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Editors: Dr. Harel Chorev, Hadas Sofer Shabtai, Natasha Spreadborough

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From the Editors

The Doron Halpern Middle East Network Analysis Desk is happy to present a special issue of *Beehive* devoted entirely to the issue of incitement on social networks (SNS). The opening article deals with incitement and expressions of racism against Arabs on Iranian SNS; the second discusses the online activity of anti-Israeli organizations that incite against Israel in Arabic as well as other languages; and the final articles covers the intensification of political incitement on Turkish SNS.

Enjoy!

"Arab Lizard and Grasshopper Eaters": Incitement and Expressions of Racism on Iranian SNS

Dr. Raz Zimmt

On April 12, 2015, the Iranian daily *Etemaad* published an article by reformist intellectual and journalist Abas Abdi entitled, "We Forbid Nationalist and Racist Insults." In the article, Abdi warned about the growing racial incitement against Arabs on Iranian social networking sites (SNS) that could, he said, jeopardize the security and stability of Iran. Abdi wrote that the disagreements between Iran and its Arab neighbors created fertile ground for the dissemination of racist insults on unofficial media like Viber¹ and online blogs. These insults contravene Islamic and human values, he stressed, especially given that many of Iran's citizens are Arabs. He added that Iran has always been a heterogeneous society, that maintaining mutual respect among its citizens is of utmost importance, and that government regulations do prohibit racial incitement, but the prohibition is not anchored in law, thereby creating a need for legislation that explicitly bans racist invective.²

Abdi's words did not emerge from a vacuum. In April 2015, reports about the sexual harassment of two young Iranian pilgrims in Saudi Arabia provoked a storm of outrage and expressions of anti-Arab racism on Iranian SNS. The teenage boys, ages 14 and 15, were returning to Iran after a pilgrimage to the holy sites in Saudi Arabia. By their own account, they were detained at Jeddah International Airport, separated from their families and taken to a separate room where two Saudi police officers molested them while conducting a body search. After the incident was reported on SNS, the angry responses from Iranian citizens were accompanied by racist expressions directed towards Arabs. Alongside criticism of the Saudi authorities and demands that the two policemen be punished severely, responses included offensive, racist statements against Arabs as a whole. Some of the derogatory epithets used were: "unclean dogs," "lizard-and grasshopper-eaters," "dirty Arabs" and "barbarians." Some users claimed that the incident at the airport was a clear reflection of the Arabs' character and mentality.³

Incitement and racism on the part of Iranians towards Arabs are not only the result of differences of political opinion between Iran and its neighbors; they are also motivated by a sense of ethnic and cultural superiority. Throughout history, Iran has preserved its cultural and ethnic uniqueness. After being conquered by the Arabs in the seventh century, Iranians maintained their language, although Persian has, over the years, been influenced by Arabic. Today, the question of Iranian identity, the tension between the focal points of national and religious identification, as well as the historic animosity between Persians/Iranians and Arabs, is clearly reflected in the discourse on SNS, especially surrounding issues on which Arabs and Iranians are on opposing sides.

The sexual molestation of these two young Iranians was not the only affair in recent years to provoke incitement and racism against Arabs on Iranian SNS. Similar responses have been recorded in the wake of statements by senior officials in the Arab world who challenge the territorial integrity of Iran or its national-cultural identity. A good example is the irate reaction of Iranians to a video distributed on YouTube in November 2010 that showed excerpts of a speech by Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah about Iran's Islamic identity, claiming that it has Arab, rather than Persian, roots.⁴ At the time, one blogger responded that Nasrallah's words reflect a reality in which the Iranian nation, and the culture, civilization and resources of Iran, are held prisoner by foreign forces.⁵ Facebook was also flooded with the furious responses of Iranian users and comments disparaging both Nasrallah in particular and Arabs in general. Their comments were peppered with derogatory monikers, including "freeloaders" and "lizard-eaters."⁶ The September 2015⁷ deaths of 464 Iranian pilgrims in a disaster in Mena, Saudi Arabia, also triggered expressions of hate and incitement against Arabs on SNS, including, *inter alia*, the distribution of racist online games encouraging players to attack Arabs.⁸

