Facebook zensiert arabische Atheisten

Im realen Islam ist Atheismus eine strafbare Weltanschauung, Atheisten zum Tode zu verurteilen, kann in Islamstaaten im Strafgesetzbuch stehen. Da wollte offenbar auch Facebook einen strengen Maßstab anlegen, wie seit 16.6.2016 auf https://www.the-newshub.com/ zu lesen ist, wurden von Facebook zehn arabischsprachige Atheistenseiten zensiert:

Facebook facing heavy criticism after removing major atheist pages

Human Rights activists and dissidents living in closed societies are risking their lives by defying oppressive dictators. They want our help defending their freedom. Free societies have an abundance of individuals with the skills needed by human rights defenders. Media professionals, lawyers, tech providers, and others are an enormous source of untapped assistance. That's where Movements comes in. MOVEMENTS.ORG[1] is an innovative platform that taps into this well of expertise, enabling activists around the world to associate without restriction. Our crowdsourcing model enables them to connect with organizations and individuals who can help spread awareness, organize campaigns, build websites, and more.

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In the middle of April, Facebook removed more than six Arabic-speaking atheist pages due to "violations" of Community Standards. This is not the first time that Facebook has censored atheists and freethinkers in the MENA region. In response, the Atheist Alliance – Middle-East and North Africa (AA-MENA)[2] has decided to speak out, demanding that Facebook change the way it addresses violation reports, so as to preserve members' freedom of speech.

In February 2016, ten of the largest Arabic-speaking atheist groups, with a total of about 100,000 members, have been deactivated for the same reason: heavy reporting campaigns that are organized by "cyber jihadist" fundamentalist Islamic groups, especially for the removal of any anti-Islamic group or page. In such coordinated campaigns, very large numbers of people, and possibly automated scripts, simultaneously file reports falsely claiming that a page, group, or personal account has violated Community Standards.

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[1] https://www.the-newshub.com/@movementsnews

[2] https://www.facebook.com/AtheistAllianceMENA

Representatives of AA-MENA petitioned[3] Mark Zuckerberg demanding that Facebook reactivate the removed groups. The petition was shared on most major atheist groups in the Arab world, the US, and the UK, and it has been supported by many prominent social media activism organizations such as *Atheist Alliance Internationa[4]l* and the *Council of Ex-Muslims of Britain*.[5]

AA-MENA has adopted #FacebookVSFreeSpeech[6] as the hashtag of its Facebook event, Atheism: Campaigning to regain the right to free speech within Facebook Pages. The campaign's goal is to rally atheists and freethinkers of the MENA region and to attract the attention of relevant nongovernmental organizations and irreligious social media activists to their cause.

But this attack on free speech spilled out of Facebook and resulted into a cold-blooded murder.[7] On April 22, 2016, Yemeni activist Omar Bataweel was abducted in front of his home in the city of Aden. Police reports stated that he was shot and left to die on the street; locals discovered his body the next morning. Omar had received death threats prior to his execution for posting criticism of Islamic clergy and heritage on Facebook and was accused of apostasy and atheism. His case remains open and no suspects have been apprehended till now.

Immediately, AA-MENA took action, and concurrently launched a second campaign, *Killed Yet Still Loud*,[8] under the hashtag #Omar_Human_Case[9] to draw attention to this horrific precedent and to commemorate the life of this young man who was killed simply because he spoke his mind. Also, AA-MENA seeks to raise awareness amongst activists about the security risks associated with online activism along with recommendations on how to stay safe.

The Alliance has three goals for the free speech campaign:

1. Reactivate the pages that were removed due to intensive, unfounded reporting activities;

2. Convince Facebook to respect the rights of irreligious individuals and groups in the MENA region as well as respect the freedom of thought and expression; and

3. Convince Facebook to reform its standard procedures in collecting and addressing reports in a way that ensures a just evaluation of any alleged violation of Community Standards.

Participants in the campaign, most of whom are atheists, freethinkers, and freedom activists in the MENA region, have been publishing and sharing posts that heavily criticize Facebook's policy regarding the way it deals with reports of standards violations. Since the launch of the Facebook event, the campaign's official hashtag has covered Arabic-speaking atheist groups and pages and reached many Western sympathizers' pages and websites. Posts are generally direct and spontaneous, focused on Facebook's approach to freedom of speech.

Maryam Namazie,[10] spokesperson for the Council of Ex-Muslims of Britain, tweeted, Blocked for seven days by @Facebook for criticising its censorship of ex-Muslim/Arab atheist pages.[11] Namazie's Facebook post featured a picture that she shared from an Arabic-speaking atheist's (ex-Muslim) Facebook Page that depicted Mark Zuckerberg as an ally to ISIS.

