

# Challenging Islamophobia with Humor - The Example of the Datteltäter on Youtube<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

*A new generation of Muslim youth in the West is using humor to cope with rising Islamophobia, racist immigration rhetoric, and sexism. A representative of this new generation is the YouTube channel Datteltäter. Drawing on social theories of humor and dissent, this study analyzes Datteltäter's content, arguing that their humor is a practice of dissent and attempts to subvert dominant discourse. Since humor is not a practice of opposition per se, its character at this point depends on its context, the distribution of sensibilities, its relationship to policing regimes, and the techniques it uses. This study, using the online ethnography method, described and analyzed Datteltäter's representative videos, which were selected through purposive sampling. The study concluded that its humor exposes the Islamophobic and racist discourses and practices that permeate everyday life in German society and distribute the sensible in order to police bodies by disrupting their hierarchy of emotions and ideas. The study also found that the new generation of Muslims has strong insights due to their in-betweenness and has developed a similar oppositional attitude towards their communities. In doing so, they create a space of shared experiences and hybrid subjectivities that are open to others.*

**Keywords:** Islamophobia, Humor, New Generation Immigrants, Datteltäter, YouTube  
**Öz**

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*Batı'daki yeni nesil Müslüman gençler, yükselen İslamofobi, göçmen karşıtı ırkçı söylem ve cinsiyetçilikle başa çıkmak için mizahı kullanmaktadır. Bu yeni neslin bir temsilcisi de Datteltäter adlı YouTube kanaludur. Mizah ve muhalefete ilişkin sosyal teorilerden yararlanan bu çalışma, Datteltäter tarafından üretilen içeriği analiz ederek, mizahlarının bir muhalefet pratiği olduğunu ve mizah yoluyla egemen söylemi yıkıma çalıştıklarını ortaya koymaktadır. Kendi başına bir muhalefet pratiği olmayan mizahın muhalif etkinliği onun bağlamına, duyarlılıklar dağılımı ve kontrol rejimleri ile ilişkisine ve kullandığı tekniklere bağlıdır. Çevrimiçi etnografi yönteminin kullanıldığı bu çalışmada, Datteltäter YouTube kanalının amaçlı örneklemle seçilen temsil edici videoları betimlenerek analiz edilmiştir. Çalışmada, Alman toplumunda gündelik hayata nüfuz eden, bedenleri kontrol etmek için duyumsanabilir olanı dağıtan İslamofobik ve ırkçı söylem ve uygulamaların, onları anlamlı kılan duygu ve fikirler hiyerarşisini bozan mizah yoluyla ifşa edildiği sonucuna varılmıştır. Çalışma ayrıca yeni nesil Müslümanların iki toplum arasındalık halleri nedeniyle güçlü içgörülere sahip olduğunu ve kendi toplumlarına karşı da benzer bir muhalif tutum geliştirdiğini ortaya koymuştur. Bunu yaparken, başkalarına açık bir ortak deneyimler ve melez öznellikler alanı yaratmaktadır.*

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** İslamofobi, Mizah, Yeni Nesil Göçmenler, Datteltäter, YouTube

<sup>1</sup> This article is based on and developed from the paper "Humor Practices of Muslim Youth Living in Germany: The Case of Datteltäter YouTube Channel" which was presented at the 9th International Communication Days, Communication Studies in the Digital Age Symposium, organized by Üsküdar University Faculty of Communication.

## Introduction

While Islam and Muslims had long been constructed in the West from an Orientalist perspective, with the Iranian Revolution in 1979, this construct was additionally associated with political fundamentalism and, after the 9/11 attacks in New York, with terrorism (Hafez and Richter, 2007). This shift made life difficult for Muslim populations living in the West (Nussbaum, 2018, p.17-23), while leading to the rise of Islamophobia. At the same time, as European countries became multicultural societies through migration, various debates arose (Bekaroğlu et al. 2015, p. 4-5), such as whether Islam is compatible with Western values and lifestyles (Göle, 2015, p.19), which positions Muslims and the West in a hierarchical way. A new post-migrant (Yildiz, 2021, pp. 20-21) generation of Muslim actors, who grew up in Europe, speak the language of the countries they live in, have communication skills, and see themselves as part of those countries, has emerged as a significant opposition force that does not accept the terms of discussion determined by these questions and seeks to reverse the theoretical arguments developed by the West about Islam and the Middle East (Göle, 2015, p. 64). Young people of this post-migrant generation also use the power of humor in their struggle. They do not let others speak for them, they do not passively observe, but "talk back" (hooks, 1989).

The use of humor by Muslims has not only been on the rise since the 9/11 attacks. This young generation has also changed the form and quality of ethnic humor (Bilici, 2010). The new generation of Muslim youth living in Germany also object against the Islamophobia and marginalization practices of the German society with humor. This article discusses humor as a practice of dissenting (Rancière, 2004), in addition to its therapeutic function, by analyzing the humorous content of the German YouTube channel *Datteltäter* and asking what the techniques are that make their humor a practice of dissenting. The channel was launched in 2015 by Muslim and non-Muslim young people from different cultural backgrounds living in German-speaking countries, especially Germany. The channel produces humor that deconstructs Islamophobic and anti-immigrant sentiments and

practices and attempts to show the intergenerational contradictions of the Muslim community. The channel's content producers aim to reverse the mainstream media's stereotypical portrayal of Muslims as marginalized and victimized and to generate a virtual space for healing and solidarity within the community by showing the tensions they face not only in society, but also in their own community in everyday life.

We now have a body of literature that sees humor and laughter as a practice of resistance. According to this literature, laughter/humor has the function of correcting the defects and malfunctions of the social order. For communities and classes excluded from the ideal public order, humor has been an important tool of latent and implicit resistance and critique of hegemonic discourses and practices (Sanders, 2001) by making fun of the dominant (Kundera, 1988). But this article does not necessarily assume humor as a practice of dissenting per se. Humor has a long history of serving dominant social groups and maintaining power relations - for example, the social Darwinist representation of African Americans and other cultures in the colonial era (Aidi, 2021). The point then is that humor is certainly in some way related to power and the distribution of what is sayable, visible, and sensible (Rancière, 2004), but how it is related, whether it is a practice of policing or dissenting, depends on its context and techniques. Through the case of the *Datteltäter* channel on YouTube, this article looks at humor as a dissenting practice by analyzing its content and techniques, such as appropriating and subverting stereotypes, disrupting identities and deconstructing associations, accumulating and densifying the subtly distributed everyday techniques of racism and sexism, reversing the prevailing hierarchies, transforming the unequal discourses of society into encounters of equals, bringing one's own views to the center, not accepting the attributions and raising one's own voices that have been silenced by the regime of the sensible, claiming spaces in-between and hybrid subjectivities.

