

BeeHive

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From the Editors

The Doron Halpern Middle East Network Analysis Desk is happy to present the October issue of **Beehive**. This issue focuses on socio-economic issues. The first article addresses a viral video in which an Egyptian Tuk Tuk driver reveals his perspective on the country's shaky economic situation. The second article shows the increasingly wide gap between the Iranian public and the religious establishment, against the backdrop of the clergy's uncompromising attitude towards leisure activities. The third article reviews the public campaign in Turkey to prosecute men who commit violent crimes against women, after a video of a woman being assaulted was disseminated on SNS.

Enjoy!

I'm a Tuk Tuk Graduate: Egypt's Economic Situation Reflected in Social Networking Sites

Dr. Michael Barak

Social networking sites (SNS) in Egypt responded tumultuously to an al-Hayat TV-Egypt interview with Mustafa Abdel Azim al-Laithi, a 35-year-old Tuk Tuk (rickshaw taxi) driver broadcast on October 12. In the interview, which lasted approximately three minutes, the driver expressed his views about the precarious situation of the Egyptian economy. Al-Achim emphasized the gap between the purported economic growth described by Egyptian establishment media and the severe economic crisis the country is actually facing: “[if] you only watched television, you’d think that Egypt is Vienna, but if you go out to the street, you’ll find that it’s a cousin of Somalia.”¹ The interview was uploaded to social media and quickly went viral, receiving more than 6 million likes on al-Hayat TV’s Facebook page, and being shared more than 500,000 times.² It was accompanied by extensive public discourse that revealed intensifying feelings of frustration and bitterness among Egyptian citizens faced with spreading poverty and a rising cost of living, despite the regime’s promises to institute comprehensive reforms that would lead to growth and economic improvement.³

Among the many and varied responses to the interview, the most prominent was widespread identification of young Egyptians, including college graduates, with the position of the taxi driver, who was crowned “hero of the day” for daring to speak clearly and precisely on a sensitive subject, giving voice to their frustrations. A lawyer from Cairo wrote: “After three minutes [of an interview], two years of controlled media attempts to brainwash the public went down the drain.”⁴ The manager of a plastics factory in Alexandria tweeted, “By the life of Allah, my son you understand better than all the educated people of the land, and have been blessed with a finer conscience than those who rule the country.”⁵ On his Facebook page, well-known Egyptian entertainer Bassem Yusuf praised the driver for making the Egyptian people aware of the issue and said that the interview “Broke the barrier of fear surrounding the regime’s oppression, tyranny and despotism.”⁶ As a sign of solidarity, the hashtag “I’m a Tuk Tuk graduate” was launched (see picture), quoting the Tuk Tuk driver’s response to the interviewer’s question about his education.⁷

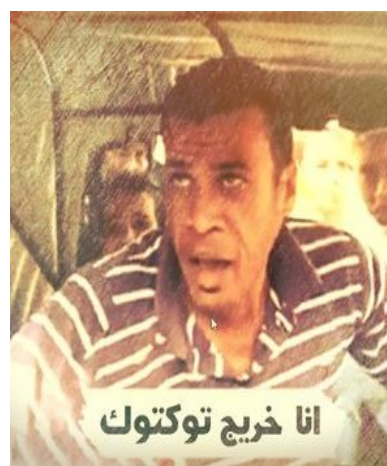


Photo of the driver with the caption: “I’m a Tuk Tuk graduate”

Inspired by the interview, on SNS, Egyptian citizens began uploading videos of themselves complaining about the difficulties they have purchasing basic commodities and the government’s disregard for those problems.⁸ The interview led to spontaneous demonstrations of young people in the streets of cities like Giza.⁹ An extreme expression of the protest occurred several days later, when a 30-year-old Egyptian taxi driver committed

suicide by setting himself on fire in front of an Egyptian Army base in Alexandria, while shouting “I don’t get any food [for my mouth]... Step down Sisi.” The incident was documented and widely distributed on SNS. From the perspective of many SNS users, his suicide was an expression of the despair of poverty. There were even those who called him “the Egyptian Bouazizi,” evoking the Tunisian vegetable vendor Mohamed Ibn Bouazizi whose death by self-immolation in 2010 became a symbol of the Arab Spring.¹⁰ Conversely, supporters of the regime claimed that Shahin set himself on fire because he was in trouble with the law.¹¹

