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We are happy to present the January issue of Beehive. This issue opens with a special article that examines the activity of ISIS supporters on the Tumblr microblogging platform that is subject to less stringent monitoring and censorship than other SNS. The next two articles examine the storm on SNS over sociologist Dr. Yousef-Ali Abazari's accusation that Iranian society is culturally bankrupt, and the response on Turkish SNS to the massacre at the French satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo. Enjoy!

ISIS Social Media and the Case of Tumblr

Linda Dayan

In mid-December, police forces in Bangalore, India identified and apprehended @ShamiWitness, a Twitter user with tens of thousands of followers who used his social media platforms to drum up support for the Islamic State (ISIS).¹ This crackdown comes in the wake of increased mainstream international media attention to Twitter and Facebook as tools of ISIS recruitment. For many of the young, mostly European, Muslims who are making the journey to fight and live alongside ISIS in Iraq and Syria, Social Networking Sites (SNS) are often the first stop.² While Twitter and Facebook (as well as the website ask.fm, where users send others questions to answer) have played a major role in disseminating ISIS propaganda, ISIS accounts are suspended and removed every day.³ Most social networking sites have terms of service that forbid incitement, hate speech, and images of real-life violence and gore, and ISIS members cannot broadcast their message – and seek out possible recruits – without violating these rules. One social media site that seems to be immune to this pattern of registration, termination, and restarting of ISIS accounts is Tumblr.

A “microblogging” platform, Tumblr allows users to maintain blogs in which they can post long- or short-form text, videos, pictures, music, and other media. They can also

“reblog,” or share content, from other Tumblr blogs, and send and answer private and public messages. While the Tumblr Community Guidelines also forbid incitement, illegal activity, gore, and hateful speech,⁴ its staff of 318 oversee more than 200 million blogs with over 98 billion posts.⁵ If ISIS blogs fall under the radar or are not reported to the staff as often as others who violate the guidelines, they can remain active for much longer than accounts on Twitter or ask.fm, which boast a more robust staff.

The Tumblr demographic skews young, female, and Anglophone.⁶ On the website, ISIS members and their supporters tend to fit this profile as well. Many ISIS-aligned blogs are difficult to identify at first, because they often include similar content to blogs run by teenage, female, moderate, observant Muslims – quotes about *Jannah* (paradise) superimposed over pictures of flowers, relatable quotes and jokes about high school, artfully photographed desserts, verses from the Qur’an. As many Tumblr users have a social justice bent, anti-imperialist or anti-Western content is neither unusual nor indicative of affiliation with actual political parties or groups. It is pictures of mujahids in Syria rather than refugee children, ISIS flags rather than those of their homelands, and quotes extolling the virtues of martyrdom that set bloggers who affiliate themselves with ISIS apart. One Danish blogger, bintkhalil,⁷ is representative of this archetype; interspersed between edited graphics of flowers, gifs from popular films, and posts expressing solidarity with oppressed peoples around the world are black ISIS flags⁸ and content from pro-ISIS blogs praising jihadis.⁹



Bloggers who post content sympathetic to or supportive of ISIS often follow and reblog posts from users who are already living and fighting in ISIS territory. One particularly popular blogger is “Bird of Jannah,” an English-speaking Malaysian woman in her mid-twenties. She has joined ISIS in Tabqah, Syria, and maintains a following on Twitter over 1,500 strong¹⁰ despite having had her account terminated multiple times. Her Tumblr blog, “Diary of a Muhajira,” serializes her experiences as a wife in the Islamic State.¹¹ Below homemade graphics featuring quotes about martyrdom,¹² jihad, and *Jannah*, she writes impassioned posts urging readers, particularly women, to join ISIS themselves as fighters and professionals.¹³ She also writes semi-regular updates about her home life, her husband (an ISIS militant), and friends in ISIS-controlled Syria.¹⁴ Significant media attention has been paid to this “love story,”¹⁵ a rare report of the mundane lives of those living in ISIS territory from the perspective of one doing so voluntarily, with the threat – or joy, as Bird of Jannah sees it – of looming martyrdom. In addition to giving advice to those asking for it on her blog and posting original content, she has also provided links to contacts who want to help other young Muslims move to ISIS territory.¹⁶

