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BeeHive

Middle East Social Media

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Volume 3, Issue 7, July 2015

Table of Contents

From the Editors.....1

After the Nuclear Accord: Celebrating the Agreement, Hoping for Change2

The Connection between Music, Politics, Gender, and Sexuality: The Mawazine Festival in Morocco5

Turkish SNS on behalf of the Uyghurs : The Power of SNS vs. Vital Interests8

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From the Editors

We are happy to present the July issue of **Beehive**. The current issue opens with a review of responses on social networking sites (SNS) to the nuclear agreement reached on July 14 between the world powers and Iran. The next article examines the echoes of the annual Mawazine Festival in Morocco as they reverberated on SNS, and the final article discusses relations between Turkey and China against the backdrop of rumors that spread on SNS about the situation of the Uyghurs in Xinjiang Province.

Please note that Beehive is taking a short break during August. We will return with a new issue in September.

After the Nuclear Accord: Celebrating the Agreement, Hoping for Change

Dr. Raz Zimmt

When news of the July 14 nuclear agreement between Iran and the Western powers became known, social networking sites (SNS) in Iran were flooded with joyous, enthusiastic responses from thousands of Iranian citizens. Many Iranians expressed their satisfaction with the agreement, and referred to it as “a victory.”¹ Manifestations of joy quickly spread onto the streets of Tehran and other cities, which were filled with thousands of young people who shared photos of the celebrations on SNS. Users created a hashtag #IranWinsPeace for uploading reports and images expressing their happiness with the agreement that was reached.

From the ensuing discourse on SNS, it is evident that the expressions of joy can be attributed mainly to Iranian public’s deeply-felt expectation that the country’s economic situation will improve after the anticipated lifting of sanctions following the agreement. Indeed, the ensuing conversation that developed on SNS rarely dealt with the contents of the agreement relating to restrictions on the nuclear program and the supervision of nuclear facilities, but focused primarily on expressions of happiness and hope that the economic situation will improve. The night before the agreement, exiled Iranian journalist Behrooz Kazemi wrote on his Facebook page: “Tonight might be the last evening of sanctions. Hopefully tomorrow we can march towards the day when we will be a normal country, like many others, a country without sanctions.”² Iranian-American journalist Negar Mortazavi uploaded screenshots of cell phones with text messages full of hope to his Twitter account, sent by Iranians after the agreement was announced. In one message, an Iranian citizen wrote, “Today is a unforgettable day in the modern history of Iran, July 14 must be added to the political calendar of Iran.”³

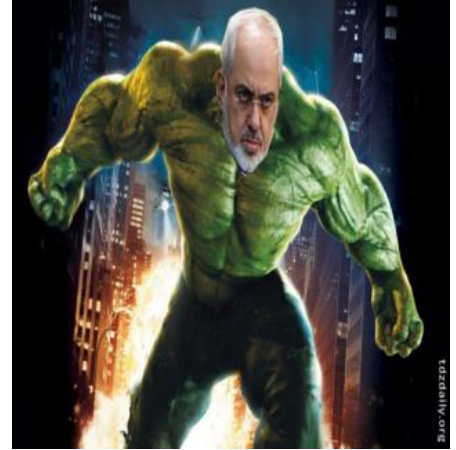
Many comments also included expressions of appreciation for President Hassan Rouhani and Foreign Minister Mohammad Zarif, who managed the negotiations for the Iranian side. Users uploaded cartoons published in reformist newspapers that depicted Zarif as a national hero, comparing him to heroes from Iranian history, such as former prime minister Mohammed Mossadegh, who was responsible for the nationalization of oil in the early fifties; Amir Kabir, the prime minister and most respected reformer during the Qajar dynasty in the 19th century; and the legendary archer Arash, who fought in the name of Iran and its honor after it was defeated

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by the Turanian Kingdom. It should be noted that the fierce confrontation between Zarif and the European Union’s High Representative for Foreign Affairs, Federica Mogherini, during the last week of talks in Vienna, contributed significantly to his public prestige at home. On July 8, diplomatic sources reported that during a meeting between negotiators from Iran and the West, Mogherini threatened to leave, to which Zarif retorted: “Never threaten an Iranian.”⁴ This response sparked a surge of expressions of national pride on SNS, and Iranians users created the hashtag #NeverThreatenAnIranian for use when uploading comments in support of the Foreign Minister, who was depicted as giant, green superhero The Hulk (pictured).