The regime’s political rivals took the opportunity to intensify their criticism of the government and President al-Sisi. For example, the April 6 Movement, a secular organization of Egyptian young people, published a PR video on the economic decline of Egypt under the al-Sisi regime and the collapse of the Egyptian pound against the strengthening American dollar. An Egyptian journalist identified with the Muslim Brotherhood urged readers to continue feeding the discourse so that the issue would remain on the agenda.¹² The Qatari network al-Jazeera-Egypt also made a conspicuous contribution to the escalating criticism by broadcasting interviews and articles about increases in the prices of food, fuel, clothing and cigarettes in Egypt.¹³ Moreover, activists in the Muslim Brotherhood and young, politically-unaffiliated, secular Egyptians encouraged citizens suffering from the high cost of living to take to the streets on November 11 in a massive demonstration being called, “The Revolution of the Poor” (see picture).¹⁴



**Flier advertising the
“Revolution of the Poor”
protest scheduled for
Nov. 11, 2016.**

On their part, supporters of the regime responded with their own offensive, sparing no criticism of the interview. They argued that it was staged, and showed signs of being influenced by the Muslim Brotherhood and Qatar, with intent to incite a rebellion against the regime.¹⁵ For example, they circulated magnified images of the driver’s ear lobe on SNS, showing what they claimed was an earpiece through which he received instructions from members of the Muslim Brotherhood. Furthermore, they distributed an interview with the Tuk Tuk driver’s brother, who claimed that the driver’s economic situation was relatively stable and alleged that he had ties to the Brotherhood.¹⁶ SNS users greeted this conspiracy theory with scorn, and stressed that it would be better to focus on the driver’s critique than question the authenticity of the interview.¹⁷

The even more strident responses coming from the Egyptian government itself led to the video being removed from many Facebook, Twitter and YouTube accounts. Amr al-Laythi, the journalist responsible for the program,¹⁸ was made to explain what happened to al-Sisi’s political advisors. The program was later cancelled, and al-Leithy was forced to take a leave

of absence despite his protestations that he had nothing to do with the interview. Moreover, the National Security Council filed charges against al-Leithy and the driver for incitement against the state.

The responses to the interview with the Tuk Tuk driver expose the reality of spreading poverty and Egyptians' growing dissatisfaction with their economic situation. This reality contrasts with the economic revival described by Egyptian media outlets identified with the regime's propaganda arm and characterized by biased, misleading reporting that seriously impairs credibility. Due to this lack of credibility, many young people have migrated to SNS, which they use as a tool for creating an alternative, censorship-free discourse, based on more reliable reporting. Additionally, the regime's conspicuously lacked the suitable tools to address public protests on SNS, and instead subsequently responded with aggressive measures, including removing content and arrests.¹⁹ In Egypt after the revolution of 2011, the impact of SNS is on the rise, as evidenced by the ability of frustrated citizens to lead demonstrations against the regime, as happened in the final days of Mubarak.

Editor's Note: After this article was written, on November 11, due to heavy government security deployment, mass demonstrations failed to materialize, although several small gather.

When Soccer and Music Conflict with Religion: Citizens on Social Networks against Clerics in Iran

Dr. Raz Zimmt

During the last month, the focal points of public debate on Iranian social networking sites (SNS) were a musical performance in the city of Qom, a major center for the Shi'ite religious establishment, and a soccer match during a Shi'ite day of mourning. The discourse that developed around these events showcases Iranians' criticism of the conservative clerics who refuse to accommodate the public's wishes, and increasing alienation – particularly of young people – from the religious establishment.

