

# **LANGUAGE USE IN THE PUBLIC SPHERE. METHODOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES AND EMPIRICAL APPLICATIONS**

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## Public Discourse on the Internet: Interactive Control of the Integration Debate in German

New forms of public discourse on the Internet (Web 2.0) enable greater semiotic plurality and concentration: closer ties between texts and images, professional writers and amateur enthusiasts, as well as reader comments. In light of the debate about integration in Germany, this chapter describes a mode of textual analysis in which such “media rhetoric” is addressed in relation to the rhetorical parameters of emotion and visualization. In this regard, the main features of new forms of communication are presented in terms of the critical-hermeneutic awareness of the new readers/writers, argumentative emotionality, the use of images, and the creation of textual dramaturgy.

**Keywords:** Online articles; Online comments; Emotionality; Media rhetoric; Visualization.

On 8 July 2008, with strong support from the Swiss People’s Party (SVP: original acronym), a decision was taken to hold a referendum in Switzerland on a constitutional amendment to ban the building of minarets. An advertising campaign in favor of the initiative ran for a year, until the amendment was passed with 57.5% of the votes cast on 29 November 2009.

Posters and images (in the street and on the Internet) played a key role in the referendum campaign, used to warn voters of the danger to the country if the increased Muslim presence were not to be curbed.

To introduce the topic, example (1) below comprises an extract (with translation into English) from the online version of an article published in the *Neue Züricher Zeitung* (NZZ) which addresses the use of such posters; the extract encompasses a number of the aspects of public discourse dealt with in this chapter:

- a) posters and images;
- b) journalistic texts;
- c) reader comments.

(1)



«Gegen den Bau  
von Minaretten»



NZZ ONLINE

7. Oktober 2009, 15:18, NZZ Online

<[http://www.nzz.ch/nachrichten/schweiz/rassismuskommission\\_will\\_plakate\\_nicht\\_verbieten\\_1.3815931.html](http://www.nzz.ch/nachrichten/schweiz/rassismuskommission_will_plakate_nicht_verbieten_1.3815931.html)>

*Rassismuskommission will Plakate nicht verbieten*

Federal Commission against Racism does not wish to ban posters

*(...) (sda) In ihrer am Mittwoch veröffentlichten Stellungnahme zuhanden der Städte kommt die EKR [Eidgenössische Kommission gegen Rassismus] zum Schluss, die Plakate nährten Vorurteile, seien pauschalisierend und stellten den Islam global als negativ bedrohend dar.*

In a statement addressed to the cities and published on Wednesday, the Federal Commission against Racism (EKR: original acronym) concludes that the posters cause prejudice, make generalizing assertions and depict Islam as negatively threatening.

*Suggestive Plakate*

Loaded posters

*Die Plakate suggerieren in den Augen der Kommission, dass von der hiesigen muslimischen Minderheit eine Gefahr ausgehe und man diese fürchten müsse. Es entstehe der Eindruck, dass die Muslime die Schweizer Bevölkerung beherrschen wollten, Frauen unterdrückten und die Grundrechte missachteten (...)*

According to the Commission, the posters imply that the minority Muslim population in Switzerland poses a threat of which many may have cause to be afraid. The impression given is that Muslims want to dominate the Swiss population, oppress women and undermine fundamental rights (...)

*Gleichzeitig hält die EKR in ihrer Mitteilung fest, dass dieses und ähnliche Plakate in der Schweiz strafrechtlich nicht verboten seien.*

At the same time, the Commission contends that in terms of criminality neither these posters nor similar notices are proscribed.

*Sorgfältige Güterabwägung empfohlen*

A careful weighing up of pros and cons is advisable

*Die Kommission empfiehlt den Städten deshalb, «eine sorgfältige Güterabwägung zwischen Meinungsfreiheit, Diskriminierungsschutz und dem Schutz der schweizerischen Gesellschaft vor Hass fördernder Agitation» vorzunehmen (...)*

Therefore, the Commission advises the cities “to balance carefully competing values like freedom of expression, protection against discrimination and the protection of the Swiss society from incitement to hatred” (...)

#### KOMMENTARE

#### COMMENTS

(1.1) Walter Schneider (8. Oktober 2009, 11:21)

*Einspruch!*

Objection!

