

„I am the opposite of Osama bin Laden“

A conversation between Claudia Dantschke and Imam Abu Adam Hesham Shashaa about Salafism in Germany, the war in Syria and questions of reradicalization and deradicalization of adolescents

Claudia Dantschke¹

CD: Imam Abu Adam Hesham Shashaa, those who don't know you immediately think you look like Osama bin Laden. It is not just your outfit but you really physically resemble him.

Imam Abu Adam²: Right. (laughing)

CD: You are a practicing Muslim and have studied Islam. How would you describe yourself?

Imam Abu Adam: I studied in Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Libya and Pakistan. I am a Muslim, just a Muslim. I don't want to be identified and then associated with a certain group, sect or organization. I was born as a normal human being, just like everyone else. And even though we share similar characteristics when it comes to the face, beard and our outfits, I would rather describe myself as the exact opposite of Osama bin Laden.

CD: It is your entire appearance. You have a long beard and prayer points on your forehead; on your head a white cap with a headscarf on top; and in daily life you also wear a white Jalabiya and, from time to time, even an Abaya (black coat-like garb) on top. This is how many people imagine a "Salafist" to look like. Why are you also wearing these clothes in Germany?



Imam Abu Adam im May 2013 at the 3rd interreligious conference on „Religions create peace in communities“, in the Evangelischen Akademie Villigst/ Westfalen. Photo: © private

Imam Abu Adam: It is a habit due to me being an Arab. It is the clothing from my country of birth that I have always been used to and also feel very comfortable in. I'm not saying it is Islamic clothing because there is no Islamic clothing. There is clothing that is comfortable but none that makes you a good Muslim by wearing it. I'm wearing it out of a habit and not because I'd like to differentiate myself from others. Absolutely not! My children are wearing Jalabiya as well as Western clothing. When I'm doing sports, I also wear jogging pants, when I'm working I wear a shirt and trousers and at the beach I'm putting on shorts or bathing trunks. There is no Salafi or Muslim clothing. Whoever claims this is on the wrong track.

CD: You have been living in Munich and preaching in a local mosque for a couple of years. What kind of mosque was that?

Imam Abu Adam: I worked in several mosques on a voluntary basis since the end of 2000. I preached and taught kids. However, I was kicked out of almost every mosque because the respective managing boards did not like my ideas and views. In 2003 I decided that it was time to found my own mosque organization. For me it was about building bridges and to get into dialogue with the society we've been living in – Muslims and non-Muslims together. I didn't want Muslims in their ghettos to distance themselves from majority society. What I wasn't allowed to do in other mosques, I could now finally realize in this mosque association: we for instance invited non-Muslims, Christians, Jews, Buddhists and atheists to our mosque, sat together and exchanged and discussed. What had been considered taboo or even explicitly prohibited was exactly what I wanted to overcome. That's why together with my students and friends I founded the organization „Haus des Qurans und der Sunnah“ (,House of Qur'an and Sunnah'/Darul Quran e.V.). Our mosque is close to Munich central station. But I'm living in Leipzig now and am no longer working as an Imam in this mosque. Though, within the organization I am still the person in charge of interreligious dialogue and responsible for questions around extremism and radicalization – within our community as well as to the outside.

CD: Did your mosque in Munich only address Arab Muslims or has it been multicultural right from the beginning?

Imam Abu Adam: I previously worked in many mosques; however they were always organized according to national backgrounds. I thought that was wrong since we are living in a multicultural society in Germany with people from 200 different countries. You can't say: We are a Moroccan mosque or an Egyptian organization. In our organization we've always been seeking to represent various nationalities among our members as well as the executive board. We also have members with Israeli citizenship – for many this is a taboo. Our members come from Togo, France, Germany, Palestine, Jordan etc. – overall from 20 different countries. Thus, our organization represents the global situation since the world has basically become a village nowadays. I also don't mind Jews or Christians being a member of our organization. We have non-Muslim friends and supporters who are working with us in the mosque. This is normal to me because mosques are houses of God. I don't owe them and neither do you; they belong to everyone. God opens doors for everyone and not only certain groups. That is our philosophy.