With the diversification of internet-based social media and the opportunity for ordinary people to produce content, the new generation of Muslim youth is trying to reverse the racist and sexist

discourses and discriminatory practices that are implicit and explicit in everyday life in liberal and democratic Western societies. They use social media platforms not only to disseminate their content, but also as a space to share experiences and feelings and to generate ideas. Internet ethnography, one of the basic qualitative research methods, was therefore adopted for the study. Online ethnography is conducted by adapting the ethnographic field research method to the study of computer-mediated communication (Alyanak, 2014, p.134). This study, which adopts the method of internet ethnography, focuses on 20 videos of the long-followed *Datteltäter* YouTube channel that expose and criticize Islamophobic and racist discourses and practices and reveal their seemingly meaningful hierarchy of feelings and thoughts. These videos, which represent many similar videos and best exemplify the technique, were selected and explained in different categories. These videos were analyzed between 2021 and 2022 and 10 videos were described for the study. These videos were interpreted within the framework of the literature. For each video, the tactics and techniques that would enable it to be identified as a practice of opposition were discussed.

After a brief theoretical discussion of humor as a practice of dissenting, the following part of the article contextualizes the case study in a social network of Islamophobia, immigration, and post-migrant life in the West and in Germany. The second part of the article is devoted to an analysis of the content produced by *Datteltäter* and a discussion of the techniques used in their satirical practice of dissenting.

### Laughter and Humor

Thinkers from various disciplines and different time periods have tried to provide different explanations of why and what we laugh at, and the function and purpose of laughter. Terms such as laughter, farce, wit, humor, satire, and comedy are close in meaning and are used interchangeably. According to this body of literature, the perpetrator and the object of laughter are human, and it is this characteristic that distinguishes humans from other living beings (Aristoteles cited

in Bakhtin, 2001, p. 89; Bergson, 2015, p.5). We have three classical theories of laughter: superiority, incongruity, and relaxation (Moreall, 1997), all of which go back to Aristotle or Plato. According to the superiority theory, laughter is an expression of superiority (Moreall, 1997, p. 8), that one feels superior and happy not to be in the situation of the ridiculed (Hobbes, 2005, p.54). The theory of incongruity, takes laughter as a mental reaction to the unexpected and irrational, while Kant see it out of disappointment of expectations, Schopenhauer formulate it as an incompatibility between a concept and the real thing related to it (Morreall, 1997, p.28). The psychoanalytic explanation, the relaxation theory, based on Aristotle's concept of catharsis and the ideas of Spencer and Freud, explains laughter, in terms of the theory of the return of repressed emotions, as a healing release of the energy repressed by prohibition (Freud, 1996, p. 200). Although they are inadequate and differ in their explanation of why we laugh, they all relate to the power relations and social norms. Laughter occurs and only gains meaning in a social context. Laughter always belongs to a social context (Bergson, 2015). According to Bergson, one cannot enjoy the funny in isolation; laughter always needs a resonance. So much so that laughter is like complicity with other laughs. This is where the power of laughter comes from. Laughter is a social "gesture" that has the advantage of correcting things that disrupt the social flow, adding flexibility to the mechanical rigidity of the social structure (Bergson, 2015, pp. 6-14). Looking from this social theory of laughter helps us avoid the problems posed by other theories and allows us to approach laughter as something that can also reverse the patterns of superiority, make us enjoy discord, and find relief through opposition. This body of literature approaches laughter as a tool of critique and resistance for subaltern groups. Sanders (2001, p. 45), for example, sees laughter as a means for the dispossessed, against the white and educated upper class men who are the voice of history, to 'at least try to erase it, even if they cannot participate in writing history'. According to Kundera (1988), who sees laughter as a tool of rebellion, it is by mocking the dominant that the weak overcome obstacles. This is not to say that laughter is

exclusively emancipatory. Although our case exemplifies this theory of laughter, this paper does not limit laughter to this aspect alone. It is certainly constitutive of power relations, but whether it is an instrument for maintaining or disrupting these relations can only be understood by taking into account the context, the producers, the consumers, the production techniques.

The cartoon crisis in Denmark in 2005 is a perfect example of how something that functions as objection and criticism for non-dominant groups can easily be used by the dominant culture against sub-groups, as a practice of policing bodies. On the one hand, the cartoons depicting the Prophet Muhammad as a terrorist with a bomb participate in an Islamophobic discourse that constructs Muslims as violent people; on the other hand, the protests against them have been used to establish a discourse that claims Muslims lack humor, a modern virtue of criticism (Marzolph, 2011). Saba Mahmood (2015) draws our attention to the emotions involved in interpreting the cartoon crisis. The trigger for the cartoon crisis is not the violation of religious law, but the sensitivity to the shaking of the self on which the relationship of loyalty to the Prophet is based. In other words, according to most Muslims, the crime committed by the cartoons is not committed against a moral prohibition, but is related to the injury of one's feelings (Mahmood, 2015, p. 99). By interpreting it as a violation of an emotional bond, she destabilizes the culturalist perspective through an affect-based approach. Berlant and Ngai (2017) argue that what is humor for some can easily turn into shame and fear for others. This is not a call to establish some norms to identify true or false humor, but rather to reckon with humor's intimate relationship with the production of power relations and its long history. The question then becomes who is laughing at whom in what social context and environment of hegemonic discourse and power relations (Bhungalia, 2019). In this context, laughter can be defined as a dissenting practice as long as, following Rancière (2004), it puts the marginalized, silenced, and dominated groups into the center of the political, not the discourses about them or the overrepresentation of foreign-produced labels and identities, but their

voices and practices that subvert these labels and foreign-produced identities (Yildiz, 2021).

For Rancière, the distribution of the sensible is a police order that determines what makes sense and what is excluded from it, and dissent is a challenge to this regime of distribution of the sensible, the sayable, the visible (Rancière, 2004). Dissensus is the basis of Rancière's concept of democracy, not as a form of government, but as a mode that does not function through consensus and unity, but rather through disagreement as the main mode of relationship and heterogeneity as preference (Rancière, 2009). This is established only on the basis of equality, not as a reality or teleology, but as a fundamental presumption. The practice of dissent challenges the consensual ideas and helps a possibility of the otherwise to emerge, tries to redistribute the sensible. It presupposes equality and constantly verifies it. Humor is not *per se* a practice of dissenting, since it sometimes maintains the exclusion of some bodies by making them nonsense, or simply disguises and legitimizes the police order, becoming a means of policing bodies, as in the case of rape jokes or racist parodies. But it can also contribute to disturbing the dominant distribution of hierarchies, fears, and pleasures. It can turn fear into something absurd, laughable. What humor can produce again becomes a question of context, of power relations, of regimes of distribution of the sensible, and of techniques that make this possible.