*“... seien pauschalisierend und stellen den Islam global als negativ bedrohend dar (gibt’s positiv bedrohend?)”*

*“... make generalizing assertions and depict Islam as negatively threatening (can something be positively threatening?)”*

*Wenn also der Islam keine Gefahr darstellt und wir uns vor deren Reaktionen nicht fürchten müssen, warum werden die Plakate an öffentlichen Plätzen verboten?*

If, then, Islam poses no threat and we have no need to fear its reactions, why are the posters banned from public places?

(1.2a) Peter Juon (8. Oktober 2009, 17:17)

*Plakatverbot*

Ban on posters

*Was soll das Verbot? Ich bin erklärtermaßen für das Plakat gegen Minarette. Wenn denn in muslimischen Ländern christliche Kirchtürme erlaubt wären, und Christen nicht verfolgt würden, wäre ich für Minarette in der Schweiz und gegen das Plakat. Ist das so Klartext genug?*

Why the ban? I’m totally in favor of the posters against minarets. If the steeples of Christian churches were permitted and Christians were not

persecuted in Muslim countries, I would be in favor of minarets in Switzerland and against the poster. Is that clear enough?

(1.2b) Frintz Menzer (8. Oktober 2000 9, 18:57)

*@Peter Juon und alle anderen, die behaupten...*

*@Peter Juon and everyone who claims...*

*es gebe keine Kirchen in islamischen Ländern: Hier ist die Wikipedia-Seite einer armenischen Kirche mit Kirchturm in Isfahan, mitten in Iran.*

there are no churches in Muslim countries: here is a Wikipedia page of an Armenian church with a steeple, in the middle of Iran.

[<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vank\\_Cathedral>](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vank_Cathedral)

*Ich finde die Diskussion über die Anti-Minarett-Plakate sehr wichtig, weil es über etwas sehr grundsätzliches geht: Meinungsfreiheit vs. Respekt vor Fremden bzw. Minderheiten. Aber einfach etwas zu behaupten, das gar nicht stimmt, diskreditiert die ganze Diskussion.*

I think the debate about the anti-minaret posters is very important, because it's about something basic: freedom of expression versus respect for foreigners, or for minorities. But simply saying something is not true devalues the whole debate.

(1.3a) Hakan Parlak (neun. Oktober 2000 9,13:59)

*Danke liebe Rassismuskommission,*

Thank you, beloved Commission against Racism

*dass sie einer Initiative die mediale Aufmerksamkeit gegeben haben, die sie ansonsten nie bekommen hätte oder nur mit massiven finanziellen Aufwand.*

for having drawn media attention to an initiative that otherwise would not have generated it on its own or without huge financial backing.

(1.3b) Markus Galbrich (14. Oktober 2009, 22:58)

*Ich musste lachen...*

It made me laugh...

*Einerseits sind die Journalisten traditionell eher links und verbieten sich die Diskussion über solche, von der SVP hergeholten Themen; auf der anderen Seite können sie nicht genug darüber berichten und beklagen anschließend die Öffentlichkeitswirkung ihrer Schreiberei.*

On the one hand, traditionally speaking, journalists are left-wing and would never think of writing about matters brought up by the Swiss People's Party (SVP); on the other, they never get tired of writing about this and then they complain about the effect of their scribbles on public opinion.

The following comments may be made with regard to the aspects of example (1) highlighted above, which frame the remit of this study:

- a) Posters and images: to the right of the poster reprinted above the image is used as its logotype by a group campaigning against the building of minarets. The bias of such pictures is clear, as well as their loaded messages and sense of menace. The brief text below the images reinforces their content: “Stop! Yes to the ban on minarets” (poster on left) and “Against the building of minarets” (logotype on right).
- b) The journalistic text articulates an opinion contrary to the campaign to ban minarets. In stylistic terms, the journalist communicates the point of view by describing the statement issued by the Commission against Racism.
- c) The reader comments seems to reflect a general prevalence of the two polar opposite positions:
  - (1.1) cites a specific sentence from the article for critical-hermeneutic purposes: *seien pauschalisierend und stellen den Islam global als negativ bedrohend dar (gibt’s positiv bedrohend?)* —“make generalizing assertions and depict Islam as negatively threatening (can something be positively threatening?)”.
  - (1.2a and 1.2b) comprise an argument between commentators: one expresses his support for the posters and the other argues back on the basis of the previous reader comment.
  - (1.3a and 1.3b) offer a more general, meta-discursive, meta-communicative form of criticism regarding the media impact of the Commission’s statement and the ideological backgrounds of journalists.

The following questions may be posed in light of the brief introduction outlined above:

- a) What are the distinctive textual and stylistic features of this public discourse?