Incitement against Arabs presents the Iranian authorities with two major problems: First, it undermines efforts to improve ties with the Arab world; second, it could potentially strengthen any separatist tendencies among Iran's Arab minority, who make up approximately 2% of the population. Therefore, against the background of increasing expressions of racism on SNS, several Iranian media outlets have, in recent months, called for a fight against the phenomenon. The conservative website *Alef* warned against the spread of anti-Arab views. It stressed that Iranians must remember that they are destined to live alongside Arabs, and should therefore foster good relationships with all of its neighbors, avoiding stigmas and prejudices as opposed to considering all Arabs foolish, lazy, skirt-chasers and extremists.⁹ The leader of Friday prayers in Isfahan, Hujjat al-Islam Mohammad Taqi Rehbār, also condemned the expressions of hatred against Arabs, declaring that "harming our Arab brothers is contrary to morality, religious law and Islam."¹⁰

However, the influence of these attempts to restrain expressions of hatred and racism against Arabs on SNS is highly debatable. Old resentments and the deep cultural gap between Arabs and Persians, combined with the ideological and political disputes between the two sides, guarantee that SNS will continue to serve as a convenient and accessible locus for Iranian incitement against Arabs, especially in periods of tension between Iran and the Arab states.

Incitement and Boycott: The BDS Movement on SNS

Dr. Michael Barak

As an effective channel of communication for transmitting messages quickly to diverse international audiences, especially young people, social networking sites (SNS) have become, in recent years, a central platform for anti-Israel groups. Their incitement against Israel, communicated in many languages, is part of a larger effort to weaken Israel's international position. Among these organizations, the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement is a prominent player that skillfully uses SNS as a tool to delegitimize and demonize Israel, with incitement that sometimes incorporates anti-Semitic themes.

The BDS movement was formally established in July 2005 as an umbrella organization for over 170 Palestinian and pro-Palestinian organizations around the world. It promotes economic, cultural, political and academic boycotts of Israel, as well as the withdrawal of foreign investments and the imposition of sanctions. It opposes normalization with Israel on the grounds that it is an apartheid state which oppresses the Palestinians. The movement's three main demands are ending the occupation, the return of all Palestinian refugees, and the provision of equal rights for the allegedly dispossessed Israeli Arabs.¹¹

In Jordan, for example, the movement is conspicuous for managing online campaigns against economic agreements and other manifestations of economic normalization between Israel and Jordan. For instance, for more than a year they have been running an online campaign against the Jordanian regime's intention to import gas from Israel, using the hashtags: "The enemy's gas [is] occupation," "Jordan boycotts," and "the people will judge."¹² According to the organization, the future gas agreement will result in money taken from Jordanian citizens being transferred to the pockets of the Zionist entity, and thus indirectly perpetuating the Israeli occupation. Another campaign called, "Where's the factory?" and launched in September 2015 called on activists to boycott Israeli commercial establishments that export agricultural products to Jordan (see photo).¹³ Other activists have even called to cancel the water agreement signed between the two countries that allows Israel to use water wells on the Jordanian side of the Arava valley. (In fact Israel gives Jordan an additional yearly water allowance beyond its allocation according to the agreement, as a gesture of good will.)¹⁴ On November 9, activists in Jordan launched an English-language campaign against an agreement that the UN signed with a private Israeli security company, contending that it violates international law because of its



support for the occupation.¹⁵ A video uploaded to an Arabic-language Facebook page asks, “Why did the UN sign an agreement with G4S, which provides security services to occupation prisons, to settlements and for the separation fence, as well as training the Zionist police.” To protest the agreement, they called for their organization to hold a demonstration in front of the UN offices in Jordan on November 29, 2015.¹⁶