### **Islamophobia and Muslims in Europe**

Since we cannot analyze humor without understanding its social context and the objects and subjects of laughter, we should briefly look at the intimate relationship between the West, Islamophobia, and the discourse of migration. European society began to become cosmopolitan with migratory mobility due to the process of decolonization and the need for labor in the post-war period. In response, various debates emerged that problematized the cultures and lifestyles of migrant communities (Bekaroğlu et al., 2015, pp. 4-5), especially Muslim immigrants in Europe, such as the so-called (in)compatibility of Islam with Western values and lifestyles (Göle, 2015, p.19). The construction of immigrants as exploiters of the

welfare state or their criminalization has been one of the main channels of argumentation. Since the attacks of September 11 (2001) in New York, the construction of Muslim immigrants has been more heavily colored by security concerns and fears, in parallel with geopolitical concerns and the US "war on terror", which was also established in Europe alongside the Madrid (2004) and London (2005) bombings, the murder of Theo van Gogh in Amsterdam (2004) and the Charlie Hebdo (2015) attacks in Paris, as well as the attacks on crowds in some European cities after 2017. The fact that those who planned and carried out the attacks were young Muslims born and raised in Europe deeply affected European public opinion (Nussbaum, 2018, p. 23), leading to the production of labels such as "homemade terrorists" and the construction of Islam and Muslim immigrants as threats to Western civilization, which went hand in hand with the declaration of the end of multiculturalism (Bekaroglu et al., 2015, pp.4-5). Islamophobia is not entirely new but is also fed by the continuation of the general fear of religion in the secular age, the anti-Islamism of the Middle Ages, the Arabophobia of colonialism (Geisser cited in Göle, 2015, p.48).

Batur (2017, p. 5) also claims that Islam is today perceived almost synonymously with religious violence. Both religion as a strictly separated concept from the secular and the alleged proximity of religion to violence have their roots in the colonial modern formation of the nation-state (Batur, 2017, p. 83-105). Furthermore, the perception of Islam in the West has changed in different historical periods. Islam and Muslims - along with other cultural formations outside the West - were constructed as the Other of Europe in a more spatio-temporalized form in the Orientalist discourse during the colonial period: Europe, as the self-proclaimed most developed region of the world, perceived other contemporary regions in temporal terms, labeling them as remaining in the "prehistoric Stone Age" or the "religiously saturated Dark Middle Ages", lacking the achievements of Western civilization (Batur, 2017, pp. 49-52). Accordingly, while the West is free, rational, and developed, the East is irrational, backward, and exotic in a wide range of areas,

including academia, the arts, and mainstream media (Said, 2003).

The end of the cold war was another factor in the development of Islamophobia as geopolitics. Islam has been replaced by communism as a scapegoat for the West. With the dissolution of the Eastern Bloc and the disappearance of the threat of communism, Islam was defined as the new other (Said, 2008, pp. 55-58). Reconstruction of Islam as an enemy, Muslim countries as enemies out-there and Muslim immigrants as ones in-there, helped Europe to reach a conceptual and civilizational unity with the Eastern European Countries in the post-communist age (Batur, 2008).

One of the ways in which Islamophobia is fed and spread is through media. The role of the media in shaping public opinion, agenda setting, and hate crimes is undeniable. The media plays an important role in disseminating representations and images. Therefore, images and photographs of societies and cultures that we do not know and that are foreign to us are perceived within the confines of the media. While no significant information about Islam had previously been produced in the Western media, after the Iranian Revolution and the end of the Cold War, Islam was portrayed in the Western media as medieval, dangerous, and hostile to Western values (Said, 2008, p. 231; Hafez and Schmidt, 2020). A study focusing on the representation of Islam on the German television channels ARD and ZDF in 2005-2006 found that Islam was represented on these two channels in terms of terrorism/extremism, international conflicts, religious intolerance, fundamentalism/Islamization; it was found that 80% of the topics were on the agenda in a negative way, with concepts such as women/oppression/liberation, integration problems, human rights violations (Hafez and Richter, 2007, p.7). Islamophobic coverage in the Western media is not only the result of fear and ignorance. Some media actors, intellectuals and politicians have deliberately promoted Islamophobia as part of their political strategies. Nathan Lean (2015) conceptualizes the environment in which these people exploit this situation to gain wealth and fame as the Islamophobia industry.

The social and discursive positioning of millions of Muslims living in Northern Europe, and especially in Germany, and how they position themselves, provides an understanding of the relationship between Islamophobia, the West, and migration. Discriminatory practices against immigrants first emerged in the labor market. Under the name Ali Levent Sinirlioğlu, German journalist Günter Wallraf (1985) spends time among foreign workers in Germany and reveals the discrimination workers face in finding housing, ethical violations in the labor market and bureaucracy, violations of workers' health and safety, labor exploitation, mistreatment, and humiliation of foreign workers. However, the children of migrant workers, who are educated and have the tools to speak for themselves, are breaking new ground, as Göle (2015:64) argues. They are working to challenge and deconstruct both old and new representations of people with migrant backgrounds in mainstream racist discourse. For example, the feminist writer Aysel Özakin, one of the representatives of this new generation mentioned by Göle, opposes Wallraf's "pity" paradigm and the image of the Turk as a victim (Stowasser, 2002, p. 60).

The immigrants, who for the German public were mostly Turks, were transformed into Muslims in the public discourse alongside the development and establishment of Islamophobia. On the other hand, the children of migrant communities have also developed more ambiguous and hybrid identities as they live in social interaction with Muslims and non-Muslims from different ethnic backgrounds, leading some scholars (Yildiz, 2021) to use the term "post-migrant". Moreover, this new generation of Muslims in German society has access to new opportunities for self-representation, new tools, and new media platforms for interacting with the wider public in an environment of Islamophobic discourse produced and perpetuated by the mainstream media. With the diversification of social media platforms and the opportunities and tools for ordinary people to produce content, this new generation of Muslim youth is trying to reverse the representations of marginalization and victimization in the mainstream media in the new media environments.

Humor is increasingly one of the ways in which Muslims respond to and cope with the Islamophobic discourse and environment in which they live. Bilici (2010, p.196) draws attention to the correlation between the rise of Islamophobia in the US after 9/11 and the opening of a new era of 'Muslim comedy'. *Little Mosque on the Prairie*, a popular sitcom in Canada, the increasing number of stand-up comedians in America and Europe, and the humorous content produced on social media platforms can be cited as examples. Although Muslim humor did not emerge after 9/11, the date represents a shift in its history: it existed before in the form of ethnic comedy, but it continues its journey by taking on a different form and quality (Bilici, 2010). The resource from which it feeds is mostly the discrimination and racism that exist in the liberal societies in which Muslims live.