CD: Since 2005 I have been looking into the evolution of Salafism in Germany. Part of this development is a renowned radical German online forum, which, next to discussing general question around Salafiyya and the various interpretations, also propagates and advertises Jihad understood as a form of armed battle. The forum exists since 2008 and it was there that I encountered your name and your mosque for the first time. The comments were cautioning the forum members against you and were denouncing your community as a „hotbed of evil“. Have you been confronted with this kind of hostility in Munich as well?

Imam Abu Adam: Yes, still to this day. I think this will continue for the rest of my life. They claim that our mosque is a reformist one; which is simply not the case. There are many extremists and radicalized Muslims in Munich, who are calling our mosque non-Muslim and, thus, exclude us from Islam. They argue that we are not spreading the “true Islam” merely

due to the fact that we e.g. allow women to pray behind the men without a curtain separating them or because we let non-Muslim enter the mosque without enjoining a certain code of conduct on them. Moreover, they were skeptical regarding our relation to authorities. It is important to me that this relation is understood in the right way. We are not working FOR authorities but WITH them since we believe that security is an issue concerning all of us and not only the police and Muslims. We all need to work together in order to protect our children, our mosques and our fellow citizens. This is not only task of the police, but everyone needs to engage. However, our understanding has been interpreted as treason such as my critique towards fatwas with regard to meat sold by Aldi or Penny³. I was opposing these fatwas and stated that it is to the detriment of Islam. This has been considered a scandal until this day. Many mosques and individuals execrated me and declared me a kafir for this critique. Several persons also came to our mosque in order to beat me. Or some people stood up in the middle of the prayer yelled and tried to provoke a conflict within the mosque. Then they send someone to our mosque who tried to manipulate youths and to recruit them for the militant Jihad. We observed that very carefully and could prevent this. But there was constant negative propaganda directed at us. In 2003 I printed a fatwa by the Saudi scholar Sheikh Mohammed bin Saleh and put it up on the wall. In this fatwa the Sheikh criticized the Salafiyaa and argued that they are exactly like other sects and parties and that in Islam this should not be the case. Naturally this resulted in insurgencies and the reactions towards me and the Darul-Quran-mosque across the street have been very hostile. I have always made clear that I am not a Salafist – never have been and never will. Prophet Muhammad (saw)⁴ was no Salafist and in Islam there is no Salafiyaa, only Islam. But no, I should say that I am a Salafist! Why?

CD: But you also consider the Prophet Muhammad and the as-Salaf as-Saleh, the ancestors⁵, as your ideal and guide?

Imam Abu Adam: What does as-Salaf as-Saleh mean? I don't want the term to be associated with this particular group that wants to limit Islam to the ancestors and claims that

everything else is not Islam. But Islam is more than what this group is propagating in regard to the as-Salaf as-Salih. Islam is much broader and more beautiful than this constricted point of view. This is my perspective on what I studied, read, discussed and understood from the Qur'an and Sunnah. If you can scientifically prove my theory wrong – you are welcome to do so. But until today no one could. Nobody I ever discussed with could provide me with evidence that the Salafiyaah even exist within Islam. Salafists simply take something from some random Sheikh and even if they have a great Aqida [statement of faith]⁶, as often claimed, they still have a bad conduct: they are aggressive, criticize others, denigrate and degrade, misdirect them and threaten them with hell. They are behaving as if they would live in medieval times. They certify who goes to paradise and who goes to hell; act as if they were judges and make decisions even though Allah didn't ask them to do so. It is up to him to judge, not us. Or they are publishing letters e.g. addressed to Angela Merkel, in which they request her to convert to Islam since otherwise she would bear all the sins of the German population. Those who are acting like that must feel like they are the Prophet himself because this is what Prophet Muhammad (saw) has been doing. But if everybody would be allowed to do that, why haven't the four successors of the Prophet, the Caliphs Abu Bakr, Omar, Othman and Ali done so as well? Am I better today than the four Caliphs have been? They haven't done this because it hasn't been their task and haven't had the authority. I'm not allowed to say who is going to hell or paradise because in order to do so I would have to know about the hidden. But I have no knowledge of that. Only God can know about that, not me. The behavior of these Salafists is damaging our Islamic ideals. That's why I reject their ideology and their perspectives. But I am addressing them in order to counsel them, give advice and try to show them the right path. But I myself cannot show them the right path, only Allah can. I try to be a candle in order for them to see some light and get to the truth.