The campaigns themselves are characterized by very strident language and videos, slogans and images uploaded of Israeli products that should be confiscated. They present Israel’s operations against terrorism as war crimes, and call for citizens to take to the streets and protest normalization with Israel. For example: on May 26, 2015, BDS activists in Jordan brought hundreds of demonstrators into the streets of Amman to protest the government’s intention to import gas from Israel. In another case, a Saudi surfer called on Muslims to support the European left-wing activists in a boycott of Coca-Cola, claiming that it is a Zionist product: “Drinking Coke is like drinking the blood of Palestinians.”¹⁷

In April 2015, the movement began to operate in Egypt. According to activists, efforts there concentrate on campaigning for boycotting all contact with Israel, while simultaneously working to enhance the image of the Palestinians in the eyes of the Egyptian public. The goal is to lay a foundation for solidarity between the Egyptian and Palestinian peoples, countering the Egyptian media’s hostile stance towards the Palestinians, especially Hamas, which is presented as a terrorist organization that harms the security of Egypt. One success of which Egyptian BDS boasts is the increased tensions between the international cellular phone company Orange World and Israel, which peaked with the statements by the CEO Orange World that he intends to withdraw the company’s operations from Israel.¹⁸

Also prominent in the Palestinian arena are several BDS organizations that coordinate efforts to promote an economic and academic boycott on Israel. The “Palestinian Students' Campaign for an Academic Boycott of Israel” in the Gaza Strip regularly publishes Arabic and English posts on its Facebook page, emphasizing the importance of weakening Israel through boycotts, and initiates conferences on the subject. For example, in late October 2015 it launched an online campaign calling students and young people around the world to support the Palestinian “people’s protest” (known as the “Intifada of knives”) against “Israeli apartheid” and aggression shown by Israel towards the Palestinians, through demonstrations and promoting discourse around the issue on SNS.¹⁹ Another Palestinian BDS organization, the “National Committee for a Boycott of Israel”, is leading a campaign against the emerging security agreement between Israel and the Gulf states involving the sale of the Iron Dome defense system, in response to threats from Iran. According to the organization, any normalization with Israel is unacceptable, and security cooperation is even worse.²⁰

The decision of November 11, 2015 by the European Commission in Brussels to mark products made in the West Bank settlements and the Golan Heights re-ignited discourse on SNS regarding boycotts against Israel. A Jordanian cartoonist Emad Hajjaj commended Europe on the move and expressed hope that Arab states would follow suit.²¹ The al-Carmel elementary school in Bethlehem uploaded a video showing a student reciting a poem praising the boycott



Cartoon drawn by Hajjaj. Upper text: EU has decided mark products from Israeli settlement with stickers. Lower text: This label should be imported by Arab countries

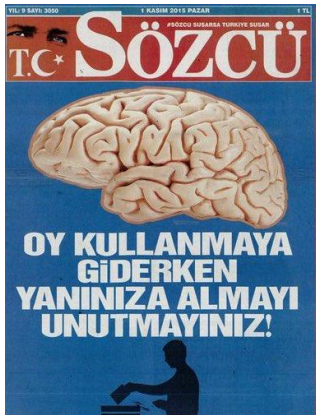
of Israeli products.²² Hamas also praised the decision and called on the EU to extend the ban to all Israeli products.²³ In this spirit, other Palestinian users noted that economic boycotts frighten Israel greatly and do significant economic damage, and therefore pursuing this channel is worthwhile. (Interestingly, this concept has been part of Palestinian discourse almost since the beginning of the conflict.) On the margins of discourse, several users put forward the conspiracy theory that the recent terrorist attacks in Paris were backed by the Israeli Mossad, who initiated them in response to the EU's decision to boycott settlement goods.²⁴

The SNS are, therefore, an important public relations arena in the struggle for international awareness in general, and particularly among Arabs. They serve as an important tool in promoting an anti-Israel agenda and recruiting new supporters. In the absence of supervising or controlling forces, messages spread quickly and efficiently, and then move from cyberspace out onto the field. BDS organizations are a prominent part of this incitement, and are currently expanding considerably thanks to SNS. Therefore, Israel must not belittle the importance of online incitement as a critically important front in the fight for international opinion.