The above correlation could support Sander's (2001, p.308) therapeutic theory of humor. When people feel neglected, marginalized, and forgotten, they increasingly need humor in their lives to neutralize the problems and evils of the world and to temporarily suspend them. But the new form and content of Muslim humor go beyond this therapeutic function. American Muslim stand-up comedians are probably the first agents of this shift and the most analyzed cases (e.g., Aidi 2021). Aidi (2021) links their humor to the traditions of African American comedy, especially its technique of subverting racist stereotypes. Ömer Hammad's study, based on the textual analysis of the web series *Guess Who's Muslim*, produced by Canadian Muslims in 2016, shows that Muslims resist one-dimensional and racist representations with the humor they produce on social media and connect with North American Muslim and non-Muslim viewers. Humor emerged as a means of communication and self-representation not only with one's own community, but also with translocal communities of Muslims in the West and the non-Muslim public (Hammad, 2020). In another study that examined a blog called *Yalla Italia*, which emerged from the unity of culture, politics, and humor founded by second-generation Italian Muslims, the hybridity of storytelling, along with efforts to reconcile Muslim and Italian identities, highlights second-generation stories

that allow for a better understanding of multiple cultural, religious, and linguistic codes (Evolvi, 2017). Digital platforms are increasingly becoming spaces for the dissemination and communication of humor and, in parallel, spaces for research on humor (e.g., Aydin, 2023) that may escape the attention of social scientists.

### Dissenting with Humour on YouTube - The Case of Datteltäter

*Datteltäter* (Offender Dates), a popular German YouTube channel with more than 500 thousand followers from Muslim and immigrant backgrounds, illustrates how the young Muslim generation uses humor differently and provides a good case study of how laughter can be a tool for non-dominant social classes and groups to resist, cope with problems, and engage in dialogue. Through this channel, a group of German-speaking Muslim and non-Muslim young people from different cultural backgrounds broadcast religious, ethnic, and political humorous content produced by themselves. The channel was founded by Younes, Fiete, Farah and Marcel, and as it gained interest, new young people joined the group. Those who produce content on the channel are post-migrant Muslim women and men, believers and non-believers, women with/without hijabs, men with/without beards, and their close Christian friends.

*Datteltäter* is derived from the German word *Attentäter* (meaning offender, assassin) by retaining and combining the last part *Täter* (meaning offender) with the word *Dattel* (date, the fruit). The channel's logo features a smiling date with a fez on its head, the string of which resembles a detonated dynamite fuse. Farah Bouamar, one of the channel's founders, explains how they came up with this name with satirical and bizarre connotations:

While the date is a special fruit, especially for Muslims, and has positive connotations, assassin evokes rabid hooded men waiting to detonate a bomb. The conflation of the two words creates a strange allusion: perpetrator date - assassin? Satirically, this means we make fruitful assassinations on laughing muscles and brains. The tenor of the term may sound a bit cynical, but

it illustrates well our intention to use satire to encourage people to think and question prejudices. (Bouamar, 2017)

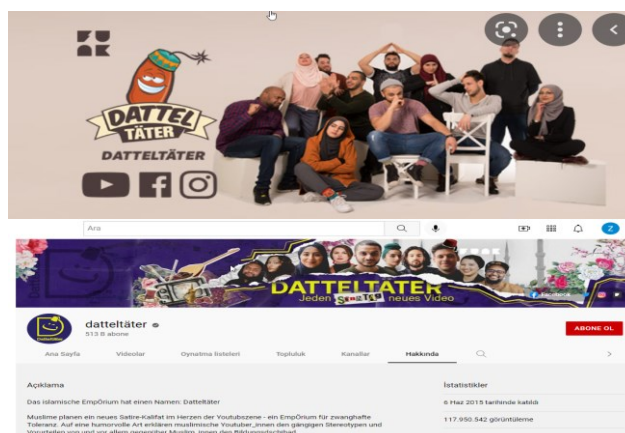


Fig. 1. Visuals from *Datteltäter* YouTube Channel, <https://www.youtube.com/@datteltater/about>

Through "fruitful assassinations on laughing muscles and brains," *Datteltäter* aims to deconstruct racism, Islamophobia, and similar prejudices that exist in public opinion about Islam and Muslims, as well as to build dialogue and bridges in the society in which they live. It also opens a door to the daily lives of Muslims in Germany and Austria and holds a mirror to Muslim society (Aleksander, 2019). Since 2016, the channel has been one of the groups that mainstream broadcasters such as Germany's ARD and ZDF cooperate with after the channel became popular among the German public. For producing content against prejudice, hate, and racism, the *Datteltäter* channel was included in YouTube's international Creators for Change network, which campaigns against intolerance and "hate speech" on the internet, and was awarded the 2017 Grimme Online Award and the 2017 Smart Hero Award.

The channel is followed by young people between the ages of 12 and 30 from different religions and ethnicities, and 60 percent of the followers are women (Fiete, 2019, p. 48). The standout, the pace of growth, and the endurance are not only related to the quality of the content produced but also to the community of followers, the communication with them, and the shared experiences and emotions. Followers are not just passive consumers of content but also participate in the generation of ideas for future content, sharing the discriminatory and racist practices

they experience at the call of the channel. As a space for sharing experiences both through the videos and the communication through the comments, the channel allows the construction of a space of shared experiences and feelings.

### Calling to Confront Islamophobia

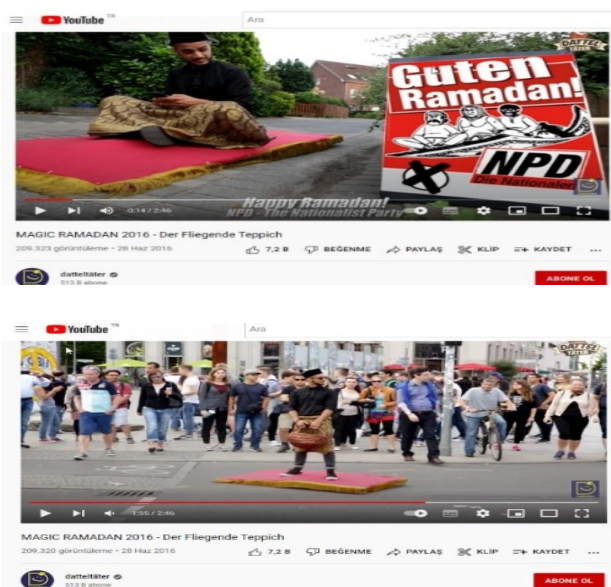


Fig. 2. "MAGIC RAMADAN 2016 - Der Fliegende Teppich,"  
Source: YouTube/Datteltäter-2016a