Iran’s radical right, its Arab neighbors, and Israel, however, were subjected to torrents of criticism and presented the biggest losers in the nuclear deal. Following the harsh criticism he voiced against the agreement, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was the target of especially hostile reactions. Responses included invectives, slurs, and death wishes.⁵ Alongside the displays of happiness and expectations for a better economic situation, many users expressed hope that the nuclear deal would lead also to improvements in the human rights situation in Iran. Responses to the agreement included,



Demonstrators celebrating in Tehran, waving a sign, “Iran will be green again”

among other things, calls for President Rouhani to keep his election promise and act to release two opposition leaders, Mir Hossein Mousavi and Mehdi Karroubi, who have been held under house arrest for over four years, and to promote civil and political reforms in Iran.⁶ Reformist journalist and author Reza Alijani wrote on his Facebook page that he is awaiting the day when free and democratic elections can be celebrated in the streets of Iran.⁷ Moreover, many

users expressed hopes for improved ties and normalized relations with the United States. “I hope that the slogan, ‘Death to America’ will be canceled,” wrote one user.⁸

Alongside the expressions of joy and buoyed expectations, discussion on SNS also included expressions of pessimism and skepticism about the future. Users argued that the expectations

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for improvements in the situation of the Iranian citizens following the nuclear agreement are unfounded. One of them wrote that there was no reason to celebrate, because the citizens' problems will not be solved, the money taken from the Iranian people will not be returned to them or used for their benefit; the prices of gas, water and electricity will not be reduced; and unemployment will not disappear.⁹ According to others, there is no reason to celebrate an agreement that returns Iran to the situation it was in before the sanctions were imposed. In this spirit, one commentator on SNS wrote a parable: the people celebrating the agreement on SNS are like a farmer who has complained to his master that his small room is inadequate for the needs of his family. In response, the master sends him and his family to sleep in the yard. A few days later, the master agrees to let them return to the little room, and in response, the farmer incessantly thanked him for his kindness. The moral, according to user, is obviously that the Iranian people are celebrating an agreement that returns them to the same conditions in which they lived a decade ago.¹⁰ Many users went even further, arguing that the funds flowing to Iran following the agreement will not help the people of Iran anyway, since they will be used to assist foreign countries or to fill the private coffers of the country's rulers. One user wrote sarcastically that the citizens of Lebanon, Gaza, Iraq, Syria and Sudan are the ones who should celebrate the nuclear deal, for they are the one who will benefit from the funds. Another user wrote that the money will not reach the pockets of ordinary citizens, but the clergy will become even wealthier.¹¹

In conclusion, responses to the nuclear accords on Iranian SNS show widespread support from the people of Iran for the agreement, as well as the intensity of expectation both for an improved economic situation and more individual freedoms. Therefore, the lack of proper response to the aspirations of the public could lead to a crisis of expectations that would pose a significant challenge to the Iranian regime.

The Connection between Music, Politics, Gender, and Sexuality: The Mawazine Festival in Morocco

Dr. Joel Parker and Laura Brantley

The annual Mawazine Rhythms of the World Festival held in Morocco this June provoked a heated discussion on social networking sites (SNS) regarding gender issues in Morocco in particular and the Arab world in general. The festival began in 2002 as an event initiated by the Moroccan government to support and promote local artists.¹² This year, in keeping with King Mohammed VI's intention to give the festival cosmopolitan feel, international stars like Usher, Sean Paul, and Jennifer Lopez were also invited to appear, in addition to local bands, traditional divas from Lebanon, and famous singers from the Arab diaspora, like Swedish-Muslim pop star Maher Zain. The resulting cultural encounter at once reflected the Moroccan concept of *Naydah* (which means "up" in Moroccan Arabic, and is identified with the revolutionary musicians of the Moroccan hip-hop scene),¹³ demonstrated how internationally-based cultural activism can be misunderstood by local authorities and grass-roots activists alike..



Artists at the festival expressed multiple approaches to sexual expression. For example, the Moroccan hip-hop star Soultana appeared onstage wearing her typical fashion, inspired

by international male hip-hop artists, in order to divert attention from her body and tangibly transfer the emphasis to the messages of her songs.¹⁴ At the opposite extreme, Jennifer Lopez did not spare

her gigantic audience of 160,000 spectators of all ages from around the Arab world explicit sexual gestures. Lopez's appearance was not the only provocation at the festival. The English rock band Placebo caused a storm when one of its members came on stage shirtless, with the number 489 crossed out with an "X" written on his chest (pictured), to express of band's protest against Article 489 of the Moroccan Criminal Code, which defines homosexuality a criminal offense.¹⁵ This display echoed the protest of the European feminist organization Femen, whose activists denounced the law earlier in the day, when members kissed topless in the historic Minaret Square by the Hassan



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Mosque in Rabat, with the slogan “In Gay we Trust” written on their torsos.