CD: By now you are travelling a lot; not only in Germany and Europe but also globally. You voice your opinion in many places, barge in and debate. Thereby you are also intensively making use of your facebook profile. I will address your work with youths in a bit. But

interesting thereby is your exchange with numerous Sheikhs and scholars in various countries. What is your intention with this exchange?

Imam Abu Adam: I have been working on that exchange for the past 12 years. Especially since I noticed that our idols, the Sheiks, Imams and scholars in Islamic countries are very much influenced by false information about the Western world. Accordingly, their fatwas and decisions look the way they do. But these fatwas also provide orientation for Muslims in Germany. At this stage I thought I am able to mediate as most of them are Arabs and we speak the same language. I invited many of these scholars to Germany or e.g. France, Norway and Spain. I make these invitations by hand and then send them to e.g. the embassy of Saudi-Arabia. This is how I get them to come here. I then accompany them and drive them around in my own car or take one of our organization – spending one week or up to two months with them. I organize and cover all expenses by myself. I also take them to restaurants, markets, the beach – basically to any place where they have the chance to meet local people. Thereby it's about giving them the opportunity to get in touch with individuals, talk to them and get to know them. I'm solely the interpreter; they should thereby make their own experiences. Often, they thereby realize that the claims, which they heard about the West from far away and which they thought to be true, are in fact not in line with reality. Of course there are cases of discrimination here but, generally, Muslims in Europe e.g. in Germany are better off than in their respective country of origin. They practice their rituals and enjoy far more freedoms than in Egypt, Saudi-Arabia or any other Islamic country. And in 99% of the cases my efforts have been crowned by success. I recognize that when looking at the statements in sermons, speeches and lectures made by these scholars in their mosques after their return. We also have recordings in which scholars state: „To disintegrate and to distance oneself has been the wrong path. The right thing to do is to understand oneself as citizen of the respective country and not as a foreigner any longer. But then you really need to 'dive into' this society and cooperate and live together with the people as a matter of course. You should be beneficial for that society, should bring in your creativity and should not constantly complain about: discrimination, foreigners and fear or

differentiate between kuffar (non-Muslims in the sense of non-believers) and Muslims. Just live your life, keep your faith but participate. Our Prophet (saw) said: 'No matter where you are, spread courage.' Do something that make Muslims be perceived in a positive instead of negative light. A Muslim beat, a Muslim killed, a Muslim stole, a Muslim planted a bomb. No, let us show them a different story and that a Muslim can have a good job e.g. in a hospital, performing a good surgery and helping someone or even saving his or her life. Let us be a little more positive.'

Hamdulillah [thanks to God], this has worked very well. These Imams and scholars now come regularly, not only to Germany but also to other European countries and preach this in every mosque and community that will let us in and back my words. This is really important to me, since my credibility has been always put into question due to the fact that I am living in Germany and am allegedly getting paid by the German state. This was believed to be the reason I talked the way I talked. But I am not getting paid, neither does my family. We are working and I never received any kind of social welfare. This is a no-go for us. And when the rich Sheikhs and Imams come here and support the things that I am saying it helps a lot to bring people closer together.

CD: Particularly Arab but also Turkish Sheikhs and TV-scholars have a considerable influence on young Muslims in Germany. Their preaching and speeches are available online as videos or are received via satellite. When these preachers, also due to being based on incorrect assumptions, are emphasizing that the West, the kuffar, are only striving for fighting and subduing Islam and Muslims, it comes as a confirmation to youths, who already made experiences with discrimination and social exclusion. This results in enemy conceptions being strengthened and youths becoming more open towards radical ideologies. But when suddenly experiencing the preacher in a more nuanced way, they will probably become more clairaudient and interested.