The video titled "MAGIC RAMADAN 2016 - Der Fliegende Teppich" (Magic Ramadan 2016 - Flying Carpet) opens with a poster of the far-right NPD party depicting a man with a turban and mustache, a woman with a headscarf, and a black man who resembles a monkey sitting on a flying carpet. At the top of the poster, there is the text "Have a nice flight home-Guten Heimflug". Younes Al-Amayra, the founder of the channel, shows up next to the poster while sitting on a sliding red carpet with his fez on. Turning the embodiment of the orientalist view upside down, Al-Amayra changes the text on the poster next to him to "Happy Ramadan" by pressing a button on her phone. The video continues with the record of a performance in which Younes slides on the streets of Berlin on the red carpet with a fez on his head, a skirt wrapped around her waist, a date basket and the "Happy Ramadan" banner in his hands offering dates to everyone (Datteltäter, 2016). This

performance mocks orientalist and Islamophobic stereotypes and shows their absurdity by confronting people with those in their everyday lives.

Comedian Ahmed Ahmed (Çiçek, 2015) states that all people are the same when it comes to laughing and that humor is equalizing and generates empathy between communities. Muslims, according to him, can stand against Islamophobia with humor and overcome all negative and stereotypical attitudes about them with humor and trust and correct relationships between people can only be established with humor. Exposure to racism and religious discrimination can only be understood when it is articulated in a humorous way and so it helps to change world views by establishing a relationship between opposites. Fiete, one of the founders of the channel, states that they set out with a similar idea: in 2015, they chose humor as a way to endure and cope with a tense environment of news about ISIS and nightmare scenarios about Refugees in the German media, right wing movements such as Pegida<sup>2</sup> spreading the fears of "Islamization of the West." Similarly Muslims in Germany, observes Farah, try to deal with socially critical and sensitive issues such as racism, stereotypes, hatred, radicalization, and sexism that Muslims in Germany encounter in their daily lives by problematizing them with sarcastic humor on the social media scene. With their humorous content, they strive to build a long-overdue bridge between the dominant society and the Muslim minority and to reverse the media-based black-and-white image of Islam and Muslims (Bouamar, 2017). Blurring the border between these representations and everyday encounter through exaggerating helps them to deconstruct them. Appropriating an orientalist cliché and turning it into a performance – but not flying home, on the contrary participating in the everyday life – makes visible the absurdity of the racist placard and ridicules it.

### Deciphering Everyday Racism and Discrimination

<sup>2</sup> Pegida-Patriotische europäer gegen Islamisierung des Abendlandes (Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamization of the West) was founded as a social media community and held its first demonstration in Dresden

on October 20, 2014. This movement later took names according to the cities in which it was located.



The video series titled "Wenn RASSISMUS EHRLICH wäre" (If racism were honest) satirizes the racism embedded in daily life in Germany. Younes Al-Amayra explains in the opening how this video series emerged: after a call they made to their followers on Instagram, they received experiences from the followers for three weeks. These series of parodies reflect everyday racism in situations like renting a house and job interviews, or in spaces like schools and public transportation. He attracts attention to the racism in education which is treated as if it does not exist: "Many Muslim young people have no idea that their teachers are racist [...] Many teachers do not know where racism begins and what can be disturbing for students" (Al-Amayra 2020). They aim to raise awareness of this racism and discrimination with their videos. When the channel gained popularity, the content producers started to occasionally give educational programs in schools to provide information about racism, prejudice, and Islamophobia by using their own satirical videos as teaching material.

One of the videos titled "Wenn RASSISMUS EHRLICH wäre | SCHULE" (If racism were honest | School), parodying racism in the school environment, the teacher entering the classroom is surprised when he sees the students of immigrant origin in the classroom and begins to humiliate them with arrogant and insulting statements. After entering the classroom, the teacher says, "Thank you, Merkel, I see a German... Damn, some of you don't want to come to school again, because of Ramadan... Let's see who is on the name list. Al Qaeda's list of names? ... A black student knocks on the door and enters and the teacher asks "Are your rubber boots late?" referring to Africans trying to cross the Mediterranean. When the teacher sighs and looks at the student list, he calls a student by an anonymized Muslim name, despite the answers he receives when he asks his name. This is actually an attitude that shows that other people do not recognize them as equal individuals by trivializing their names. While explaining the grades, he calls a student, who says his name is Younes, as Muhammed Ata, and tells him that he got a low grade. Then he turns to someone else and says, "Oh Ayşe, actually your grade is 1, but if you take off your headscarf, we can talk about better

grades." He belittles the student who tries to answer his question by saying, "Think of this place as your own home, you are only allowed to speak when someone gives you a permit," and implies that the society the student comes from is authoritarian and that he does not deserve to speak freely. The teacher, who constantly favors the only German student in the class, uses a tone that degrades ethnic and cultural identities in his dialogues with other students. To a hijabi student: "Why are you covering your beautiful hair? There is no such command in the Quran!" After saying this, he talks about forced marriage and states that they live in a civilized country and that it is necessary to be civilized. He belittles a black student by saying, "You talk loudly at home, just like in the forest," referring to a monkey that has not completed its evolution (Datteltäter, 2018). In these parodies, it becomes obvious how hurtful racism embedded in different attitudes and discourses can be in the language of the teacher, who has natural authority over the students in the educational environment.

To show all these situations in a single scene and through a single teacher makes the racism embedded in everyday life and language visible by exaggeration which may otherwise be felt but not recognized as racism. Even if it is recognized as such, the blame can be easily defied by the agents of racist language. Turning the everydayness of racism into a catalog of racist attitudes and a dense experience does not allow that.



Fig. 3. Stills from "Wenn RASSISMUS EHRLICH wäre | SCHULE," Source: YouTube/Datteltäter-2018a

They do not stop at making it visible but try to make others feel the hurt and arouse empathy by reversing the roles. In a video titled "Wenn Migranten das sagen, was deutsche Lehrer sagen!" - (When immigrants say what German teachers say!), for example, they create the same situation as above by reversing the ethnocultural roles: This time, the teacher is Muslim and the students are predominantly German. They try to show how German students would feel in a similar subordinate position of being subjected to racist humiliations. It not only exposes the absurdity of individual racist attitudes but also becomes an invitation to society to empathize. We see the teacher entering the classroom, humiliating the students because of their names, ethnic, and cultural identities, distorting or anonymizing the names, giving arbitrarily low grades, judging the students by the sins of their ancestors, requesting comments and distancing statements in cases of violence against refugees. In the second parody, a hijabi Muslim teacher also enters the classroom and perpetuates similar racist attitudes and rhetoric. "Welcome animals" (Datteltäter, 2021), written in a hybrid language of Turkish or Arabic words combined with German pronouns on the blackboard in the classroom, shows that these languages are part of everyday German culture today.