The defiance of Femen triggered outrage and criticism in the Moroccan public and also on SNS.¹⁶ In any case, the Moroccan police made it clear that such acts would not be sympathetically received. The day after the Femen demonstration, two local men were arrested for kissing at the same location. For this act, they were sentenced to two to four months in prison. The sentence led to only limited criticism on Twitter and Facebook, mostly from the Moroccan social organization Aswat,¹⁷ which launched the hashtag #Love_is_not_a_crime. As of this writing, the online protest has only served to delay the trial, and the two men are still in jail.

In light of these protests by some of the artists performing at the festival, thousands Moroccans took to the streets chanting slogans like “No to attacks on Moroccan values!” and “Freedom means respect for others.”¹⁸ Even the liberal French-Arab newspaper Orient XXI criticized the Femen protest, stating “Their message is alien to local reality.”¹⁹ These voices expressed both conservative reactionaries' views and grass-roots activists' frustration with lack of media attention to issues that still plague women in Morocco, like polygamy. However, among those who are able to engender fanfare on SNS, the tone is largely laudatory with respect to the broader cultural trends seen in and around the Mawazine Festival. For example, young journalist Nancy Fakhoury, who boasts a Twitter account with more than 40,000 followers, headlined the glamor and significant social change in Morocco that is clearly reflected during the festival. Thanks to famous personalities like Fakhoury, the festival received increased attention from the media establishment in Lebanon, as well as users from elsewhere in the Arab world.

The exposure provided by the Festival and echoes of the civil war in Syria helped undermine the apolitical image of the prominent Lebanese singers who participated. For example, the Lebanese singer Majida ElRoumi was accused of expressing support for Bashar al-Assad at the beginning of her performance, but rushed to deny it publicly, according to Aks al-Sir, a news site affiliated with the Syrian rebels. The singer herself claimed that her only intent was to express regret for any Arab blood spilled, especially the blood of children, and that beyond this she has no interest in politics.²⁰ This incident was preceded by storm on SNS ignited by a Tweet posted by Al-Jazeera reporter Faisal al-Qassem. He hinted that the Lebanese army had been reduced to

killing Syrian refugees and producing music videos in collaboration with Lebanese divas like Najwa Karam, Elissa, and Nancy Ajram (each of whom have Twitter accounts with millions of followers).²¹

Although the Mawazine Festival purports to create an artistic space seemingly disconnected from day-to-day issues, this year's festival highlighted the contested space surrounding public expressions of sexuality in Morocco. Nevertheless, it would also be wise to see the glass as half full; the ongoing success of an annual festival providing a venue with widely varying modes of sexual expression stands in stark contrast to violence and instability elsewhere in the region. This is further validated by SNS, where the important discussions raised by the festival can move beyond the physical boundaries of its compound to include other parts of Morocco and the Middle East.

Turkish SNS on behalf of the Uyghurs : The Power of SNS vs. Vital Interests

Hay Eytan Cohen Yanarocak

As they were during Ramadan last year, Turkish social networking sites (SNS) were again preoccupied this month with national struggles of an Islamic nature. Just as Operation Protective Edge dominated the headlines last July, this summer saw users focusing their attention on the struggle of the Uyghurs – who are considered part of the extended Turkic family of peoples – living under Chinese rule in Xinjiang province.

Throughout history, Xinjiang Province has been conquered by a number of forces, including the Huns, Uyghurs, and Chinese dynasties. After passing through several hands during an ongoing war for control of the area, the Chinese defeated the Mongol Principality of Dzungaria in 1759 and took control of the province, changing its name to Xinjiang. But that was not the final word. The Uyghur revolted in 1864, and Chinese Muslims (Hui), led by Yakup Beg, managed to expel the Chinese from the province. This did not last, and in 1884, the Chinese regained control. Again, the Uyghurs did not give up easily, and during repeated uprisings, twice declared the establishment of “East Turkestan,” in 1933 and in 1944. Yet again, Uyghur independence was short-lived, and the Chinese again took control in 1949, and have ruled the disputed province ever since, despite ongoing Uyghur struggles against the Chinese in Xinjiang.