- b) What communicative effects may be discerned in this mode of communication?

This phenomenon comprises a cluster of different semiotic elements. For the purposes of analysis, the rhetorical approach adopted here draws in a crucial way on the parameters of emotion and visualization. So as to offer a more refined account of this methodological approach, an overview of a number of the distinctive aspects of “media rhetoric” as studied in contemporary theory of communication is provided, particularly in light of the sociological arguments advanced by Niklas Luhmann, which have been updated by Norbert Bolz, a German expert in communication.

### Aspects of media rhetoric from a communications perspective

To state that Web 2.0 amounts to a revolution in journalism is no exaggeration. We live in an age of interactive global communication, where newspaper readers may become journalists via blog entries and online reader comments. This “learned publicity” encompasses the “para-journalism practiced by amateurs” and the “post-journalism practiced by professionals” (Bolz 2007: 30); both may reflect a desire for a more direct form of democracy (*ibid*: 77), albeit not in the last analysis: such freedom is somewhat deceptive because it works with information that was selected in advance by others (*ibid*: 119).

More participation on the people’s part is linked to a higher level of emotionality. Such emotion is often a form of pessimism arising from indignation and the rhetoric of fear: “I am afraid: nothing is more authentic” (*ibid*: 60). Moreover, images published or broadcast in the mass media are not merely to be viewed; rather, they are designed to stir up certain feelings: they communicate more emotion than information (*ibid*: 40). The age-old question of the distinction between reality and fiction in discourse arises in this regard.

Luhmann (1996: 20) phrased this question not so much in terms of how the mass media transforms reality, but how the mass media constructs reality. Burger (2005: 168) asserts that nowadays the issue centers on whether the media “constructs” or “dramatizes” reality, a situation in which mixed text-types emerge (*ibid*: 224): there is no clear distinction between information and commentary. Underlying this is the rhetorical ideal of connection with the receiver, in line with Nietzsche’s conception (see Kopperschmidt 1994: 50) of rhetoric as *doxa*, not *episteme*, whereby our opinion is presented as acceptable (*pithanon*) to others, a position that is as open to question as it is widely held.

From the journalistic point of view, Luhmann (1996: 29) holds that the social success of the mass media lies in ensuring that different topics are more generally accepted. Thus, an “autopoietic system” is set in motion, whereby a problem demands solutions which in turn prompt further problems to be resolved, etc. (*ibid*: 141ff.).

The endeavor to establish textual techniques of dramatization is significant from the linguistic point of view. To Luhmann’s mind (*ibid*: 55), such dramatization amounts to giving the impression that past events are still present in some sense—that is, still of interest. In light of the idea that the history of language is linked to the history of technology—in other words, that the means of communication influence linguistic usage—Schmitz sets out a number of the features of language used in new communications media: an amalgam of writing and orality, text and image, public and private spheres, linguistic flexibility, textual fragmentation, as well as plurality and hybridity in the means of communication and in text-types (*ibid*: 82).

## Rhetorics of emotion and visualization

The emotional weight of these kinds of texts and images has been referred to above. The classical Aristotelian *pistis* dimension of *pathos* enables a rhetorical approach to the study of emotion, which can be extended through modern accounts of emotional argumentation and the relationship between image and language.



Plantin (ms.:135) makes a distinction within emotional argumentation between (i) intentional information and (ii) non-intentional information. Emotive communication relates to the former; emotional communication to the latter. Discourse analysis deals with emotive communication, in which *argumenta ad* (81ff.) such as *ad amicitiam, ad honorem, ad invidiam, ad misericordiam*, etc. play a key part. Indeed, Plantin uses an example taken from the debate about immigration (2a and 2b) to illustrate the way in which an *argumentum ad populum* (88) may function:

- (2a)  
 (a) V est une valeur positive / négative (pour nous)  
 (b) X promeut / s'oppose à la valeur V  
*Règle: On doit combattre, agir, pour ses valeurs*  
 (c) Promouvons / combattons X!

In relation to immigration, the syllogism would run as follows:

- (2b)  
 (1) L'identité du groupe est une valeur positive (pour nous)  
 (2) L'ouverture aux étrangers met en danger l'identité du groupe  
 (3) Combattons l'ouverture aux étrangers, fermons nos frontières et nos quartiers !