The most prolific of these contacts is Paladin of Jihad, a twenty-year-old Maldivian¹⁷ blogger whose first post, dated January 31, 2014, proclaims that the goal of his blog is to collect his thoughts, and, “by sharing with you some of these thoughts, I humbly believe that you might derive benefit from them, in shā Allah.”¹⁸ Though his #Dustyfeet series of posts began as a call for Muslims to identify and rectify their weaknesses, both in themselves and in their communities, they soon evolved into a call to jihad, citing the Salafi publication “The Tawheed of Action.”¹⁹ His posts, bordered by Islamic and Islamist texts, grow increasingly instructional with time: directions on braving the elements, a packing list for the journey to Syria, and even detailed, step-by-step instructions on entering ISIS territory through Turkey, with separate advice for men and women.²⁰ His prose is marked by hashtags and English slang (“I strongly recommend you to bring knives because they’re essential tools here (and because maybe I am a bit of a knife freak, but #AllowIt)”²¹), and these more informal elements have become more prominent over the last year, giving him an image that endears him to his target audience: young, media-savvy, disillusioned Westerners. Many users who have reblogged content from his and similar blogs have either expressed their support for or intention to join ISIS. One such blogger is Al-Amriki,²² who goes by the nom de guerre of Umm Kirin. A nineteen-year-old convert to Islam, her page displays an ISIS flag and her ask.fm page reveals that her mother has already confiscated her passport.²³



There is no true life but the life of the hereafter

Many Tumblr users who affiliate themselves with ISIS, are, in effect, harmless. They have committed no crimes, they have no plans to join the fighting in Iraq and Syria, and their anonymous online activism does not translate into real-world action, but this makes identifying and apprehending actual ISIS members significantly more difficult. Although some users might post ISIS material for shock value, a small but significant circle of bloggers actively supporting and recruiting for ISIS shows just how difficult it will be for administrators and staff on SNS to destroy the threat they pose. Because of Tumblr’s lax security, long-form text options, and messaging services, more bloggers like Bird of Jannah and Paladin of Jihad can easily disseminate resources on SNS to recruit fighters for ISIS, and more teens like Umm Kirin, who are already susceptible to radicalism, can find and use them.

Popular Music, Politics and Social Criticism: Iranian SNS React to a Lecture by Dr. Yousef-Ali Abazari

Dr. Raz Zimmt

On December 9, 2014, at a conference held by the Sociology Association at Tehran University, sociologist Dr. Yousef-Ali Abazari (pictured) gave a lecture that provoked stormy responses on Iranian social networks (SNS), which continued for several weeks. The lecture discussed reactions to the death of Iranian pop singer Morteza Pashaei, who died of cancer at the age of 30 the previous month. His funeral was the largest public gathering of Iranians since the popular protests in 2009.

Abazari, who is identified with the reformist opposition and supported President Khatami in the past, used his lecture to lash out at Iranian society, the country's government, and its pop music scene. He complained that while the death of Pashaei evoked public emotion, Iranian society remains unmoved by other issues, such as the desperate situation of residents in Sistan and Baluchestan Province in southeastern Iran. Abazari noted that the public responses to the singer's death is evidence of the cultural bankruptcy of Iranian society, which the government is encouraging. The December 2009 riots, he claims, evoked mutual fear of the authorities and the public, and led to establishing an accord between citizens and the state for the depoliticization of Iranian society. On one hand, citizens are distancing themselves from political involvement, while on the other hand, the authorities are encouraging the trend by bringing artists, athletes and popular singers into politics, and encouraging ceremonies – like the funeral procession of the popular singer – that provide citizens with non-political channels for expressing their emotions. Abazari specifically attacked President Rouhani, contending that his policy is intended to distract citizens' attention from sensitive political, economic, and social issues. He also expressed total disdain for pop music, calling it "the worst, vulgar, simple, stupid music" that represents the demise of society and encourages fascist thinking.²⁴

Abazari's controversial lecture was shared dozens of times on SNS, and caused a public outcry. Some users praised the sociologist for his courage and willingness to express strong criticism in public. Supporters claimed that his words accurately represent the dismal situation of Iranian society, which is experiencing cultural and ethical decline.²⁵ However, most users condemned him vigorously, criticizing both the



content of his comments and their style. First of all, they criticized his use of derogatory language, such as “idiots,” and made it clear that even if his criticism is justified, it ought to be stated more respectfully.²⁶

In addition to the criticism of his style, the content of Abazari’s lecture was also the subject of lively discussion on SNS involving hundreds of users, including sociologists, intellectuals, and prominent journalists. The discourse focused primarily on his claims regarding a process of de-politicization in Iranian society, his criticism of young people, and his disparaging attitude towards popular music. Exiled reformist activist Ali Alizadeh claimed that even if Abazari’s criticism reflects some truth about Iranian society, and even if the process of de-politicization is undeniable and encouraged by the government, there is no connection between it and the public mourning over the death of Pashaei, whose funeral cannot be considered the result of a government-directed policy. Indeed, the current government is hesitant about public involvement in politics, but it is not responsible for the de-politicization. Rather, de-politicization is the result of actions taken by conservative forces, law enforcement agencies, and the Revolutionary Guards, as well as the economic crisis that has plagued the country in recent years.²⁷