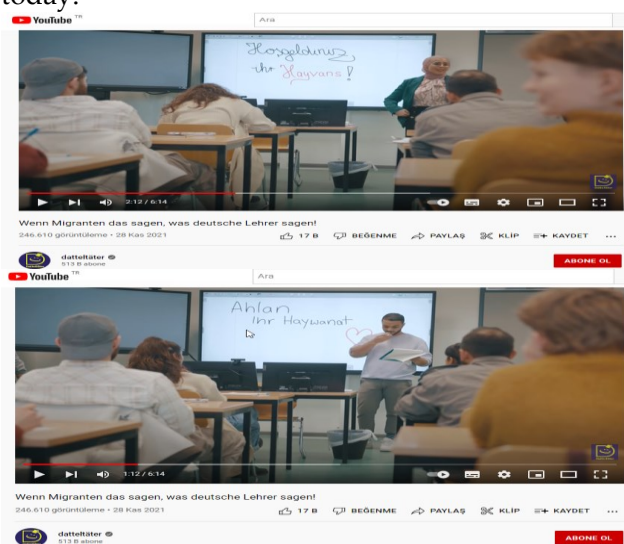


Fig. 4. "Wenn Migranten das sagen, was deutsche Lehrer sagen!," Source: YouTube/Datteltäter-2021

### Dissociating from Deadly Representations of Islam

The constant exposure to racism and the need to defend one's community, as well as the discourse of victimhood (Aydemir, 2017), prevent Muslims from seeing and dealing with the problems within their community. Overcoming the idea of victimhood and critically addressing challenging problems within the community is now an ever more pressing issue, especially with the emergence of ISIS. Younes Al-Amayra finds it particularly important to criticize and challenge the actions of such groups that claim to represent Islam by using a humor mirror on social media, as Salafi groups effectively use YouTube. The desire to do something against these trends was effective in the establishment of this channel (Al-Amayra, 2015).



Fig. 5. "Mit ISIS ins Weekend-Feeling...", Source: YouTube/"Datteltäter-2015

The *Datteltäter* first attracted attention with a YouTube video mocking ISIS. In the video titled "Mit ISIS ins Weekend-Feeling ..." published in 2015, they try to turn the proclaimed image of ISIS upside down. The parody is reminiscent of the '90s commercials with background music, depicting a happy family buying creamy yogurt on a weekend vacation. A man wearing a keffiyeh and a woman wearing a headscarf are seen entering the house with a picnic basket in their hands, while explosives are hanging from the picnic basket. Two male executioners are kneeling on the ground and are about to execute two blindfolded male hostages with "Quran" and "Sunnah" written on their T-shirts. The hijabi woman puts the Koran in the drawer and then leaves the explosive tray in its place to make room for the violence. The text "ISIS, torture, kill, and destroy" appears on the screen, drawing attention

to the fact that ISIS privileges its violent methods over the Quran and Sunnah and even violates them. The video ends with Bertolt Brecht's words, "Great political criminals should be mocked. Respect for those murderers should be destroyed" appear on the screen. Commenting on the movie *The Dictator*, Sander (2001:304) claims that Caplin destroys the image of Hitler by making an exaggerated parody of him and turning him into a funny puppet. Similar to what Caplin does, *Datteltäter* tries to destroy the frightening image of ISIS members by making fun of them. The critique coming from the Muslim perspective of this video, which deconstructs the identities proclaimed by both themselves and the West, attempts to show that it does not represent Muslims by exposing the contradiction between their actions and the proclaimed Islamic way.

### **Dwelling In-between two Cultures, Growing up Different from Parents and Previous Generations**

An important reason why young Muslim people admire the videos by the *Datteltäter* is also the tensions they experience with their families of different ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Parodies that focus on intergenerational tensions and family discord build a community of young people who have similar experiences and feelings and thus function as a space for healing. By sharing their similar experiences under the video on the platform, some content streamed in a video has turned into a series. While interaction with the community acts as a platform that generates a rich resource for further production, it also creates a virtual space for healing and community building. The video series "Dinge, die muslimische Eltern sagen!" (Things Muslim Parents Say!) is an example of this category. First, the mother who tells her daughter that she has cooked her favorite meals when she comes home makes an emotional and angry speech against her daughter who says she is not hungry: "Oh, did you eat out? What did you spend your money on? I stand in the kitchen and cook all day. Is this a hotel where everyone can come and go as they please? Am I your slave? What ungrateful children I have. I carried you for nine months! Nine months of pain!"

Again, in this video, the father's objection to his daughter, who says that her friend Laura invited her home for her birthday and a pajama party over the weekend, is quite exaggerated; "Isn't my daughter using her brain? My daughter doesn't see the news? Five rape cases and that's just on the stairs. Why do you want to sleep at his house? Don't we have a bed? Night party... What will come next? Prostitution? What will others think? Then will you invite others? Men..." This exaggerated state of vigilance is transformed into a performance that shows that intergenerational mistrust translates into oppression and restriction in the eyes of young people.

In the same video, the father who does not like his daughter's grade says, "I carried your grandmother on my back for 10 years, taking her to the doctor. I started working when I was 3 years old." His objection continues by repeating his own difficult experience. As the parody continues, the father opens the door to his daughter, who happily and proudly announces that she got a "B" on her exam. The father expresses his disappointment and reminds her of the painful experiences he had in his home country. The father angrily tears up the test paper and begins to grumble:

My daughter came home with a 2, huh? Did I swim to Europe for those grades? I came to Europe, 500 km away, on a three-legged donkey. I came to Europe with one pair of pants and one dime. And you get a B+. My God, what am I going to do with you? Should I send you back to Morocco? You can milk cows there! You're always on the phone. Click click, hello hello, you won't learn anything like that. What did I tell you? You have to be a doctor or an engineer. But you won't make it with a B+. Look at Omer. He has 13 Mercedes and he got married when he was 9 years old. With a B+ you can work as a cleaner. You have disappointed me. You are no longer my daughter. (*Datteltäter*, 2018b).

These videos consist of a series enriched by the experiences shared by the followers. These parodies focus on the discourse of parents who, through their own sacrifices, saddle young people with debt and expect them to be constantly successful. The younger generation is accused of failing to live up to these expectations. The younger generation distinguishes itself by

satirizing these attitudes of the older generation, which they perceive as oppressive and restrictive, preventing them from living their own lives. Shattering the seriousness of families by making fun of their parents' intolerance towards them reduces the tensions of Muslim youth with their parents. These videos serve both a therapeutic function and a dissensus against the norms and expectations of previous generations. Much of the video content is shaped by the cultural contradictions and conflicts that Muslim youth experience in their daily lives with their own society and families.