In light of the ethnic and religious connection of the Uyghurs in China with the Turkish people, the current Turkish authorities attach great importance to their situation. In 2012, for example, then-Prime Minister Erdoğan made an unprecedented visit to Urumqi, the capital of Xinjiang, to see the situation of the Uyghur firsthand. Before and after the visit, and despite the status of China as a world power, Erdoğan did not hesitate to severely criticize the Chinese for their attitude towards the Uyghurs. In 2009, he even accused Beijing of committing genocide against the Uyghurs. However, these harsh statements were effortlessly abandoned in favor of Turkey’s vital interests when China and Turkey signed eight agreements for cooperation in various fields in 2010. Moreover, Erdoğan did not hesitate to use the Chinese and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (which includes China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Pakistan and India) as a bargaining chip in his dealings with the EU and NATO. Ankara has presented the Shanghai Organization as a possible alternative to the European Union, and

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announced plans to acquire a Chinese system for defense against ballistic missiles. These moves seem to be intended to reduce Turkey's dependence on NATO and show that it has other alternatives, although the project was eventually canceled in response to NATO pressure.

However, the current turmoil that erupted around the Uyghur on SNS and its reflection on the Turkish street hampers, at the very least, the government's attempts at rapprochement between Turkey and China. Since the beginning of the month of Ramadan, rumors spread on SNS that China forbade the Uyghurs to fast during the holy month, and force-fed them to prevent them keeping the commandments of Islam. In response to these rumors, a variety of cartoons were circulated on SNS, pointing to the heavy pressure that the Chinese government allegedly exerted on Uyghur believers (pictured).



-China has forbidden the Turkish Uyghurs to fast-
-Chinese torture-

As part of the online protest surrounding the Uyghur issue, users uploaded pictures showing the flag of East Turkestan (resembling the Turkish flag, but blue), awash with the "blood" of the red Chinese flag. Calls for demonstrations in Turkey and throughout Europe were also spread.²² Interestingly, pro-Uyghur activists used hashtags and imagery familiar from the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (pictured).²³ This usage reflects the users' command of techniques for disseminating information on SNS, because it facilitated exposure for the Uyghur struggle to wider circles and the recruitment of additional supporters. Among users of this technique was the official Twitter account of the Mavi Marmara flotilla.²⁴ This made the comparison to Israel an effective tactic for demonizing China and raising awareness of the Uyghur cause.



The anti-Chinese propaganda on SNS also spilled out into the Turkish street. For example, groups belonging to the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) raided a Chinese restaurant in Istanbul, causing significant damage. Korean tourists, who were mistakenly identified as Chinese, were attacked in the town square in Istanbul, and a mob of Turks in Balıkesir ceremoniously "executed" Mao Zedong in effigy. The flames intensified even more after the Thai government decided to deport 109 Uyghur refugees, who had fled to Thailand in hopes of reaching Turkey, to China. The Chinese authorities accused the refugees of involvement in

jihadist activity against China as part of ISIS, and the case outraged Turkish SNS. Within a short time, crowds stormed the Thai consulate in Istanbul and caused serious damage. The mood did not relax even after the Foreign Ministry announced that it has ascertained that Chinese Uyghurs were free to fast. The Turkish news agency Anatolia even sent a delegation to Xinjiang to evaluate the situation of Uyghurs. Although the article it published had a clearly anti-Chinese tone and emphasized that Uyghurs live under heavy repression, the agency also made it clear that they are permitted to fast and pray, and that the rumors to the contrary are unfounded. To cool the conflagration, President Erdoğan announced his intention to visit China on July 28, 2015, and promised that during his visit the Uyghur issue would also be raised for discussion. Unsurprisingly, the official media used the announcement for the political benefit of the president, and increase support from him among Turkish nationalists. In this spirit, a headline in the newspaper Yeni Akit read: "Erdoğan's surprise visit to China! He is going to warn them."²⁵



In conclusion, the Uyghur issue highlights the sometimes destructive capacity of SNS to spread false rumors that have direct influence on the street, and even on the political echelon and diplomatic relations. There is no doubt that this harmed relations between Turkey and China, and intensified the already negative public opinion towards China in Turkey. Even in 2013, when the two countries declared that Beijing would provide Ankara with a defensive anti-missile system, only 27% of Turks saw China in a positive light. Today, against the backdrop of rumors about the situation in Xinjiang, the rate of sympathy for China has dropped to 18%.²⁶ Turkey's leaders understand that they cannot ignore the attitudes expressed on SNS, and President Erdoğan tried to mitigate the conflict when he called for preserving the vital interests of Ankara in the Far East and around the world. However, the incident should also be seen in the context of Turkey's desire to portray itself as a superpower, led by a president (Erdoğan) who is not afraid of confrontation with major powers, including China, and a defender of Muslim minorities beyond its borders.