Imam Abu Adam: Yes, indeed. But first of all they are under shock since it does not fit into their previous worldview. It counters everything they are used to hear by radical Sheiks. And

what they heard so far has been perceived as the core of their religion. Hence the shock, because they think it would contradict their religion, so their interpretation of Islam. They believe Allah, his messenger and his companions declared Christians as the enemies of Islam. And now someone is standing there, dressed like a grand scholar with beard and is talking about Qur'an and Sunnah. But the things he is saying contradict the Qur'an in their point of view. But these youths don't even know the Qur'an. You could let them recite abracadabra and they couldn't differentiate it from the Qur'an. I experienced that more than once. But they start to get curious as soon as you explain it to them calmly and show them proof from the Qur'an in black and white (here you can read this in surah xy, verse z in German, Turkish, English or Arabic). They are not convinced immediately, but it works like a drop that is slowly splitting the rock. Firstly, it's about them starting to entertain doubts about their previous truths. They should become curious and start to study and research: here is something that is allegedly incorrect. It is a thread that we are giving to them. They take it and continuously pull it until they reach an imaginary end at which they do not find a radical but truthful interpretation of Islam. This is what I have been doing with these Sheikhs and my scholars for more than ten years. Hamdulillah, we thereby already deradicalized many radicals. I'm in close contact with them as they need assistance and mentoring for as long as they get along by themselves.

CD: That is taking a lot of time and effort. What I think is really important about your work is the fact that you are directly talking to the youths since many adolescents would like to know more about Islam, are looking for explanations and rationales that they are able to comprehend and that relate to their daily life. Many German-speaking Salafists are very successful in this regard as they cater to these expectations. No matter what questions these youths might have, they are provided with suiting "religious" answers. The fact that they thereby encounter self-made-preachers does not seem to be relevant to the adolescents. They are apparently impressed by the „great knowledge“ of these preachers. When someone like you, Abu Adam, is talking to the youths it is irritating. How do you see your own chances to reach youths, who are already following radical, Salafist preachers?

Imam Abu Adam: I don't only see it as a chance but also as a duty. We are obliged to take care of radicalized persons because they are victims. Nowadays there is no epiphany by God to every single person that would clearly state what is right and wrong. They think what they have been taught and what they believe in is the truth. They only know about this one perspective. This is why you have to make sure that they also get to know other perspectives. When talking to youths you should try to keep it simple and don't blow it into a huge debate. I am trying to do that in mosques but also on facebook. But online it is more difficult as people are masking their identity, stay anonymous and don't show up to meetings that I suggest. I keep on inviting them as I want to meet them face to face. Why? Because many of them do have difficulties of psychological or social nature or face problems within their family etc. Often they are lacking security, love, devotion and attention. I can provide them with that when I encounter them in the mosque or on the street. I hug them, I listen to them – they get this attention from me. It is not always about immediately discussing big issues. I cook with them and we talk about common interests, so issues that are not causing us to fight. This is how I attempt to gain their trust. Only after that I also address critical issues as long as I have the feeling they really comprehend. These youths need not only mere knowledge transfer but also a little love, attention, psychology and philosophy in order to heal their bale.

CD: So, you need a network?

Imam Abu Adam: Yes, a network! We need you Claudia, we need Abu Adam, we need sociologists, pedagogues, sportsmen, teachers, Imams. We need real networks in order to deradicalize these youths.

CD: What you just described also resembles the approach of our counselling service Hayat. Currently we are confronted with an issue I'd like to address more comprehensively in the following: foreign fighters. At least 400 particularly young individuals from Germany have travelled to Syria in the past two years in order to join a Jihadist group. Some of them want

to fight and die as a martyr, others are socially active in the periphery of the group or translate Jihad propaganda into German and others might travel with their entire family to the occupied territories, do Hijra, in order to participate in the establishment of the „perfect Islamic state“. I'm also aware of the fact that you are addressing the topic on different levels: you debate with youths, who are, particularly on facebook, consuming and sharing the German Jihad-propaganda. This propaganda mainly stems from the environment of the Jihadi group „Islamic State in Iraq and Sham“ (ISIS). Often the Bahraini Sheikh Abu Sufyan as-Sulami Turki al-Binali is being quoted in this context. Though I don't know whether this Sheikh is even known in the Arab world and has any relevance...

Imam Abu Adam: No, he hasn't! He is completely unknown!

CD: Since 2013 there is explicit German Jihad-propaganda online (online-forums, facebook, youtube etc.). Numerous youths in and from Germany are continuously referring to that Sheikh and spread his flowery phrases. You addressed these youths and offered a direct contention with Sheikh as-Sulami. What happened?