By means of this example, Plantin underscores the fact that ordinary argumentation consistently refers to values, highlighting the way in which (ms.: 43) logical arguments act on representation, whereas *pathos* acts on the will. To Plantin's mind, this has a sacred or superhuman, perhaps even diabolical, dimension. Nevertheless, the relationship and mutual influence between *logos* and *pathos* has been explored since ancient times, and is encapsulated by the renowned Scholastic saying: *nihil volitum, nisi praecognitum*. The internal representation or external visualization of particular phenomena may set the free will in motion or stimulate the emotions and passions in a significant way.

The relationship between image and emotion was explored in classical rhetoric: in describing *perspicuitas*, the principal virtue of oratory (*prima virtus* VIII 2, 22), Quintilian asserted that rather than

ensuring the message reached others' ears, the goal was to ensure that the message was perceived by the eyes of the mind (*oculis mentis*, 62). Such visualization heightens emotion: the hearers perceive the events as though they were present to them —*quae non tam dicere videtur quam ostendere, et adfectus non aliter, quam si rebus ipsis intersimus, sequentur* (VI 2, 32). In this regard, it should be noted that such lively representation of events is not limited to events that have already taken place; rather, as Quintilian himself argues, what will happen or may happen can also be visualized in vivid terms (IX 2, 49).

According to Lausberg (1990: §§ 813–817), *isocolon*, *distributio*, the use of the present tense, adverbs of place, direct style, etc. are classical features of visualization. Dachsel (2003: 85) includes antithesis, as an instance of thought reflected in *pathos*, and repetition (*ibid*: 94), as a means of *amplificatio*, whose effect is more appellative than denotative.

Visualization is not limited only to artistic language; as Gerber suggests (1961: 97), visualization is an aspect of the nature of language as such, and had a significant bearing on Nietzsche's conception of language (Most & Fries 1994), as well as his notion of rhetoric. That there has been increased interest in research regarding the relationship between image and text in recent times should come as no surprise; this interest is illustrated here by reference to two significant studies in the field.

Stöckl (2004: 260 and 380) holds that material and linguistic images are functionally isomorphic; that is, images function in the same way as texts; the complex structure of images is due to the combined conditioning of situational and communicative parameters; and on their own or in combination with written texts, images pursue illocutionary purposes.

The phenomenon of normalization has been studied in relation to images, as it has with regard to language. Pörksen (2000: 196 and 200) coined the term “visiotypes” (*Visiotypen*) in this regard; with or without verbal support, visiotypes present a framework of perception that has become normative; in principle, such normal perception is the outcome of a particular perspective, a specific view of reality —in other words, visiotypes are predicates. A visiotype may stimulate a sense of identification, have connotative effects, and prompt a powerful efficacy; the visiotype may articulate an appeal or a promise,

and encompass all forms of feeling and value, as the graphic examples given in (1) above amply demonstrate. From a communicate standpoint, Stöckl (2004: 122) refers to the “typologizing capacity of images” (*Bildtypologisierungskompetenz*), which is based on the decoding of institutionalized signs in the context of common social knowledge.

In light of the foregoing, therefore, the focus of inquiry may be framed as the endeavor to find linguistic-textual resources to express the following aspects of media rhetoric:

- a) the critical-hermeneutic awareness of the reader, now also a writer;
- b) emotionality in argumentation and the use of (linguistic and real) images;
- c) textual dramaturgy in its various textual modalities.

These issues are addressed through textual analysis in the space available below.

## Analysis of public discourse on the Internet

For the purposes of this analysis, a distinction may be drawn between two types of text: (i) a journalistic article with reader comments; and (ii) a private individual’s blog with reader comments. The difference between the two is more or less significant as regards colloquial expression in the main text and the comments, as described in more detail below.

The context of the first text (3) was another referendum proposal advanced by the Swiss People’s Party on 15 February 2008: the *Ausschaffungsinitiative*, the expulsion initiative, an amendment to the Federal constitution of 18 April 1999, whereby—in very summary terms— foreigners might lose their right to live in Switzerland if (a) they commit a serious crime (murder, rape, robbery, drug trafficking, people trafficking, etc.) or (b) they abuse social welfare and social security privileges.

A provocative campaign of biased posters was launched to this end. The poster reprinted as (3a) shows the black sheep (foreigner) being kicked out of the country, under the heading “Create security” (*Sicherheit schaffen*):

(3a)



The constitutional amendment was passed with a vote of 52.9% on 28 November 2010.