Sociologist Mohammad-Reza Jalaeipour rejected the claim that the involvement of celebrities in politics and the encouragement of nonpolitical ceremonies are guided by the government. Rather, he claimed that these are an expression of the public will. The giant funeral of Pashaei was, according to Jalaeipour, the result of spontaneous public organization via SNS and cell phone coordination. The government media reported the event only once its size became evident. Moreover, he rejected Abazari’s complaint that the public’s involvement in politics has decreased. To the contrary, he contended that the duration of the protest movement after the 2009 elections and the relatively high turnout in the recent elections are evidence of lively political involvement, both in comparison to the past and relative to other societies.²⁸

Abazari’s criticism of popular music also aroused strident criticism. Many users claimed that music is a matter of taste, and no one has the right to define any musical genre as having less value than any other. They also claimed that there is no correlation between popular music and the decline of culture or morality, as demonstrated by the flowering of classical music in Nazi Germany. Jalaeipour noted that popular music was suppressed by both the Soviet authorities and the current Iranian regime. Furthermore, political involvement of young, urban Iranian people – who are considered the main consumers of popular music – is many times higher than that of those who prefer traditional music.²⁹

The discourse on Abazari’s lecture expanded into a more fundamental discussion of the weaknesses of Iranian intellectuals in general and sociologists in particular. The

sociologist Arman Zakeri claimed that conservative intellectuals like Abazari, who are disconnected from the public and prefer to critique the world rather than to work within it for change, are largely responsible for the de-politicization that he railed against. These intellectuals prefer to stay away from politics and continue their work in universities even when, as in recent years, students were suspended for their political activities. This is further amplified by politically-appointed university administrators who lack the appropriate talents for the job.³⁰ Exiled journalist Fouad Shams claimed that Iranian sociologists are disconnected from the society they are studying, and recommended that they travel by public transportation rather than sit in their ivory towers and deal with theoretical issues.³¹

The criticism of Abazari also quickly deteriorated into personal attacks. One user wrote that no courage is necessary to show disrespect for a young singer who died of a serious illness. Conversely, it was said that if he were indeed courageous, Abazari would be serving time in Evin Prison.³² Finally, Abazari's words aroused such ire that opponents launched a Facebook page entitled, "We Hate Yousef Abazari."³³

The stinging response to the lecture by Abazari again shows how SNS have become the main platform for public discourse about processes occurring in Iranian society, including moral weaknesses, de-politicization, escapism and the lack of social solidarity. The emotional responses to the criticism voiced by Abazari express both the potential inherent in SNS for lively dialogue, and the sensitivity of Iranian society to any criticism that it considers harmful, arrogant or degrading.

Charlie Hebdo: Turkey Walking a Fine Line between Islam and the West

Hay Eytan Cohen Yanarocak

In recent weeks, social networks (SNS) in Turkey have raged over the Charlie Hebdo massacre. The staff members of the French satirical magazine were murdered by terrorists affiliated with Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula because they published cartoons depicting the prophet Mohammed. As a country that moves between an Islamic identity and a democratic character and strives to be considered part of the Western world, the massacre laid a trap for Turkey. On one hand, citizens of Turkey generally and the AKP government in particular consider the caricatures gross insults to Islam hiding under the guise of free expression. On the other hand, many Turks recoiled at the massacre for many reasons, including its contribution to the increasingly anti-Muslim atmosphere in Europe. Therefore, the Turkish Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu joined world leaders in the mass march in Paris, and stressed that there is no connection between the abhorrent act of terrorism and the religion of Islam.



These ambivalent feelings about the massacre were also clearly reflected on SNS. Like users from around the world, Turkish users adopted the hashtag #JeSuisCharlie immediately after the massacre, expressed their condolences to the families of the murder victims, stressed the sanctity of life, and praised freedom of expression. SNS were also used to

organize a demonstration declaring “We are all Charlie” on Istiklal Street in Istanbul (pictured). On the other hand, other Turkish users on SNS accused the cartoonists of “inviting murder” and even praising the killers. This support also moved beyond cyberspace. Posters in Tatvan in eastern Turkey proclaimed: “Rest in peace Kouachi brothers who exacted the prophet’s revenge. May Allah accept your sacrifice on his behalf. When you [the West] attack, it is called ‘democracy,’ when we take revenge it is ‘terrorism.’” Pictures of the signs distributed on SNS were greeted with strong responses and the Tatvan municipality was quickly forced to apologize and remove them, claiming they had been hung without its permission.³⁴