Imam Abu Adam: I'm constantly offering this since two years. However, he is refusing this offer. None of them is daring to face a debate. Many of these „Sheikhs“ or activists are phantoms and unknown. They have fantasy-names such as ‚sword of Allah‘ or ‚horse of God‘. And no one is engaging with me in a discussion; not even to prove me wrong. This Sheikh as-Sulami is very young for a Sheikh. I don't want to impute something to him but basically he is completely unknown. We actually do not know whom he studied with. Presumably, one of his teachers is Sheikh Omar al-Hadoushi in Morocco. But also Sheikh al-Hadoushi is not endowed with theological knowledge. You discover many mistakes when listening to his speeches. They are also not in command of traditional high Arabic. These skills are however necessary when making religious judgments or giving expert advice. I listened to several of their speeches and they simply do not have this knowledge.

CD: This Omar al-Hadoushi from Morocco is interesting for the German context in several regards: Crucial figures within the radical-Salafist network „The True Religion“ („Die Wahre Religion“/DWR), the preacher Abu Dujana from Bonn and his father Sheikh al-Arabi are referring to this Moroccan Sheikh. This might also have to do with the fact that they are from Morocco themselves. However, Sheikh al-Hadoushi and his views seem to be even more relevant since you also find them in speeches by DWR-preachers. Moreover, al-Hadoushi has given the Ijaza (teaching permission)⁷ to the Austrian Mohammed Mahmoud alias Abu Usama al-Gharib⁸. That means that he is now authorized to preach the views of his teacher al-Hadoushi. Since then Abu Usama al-Gharib is honorably being called Sheikh by his followers of the group “Millatu Ibrahim”, which has been banned by the Federal Minister of Interior in 2012. When looking at his constituency you can see that they are valorizing themselves on the basis of alleged religious certificates in order to spread their ideology.

Imam Abu Adam: These are fictitious Ijazas. Was he sitting next to him and learnt from him? Where did this al-Hadoushi get his knowledge from? Basically I don't care whether or not he has Ijaza or studied at all. Whether he can provide authentic, scientific proofs that are logical is more important to me. If so, it is sufficient to me. But these people can't; they do not provide any evidence but are solely addressing the emotional level. They incite and insult – nothing more and nothing less. And this has nothing to do with religion.

CD: Maybe this is the reason why many adolescents are following them. We don't know concrete numbers but some of the youths, who went abroad radicalized in this particular environment and followed these preachers. You, Abu Adam, are taking care of these youths and those that already returned by now. I would like to address a case but without mentioning the name or city. It is about a boy of minor age, who has been in Syria and was accompanied back home by his parents. Now everyone is relieved: he is back home with his parents and everything is fine. Taking this boy as an example, how would you describe these youths and what needs to be done once they returned?

Imam Abu Adam: Basically, these youths are victims. They have problems in their social surrounding, often within their family. They are in a search process and find mentors everywhere, who will embrace them. These are often radical preachers that poison the youths just like in this particular case. The boy was in touch with two local Imams, who planted these radical ideas in his head over a certain period until the crop germinated. Hamdulillah, he has returned. There are many boys like him; more than official statistics in security circles would indicate. Many travel to Egypt or other countries in order to study or learn Arabic. In order to prevent being tracked, they will be endowed there with falsified documents and smuggled to Syria. And the work with these youths shouldn't start when they already returned. The work needs to start many years before in order to prevent a departure to fight in militant Jihad. We need to become active on two dimensions: Preventing young individuals in Germany from radicalizing in the first place and taking care of those who already radicalized in order to deradicalize them and to prevent them from going abroad. The second dimension is addressing youths that are already abroad in combat zones. In this case we need to make efforts to make them return. But this is very challenging. I have many of these cases, hamdulillah. How do you get them here? How do you convince them to go back home? Should you plan a hijacking? Hijacking might be the wrong term. How do you convince them to cross the border from Syria to Turkey? There would be family waiting for them. It is almost like a „return odyssey Rambo style“. We are thereby emphasizing the emotional level to a huge extent because as soon as they see their parents emotions come to the fore: ‚Oh Mom, oh Dad‘, then they start to cry, get into the car and off they go. This way they leave the group into a relaxed atmosphere. This is not an easy process since we are entering dangerous grounds. On the one hand, we are being threatened by the so called Mujaheddin, radical Jihadi groups like Jabahat an-Nusra, ISIS etc., because we are considered kuffar by them. On the other hand, also the security agencies encounter us with mistrust because we have connections to Syria e.g. via phone. As if we were spreading Jihad despite us rejecting any form of violence no matter who is the victim. We are simply trying to bring the youths back home.