¹ <https://www.facebook.com/radio.farda/posts/10153473774823841>.

² <https://www.facebook.com/kazemi.bk/posts/10200839088696149?pnref=story>.

³ <https://twitter.com/NegarMortazavi/status/620831710834356224>.

⁴ "Zarif to EU's Mogherini: Never Threaten an Iranian". 8 ביולי 2015, סוכנות הידיעות "פארס",

⁵

https://www.facebook.com/bbcpersian/posts/10153249261097713?comment_tracking=%7B%22tn%22%3A%22O%22%7D.

⁶ <https://www.facebook.com/manototv/posts/10153420005800979>.

7

<https://www.facebook.com/1441464056152541/photos/a.1445425912423022.1073741828.1441464056152541/1468430666789213/?type=1&theater>.

⁸ <https://www.facebook.com/radio.farda/posts/10153473774823841>.

⁹ <https://www.facebook.com/bbcpersian/posts/10153248487217713>.

¹⁰ <https://www.facebook.com/RadioZamaneh/posts/10155749483800705>.

¹¹ <https://www.facebook.com/mehdi.parpnchi/posts/764245353697775>.

¹² Almeida, C. M., "Unravelling Distinct Voices in Moroccan Rap: Evading Control, Weaving Solidarities, and Building New Spaces for Self-Expression," *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, Vol. 25, No. 3 (September, 2013), p. 322.

¹³ On the hip-hop scene in Morocco, see A. Boum, "Youth, Political Activism and the Festivalization of Hip-hop Music in Morocco," in Bruce Maddy-Weitzman and Daniel Zisenwine Eds., *Contemporary Morocco: State, Politics and Society under Mohammed VI*, Routledge, New York, 2013, p. 161.

¹⁴ Ben-Layashi, S., "Feet on the Earth, Head in the clouds," *Contemporary Morocco*, p. 152.

¹⁵ "Moroccan Gay Men to be Tried for Violating 'Public Modesty' over Photo," *The Guardian*, June 15, 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jun/15/moroccan-gay-men-to-be-tried-for-violating-public-modesty-over-photo>

¹⁶ For example, https://twitter.com/alaraby_en/status/612743951766781952

¹⁷ The organization's Facebook pages has received approximately 13,000 "likes" and it has more than 1.200 followers on Twitter. <https://www.facebook.com/magazine.aswat?fref=nf>; <https://twitter.com/CollectifAswat>

¹⁸ "Thousands of Moroccans Protest Against Femen in Rabat", *World News*, June 5, 2015.

<http://www.morocoworldnews.com/2015/06/160166/thousands-of-moroccans-protest-against-femen-in-rabat/>

¹⁹ Soraya el-Kahlaoui, "A Message to Femen - Don't Hijack our Struggle," *Al-Araby*, June 18, 2015.

<http://www.alaraby.co.uk/english/comment/2015/6/18/a-message-to-femen-dont-hijack-our-struggle>; "Moroccan LGBT Rights Group Distances Itself from Femen," *Morocco World News*, 12 June, 2015.

<http://www.morocoworldnews.com/2015/06/160731/moroccan-lgbt-rights-group-distances-itself-from-femen/>

²⁰ "Al-Fanana al-Libnaniya Majda El Roumi Tanfi Ta'aydha li-Nizam Bashar al-Assad," *Aks al-Sir*, May 31, 2015.

²¹ See also <https://twitter.com/kasimf/status/515951203255988224/photo/1>

<http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/fury-lebanon-over-tweet-criticising-army-1231857799>

²² #DoğuTürkistan, #VarOlsunTürkMilleti, #turkestan, #genocide, #china, #katilçin, #doguturkistandakatliamvar, #doguturkistankanagliyor #doguturkistandaoruclututmakyasak #kahhar #terroristchina #uygur #gökbayrak #uygurtürkleri #çin #eastturkestan

²³ #Gazze, #Filistin, #FreePalestine, #Gaza, #ihh, #killerisrael, #israel, #israelisterrorist, #babykillerisrael #özgürkudüs

²⁴ @mavimarmaratr

²⁵ "Erdoğan'dan sürpriz ziyaret! Çin'i uyarmaya gidiyor", *Yeni Akit*, July 4, 2015

<http://www.yeniakit.com.tr/haber/erdogandan-surpriz-ziyaret-cini-uyarmaya-gidiyor-79149.html>

[Accessed: July 15, 2015]

²⁶ PEW Turkey Survey <http://www.pewglobal.org/database/indicator/24/country/224/>

[Accessed: July 15, 2015]