At the same time, conspiracy theories began to spread on Turkish SNS claiming that agents of the Israeli Mossad were behind the attacks. According to these theories, the massacre was motivated by Israel’s desire to punish France for its support for the establishment of a Palestinian state at the UN, and in order to blacken the name of Islam around the world. The subsequent killing of four Jews at the Hyper-Cacher market was, in turn, explained as an Israeli attempt to blur its involvement in the Charlie Hebdo attack. As indefensible as they may be, these conspiracy theories also spread from the Internet to government-identified media outlets in Turkey. Even the Mayor of Ankara, Melih Gökçek, known for his anti-Israeli positions, openly pointed an accusatory finger at Jerusalem.³⁵

The participation of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in the Paris march only added fuel to the flames, and was the subject of strident responses on SNS. In the spirit of comments made by President Erdoğan, who sharply criticized Netanyahu’s presence in Paris and charged him with responsibility for the deaths of hundreds of Palestinians during Operation Protective Edge, many users adopted the slogan, “Netanyahu is the biggest terrorist.”³⁶ In addition, many joined Erdoğan’s warning about Islamophobic backlash and his criticism of European countries’ “hypocritical behavior.” These users claimed that while European governments limit the freedom of

speech by severely punishing Holocaust denial, they respond in very differently when sacred symbols of Islam are desecrated, as in the case of Charlie Hebdo.

The storm surrounding Charlie Hebdo gained renewed momentum when the front page of the next issue also featured a drawing of the prophet Mohammed. When the design was announced, users who objected to the distribution of the new magazine in Turkey organized under the slogans “We are not Charlie” and “Don’t allow distribution of Charlie Hebdo in my country.”³⁷ The protest on SNS, as well as private petitions for a restraining order to block distribution of the magazine, led to a ruling forbidding its distribution on grounds of protecting sacred, religious symbols. Furthermore, access to Internet sites showing the caricatures was blocked. Deputy Prime Minister Yalçın Akdoğan stressed his full support for this decision and tweeted, from his account: “Attacks on the prophet aren’t free speech, but rather provocation.”³⁸

A different position was expressed by the Kemalist newspaper, Cumhuriyet, which lost many journalists to political assassinations during the 1990s because of its repeated criticism of political Islam’s growth in Turkey. On the front page, the editors of Cumhuriyet announced their intention to publish the next issue of Charlie Hebdo in Turkey as a special supplement, without the front page caricature of the prophet Mohammed. However, before Cumhuriyet was able to act on its intention, the police raided its editorial offices to ascertain that the controversial page was indeed removed. Following this raid, many Kemalists protested under the slogan “We must protect Cumhuriyet” and in favor of freedom of expression in Turkey.³⁹ Simultaneously, opponents of distributing Charlie Hebdo in Turkey mounted their own demonstration and chanted slogans like “Kouachi brothers: We protect your honor.”⁴⁰

The massacre at Charlie Hebdo and the resulting public discourse in Turkey highlights, once again, the precarious position of the country as it vacillates between two opposite poles. On one hand, under the Erdoğan government, Islam has returned to the center of public life. On the other hand, Turkey still strives to be part of the West, and it seems that the European values it absorbed in previous decades have not lost their hold on the citizenry. Therefore, the Turkish public is torn between its desire to express complete support for freedom of expression and its recoiling from desecrating symbols of Islam. The protests at Cumhuriyet are a good representation of the practical consequences of these opposing currents in Turkish society, while the response of Ankara, including Davutoğlu’s participation in the March in Paris while refusing to associate terrorism with Islam and the fear that Erdoğan expressed about increasing Islamophobia, are evidence of Turkey’s desire to remain on the fence, and locate itself on the blurred boundary between Islam and the West.

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² Laura Ryan, "Al-Qaida and ISIS Use Twitter Differently. Here's How and Why." *National Journal*, October 9, 2014, <http://www.nationaljournal.com/tech/al-qaida-and-isis-use-twitter-differently-here-s-how-and-why-20141009>.

³ Rosa Prince, "Twitter suspends Islamic State accounts," *The Telegraph*, August 17, 2014, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/northamerica/usa/11039900/Twitter-suspends-Islamic-State-accounts.html>.

⁴ "Community Guidelines," last modified January 26, 2015, <https://www.tumblr.com/policy/en/community>.

⁵ "About," <https://www.tumblr.com/about>.