CD: So you are not considered an ally or partner even though you are trying to bring back these youths and deradicalize them?

Imam Abu Adam: Absolutely not. Everyone is just thinking: What is he doing there? And at the Turkish-Syrian border it is very dangerous since the parents and I are in danger of being killed or taken hostage. But also here in Germany there is persecution, investigation and police questioning. Everybody just wants you to share information with them: who, where, what, names, data etc. Sometimes I even don't have the time to do anything else, I am solely occupied with talking to the police. I have a responsibility when it comes to the youths and their families and I cannot simply get them back home from Syria, Iraq or Afghanistan and then leave them all to themselves here. If I do so, some of them would immediately go back to their old thinking and probably try to return to Syria. And you cannot forbid them to go to Spain. From there they then try to travel to Syria; after all Germany is not the only possible gate for a departure. This task is quite some challenge, but someone has to do it. The youths need to be counselled for as long as they finally break with the extremist ideology. It is not sufficient that they desist from any activity. They also need to actively deal with the ideology until they ultimately despise it. Otherwise they will always be in danger of re-radicalizing.

CD: As we would say: they need to reflect on everything.

Imam Abu Adam: It is about a complete change. Then, hamdulillah, I can back out of it eased. I'm aware that this might be scientifically doubtful as also this approach is slightly radical. But sometimes only the clear cut is of any help and is lacking an alternative. I'd rather radically counter radicalism instead of being taken in or mocked by radicalism.

CD: The youths should desist from the radical ideology but not Islam. They should definitely remain Muslims if they want to. However you, Abu Adam, can't be everywhere at the same time. What are the possibilities for these adolescents to practice their religion in a community and find an alternative Muslim group? What are the chances for that in the

German realm? You travel around a lot and meet with the youngsters for a certain time but eventually you leave again. What happens to them then?

Imam Abu Adam: They are being bullied e.g. in school or within their old extremists scene that introduced them to the radical ideology. They are being defamed, blackmailed and threatened: what you have done is riddah (apostasy). They will be banned from Islam, declared a kafir (non-believer) and someone who deserves to be killed because he/she is a murtadd (an apostate), who fled from Jihad fisabilillah (fight on the path of God). Through this, they can become extremist again.

CD: They can't take the pressure any longer and want to prove themselves.

Imam Abu Adam: Exactly. They think: 'I'm a Muslim! Ok, that was a mistake...!' It is crucial that we invest in institutions and organizations across the country that are capable of taking care of these kids. They need religious authorities but they also need sportsmen and pedagogues. This is also a task of the state – I cannot work all by myself. Everyone needs to get together and talk about these issues seriously. I've been saying this for 12 years.

CD: People in Germany are to a certain extent also scared of these young men returning. Security agencies point to the fact that some of them have been trained in camps and might also have experience in actual combat. The fear is that they come back to Germany and potentially take the war home in form of terrorist attacks. What are your thoughts on that threat? You take care of youths that are either traumatized or brought back by their parents. Do you, in fact, see a potential danger in every returnee?

Imam Abu Adam: I agree with that completely. We speak about traumatized ones or those having been taken back by their parents and thereby forget those that are actually returning in order to continue Jihad as a violent fight here in Germany. In Syria they are told: 'We don't need you here any longer, you completed your task. Now you are doing Jihad in Germany'.

They are told to recruit other youngsters and train them for violent Jihad somewhere in the Muslim world. But they also mean they should be prepared to launch a bomb attack – or some thing similar they consider as “Jihad” on German soil at some point. This is highly dangerous since they learned everything they need to know over there. They don’t need weapons; they can build explosive charges and find instructions online. And they can teach and radicalize other youths. This is really, really dangerous.

CD: Do you think that the security agencies are capable of assessing which returnee is dangerous and who is rather not?

