



„Instrumentalization of Anasheed“

German-Arab Friendship Association (DAFG)

Berlin, Friedrichstraße 186

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Overview

It is now completely clear that people are always on their smartphones, tablets and laptops and constantly using them for social media and spending their time reading posts from blogs. However many sites not only create a lot of room for opinions, but also for propaganda, and the separation between the two is often very difficult and only becomes clear upon closer inspection. It is therefore all the more important to create opportunities that educate people about extremist phenomena and thus "educate" young people about the dangers of the internet. On 5th May 2018, we launched our very first workshop on propaganda. The focus was the instrumentalization of Islamic music (Anasheed). 15 participants came together to the German-Arab Friendship Society in Berlin and started with an introduction and followed on with a small presentation that created the basic understanding of the problem and defined the most important terms. This presentation was titled "Extremism, Radicalization and Terrorism - Definition, Explanation and Examples".

Short summary of the lecture:

1. Many reports on topics such as Islamism, extremism and terrorism

→ Leads to the first challenge: On what grounds and when do these terms apply?

2. Many blogs, tweets and Facebook comments with statements like: Islamist, extremist and terrorist.

→ For the 2nd challenge = use of undefined terms

3. Misunderstandings and prejudices

→ Leads to the 3rd Challenge = Similarities fall into oblivion therefore, explain the right definition and use it responsibly.

Exact definitions for the "-ism" terms do not exist (ex: extremism, Islamism, etc.), but only approximate provisions that serve to differentiate. All of these terms, for example, combine ideological, political or psychological factors. Thus, a differentiation is essential to avoid misunderstandings.

After a detailed interactive activity, the participants exchanged their thoughts during break. This was followed by a lecture which served as an introduction to the main topic and demonstrated the history of Anasheed and the significance of Islamic tradition.



Short summary of the lecture:

- Nasheed, pl: Anasheed - Ilahi / Ilahija

- They are lyrical texts and verses associated with religious themes, which were subsequently created with melodies

- Can have a regional and / or national reference and they vary accordingly in tune. There are many general Anasheeds that are played for example during Ramadan or festivals. Scholars have different opinions on Anasheeds - some say it is forbidden whilst others argue that it is permissible.

- There are traditions that clearly indicate that during the time of the Prophet Muhammad (saw) "music" was both created and performed at festivals.

- Even today, Nasheeds are often used in Islamic traditions, for example at weddings, before and after pilgrimage, and different types of festivals.

- What Nasheeds / Music should not do:
 - Result to material or moral damage
 - Result to bad motives

The participants realized that they did not know exactly which terms should be used and when, and therefore did not know how these terms should be defined and associated. Especially participants, who have shown clear interest in their future careers as journalists, raised clear concerns that it would be difficult, especially in the media to report on incidents that involve cases that call for the use of such terms. Special care must be taken here, as misleading terms can lead to fake news, conflicts in social networks and propaganda which was further confirmed by the other participants. As one participant explained, "Muslims are labelled as terrorist when such attacks occur, whilst non Muslims who carry out similar or even worse occurrences are sectioned into 'Mental Health'. I don't understand why there is a difference in the terms used although in my opinion, both are equally bad."

These statements sparked the interest and curiosity of the participants and therefore lead to more discussions. They also showed active participation in the main topic (Nasheed) since most of them can relate, as they too listen to Nasheeds and even see it as their own "pop culture". It was evident from the beginning that their participation did not need much encouragement.

This event also illustrated the dangers that lurk in the absence of awareness, in relation to this topic and resulting to the importance of Anasheeds on how the discussions and questions were raised along with the overall participation. There are now many modern and well-known Nasheed musicians who have a similar fan base as Popstars. Nasheeds are also very popular in English speaking countries.

Both presentations were then discussed in detail within the group. At this stage it was important for the presenters Elif Altundag and Suphian Al-Sayad that the participants recognized the original thought and intention of the Anasheed before the second lecture as it dealt with a stronger abuse thought of these Islamic music pieces.

Short summary "Propaganda with Anasheed":

- First extremist Anasheed emerged in the 1970s
- Protest against leaders or the prevailing "system"
- Creation of a counterculture → Return to "lost Islam"
- A tool to fight abuse
- Link to common traditions and common culture
- Well-known rhythms and well-known Islamic songs → fed with ideology of extremists
- In Germany: The first extremist Nasheed appeared in 2008

→ **As a result: own compositions and worse in quality**

After the presentation and lively discussions, we followed on with a lunch break, offering a great variety of delicious food. During this time, there was a lively discussion and the exchange in thoughts continued within this atmosphere, the participants also got to know and understand each other better.

The second part of the workshop was presented with the methods of propaganda in which extremists use Nasheeds to inspire young people to fall into their ideologies. One of the most famous musicians that used this form is Denis Cuspert, who is also known as name "Deso Dagg" (Stage name).

In most ideologies, music is used to convey certain thoughts, opinions and ethics in order to further radicalize people / target group and manipulate them for their own cause. The key for these type of negative and psychological music is that these ideologies are emotionally arranged, with melancholic, beautiful and calming melodies.

The idea that music creates a connection is not new. This is known from concerts and festivals of right-wing extremists. They use this method to create a "comradeship or brotherhood", to mobilize and to attract newcomers, who are at first attracted to the music and consequently create a subliminal to a certain ideology.



In this context, the extremists take advantage of the enormous benefit of social media. They specifically post their content, such as extreme Nasheeds or propaganda videos that carry similar messages to serve the system spreading them to more and more extremists and potentially winning them over.

Above all, it was important for the presenters to inform the participants in dealing with social media and to point out the dangers of the extremist scenes.

Young people who have had bad experiences, such as discrimination, racism, lack of education, identity crisis or even a broken home, are unfortunately have a higher chance to be addressed and fascinated with these instrumentals that extremists make.

To show the participants a more practical image during the workshop, two groups were formed in which they watched two different Nasheed-videos in separate rooms, where both videos were used for propaganda purposes. They were instructed to watch both videos and exchange their views with the help of questions such as, How does the video affect me? How should it be addressed? How does it make you feel? etc

Final round & Conclusion

In conclusion, the opinions and thoughts expressed in the workshops were very similar. Most of the participants were surprised that both films were propaganda videos and carried extremist content, initially this was not clear, since the ideologies are hidden in such videos and very subliminal.

"The first video sounded so harmonious and beautiful, however without subtitles I would not have known that it is really this bad as it is glorifying violence and brutality," said one participant.

Another added, "Ramadan is approaching, a time when people like to listen to Nasheeds. I do not really listen to them, but even if it were to happen somewhere, I would never think of it as involving violence. "

One participant added: "That's why I only listen to Nasheeds, which I understand".

Although there are many old traditional Nasheeds that are known from respective homelands and played at events, with unknown Nasheeds it is best to look more closely and not to be blinded by emotional and "Islamic" melodies.

The feedback was very positive and the event as expected was carried out with an active participation of those present. The topic, unfortunately can continue and become a never ending conversation, after all, extremism will remain an important issue for a long time, and it must be taken seriously. But through the right channels, such as interactive workshops and lectures, a level of prevention can be achieved.

Ensuring that both multipliers and young people are made aware of the dangers such as the "instrumentalization of Nasheeds", so that this phenomenon can be isolated in the future. Nevertheless this requires creating awareness constantly, which is one of our major goals.

For more information on workshops, interviews and videos, find us on Facebook and Instagram

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Euer Team von 5hoch4!

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