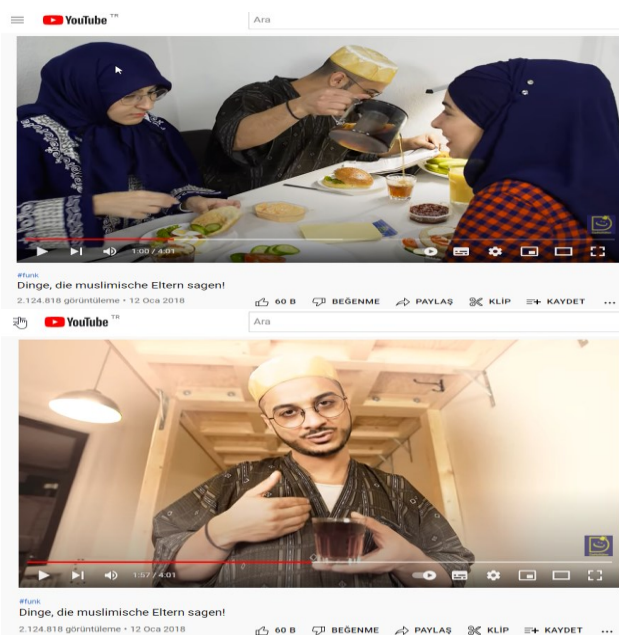


Fig. 6. "Dinge, die muslimische Eltern sagen!" Source: YouTube/Datteltäter-2018b

According to Bilici (2010: 201), the seeming disadvantage of tensions with both majority society and older generations and parents enables them to produce richer humor because they live on a critical border between the majority and minority communities to which they both belong. Positioned as guides for young people who identify with them, they can encourage them to question the dominant patterns of their own communities and to produce alternatives to them. They have a multifaceted function: they not only hold up a mirror to German society with humor but also to the Muslim community. Furthermore, they play a therapeutic function for Muslim youth in coping and dealing with, as well as rebelling against, the dominant discourses and attitudes of

former generations in their own community by parodying these (Aleksander, 2019).

### Deconstructing Muslim Women with Humor

In patriarchy, humor has mostly been masculine, and the humor produced about women has been the product of this masculine view. Humor is generally shaped by male slang, sexuality, and perception of violence. Today, the number of women writing, drawing, or performing in the world of humor is increasing, and women who have realized the power of laughter have also learned that it can be used to demonstrate political resistance (Douglas, 2014, p. 63). In contrast to masculine humor, which perceives and interprets the world in an incomplete and biased way, female humorists can create humor that interprets life from a more holistic perspective (Özdemir, 2010, p. 33). Not because of an essential characteristic of femininity, but because they gain sensitivity to relationality by living at the intersection of multiple forms of discrimination based on religion, race, and class.

Muslim women living in Western countries are exposed to multiple forms of discrimination and racism, especially when they are visible through the hijab. For a long time, under the influence of the Orientalist view in the German media, Muslim women were portrayed as oppressed by their fathers and brothers, as poor, backward, and uneducated victims waiting to be saved (Schiffer, 2004, p.83). The *Datteltäter* depicts the everyday experiences of Muslim women (with or without hijab). The women who produce content for this channel are on the one hand trying to reverse the Orientalist view by "talking back" (hooks, 1989), speaking for themselves with humor, and on the other hand setting an example for their Muslim sisters and encouraging them to talk back.

In a video with the title "16 Dinge, die Kopftuchtragende Frauen in Deutschland kennen!" (16 Things that Hijabi Women in Germany Know!) is an exaggerated parody of the difficulties and strangeness that hijabi women experience in everyday life because of their hijab. Parodies usually consist of exaggerated representations based on real experiences. The video presents the absurdity of the situation with a

humorous performance, accompanied by music where there are almost no words. The tip of a hijab falling into the food while eating, using the hijab as a napkin when no napkin is found during dinner, fixing the hijab with a peg, hurting one's eyes while trying to wear glasses with the hijab, wearing glasses over the hijab, having difficulty putting on headphones, pricking one's head with a needle while tying the hijab. Such exaggerated parodies ridicule the difficulties that racist representations attribute to the lives of hijabis, and thus the feeling of pity (Datteltäter, 2017), by showing the small but real difficulties. Another parody deals with cliché questions about the hijab like "Do you sleep with a headscarf? Do you wash your hair? Do you have hair?" Questions such as these are used to satirize the insistence on remaining alien to the lives of Muslims. In another parody, a situation of the stranger's entry into the room of a hijabi woman while she is without hijab parodied: the woman uses diverse objects in the room to cover her hair, a situation and act familiar to hijabi women (Datteltäter, 2017).

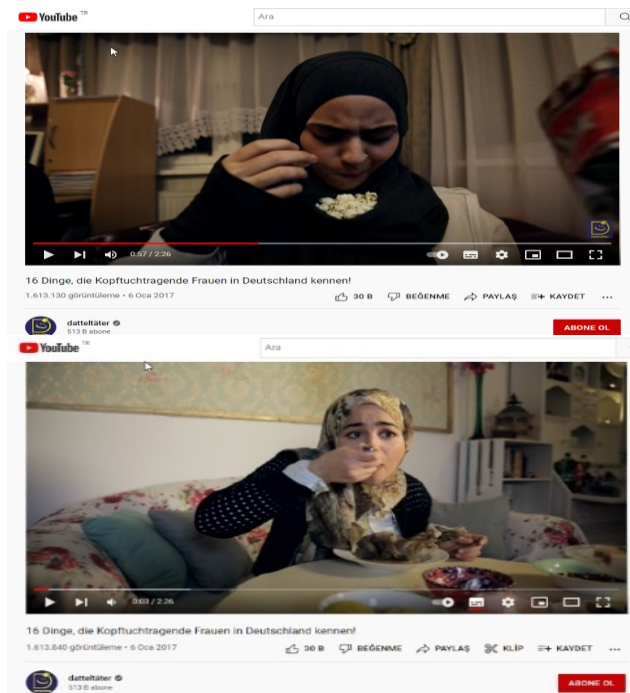


Fig. 7. "Dinge, die Muslimische Frauen ohne Kopftuch kennen!"  
Source: YouTube/Datteltäter-2017

The topic of Muslim women is not limited to hijabi women. The video "Dinge, die Muslimische Frauen ohne Kopftuch kennen!" (Things familiar to Muslim women without hijab) parodies the

attitudes and discourses that non-hijabi Muslim women often encounter within the Muslim community and German society. The video features a hijabi woman having a dialogue with a German woman who has just converted to Islam but does not wear a hijab. "When will you wear a hijab?" When the German woman replies, "It's not time yet," the dialogue takes on a comically angry tone. The hijabi woman's imperiousness includes intimidation that her good deeds will fly away, and it ends with her throwing the headscarf in the face of the German Muslim woman. In a parody that follows, we see the absurdity of a one-way conversation in which one of the women praying in the mosque tries to persuade another woman who is trying to take off her hijab after prayer: "It suits you very well; keep it like that." The same video also parodies the attitude of a German man who compares his female Muslim colleague without hijab to another with hijab and praises the one without hijab - being without hijab (Datteltäter, 2018c). The first-hand knowledge of the experiences of encountering German society and the Muslim community, as well as the open criticism of both, give these parodies their authenticity and distinction.