In early October, the musical ensemble Mahbood held a concert in Qom in honor of Sacred Defense Week, which commemorates the beginning of the Iran-Iraq war in September 1980. The performance that had been approved by the Islamic Guidance Ministry, which is responsible for government policy on cultural matters, was strongly condemned by senior clerics in the city. In a public statement, the Society of Seminary Teachers in Qom stated that due to the city's holy character, holding performances of this type is unacceptable. Another statement by religious leaders severely criticized the Minister of Islamic Guidance Ali Jannati and accused the ministry of disseminating "Western, immoral culture" instead of promoting

Islamic culture and religious values.²⁰ A senior conservative cleric, the Chairman of the Society of Seminary Teachers, Ayatollah Mohammad Yazdi demanded that the Guidance Ministry's director in Qom be fired for allegedly desecrating the sanctity of the city and its clerics.²¹ Minister Jannati responded to the criticism by stating that the event in Qom was not a Western concert, but rather a vocal performance that was careful to observe Islamic behavioral codes, and all female singers wore hijabs. However, he did admit that some of the audience was not careful to follow the codes and behave properly, and the director of the Islamic Guidance ministry in Qom apologized for that. Jannati made it clear that his office did not intend to permit future musical performances in the holy city of Qom, although it does allow them in other cities.²²

The dispute over the concert in Qom is part of a larger internal discussion, which began several months ago, about holding musical performances in Iran. Behind this confrontation is a government decision to make the process for receiving a permit for performances easier by eliminating the requirement for police approval. The argument climaxed with the forceful criticism voiced by the Friday prayer leader in Mashhad, Ayatollah Ahmad Alamolhoda, who asserted that concerts must not be held in his city. Alamolhoda declared that anyone who desires to live in a city with secular cultural activity should move elsewhere.²³

The criticism that senior clerics leveled against holding concerts in Qom was met with intense responses from users of SNS, who accused the clerics of adopting uncompromisingly extremist positions. In response to the statement of the Society of Seminary Teachers in Qom, declaring that there was a limit to the senior clerics' patience, one user tweeted mockingly that it is their intelligence and common sense that are limited.²⁴ Another cynical response on Twitter explained that the clerics have no problem with people being happy; they "only" object to theaters, cinemas, concerts, satellite dishes, instant messaging applications, social media, and any type of gathering.²⁵ Another user claimed that after forcing the cancellation of performances around the country, clerics would soon act to close music schools, because the performances are only an excuse - their main goal is targeting music itself.²⁶ Many other users complained that the clerics are preoccupied with minor matters rather than dealing with the genuine problems and anxieties faced by Iranian citizens, such as corruption, poverty, drug addiction, unemployment, and divorce.²⁷

Nor did users spare the government their criticism; they pointed accusing fingers at top officials – up to and including President Rouhani – for not taking action to stop the radical clerics. One user tweeted that although Rouhani promised during his election campaign to release reformist opposition leaders from house arrest, he had only managed – at most – to prevent the blocking of Instagram and Telegram, casting doubt on his promise to nullify the prohibition on holding concerts.²⁸

Another issue that rankled the Iranian public was a World Cup 2018 preliminary soccer match between Iran and South Korea. The match was criticized by some conservative leaders, as it was scheduled for Tasu'a Day, one of the two days of mourning observed by Shi'ite Muslims

commemorating the death of the third Shi'ite Imam Hussein bin Ali and his followers in the battle of Karbala (680 CE). Again, conservative cleric Ayatollah Mohammad Yazdi led the opposition. Yazdi warned that the game could lead to fans expressing joy that would mar the atmosphere of mourning, and called on the Ministry of Sports to cancel the game.²⁹ In response, a member of Majlis (the Iranian parliament) Ali Motahari dispatched a strident letter to Yazdi, claiming that Yazdi's uncompromising positions would likely cause a decline in public support for clerics. Motahari wrote that Yazdi's behavior evokes the behavior of the medieval Catholic Church, which led believers to leave the faith.³⁰

Users of SNS responded strongly to the opposition some clerics voiced to the soccer game. Many of them called the response of radical clerics "stupid" or "ridiculous," and said that the public could be trusted to respect the spirit of the day of mourning even if the soccer match was held as scheduled. Some derisively suggested that instead of cheering after scoring a goal, fans would flagellate themselves, as customary among Shi'ites as a sign of mourning.³¹ To illustrate this idea, a user uploaded a long video to Twitter, showing a previous match between Iran and South Korea with an audio track of mourning ceremonies, including self-flagellation and cries of grief, inserted after each goal scored by the Iranian national team. This video was shared hundreds of times.³²



Members of the extreme Islamic group Ansar-e-Hezbollah demonstrating against holding the Iran-South Korea soccer match. From Telegram on October 7, 2016

