the prevailing values. In both of the examples examined here, the 'transgressions' against these values are defined by the respective actors and can thus be used to degrade the offenders collectively. Since there is no longer any separation between the digital and the analogue world, it is impossible to predict the psychological impact of a public denunciation on the victims or the adoption of this image of the enemy by the recipients.

### 3.5 Conclusion

"Social media are emotional media." (cf. Döveling et al. 2018, 1)

Islamist actors on social media employ targeted emotionalisation strategies in their posts to imbue their narratives with "tension, focus, interest and excitement" (cf. Reinke de Buitrago 2022, 66) [our translation]. Through content posted on social media platforms in the form of 'stories' (*Instagram*), videos (*Instagram*, *TikTok*, *YouTube*) or posts (*Instagram*), actors can use these dramatised narratives to evoke emotions in their followers without prior interactions.

Quranic verses, *hadith* ascribed to the Prophet Muhammad, comments from scholars, or specific Arabic sayings are drawn on as 'evidence' and interpreted in contexts which serve the narrative, as a way of convincing followers of the content of these posts. In light of religious connotation and 'divine command', Islamist actors establish value maxims and behavioural norms within their in-group, i.e. in different factions or social media channels. In some of the case studies presented in Chapter 3 (Figs. 1, 5 and 8), this method is used by actors to suggest some religious authority and underpin their narrative from a 'normative-religious' perspective.

Generally speaking, these value maxims and behavioural norms are not presented descriptively, but instead come already laden with emotions for the viewers of the posts. In the examples in Chapter 3, the actors identify 'wrongdoings'

which they decry. All of the examples given here (except for 3.3.2) state that this behaviour will result in punishment in the afterlife. Women, in particular, are presented in most examples as 'rule-breakers', the majority of them guilty of wearing an 'incorrect' covering or 'none at all' (Figs. 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7). Several actors (Figs. 3, 4, 5 and 6) also denounce the outwardly visible behaviour of women which they consider transgressive or 'dishonourable'. The fact that Islamist actors specifically address women in degrading and denunciatory social media posts could be because the hijab and the public appearance of women are things which can be perceived – and judged – 'outwardly'. In his video, the actor behind *Young Muslim* names the hijab as a "prime example" which represents the in-group externally (Fig. 6). The actor considers 'false' representation to be harmful to the honour of the entire community. Consequently, women are associated in many posts (Figs. 3, 4, 6 and 7) with the 'honour' of the in-group, while at the same time being held responsible for the loss of this honour. 'Honour' in these examples is understood as the standing of the man (Figs. 4 and 6) and of the in-group (Figs. 3, 6 and 7) outwardly and before Allah (Fig. 3). In order to restore this 'honour', the actors believe it is necessary to call out, shame and denounce those who are responsible for this 'loss of honour' (see Chapter 2.4.). These arguments mostly rely on misogynistic narratives (Figs. 3, 4, 5 and 6) which first essentialise and then degrade women.

The emotional aspects of the posts serve to intensify the message and establish a hierarchy within the in-group. The posts describe horror scenarios in order to evoke fear (Fig. 1), while at the same time offering (imprecise) solutions for avoiding such situations. The aim here is to 'provoke' behaviour that conforms to the norms (Figs. 1 and 2) and to evoke an intrinsic motivation to modify one's behaviour. Smith and Mackie explain that 'fear' is most useful in persuasive communication when it is used in conjunction with potential ways to attain relief (cf. 2007, 258). In narratives intended to elicit feelings of guilt in recipients, the aim of the actors is to denounce their target audience morally and to internalise the understanding of transgression through external judgement. This is supposed to create for the target audience a need to 'make amends for the harm caused' (cf. Hosser 2005, 229) and ask for 'forgiveness' (Fig. 3). Eliciting shame (Figs. 5 and 6) does not necessarily require that blame be apportioned, rather it can lead to the target audience degrading themselves internally as a result of being degraded externally by the actors (cf. Groß et al. 2022, 79). Because of the associated social control, shame can acquire "an important social function in the forming of collec-



tive identities" and ensure "conformity with group norms" (ibid) [our translation]. Online actors utilise a strategy of publicly singling out specific persons as 'dishonourable' in order to strengthen the self-image and identity of the group internally. This boosts the group identity by degrading the individual.