Turkish SNS as Mouthpieces for Hatred and Incitement

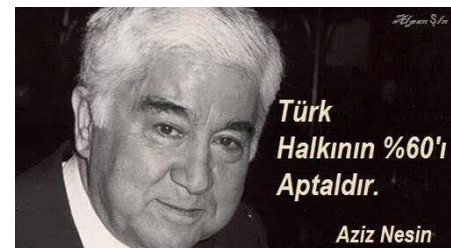
Hay Eytan Cohen Yanarocak

On November 1, 2015, after six months of governmental instability, the Turkish people returned the Justice and Development Party (AKP) – the home of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan that is currently headed by Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu – to power. Judging from comments on social networking sites (SNS), the decisive victory of the AKP, which gave it a parliamentary majority, surprised even its supporters. Conversely, the bitter disappointment of the defeated opposition parties was also clearly felt.



There are several reasons why voters returned to the ruling AKP, including the inability of other parties to put together an opposing bloc against the AKP following the previous elections, a lack of economic stability, and the series of attacks that shook the country in recent months. In addition, it seems that opposition supporters' expressions of arrogance towards the AKP voters catalyzed its renewed strength, paving the way for restoring one-party rule. In the weeks preceding the elections SNS were flooded with photos that showed supporters of AKP as a witless flock. A good example is the cover of the strongly Kemalist newspaper *Sözcü*, which is known for its intense criticism of the government. The cover features the image of a brain and a warning to voters not to forget “to bring your sense when you vote.” Images like this were greeted enthusiastically by opposition supporters, but had the opposite effect among many unsure of their support for AKP, reinforcing these voters' resolve to support the ruling party, if only to punish the arrogant opposition.

Even after the publication of the results, when it became clear that AKP had increased from 258 seats to 317 seats (i.e., it won 49.48% of the votes), opponents of the government did not alter their insulting style. For example, they spread the famous statement of the late Turkish intellectual Aziz Nesin, who claimed, “60% of Turkish people are retarded” (pictured). Nesin's name and face rapidly went viral on Twitter and Facebook.²⁵ In response, the government's supporters called the citizens who did not vote for the AKP “retarded,” and noted with satisfaction that there has been a decline in the number of “retards” since the previous elections.²⁶



Tensions reached a new peak on November 10, the anniversary of the death of the Republic's founder, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. As every year, many Kemalists and citizens who wish to honor his memory published pictures of Atatürk on SNS, alongside words in his memory.

Unsurprisingly, this gesture led to hostility from some segments of the public. The television channel associated with the Islamic newspaper *Yeni Akit*, which is known for its anti-Kemalist (and anti-Semitic) positions, broadcast a program in which the announcer welcomed Atatürk's death and described it as, “the end of [the era of] suffering”. From a Kemalist perspective, this statement crossed all boundaries; Kemalists responded with the slogan “Curse you, Akit” on SNS, and a few even filed lawsuits against the newspaper for desecration of the memory of Atatürk (under a law from 1951).²⁷

Among opponents of memorializing Mustafa Kemal, some users expressed indignation at the title “Atatürk,” which means “Father of the Turks.” These users, whose position is actually supported by President Erdoğan, claim that Mustafa Kemal was indeed a leader and commander worthy of respect and honor, but the patriarchs of the Turks are the Ottomans, not Mustafa Kemal, who founded the Republic. As President Erdoğan persisted in refraining from using the appellation “Atatürk,” so the preoccupation of SNS with this issue increased. While Kemalists spread the image of Atatürk on SNS accompanied by the slogan “Without you we would not be” (left panel in the image), their opponents responded by replacing the image of Atatürk with the