### Parody of Incompatible Close Encounters

Social encounters are the resource that feeds the content of the parodies produced by *Datteltäter*. Everyday life involves interactions that can lead to both bonding and separation. Although members of the Muslim community, or marginalized communities in general, are easily blamed for their exclusion because of their different attitudes and values, differences are mutual and relationships can be fostered through rapprochement. They draw attention to the fact that a better way of dealing with these differences is only possible without establishing a hegemonic relationship between them. A video entitled "8 Dinge, die Du bei Muslimen NIE tun solltest!" (8 things you should never do with Muslims) focuses on approaches that turn into violations of other people's values and norms. For example, one of the videos shows an exaggerated parody of what not to do to a person who is praying: Marcel leaves the room while his friend Younes is praying and gives

Younes a friendly pat on the back. Or Marcel enters the room with joy to share the good news that his podcasts have been listened to a lot. Younes is praying at the time, but Marcel joyfully begins to slap Younes's hand, which he has opened for prayer. When Marcel leaves, Younes angrily throws his slippers after him. In another parody, Marcel shows off the prayer rug he bought from Turkey as a doormat, and he pretends to step on it. Meeting a hijabi woman at the door of the house, Marcel fixes the protruding strands of hair of the hijabi woman by pushing them under her headscarf. The woman looks at Marcel in surprise. Marcel, who has brought wine as a gift for a Muslim friend, explains in an emotional tone that it is a family heirloom and that he can only give it to a friend. Faced with this situation, Younes accepts the gift with surprise. In these parodies, incompatibilities are revealed through the differences in the relationship norms of the Muslim community and German society through situations such as prayer, touching women, and giving wine (Datteltäter, 2020a).

These parodies show that relationships that tend towards closeness, even if based on good intentions, can lead to distance due to different norms. These staged themes appear as content that enables the non-Muslim community to better understand Muslim practices and indicators, and become a call to develop a style of relationship that is compatible with diversity. This way of approaching cultural differences can also be interpreted as a critique and practice of dissent against the hegemonic discourse of integration and its label of "parallel society." Bringing those who are overrepresented and marginalized by these discourses into the center of the discourse is again in line with dissent practices.

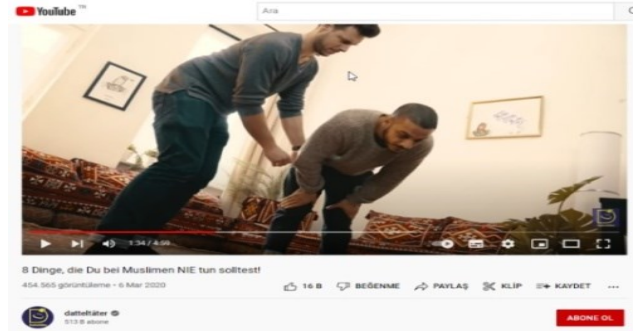
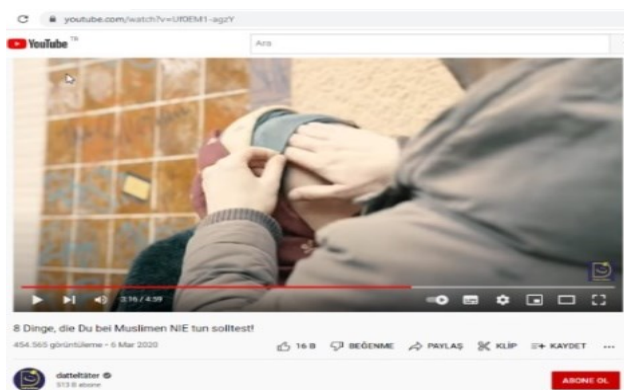


Fig. 8. "8 Dinge, die Du bei Muslimen NIE tun solltest!," Source: YouTube/Datteltäter-2020a

## Conclusion

In this study, laughter and humor have been analyzed under the theoretical premise that they are inherently social (Bergson, 2015), thus they emerge within a sociality and gain meaning within the social context. Further, Sanders' (2001) approach to laughter as a tool of critique and resistance for communities and classes that have been displaced from the ideal public order has been taken as the main theoretical focus, which is, however, elaborated with Rancière's (2004, 2009) approach to dissensus. On the YouTube channel *Datteltäter*, post-migrant Muslim youths produce comedy as a practice of dissent against the regimes of sensible that are shaped by the racism and sexism against them in society. While being a practice of dissent, humor, and parody also have a therapeutic function, helping to create a space for hybrid subjectivities and shared experiences and feelings.

For post-migrant Muslim youth, humor has emerged as a powerful tool for subverting and reversing representations of marginalization and victimization in mainstream media. They attempt to construct and make visible their own subjectivity against hegemonic stereotypes. The *Datteltäter* channel exemplifies the use of humor to serve the dissent of a group of young people, their critique of the discourse of Western culture and media, the protectionist culture of their parents and the previous generation, and the authorities who speak in the name of Islam. Yet, it is not an opposition that denies and ignores what they are ultimately opposing. Instead, they continue to search for a way of communicating in which they verify their equality and their own subjectivity.

After this group's humor attracted an audience, it began to receive approval from the mainstream media. This also shows that there has been some success in reversing the assumptions of the mainstream media and that contact and communication with the mainstream has been established.

The content the channel broadcasts, on the one hand, focuses on the racist and discriminatory attitude of Western society towards Muslim people in the society, subverts and disrupts the prevailed normality of these, the distribution of the sensible (Ranci re, 2004), and on the other hand, carries internal criticism towards the culture of the Muslim communities. Especially after the differentiation of life expectations between the older and new generations of Muslims, the imposition of family authority on young people with old patterns of behavior becomes a subject of criticism. Producing and broadcasting humorous content on the channel has become a practice of dissent through which they disrupt the power relations by deconstructing the biased identity conceptions and forms of relations, as well as constructing and making visible their own hybrid subjectivity by creating a virtual space that contributes to German society and their own communities through the insights of their in-betweenness.

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