For irreligious people of the MENA region, social media outlets - especially Facebook - have become the only platform that they can safely use to express their thoughts and opinions, share their stories, and come together without feeling threatened. In most Arab countries, the demographic majority is Muslim; many regimes are actual theocracies while the others are very deeply influenced by Islamic religious authorities at all levels of public life.

The oppression practiced by Arab authorities against those who speak out about religious and/or cultural taboos and dogmas has often made the headlines. The story of Saudi blogger Raif Badawi[12] was largely covered by the world media in 2015 after he was sentenced to a thousand lashes, ten years in prison, and a fine of $266,000. The blogger's website - which has since been shut down - contained articles that criticize the Saudi Committee for the Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice,[13] which is practically a police of morals in charge of enforcing the righteous Islamic behavior in public places.

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[3] https://www.change.org/p/mark-zuckerberg-stop-deleting-arab-atheists-and-seculars-groups-and-pages

[4] https://www.facebook.com/AtheistAllianceInternational

[5] https://www.facebook.com/exmuslims

[6] https://www.facebook.com/search/top/?q=%23facebookvsfreespeech

[7] https://l.facebook.com/l.php?u=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.alaraby.co.uk%2Fenglish%2FNews%2F2016%2F4%2F26%2FYemeni-murdered-by-extremists-after-being-accused-of-athiesm&h=bAQGvpzKE

[8] https://www.facebook.com/events/1694152924186378/permalink/1694574980810839/

[9] https://www.facebook.com/search/top/?q=%23Omar_Human_Case

[10] https://twitter.com/MaryamNamazie

[11] https://twitter.com/MaryamNamazie/status/723078432536436736

[12] http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/01/15/raif-badawi-saudi-blogger-flogging_n_6478520.html

[13] https://www.pv.gov.sa/Pages/HomePage.aspx

In December 2015, Mohamed Mkhaïtir,[14] a Mauritanian blogger, was sentenced to death for apostasy in Mauritania. His sentencing was based on an article he published on his blog, in which he states his conviction that using Islam as a basis to discriminate against non-Muslims is unjust.

On April 20, 2016, Amnesty International issued a press release demanding the Mauritanian authorities to quash the death sentence and set the blogger free, ahead of the appeal court hearing for the case. In 2013, a young Palestinian poet, Ashraf Fayad[15] was arrested in Abha, Saudi Arabia after he was reported to the police for blasphemous poetry. He was later sentenced to death, which is the Islamic Sharia's ruling for cases of apostasy. His death sentence has since been overturned by the Saudi court and replaced with an 8-year prison sentence and 800 lashes in public, on the condition that he repents and publicly declares his returning to Islam.

In 2008 the Jordanian police arrested another poet, who was reported to have had used verses from the Quran in his sensual and suggestive poetry. Islam Samhan[16] was sentenced to three years in prison, which appears to be a rather light penalty considering Jordan's Grand Mufti's (the highest religious authority) proclamation that the "enemy of Islam" should receive the death penalty.

Many stories can be recounted under the same title: Islamic authorities' oppression of freedom of expression. One of the most intriguing stories is that of Dr. Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd,[17] an Egyptian scholar who has a doctorate in Arab and Islamic studies. Known for his revolutionary approach to the interpretation and the critique of religious scriptures and traditions, he was separated from his wife (also Muslim) by an Egyptian court in 1993. Abu Zayd had to leave his homeland for the Netherlands in 1995.

Freethinkers, atheists, and freedom activists in the MENA region live under such oppressive regimes and communities. Most of them cannot express their religious, political, cultural, or social views and thoughts freely. This ever-growing segment of people living in the Arab World is still operating with a "low profile" and with minuscule traditional media coverage. This is the main reason for their enormous investments in social media platforms, such as Facebook, which are viewed by them as the last resort for freedom of thought and expression.

The views expressed are the author's own and do not necessarily represent the views of Movements.

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[14] http://www.nytimes.com/2014/12/26/world/asia/death-sentence-in-mauritania-for-islam-insult.html

[15] http://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/feb/02/palestinian-poet-ashraf-fayadhs-death-sentence-overturned-by-saudi-court

[16] http://adamholland.blogspot.com/2008/10/jordan-poet-arrested-for-using-quran-in.html

[17] http://www.britannica.com/biography/Nasr-Hamid-Abu-Zayd