Text (3b) below is an extract from an article published in NZZ the following day (29 November), which compiles a range of comments taken from the German and Austrian press. As in example (1) above, a number of reader comments are also given here:

(3b)

NZZ ONLINE

29 November 2010, 09:08, NZZ Online

<[http://www.nzz.ch/nachrichten/schweiz/ausschaffungsinitiative\\_auslandspresse\\_1.8502991.html](http://www.nzz.ch/nachrichten/schweiz/ausschaffungsinitiative_auslandspresse_1.8502991.html)>

*«Das Signal der Schweizer ruft nach einer Antwort»*

*Die ausländische Presse sieht die EU nach der Ausschaffungsinitiative gefordert*

“The Swiss poll calls for some response”

The foreign press speaks of a challenge for the European Union following the expulsion initiative

*(sda/afp/dpa) Mit «irritierend» und «knallhart» beschreiben deutsche und österreichische Zeitungskommentatoren die Annahme der Ausschaffungsinitiative in der Schweiz. (...)*

Comments in German and Austrian newspapers describe the acceptance of the initiative to expel foreigners from Switzerland as “incomprehensible” and “brutal”. (...)

*Die Berliner «tageszeitung» setzt auf den Europäischen Gerichtshof für Menschenrechte (EGMR): «Bleibt zu hoffen, dass der Europäische Gerichtshof die praktische Anwendung der neuen Bestimmungen verhindert». (...)*

The Berlin “Tageszeitung” puts its trust in the European Court of Human Rights: “We hope that the European Court will prevent the practical implementation of this new law”. (...)

*Von einer «fraglichen Mentalität» und einer «gewissen Schizophrenie» ist in der Wiener Zeitung «Die Presse» die Rede. Auf der einen Seite sollten ausländische Mörder, Räuber und Dealer aus der Schweiz geworfen werden. Andererseits «wurden und werden» Diktatoren, Mafiosi und Geschäftemacher, «deren Geld oft fragwürdiger Herkunft ist, mit einem «Grüezi» aufgenommen». (...)*

The Vienna newspaper “Die Presse” speaks of “a peculiar mentality” and “a certain schizophrenia”. On the one hand, foreign killers, thieves and drug traffickers are to be expelled from Switzerland. On the other, “dictators, Mafiosi and corrupt businessmen, the source of whose wealth is dubious, are welcomed and still receive a warm Swiss welcome (“Grüezi”)”. (...)

*In der österreichischen Tageszeitung «Der Standard» bezeichnet es die Kommentatorin als beunruhigend, «dass nach dem Minarettverbot in der Schweiz jetzt schon zum zweiten Mal offen Ausländerfeindliches in Recht und Gesetz eingeht». «Könnte sein, dass hier direkte Demokratie am Fremdenhass scheitert».*

In the Austrian newspaper “Der Standard”, a commentator describes as worrying [the fact] “that following the ban on minarets in Switzerland, anti-foreigner ideology has entered law and justice now for a second time. It may be that direct democracy fails here because of hatred of foreigners.”

#### KOMMENTARE

#### COMMENTS

(3b.1) dirk heinrichs (29 November 2010, 10:03)

*Entscheidung der Schweizer Buerger*

Im Forum eines Montags in D erscheinenden Magazins ist das Echo weit überwiegend positiv.

*Sonderbar, die erhebliche Diskrepanz der Wahrnehmungen bei diesen Themen. Medien auf der einen - Buerger auf der anderen Seite. Die Politik laviert dazwischen. Dazu noch jene, die sich bemühen, die andere Seite pauschal als begriffstutzig in eine bestimmte Ecke zu drängen.*

## Decision of Swiss people

In the forum of a German magazine published on Mondays, the reaction is mainly positive.

The huge discrepancy in how these topics are understood is striking. The media on one side and the people on the other. Politics swings back and forth in between. In addition, there are some that are determined to describe those who think differently as useless.

(3b.2) reto stebler (29 November 2010, 10:08)

*Wen interessiert?*

*Das ist doch den Befürwortern alles Wurst, selbst konkrete Inhalt der Initiative interessieren niemanden. Unausgegoren? Nutzlos? Völker- und/oder menschenrechtswidrig? Who cares? Hauptsache es steht SVP drauf und die Message ist deutlich. Die Stimme ist die symbolische Faust im Sack, die endlich mal wieder raus genommen und ordentlich auf den Tisch gehauen werden kann, so! Auch eine Art der Frustbewältigung.*

Who is interested in this?

Those in favor couldn't care less about all of this, even the specific content of the initiative is of no interest to anyone: Lack of reflection? Useless? Against international law and human rights? Who cares? The important thing is that the SVP is involved and that the message is clear. The voice is a symbolic fist in a pocket, which is finally taken out and banged down hard on the table. That's the way it's done. This could be some kind of response to the frustration.