The response to religious leaders' criticism of the concert and soccer game is additional evidence of the increasing alienation between the Iranian public and the religious establishment. Clerics are now identified with the government and widely considered responsible for its injustices. Moreover, the relative wealth of senior clerics further distances them from the common people. These factors contribute to the process of secularization occurring in Iranian society, as well as its alienation from the religious leadership. Expressions of this ongoing decline in the status of religious leaders were evident in the past, for example, in the expressions of joy and ridicule at the declining health of the chairman of the Council of Experts, Ayatollah Mohammad-Reza Mahdavi-Kani, who died in October 2014.³³

Mobilizing SNS in Turkey to Protect Women's Rights

Hay Eytan Cohen Yanarocak

Despite ongoing public discussion of Turkey's failed July 15 coup, the issue of women's status and rights managed to gain a prominent place on Turkish social networking sites (SNS) in recent weeks. With the backdrop of women's organizations' considerable effort to create public awareness of women's rights as a Turkish issue, a physical attack on a woman riding a city bus sparked recent discourse. The incident, in which a man assaulted a woman because he objected to her allegedly revealing outfit, was documented by passengers and security cameras, and widely disseminated on SNS. As a result, the attacker was apprehended and is facing legal proceedings, even though Turkish law lacks the appropriate legal infrastructure for cases of this type. This serves as further evidence of the power of SNS to attract public attention, and lead to social and political processes, including bringing criminals to justice, in instances that might otherwise not have received any publicity.

On September 17, 23-year-old Ayşegül Terzi, a hospital nurse, boarded an Istanbul city bus on her way out. Several minutes later, she was assaulted by another passenger because she was wearing shorts. The attacker, Abdullah Çakıroğlu, kicked Terzi in the face and then fled the scene, while the other passengers came to her assistance. The incident was documented by both passengers and security cameras, and the attacker's picture spread like wildfire on SNS, as did the image of Terzi with tears and marks of violence on her face. Although the police located the attacker quickly, the Turkish legal code does not have a statute applicable to a case of this type, and so they released Çakıroğlu only a few hours later.



Ayşegül Terzi showing the wounds on her face caused by the attack.
Photograph from Twitter.

The incident sparked a widespread public call for women to protest in the streets wearing shorts, using the slogan, "Wear shorts and come out to the street."³⁴ Similar to many stories that began virally, the establishment media began covering the story after it was widely distributed on SNS. The media covered the public campaign extensively, which led to several other mass demonstrations of men and women wearing shorts.³⁵ The pressure to bring the attacker to justice led the public prosecutor to demand that Çakıroğlu be re-arrested, that charges be filed against him, and that he face a sentence of 2-8 years in prison. Lacking a suitable clause under which to prosecute him, the prosecutor asked that Çakıroğlu be charged with "causing dissension, inciting the people and causing enmity" and "preventing freedom of belief and viewpoint."³⁶ Although the incident highlighted gaps in the law, Turkish authorities have not yet taken any steps to fill them.

After the attack on Terzi received extensive publicity, many women chose to reveal incidents in which they were victims of attack and sexual assault in workplaces and on public transportation. Women were encouraged to make these revelations by a Turkish-language Twitter hashtag, “you tell, too,” intended to promote conversation on the subject.³⁷

The attack against Terzi also brought last February's murder of 20-year-old Özgecan Aslan back into the headlines. Aslan was killed in a minibus while fighting off the driver who was attempting to rape her. Her body was raped and then burned by her attacker, in an attempt to conceal evidence. However, the murderer was apprehended, imprisoned, and stabbed to death in prison by unknown assailants. The murder shocked the Turkish public, and pictures of Aslan became a symbol of opposition to violence against women.³⁸

In addition to widespread public condemnation and discourse on the issue, SNS also provided a platform for conservative voices to express their anger at secular women who wear shorts. Some conservative women contended that religious women formerly suffered discrimination at the hands of secular people – for example, preventing religious women from entering public places while wearing head coverings.³⁹ The conservative discourse also included expressions of opposition to violent assault, but dissatisfaction with Terzi's behavior, and support for the need to protest against it. This sentiment was prominently expressed by Turkish Prime Minister Binali Yıldırım, who said that in cases like this, a man should “murmur” rather than attack, as a way to express discomfort with immodest dress.⁴⁰ Women's organizations responded sharply to the Prime Minister's statement, claiming that it reflected the patriarchal structure of Turkish society.⁴¹