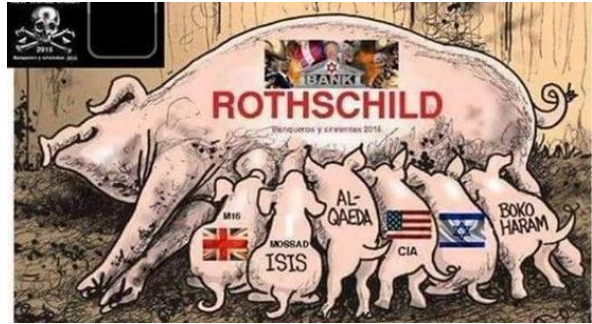
Arabic letter “*vav 3*” a symbol of the Prophet Muhammad (center panel in the image) and repeated the same slogan that was used for Atatürk. Verbal skirmishes between the two blocs broke records on SNS, following the cynical exploitation of a poster



by Turkish condom company O.K., to which opponents of Kemalists added the caption: “If we were there, you wouldn’t be” (right panel in the image).²⁸

The exchange of insults did not stop even when ISIS shocked the world on the night of November 13 with its murderous terrorist attacks in Paris. On the one hand, many Turkish users changed their profile picture to a French flag and expressed solidarity with the French people; condemnations and curses against ISIS flooded SNS in Turkey, as they did elsewhere.²⁹ On the other hand, there was also considerable criticism of Western leaders, who were accused of being two-faced, because only attacks on a Western symbol, like Paris or New York, woke the world from its slumber and prompted action against terrorism.³⁰ This criticism was joined by even harsher condemnations on SNS, which likened the iconic Eiffel Tower to a sexual symbol penetrating traitors who did not express sadness after the attack in Ankara on October 10, 2015, but were now grieving with the French.³¹ At the same time, there were also demonstrations of support for ISIS on SNS, including expressions of satisfaction with the number of fatalities and conveying hope that ISIS personnel would return to the streets of Paris in 2016, to kill more

“Christian terrorists.” These users also participated in the circles of incitement on SNS, and contemptuously derided the Turkish users who expressed their solidarity with the French.³² Moreover, anti-Semitic incitement did not disappear. A cartoon circulated after the terrorist attacks in Paris depicted Rothschild Bank as a pig suckling ISIS - written beneath the name of the Israeli Mossad - Boko Haram, al-Qaeda and the major Western intelligence agencies (pictured).³³



In summary, the Turkish SNS are currently providing a platform for violent and belligerent discourse that slaughters sacred cows and attacks all sectors of the population. Even the attack in Paris, which was perceived, around the globe, as a battle of civilizations and a conflict pitting the “forces of good” against “the forces of evil,” did not bridge the extreme polarization in Turkish society. Hatred and incitement on SNS have, therefore, the effect of a snowball rolling down steep slope. Only time will tell how large it will eventually become.

¹ A social network that can be used, *inter alia*, for instant messaging and group chats.

² Abbas Abdi, “We forbid nationalist and racist insults.” *Etemaad*, April 12, 2015 (in Persian).

³ See for example:

<https://www.facebook.com/Taghato.net/photos/a.367159596688202.80081.277518702318959/850199648384192/?type=1> ; <https://www.facebook.com/radio.farda/posts/10153234001298841> ; <https://www.facebook.com/radio.farda/posts/10153228810693841> ; <https://www.facebook.com/radio.farda/posts/10153225889648841> ; <https://www.facebook.com/bbcpersian/posts/10153008685442713>

⁴ “Controversial speech of Hezbollah CEO about Iranian civilization .” BBC in Persian, November 8, 2010.