In their study, Groß et al. (2022) highlight the use of emotions in extremist narratives which are most widespread on social media. In addition to a lack of time and spatial restrictions, the transmissions between senders and recipients on social media are fluid, which, according to Groß et al., could lead to a "[...] never-before-seen chain of theoretically limitless acts of mobilisation communication [...]" (2022, 77) [our translation].

By using 'we' as opposed to 'you', the actors construct "delineating frameworks" (Wiedl 2014, 20) [our translation] which imply two sides. The 'we'-side represents the virtuous in-group while, by contrast, the 'you/they'-group is presented as the sinful, bad side (ibid). Persuasive communication, conveying feelings of guilt and shame and singling out specific persons, thus establishes a hierarchy within the in-group. On the one hand, the actor assumes the role of an indoctrinator, positioning themselves in opposition to the recipients – the indoctrinees. On the other, a disparity can be created among the target audience, in that they see themselves either as being on the side of the indoctrinator (and therefore superior to others in the 'moralistic' hierarchy) or as indoctrinated (or rather, guilty or shamed) individuals.

In order to understand the mechanisms which Islamist actors use in their communication and to raise awareness of how to spot emotionalising appeals, it is necessary to examine the functions of these strategies.

#### 4. Implications for practitioners

When dealing with fears and anxieties – as they are examined in this publication – in practical counselling work, it is important to first create an atmosphere and relationship which allows young people to open up and communicate their fears (Nordbruch 2020). It is therefore important that practitioners take young people's needs, concerns and fears seriously. In concrete terms, this means identifying and engaging with the fears behind the threat scenarios. If a client is fearful of potentially being punished in hell, for example, then the fears behind this, e.g. fear of death, should be addressed (ibid). In the case

of fear of punishment, prompts can be used to interrogate the underlying image of God (ibid). Is God always wrathful, punitive and uncompromising or is he benevolent and merciful, or somewhere in between (ibid)? It can be helpful in this context to engage alternative religious authorities, such as imams, or practitioners with the same religious background. That way, the religiosity of the client can be utilised as an additional resource.

The ability to understand, articulate and nurture one's own emotions is particularly important when tackling negative feelings like guilt and shame. Stable social relationships, dialogue with peers and sports activities can help to foster this skill (Streit 2019, 22). The relationship with the client is also particularly important when dealing with shameful topics as shame can lead to withdrawal and an unwillingness and inability to communicate (Streit 2019, 53). During sessions, practitioners can refer to their experiences and how they deal with similar feelings in order to show the client that they are not alone with their feelings and in order to strengthen the relationship (Nordbruch 2020).

Highlighting and praising successes or activities both big and small, e.g. homework or child-rearing, can be a good tool for managing feelings of shame and counteracting the emotions and doubt associated with shame (Streit 2019, 100). This approach will break through the negative expectations which this shame causes and create an irritation which over time can help the client to reflect on these expectations and open up during sessions.

At the same time, it is important that practitioners be aware of the limits of their actions. Attempts by the client to compensate for feelings of guilt and shame with religious piety can end in a vicious circle. In order to break this cycle, it may be advisable to send the client for psychotherapy which should not be performed by the practitioner (Sonnenmoser 2010, 320 f.). The best tools for making this journey easier for practitioners and their clients are the principles of emotional work, an empathetic and respectful attitude, and patience (ibid).