The Turkish public's lack of consensus regarding the rights of women was evident in a speech given by President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan last February, in which he addressed the status of women and violence against women. Erdoğan evoked the Prophet Mohammed's last sermon, in which he declared that women should remain under the control of men and be subservient to them. The president also accused the Turkish feminist movement of being disconnected from Islam.⁴² Secular women firmly protested the president's comments, but many conservative women supported them. Others in Turkish society wished to conceal the country's ills and objected to any public exposure. A conspicuous example of this tendency was the opposition by parts of the Turkish public to Turkish-French director Deniz Gamze Ergüven's award-winning film *Mustang*, which portrays the misery of women in the Turkish periphery. Despite the Turkish public's familiarity with this situation, there were many male and female users of SNS who were angry at the film's director for besmirching Turkey's good name in the eyes of the world. From their perspective, producing a movie that was translated into several languages and screened around the world is not a worthy way to solve the problems of Turkish society.⁴³

The case of Ayşegül Terzi highlights the role of SNS as the “new watchdog of democracy,” and the power they give the public for launching significant public campaigns. However, despite the power SNS place in the hands of the public, their global reach contravenes the desire of

some people to conceal social problems and resolve them only within the “walls” of the country, for fear of harming its image - even though such leaks are inevitable in this day and age. The discourse on SNS also reveals the ideological opposition of a segment of the Turkish citizenry, including top government officials, to women’s rights. Despite this, it does seem that the current campaign will be successful in creating a public response that may lead to changing the criminal code pertaining to assault on women.

¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3kD3B8U3fR4>: Oct. 12, 2016.

² أنا خريج توكتوك # #سائق التوكتوك

³ The opening of the new Suez Canal in August 2015 and Egypt Vision 2030 (a organized, detailed plan for developing and structuring the economy) are key elements in the regime's efforts to advance the Egyptian economy.

⁴ <https://twitter.com/negadelborai/status/786537603260559362>: Oct. 13, 2016.

⁵ <https://twitter.com/KhaledShehab/status/786342466215616513>: Oct. 12, 2016.

⁶ https://www.facebook.com/Solidarity.Bassem.Youssef/videos/1193721637341524/?hc_ref=SEARCH: Oct. 17, 2016.

⁷ https://www.facebook.com/hashtag/انا_خريج_توكتوك

⁸ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MfkJG_glQWU&feature=youtu.be: Oct. 16, 2016;

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

⁹ #بوعزيزي مصر #مواطن يشعل النار في نفسه,

<https://twitter.com/nashet2007/status/787355435581964288>

¹⁰ <https://twitter.com/axO1PUMHZpXHXJQ/status/787369527998832641>: Oct. 15, 2016.

¹¹ #بوعزيزي مصر #مواطن يشعل النار في نفسه,

<https://twitter.com/nashet2007/status/787355435581964288>

¹² <https://twitter.com/Esraa2008/status/786345619707289600>: Oct. 12, 2016.

¹³ <https://www.facebook.com/AJA.Egypt/videos/306170943099277/>: Oct. 16, 2016.

¹⁴ #ثورة الغلبة; #لا لإعدام الغلبة والمظلومين; #ثورة الغلبة_11_11

¹⁵ <https://twitter.com/DRAHMEDALNOMAN/status/787671740944089088>: Oct. 16, 2016.

¹⁶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3kD3B8U3fR4>: Oct. 16, 2016.

¹⁷ <https://www.facebook.com/mohmed.elkomy.7/posts/1304087252975582>: Oct. 13, 2016.

¹⁸ As part of the program “One of the People” which interviews random people on the street about current issues.

¹⁹ <http://www.youm7.com/story/2016/10/17/:2925998> /وتكدير-بتهم-التحريض-عمر-و-الليثي-وسائق-التوك-توك-بتهم-التحريض-عمر-و-الليثي-وسائق-التوك-توك

²⁰ “Warning of the Society of Seminary Teachers to the Authorities regarding Concerts in Qom” ISNA, October 2, 2016.