⁵ <https://greenmanifesto.wordpress.com/2010/11/07/%D8%AD%D8%B3%D9%86-%D9%86%D8%B5%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%84%D9%87-%D8%A8%D8%A7-%D8%AA%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%85-%D8%A8%D9%89%E2%80%8C%D8%B4%D8%B9%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%B4-%D9%81%D9%87%D9%85%D9%8A%D8%AF-%D9%83>

⁶ See for example https://www.facebook.com/note.php?note_id=447544827986&id=83359068840 ; https://www.facebook.com/note.php?note_id=462745579089&id=95040933929

⁷ Regarding the tragedy and responses to it on SNS, see Nahum Shiloh, “Hajj Tragedy in Mina – Saudi SNS in the Service of the ‘Great Game’ against Iran,” *Beehive. Vol 3, no. 8-9 (Sept.-Oct. 2015), pp. 6-8.*

⁸ “Distribution of a racist online games target Arabs on several Iranian sites.” *Nazar News*, September 4, 2015.

⁹ “Criticism of the common hatred of Arabs.” *Alef*, October 15, 2015.

¹⁰ “Friday preacher in Isfahan: My words were misquoted, harming our Arab brothers contravenes morality and Islam.” *Asr Iran*, April 15, 2015.

¹¹ For additional information about the BDS movement, see: Dan Diker, “Unmasking BDS: Radical Roots, Extremist Ends”, Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, 2015. http://jcpa.org/pdf/Unmasking_.pdf.”:

¹² #غاز_العدو_احتلال ; #الاردن_تقاطع ; #الشعب_يحاكم

¹³ #اين_المنشأ ; For example, see the video parody on the subject produced by movement activists: “Dialogue on potatoes and the state of potatoes.” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YoD9IGXPcf4&feature=youtu.be>

¹⁴ #الاردن تقاطع

¹⁵ #UNDropG4S; <https://www.facebook.com/BDSJO/>; In August 2015, BDS in Jordan marked one year since its founding, and produced a video summarizing its activities against Israel:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lrFGMA6VrEE>

¹⁶ <https://www.facebook.com/BDSJO/videos/o.864404013678101/1737300799831786>, November 20, 2015.

¹⁷ <https://twitter.com/make19541954/status/649974629575036928>, October 2, 2015.

¹⁸ #مصر_تقاطع #BDSEgypt

¹⁹ <https://www.facebook.com/PSCABI/>;

http://www.odsg.org/co/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=3277%3Aurgent-call-from-gaza-students-and-youth-join-the-wave-of-resistance-this-weekend&catid=42%3Abds&Itemid=1

²⁰ <http://www.nbprs.ps/news.php?action=show&id=23211>, October 21, 2015. See also another Palestinian BDS

organization, "Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (PACBI) <http://www.pacbi.org/>

²¹ <https://twitter.com/EmadHajjaj/status/6647049055050424321>, November 11, 2015.

²² <https://www.facebook.com/424119854271692/videos/vb.424119854271692/1242045059145830/>, November 18, 2015.

²³ <https://twitter.com/hamasinfo/status/664697426805178368>, November 11, 2015.

²⁴ .18.11.15 <https://www.facebook.com/moh.abuallan?fref=nf>, November 18, 2015.

²⁵ Aziz Nesin

²⁶ AKzaferimizHayırlıOLSUN #HaydiBismillah #1KasımSecimi

²⁷ #AkitelAnet

²⁸ #OlmasaydınOlmazdık, #10 Kasım, Okey

²⁹ #ParisteKatliamVar #terörulanetliyoruz, Neden Fransa #Paris

³⁰ #FransayaFransızım

³¹ Eyfel Kulesi

³² "Dünya Paris Saldırılarının Şokunu Yaşarken Saldırıya Sevinen ve Kutlayanlar", *Onedio*, November 14, 2015

<http://onedio.com/haber/paris-saldirilarina-sevinen-kutlayanlar-624233> [Accessed: November 15, 2015]

³³ #Paris "Neden Fransa" "Saldırıları IŞİD