(3b.3) John Doldon (29 November 2010, 10:09)

*Ein herzliche Einladung...*

*...wenn die Schweiz ja so inhuman ist wie von der ausländischen Presse beschrieben, dann können ja diese Länder die Mörder, Dealer etc. ja gerne aufnehmen. Es wird ja wieder keine Sekunde an die Opfer gedacht, jemanden umzubringen ist ok, aber wenn dann dieser die Konsequenzen tragen muss ist inhuman.*

*Wie gesagt die Schweiz wird allzu gerne diese Verbrecher frühzeitig in unsere Europaeischen Nachbarn entlassen.*

*Mit fremdenhass (sic!) hat dies garn (sic!) nichts zu tun, nunmehr mit einer moralischen Pflicht gegenüber den Opfern.*

Cordial invitation...

... if Switzerland is as inhumane as the foreign press maintains, then let those countries welcome the killers, drug traffickers, etc. Nobody ever thinks of the

victims: killing someone is not a problem, but the perpetrator facing the consequences is inhumane.

So Switzerland would be delighted to let these criminals go as soon as possible and transfer them to our European neighbors.

This has nothing to do with prejudices or hatred of foreigners, this is a moral duty to the victims.

The following features of the NZZ article may be noted here: (i) the journalist creates a specific situation, focusing on articles critical of the Swiss referendum result; and (ii) the article envisions two possible futures: the hope that the European Court of Human Rights will prevent the application of the constitutional amendment in practice, and the fear that direct democracy may buckle under the weight of hatred for foreigners.

Three aspects of the many reader comments are highlighted here:

- a) (3b.1) expresses surprise at the NZZ article in a meta-discursive comment that refers to other German publications offering positive opinions and reflects on the difference in perception between the media and the people. In addition, the problems of communication itself, such as the discrediting of those who think differently, are also referenced.
- b) (3b.2) is an example of the multifaceted style described above:
  - colloquial spontaneity: *alles Wurst* — “[they] couldn’t care less”
  - linguistic competence in rhetorical questions: *Unausgegoren? Nutzlos? Völker- und/oder menschenrechtswidrig? Who cares?* — “Lack of reflection? Useless? Against the rights of peoples and human rights? Who cares?”
  - use of a strong colloquial image in an isotopic structure: *Faust im Sack (...) ordentlich auf den Tisch gehauen* — “The voice is a symbolic fist in a pocket (...) banged down hard on the table.”
- c) (3b.3) is an unequivocal instance of emotional argument,

which draws on irony as a rhetorical resource: ...wenn die Schweiz ja so inhuman ist wie von der ausländischen Presse beschrieben, dann können ja diese Länder die Mörder, Dealer etc. ja gerne aufnehmen —“... if Switzerland is as inhumane as the foreign press maintains, then let those countries welcome the killers, drug traffickers, etc.”

Text (4) below is a blog dating to May 2010 which deals with a possible ban on wearing the *burqa* in public places in Germany, similar to the prohibition that had come into effect the month before (April 2010) in Belgium. (While France was not to enact a ban until September 2010, the issue was already a matter of public debate in May.)

(4)

BLOG

<<http://blog.nn.de/hirnduebel/2010/05/03>>

Burkaverbot ist wie Sandalenzwang für den Straßenstrich

Banning the burqa is like forcing street prostitutes to wear sandals

*(...) Gehen wir das Thema mal durch: Es gibt ja das Gerücht, dass die Burka mit Religion zu tun hätte. Wer dies ausspricht, bedient sich der Sichtweise der allerdümmsten Islamisten. Ich denke, dass man dieses Kleidungsstück keinesfalls der Religion anlasten kann. Genauso, wie die geschmacklosen Designer-Lederjacken mit großformatigen Strass-Kreuzen null und nichts mit dem Christentum zu tun haben.(...)*

*(...) Let's look at it more slowly: rumor has it that the burqa is related to religion. Whoever says this has the same take on it as the most foolish Islamists. I think that this item of clothing cannot be blamed on religion. Just like those kinds of leather jackets in terrible taste worn with big crosses have nothing to do with Christianity. (...)*

*Nein, das Burkaverbot ist ein Quatsch, das ich ernsthaft gar nicht kommentieren will. Deshalb ist auch mein Text bis hierhin Quatsch. Ernsthaft sage ich: Das Burkaverbot ist wieder mal nicht mehr als ein Ablenkungsmanöver von Politikern, die mit den wirklichen Problemen überfordert sind. Nicht mehr, nicht weniger.*

No, banning the burqa is nonsense, which I don't want to take seriously. So up to now, my text has been nonsense. Seriously though: the prohibition of the burqa is again another ploy by politicians, who don't know how to solve real problems. Nothing more and nothing less.