²¹ “Ayatollah Yazdi Criticizes the Concert in Qom and the Soccer Game held on Tasu’a Day,” Khabar Online, October 2, 2016.

²² “Response of Jannati regarding the concert in Qom,” Tabak, October 2, 2016.

²³ Raz Zimmt, “The Struggle over Holding Concerts in Iran,” August 21, 2016 <http://www.regit> August 21, 2016 <http://www.hink.org/articles/%D7%94%D7%9E%D7%90%D7%91%D7%A7-%D7%A2%D7%9C-%D7%A7%D7%99%D7%95%D7%9D-%D7%A7%D7%95%D7%A0%D7%A6%D7%A8%D7%98%D7%99%D7%9D-%D7%91%D7%90%D7%99%D7%A8%D7%90%D7%9F> [Hebrew].

²⁴ <https://twitter.com/AghBahman/status/782462999063728128>.

²⁵ <https://twitter.com/idinsayyar1/status/783650916952080388>.

²⁶ <https://twitter.com/digaran/status/782475543816044544>.

²⁷

https://www.facebook.com/bbcpersian/posts/10154260586252713?comment_id=10154260613307713&comment_tracking=%7B%22tn%22%3A%22R9%22%7D.

²⁸ https://twitter.com/asm_erfan/status/782791107444895744.

²⁹ “Motahari’s Letter to Ayatollah Yazdi re: the Iran-South Korea Game,” Asr Iran, October 4, 2016.

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- ¹¹ https://twitter.com/GarCia_RaStDaSt/status/785024254328840192
- ³¹ <https://twitter.com/shahinsartipi/status/783447040273608704/video/1>
- ³² Raz Zimmt Responses to the Deteriorating Health of the Chairman of the Council of Experts, as an Expression of the Eroding Status of Clerics in Iran.” Beehive, vol. 2, issue 8 (September 2014)
<http://dayan.org/content/beehive-responses-deteriorating-health-chairman-council-experts-expression-eroding-status> .
- ³⁴ #ŞortunuGiySokağaÇık, #AbdullahÇakıroğlu #AyşegülTerzi
- ³⁵ “Saldırıya uğrayan Ayşe Terzi için protesto”, Euronews Türkiye, September 25, 2016
<http://tr.euronews.com/2016/09/25/saldiriya-ugrayan-aysegul-terzi-icin-sortlu-protesto> [Accessed: October 11, 2016]
- ³⁶ “Tekmeci saldırgana 8 yıla kadar hapis istendi”, Sözcü, September 28, 2016,
<http://www.sozcu.com.tr/2016/gundem/son-dakika-tekmeci-saldirgana-8-yila-kadar-hapis-istendi-1415783/>
[Accessed: October 11, 2016]
- ³⁷ #sendeanlat
- ³⁸ ÖzgecanAslan
- ³⁹ “Kamuda başörtüsü yasağı kalktı”, Sabah, October 8, 2013,
<http://www.sabah.com.tr/gundem/2013/10/08/kamuda-basortusu-yasagi-kalkti> [Accessed: October 16, 2016]
- ⁴⁰ “Yıldırım'dan 'şortlu kadına saldırı' yorumu: Hoşuna gitmeyebilir, mırıldanırsın”, Sputnik Türkiye, September 22, 2016, <https://tr.sputniknews.com/turkiye/201609221024937475-basbakan-binali-yildirim-sortlu-kadina-taciz-aciklamasi/> [Accessed: October 11, 2016]
- ⁴¹ “Yıldırım'ın 'şortlu kadına saldırı' açıklamasına tepki: Mırıldanamazsın”, Sputnik Türkiye, September 23, 2016, <https://tr.sputniknews.com/turkiye/201609231024954683-basbakan-yildirim-sortlu-kadina-taciz-mirildanamazsin/> [Accessed: October 11, 2016]
- ⁴² “Erdoğan: Bu Femisitler var ya...”, Cumhuriyet, February 17, 2015,
http://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/haber/siyaset/216282/Erdoğan__Bu_feministler_falan_var_ya....html
[Accessed: October 11, 2016]
- ⁴³ Mustang filmi