Imam Abu Adam: No, security agencies alone can’t do that. You need psychologists, sociologists, mentors and Muslims who are familiar with these issues. It requires a network of several experts. If security agencies could do that on their own, they would have already prevented many things in the first place. But they didn’t succeed when the youngsters were radicalizing and leaving the country, how are they supposed to tackle that after the return? I also don’t think that they are able to assess every returnee properly. It is also not about looks; many Jihadists just look like Thomas and Philip with green eyes, blond hair and „Western“ clothes. Still, they have this dangerous poison in their head. This is why we need strong networks. Included should be Imams but also persons from outside the mosques; even on markets, in shopping malls or clubs – everywhere the youths are hanging out. What can security services do? Wiretapping and categorizing telephone calls? And then? What is the solution? Will the head of the secret service come and talk to a youngster trying to religiously convince him/her that his/her actions were wrong? Or will he start a counseling process with him/her and the family? No, he won’t. And as a representative of security agencies he won’t be accepted anyways. There are many individuals who are invited by authorities but simply don’t show up. They take an attorney who explains to them that they are not obligated to make any statement: ‚In case you have some evidence against me, please contact the federal prosecutor. If not, we have nothing to say‘. I experienced that

several times with youths in Munich. They have been invited many times but told me that they never went there.

CD: But they would talk to you?

Imam Abu Adam: If they don't talk to me, who else should they address? And thereby it doesn't matter whether they consider me an enemy or a like-minded person. They will address me because it is about religious questions. I say something, they say something and then we start to debate. But to do that with security agencies? I can enter every house; even the house of my enemies that can't stand me and actually would like to see me dead. If we know each other I can even talk privately with them at their home. They have to talk to me, that's absolutely normal. And a lot of them also trust me. And those who don't try to prove me wrong or make me share their point of view. This would be a win for their dawa (here referring to mission). I like that, I expect that from them: 'Yes, right. If you convince me, I'm going to do it just like you. You know that I have a tongue like a sword'. I let them fall into this trap.

CD: Of course, the extremists are aware of this, which explains you getting horrible hate mails as I could see.

Imam Abu Adam: Yes, I'm threatened with death and many other things. Three or four times in Munich alone and then in Spain my bodyguard and I were almost beaten up. Hamdulillah, I always have my bodyguards around. They are trained for situations like that. One of the two was formerly employed in an embassy as security guard; the other has been in the Jordanian army. Without them I would have already been beaten up or killed.

CD: You continue your work despite this threat?

Imam Abu Adam: I have to continue! This is a religious but also societal command. I at least save my children. I don't want them to radicalize, blow themselves up or travel to combat camps in order to learn how to kill us here. You can't say: 'It is none of my business; it's not burning in my house'. But it is burning at the neighbour's house and the fire will soon jump over to your house. Thus, I have to take a bucket full of water and help my neighbour.

¹ **Claudia Dantschke:**

Born in 1963, Claudia Dantschke studied Arabic at the University of Leipzig. Since 2001 she works as a researcher for the Centre for Democratic Culture (ZDK Gesellschaft Demokratische Kultur gGmbH) in Berlin. Since July 2010 she is the director of the "Working Group Islamism and Ultra-nationalism" (ASTIU). Claudia also leads "Hayat", the first counselling centre for families of radicalised Islamist youths in Germany since end of 2011.

² **Hesham Shashaa (Imam Abu Adam):**

Imam Abu Adam was born in Egypt, is of Palestinian descent and was raised in Libya and Egypt. He studied in Egypt, Saudia Arabia, Pakistan and United Arab Emirates and received several diplomas in various fields. He is currently writing his dissertation at the Punjab University (Pakistan). 2003 he founded the organization „Haus des Qurans und der Sunnah“ (Darul Quran e.V.) in Munich and worked there as an imam for several years. He is currently Imam and preacher at the Waqf-ministry of Kuwait. Worldwide he is considered integration officer and terrorism experts by Muslims and non-Muslim alike. He is often being invited to give speeches and lectures and is particularly taking care of radical Salafi or Jihadi youths.

³ Supermarkets in Germany

⁴ Salla-llahu ,alaihi wa Salam – Blessing to the messenger of Allah.

⁵ Referring to traditional, ancient Islamic scholars

⁶ Entirety of the contents in Islam that need to be internalized, basis of the Islamic way of life

⁷ Ijaza (teaching license) is referring to a certificate, which documents the training and mentions the names of the teachers.

⁸ Since March 2013 Abu Usama al-Gharib is imprisoned in Turkey. He was on his way to Syria in order to join a group with links to al-Qaeda. He escaped expulsion from Germany by leaving to Egypt in 2012.