## KOMMENTARE

## COMMENTS

(4.1) 4. Mai 2010

drsarkozy

*Verehrter Herr @hirnduebel,**eine Burka ist Genitalverstümmelung mit anderen Mitteln.**Nur mal so.**Liebe Grüße**dr sarkozy*

Dear Mr @hirnduebel:

A burqa is genital mutilation by other means. Just so that you know.

Yours affectionately

dr sarkozy

(4.2) 4. Mai 2010

flagellant

*Statt die wirklichen "belgischen" Probleme zu lösen, ist doch dieser kleinste gemeinsame Nenner als Ablenkungspolitik doch recht praktisch, oder???**Instead of solving real "Belgian" problems, this lowest common denominator is, as a policy of confusion, really practical, don't you think???*

(4.3) 5. Mai 2010

Rainer K.

*Es ist verbrecherisch und frauenverachtend einer Frau eine Burka überzuzwingen. Das ist Ausdruck moderner Sklaverei und nur naive Multi-Kulti-Romantiker können das als folkloristische Angelegenheit auslegen.**Toleranz gegen Intoleranz ist selbst höchste Intoleranz. Die demokratische Mehrheitsgesellschaft darf hierüber nicht wegsehen. Helft diesen Frauen und verbietet diesen mittelalterlichen Idioten ihre verbrecherischen menschenverachtenden Traditionen. Die Gesellschaft darf Zeichen erzwungener Stigmatisierung und Unterdrückung nicht ignorieren.**VERBIETET DIE BURKA in der Stadt der Menschenrechte!*

It is criminal and discriminatory to women to force them to wear the burqa. It is an expression of modern slavery. Only romantic multi-culti naïfs could interpret this as a matter of folk tradition. Tolerance of intolerance is greater intolerance. The majority of the democratic society cannot turn a blind eye to this reality. Help these women and ban the criminal traditions of these outdated fools, who trample on human rights. Society cannot ignore these signs of stigmatization, imposed by force, and repression. BAN THE BURQA in the city of human rights!

(4.4) 17. Mai 2010

Charlotte Vauvier

*Die Burka ist kein Modegag, keine regionaltypische Folklore aus Einwandererländern, oder gar neckisches weibliches Versteckspiel. Sie ist das äußere Zeichen der Entrechtung und Entpersönlichung von Frauen und symbolhaftes äußeres Zeichen der brutalen Unterdrückung eines menschlichen Individuums.*

*Anzunehmen, dass eine Burka "freiwillig" getragen wird ist entweder bodenlos naiv oder menschenverachtender Zynismus. Eine Gesellschaft die vor diesen verbrecherischen "Traditionen" —naiv oder ignorant— die Augen verschließt und die Opfer nicht durch ein längst überfälliges Verbot aus dieser unmenschlichen sozialen Isolation befreit ist unmenschlich.*

The burqa is not a fashionable outfit, a folkloric regional costume typical of migrant countries or a fun female game of hide and seek. It is the external sign of the violation of the rights and the personality of women and an external symbolic sign of the brutal repression of a human being. To think that someone wears the burqa 'freely' is the mark of a terrible gullibility or cynicism that sees no value in human rights. A society that —innocently or ignorantly— turns a blind eye to these criminal 'traditions' and doesn't set its victims free from such inhumane social isolation by means of a ban, which was a very long time coming, is inhumane.

The following features may be discerned in the blog as a text:

- a) the style is very personal and confident, as well as provocative;
- b) the writer knows how to use visualization strategies, through striking and clever comparisons: *wie Sandalenzwang für den Straßenstrich* —“like forcing street prostitutes to wear sandals”; and *die geschmacklosen Designer-Lederjacken mit großformatigen Strass-Kreuzen* —“those kinds of leather jackets in terrible taste worn with big crosses”;
- c) the text is meta-discursive: *Deshalb ist auch mein Text bis*

*hierhin Quatsch. Ernsthaft sage ich* —“So up to now, my text has been nonsense. Seriously though: (...)”.