However, guilt and shame are not just relevant in pre-radicalisation processes, they also come into play in disengagement work (Walkenhorst 2022, 7). In this context, these emotions can have a positive and intensifying effect on the disengagement process by enabling the client to perceive their responsibility for their own actions and can lead to regret and the desire to make amends (Ohlenforst

et al. 2022, 52). These feelings can therefore be utilised during the initial stages of disengagement, in particular (Walkenhorst 2022, 8). Nevertheless, feelings of guilt and shame are initially negative-coded emotions for clients and so it is important to bear in mind clients' avoidance and coping strategies which are designed to avoid these uncomfortable feelings and thus also prevent any appreciation or acceptance of a client's own responsibility (Hosser et al. 2005, 229). While the data do not permit any general statements on the preventive effect of feelings of guilt and shame at this stage, isolated studies on detainees strongly indicate a link between feelings of guilt following a serious violent act and preventing recidivism after release (cf. Hosser et al., 2005). However, extreme caution is advised when dealing with these emotions, especially in the context of mental illnesses, as intense feelings of shame and guilt can aggravate symptoms and thus have the opposite effect (Al-Attar 2019, 19).

It can be helpful to seek external support at a theoretical level as well. Projects like *RISE* offer both theoretical background knowledge and methods and tips for practical work on making young people more resistant to extremist discourse.<sup>28</sup> The Department of Psychotherapy at Violence Prevention Network gGmbH works on "reinforcing the psychological perspective in extremism prevention and disengagement work"<sup>29</sup> and establishing a network between the advice centre in Berlin and practitioners working in psychiatry and psychotherapy. The aim of this work is to guarantee holistic practical casework with young people.

#### 5. Results and outlook

This publication demonstrates how Islamist actors use emotional aspects in their social media posts to underpin their narratives. The *primary emotion* of fear is often used in connection with the prospect of punishment in the afterlife and serves to convince the target audience of the actor's own narrative, with the solution being to adhere to conformative behaviour. The *secondary emotions* of guilt and shame act as regulators and 'social control' within the in-group. While the triggering of feelings of guilt is an appeal to make amends and express regret, shame causes recipients to adopt the external degradation, resulting in

internal self-deprecation. The emotions of fear, guilt and shame are closely connected and it makes sense to analyse the different functions of these emotions in detail so that they can be addressed more precisely in prevention and disengagement work.

Publicly degrading and singling out 'sinful people' serves to restore the damaged 'honour' of the in-group and allows the 'dishonour' to be morally circumscribed. Naming concrete objects of 'dishonour', especially in the context of extremist groups, can elicit digital and analogue reactions which could prove dangerous for the person in question. It is therefore necessary for prevention practitioners, and also security agencies and social media platforms themselves, to remain alert to the singling out of specific individuals as 'scapegoats' and to the recipients reacting to such incidents.

An important identifying feature and contrasting element in the persuasive communication of Islamist actors is the use of keywords. Through a linguistic juxtaposition of 'good' and 'evil', it is left to the target audience to pick a side. However, since the recipients evaluate emotions differently in their lived reality outside of social media as a result of their socialisation and cultural education, the influence of Islamist social media actors on the emotional lives of their followers must always be assessed individually in prevention work.

The theory of 'contagious emotions' (see Chapter 3.5.) assumes that 'affective factions' on social media can "construct [the feeling of] emotional and cultural belonging" by communicating across time and space (Groß et al. 2022, 83) [our translation]. It is possible that recipients adopt the narratives of extremist actors or adapt their behaviour or self-image based on external (negative) appraisals due to "emotional resonance" (ibid). In the case studies on 'fear' and 'guilt', the actors are potentially intending to motivate a modification in the behaviour of the 'accused' and to bind them more closely to the in-group by exerting pressure to 'make amends'. The posts on 'shame' also appear to be attempts to regulate and simultaneously lower the social status of the 'guilty' persons. Little is known at present about the actual impact and reception of social media posts among followers. This should be the focus of further investigations.

While this publication tackles narratives of 'Islamist actors', it is necessary to assess accounts from different scenes individually, according to their respective circumstances.