⁶ Brandon Gaille, "Astonishing Tumblr Demographics, Trends and Stats," August 3, 2013, <http://brandongaille.com/26-astonishing-tumblr-demographics-trends-and-stats/>.

⁷ <http://bintkhalil.tumblr.com/>

⁸ <http://bintkhalil.tumblr.com/post/103125207858/islamisourway>

⁹ <http://bintkhalil.tumblr.com/post/103542855218/w0rldofmina-revert-toreality>

¹⁰ https://twitter.com/__birdofjannah

¹¹ <http://diary-of-a-muhajirah.tumblr.com/>

¹² <http://diary-of-a-muhajirah.tumblr.com/post/98034577019/shaykh-anwar-al-awlaki-rahimullah-commented-on>

¹³ <http://diary-of-a-muhajirah.tumblr.com/post/98134165889/why-am-i-left-behind-for-those-who-wants-to>

¹⁴ <http://diary-of-a-muhajirah.tumblr.com/post/97959430134/confession-my-life-in-the-islamic-state-part>

¹⁵ "IS: Jihadi bride blogs her disturbing Syrian love story," *News.com.au*, September 19, 2014, <http://www.news.com.au/technology/online/is-jihadi-bride-blogs-her-disturbing-syrian-love-story/story-fnjwnhzhf-1227063652129>.

¹⁶ <http://diary-of-a-muhajirah.tumblr.com/post/100754732099/attention-contacts-for-brothers-and-sisters-as>

¹⁷ <https://twitter.com/paladinofjih4d/status/555420416031080449>

¹⁸ <http://paladinofjihad.tumblr.com/post/75150924011/what-is-this-blog-about>

¹⁹ <http://paladinofjihad.tumblr.com/post/76847384541/dustyfeet-part-2-like-a-feather>

²⁰ <http://paladinofjihad.tumblr.com/post/86834523440/dustyfeet-part-6-issues-about-turkey>

²¹ <http://paladinofjihad.tumblr.com/page/2>

²² <http://al-amriki.tumblr.com/>

²³ <http://ask.fm/alamriki>

²⁴ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W0Is3DGcrlo>.

²⁵ <https://www.facebook.com/video.php?v=941185439243301>;

<https://www.facebook.com/Iranwire/posts/593869584092780>.

²⁶ <https://www.facebook.com/video.php?v=941185439243301>.

²⁷ <https://www.facebook.com/Alizadeh.Ali/posts/10153003388842784?pnref=story>.

²⁸ <https://www.facebook.com/jalaeipour/posts/10101003925143129>.

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³⁰

<https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=1015387741821585&set=a.100580613302307.1244.100000511059683&type=1&theater>

³¹

<https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=10152941135181079&set=a.75005716078.97214.543716078&type=1&theater>.

³² <https://www.facebook.com/video.php?v=941185439243301>.

³³ <https://www.facebook.com/pages/%D9%85%D8%A7-%D8%A7%D8%B2-%DB%8C%D9%88%D8%B3%D9%81-%D8%A7%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%B0%D8%B1%DB%8C-%D9%85%D8%AA%D9%86%D9%81%D8%B1%DB%8C%D9%85/792791607455282>

³⁴ "Tatvan'da asılan afiş sahte mi? Kaldırıldı mı?," *T24*, January 10, 2015, <http://t24.com.tr/haber/tatvanda-olay-yaratan-afis-allahin-resulunun-ocunu-alan-kuasi-kardeslere-allah-sehadetinizi-kabul-etsin,283341>.

³⁵ "Ankara Mayor Gökçek: Mossad is behind Paris attacks," *Today's Zaman*, January 12, 2015, http://www.todayszaman.com/diplomacy_ankara-mayor-gokcek-mossad-is-behind-paris-attacks_369544.html.

³⁶ #EnBüyükTeröristNetanyahu , #NetanyahuWarCriminal

³⁷ #ÜlkemdeCharlieHebdoDağıtılamaz³⁷ #BenCharlieDegilim #JeNeSuisPasCharlie #IamNotCharlie
#IchBinNichtCharlie

³⁸ "Twitter'da hakaret, küfür, tehdit ve nefret söylemi dolu kampanya: #ÜlkemdeCharlieHebdoDağıtılamaz," *T24*, January 14, 2015, <http://t24.com.tr/haber/twitterda-hakaret-kufur-tehdit-ve-nefret-soylemi-dolu-kampanya-ulkemdecharliehebdodagitilamaz,283664>.

³⁹ #CumhuriyeteSahipCik #cumhuriyetteyasakolmaz #cumhuriyet

⁴⁰ Kuaşi kardeşler onurumuzdur