The reader comments on the blog reflect a wider range of views than the journalistic article:

- a) (4.1) is a colloquial/vulgar comment: *Genitalverstümmelung mit anderen Mitteln* —“genital mutilation by other means”. In this regard, and on the basis of this comment, Bolz’s remark (2007: 124ff) that it is easier to be daring at a distance than face to face is worth recalling: the advantages and disadvantages of anonymity. Bolz illustrates this in striking terms by describing blogs as the electronic equivalent of graffiti (144).
- b) (4.2) is an example of “spoken-written” language, the use of punctuation marks (inverted commas and the triple use of the exclamation mark in this case) to articulate paralinguistic phenomena: *wirklichen “belgischen” Probleme* —“real ‘Belgian’ problems” / *doch recht praktisch, oder???* —“really practical, don’t you think???”
- c) (4.3) is a good example of the combination of different functional elements in a multifaceted style:
  - an uninhibited form of expression: *Multi-Kulti-Romantiker* —“romantic multi-culti naïfs”
  - phrasing in direct speech form, including insults and the use of graphic features (capital letters): *Helpf diesen Frauen und verbietet diesen mittelalterlichen Idioten ihre verbrecherischen menschenverachtenden Traditionen (...)* **VERBIETET DIE BURKA** —“Help these women and ban the criminal traditions of these outdated fools, which trample on human rights. (...) BAN THE BURQA”
  - literary-philosophical asides: *Toleranz gegen Intoleranz ist selbst höchste Intoleranz* —“Tolerance of intolerance is greater intolerance”
- d) (4.4): the style of the final comment is careful, drawing on a

higher form of visualization, the use of antithesis: *Die Burka ist kein Modegag (...) Sie ist das äußere Zeichen der Entrechtung* — “The burqa is not a fashionable outfit (...) It is the external sign of the violation of [the] rights”. This more refined style mirrors a more reflexive formulation of thought; for instance, the anthropological arguments adduced by the writer in the final lines of his critique of the burqa: *Eine Gesellschaft die vor diesen verbrecherischen “Traditionen” —naiv oder ignorant— die Augen verschließt und die Opfer nicht durch ein längst überfälliges Verbot aus dieser unmenschlichen sozialen Isolation befreit ist unmenschlich* — “A society that —innocently or ignorantly— turns a blind eye to these criminal ‘traditions’ and doesn’t set its victims free from such inhumane social isolation by means of a ban, which was a very long time coming, is inhumane”.

## Results

On the basis of the examples detailed above and in light of the form of public discourse, the following preliminary responses may be made in relation to the questions formulated above:

- 1) With regard to the critical-hermeneutic awareness of the reader-writer in reader comments:
  - a number of the comments are meta-discursive and meta-communicative, in relation to the text on which they reflect, as well as with regard to journalistic discourse and the discourse of politics in general;
  - the comments evince full freedom of expression, enabling the expression (not necessarily in anonymous terms) of completely opposed opinions.
- 2) emotionality in argumentation and the use of images:
  - very provocative and biased posters are used,

- comprising striking visual and textual juxtapositions;
- editorial articles stir up fear and a sense of future menace;
  - the comments draw on emotional arguments, amplifying their effect with irony.
- 3) textual dramaturgy:
- editorial articles dramatize situations through the selection of topics and emotional implications (the blog is more provocative in this regard);
  - reader comments are acts of dramatization by nature, referring both to the original text and the comments of others;
  - that such dramaturgy may be strengthened is no surprise: the more comments it provokes, the greater the impact of the text.

Of course, these features are not new to public discourse; what is new, however, is that technical resources may amplify its communicative scope and potential.

Finally, the following remarks may be made with regard to language as such:

- 1) in light of Coseriu's argument (2007) that the linguistics of text is hermeneutics and (since overall meaning references specific meanings) the linguistics of text is stylistics, and given the plurality of facets outlined above, this is a discourse-in-progress. Schmitz (2004: 32) refers to *multilektaler Konsolidierungsprozess* (a process of multilectal consolidation);
- 2) the examples cited here disclose multidimensionality as a defining feature of this public discourse, combining different styles and registers in a limited space;
- 3) whether this online discourse will begin to separate into different registers or if its popularization (better put than democratization) will safeguard this discursive multifunctionality is an open question.

In the broader context of discourse studies, this type —or amalgam— of interactive texts may prompt reflection from new perspectives on a number of issues in this academic field: the relationships between discourse and truth, and between democracy and freedom of expression (which appear not to be interchangeable), as well as the steep learning curve that lies ahead in living together in a society shaped by different cultures.

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