28 See: <https://rise-jugendkultur.de/> (Last accessed 24/11/2023).

29 See: <https://violence-prevention-network.de/fachbereiche/fachbereich-psychotherapie/> (Last accessed 27/11/2023).

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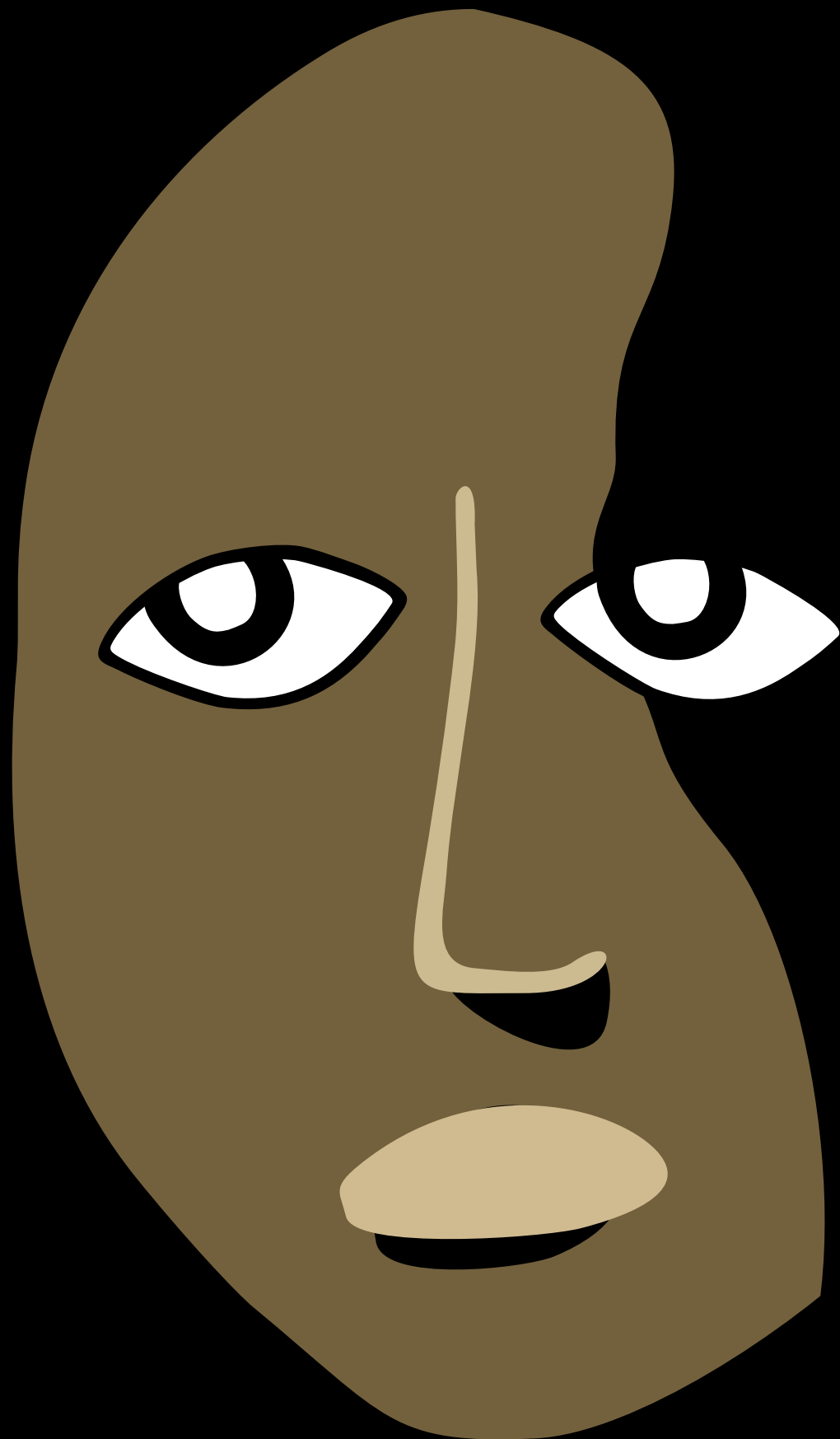
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Figure 8: Maliki-Kurs. Instagram story. 05.02.2023. <https://www.instagram.com/malikikurs/> (Last accessed 24/11/2023).

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📍 Violence Prevention Network gGmbH  
Judy Korn, Thomas Mücke - Management  
Alt-Reinickendorf 25  
13407 Berlin  
☎️ (030) 917 05 464  
✉️ (030) 398 35 284  
✉️ post@violence-prevention-network.de  
🌐 www.violence-prevention-network.de

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