

BeeHive

Middle East Social Media

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We are proud to present the May edition of Beehive. In this issue, Dr. Michael Barak discusses the protest movement in the Gaza strip that moved from social networks into the street. Hay Eytan Cohen Yanarocak deals with the Turkish government's use of the 100th anniversary of the Battle of Gallipoli to divert the world's attention from the anniversary of the Armenian Genocide. Dr. Raz Zimmt examines Iranian social attitudes towards animal rights as seen in the recent uproar on social media over the killing of stray dogs.

April 29: Criticism and Protest against the Leadership of Hamas as Seen on SNS

Dr. Michael Barak

In April 2014, Fatah and Hamas signed a reconciliation agreement. After years of tension between the two parties, the agreement stirred hope in the people of Palestine, and particularly those in the Gaza Strip, that the reality of their situation would improve. However, the scope of their expectations was matched only by the dimensions of their disappointment. The continuation of the traditional suspicion between the leadership of the two movements, which increased following the kidnapping and murder of three Israeli teens last June; the wave of arrests of political activists; and the entrenchment of both sides in their positions did not lead to any truly productive movement towards reconciliation. A substantive expression of people's displeasure with the paralysis of the situation and the inability of the Hamas and Fatah leadership to reconcile their differences was apparent on social networking sites (SNS) in late April 2015.

A group of young people from the Gaza Strip, who are not identified



with either side, organized under the name “**April 29**,” and decided to use SNS to catapult the issue to the top of the agenda. Their goal was to make it clear to Fatah and Hamas that they must reach a true reconciliation and devote their full energies to rebuilding and improving the life of residents of the Gaza Strip. Members of the movement called on Gaza residents to gather for a demonstration in the Shuja’iyya neighborhood in eastern part of the city (see picture). The demonstration called for ending divisions, reducing the overwhelming unemployment, respecting civil rights and freedoms, and advancing elections for the presidency, Palestinian legislature, and municipalities.¹ For this purpose, they created hashtags and Facebook pages where they displayed slogans encouraging support for their initiative. One organizer of the protest tweeted: “Do you oppose the solidarity tax (a progressive tax that Hamas imposed on merchandise imported into the Gaza Strip)? Do you oppose division and [the problem of] the checkpoints? Do you want electricity? A salary? Your rights? Then come tomorrow and make your voice heard!” Another young person noted: “April 29 does not identify with anyone and does not work against anyone but rather speaks in the name of the people. It is demanding change that will lead to a reality better than the present one.”²

The discourse that surrounded the April 29 initiative involved several hundred participants, primarily from the Gaza Strip but also from the West Bank. Most of the participants responded favorably to the initiative. One user noted, for example, that Gaza is facing serious problems which require intensive treatment in order to root out the increasingly rampant crime in the Gaza Strip, caused by the city’s poor economic and political situation (evident from the violent altercations between different factions). They demanded immediate intervention: “Where are Hamas and Fatah? Where are Abbas and Haniyeh? I call on anyone with any remaining honor, the Palestinian people are dying.” Another stated that all of the factions owe an apology to the Palestinian people, especially the residents of Gaza, because they are more concerned with internal issues than with the welfare of residents: “Factionalism has pushed us back many years, our [main] problem has become the problem of [the lack of] reconciliation.”³ Some supporters of Hamas attempted to intervene in the discourse, claiming that the protests are being controlled by members of Fatah who are constantly striving to undermine Hamas: “The goal of April 29 is to strike against Hamas, this is its only goal.”⁴

While coordinating the demonstration online, young people from Gaza expressed their concern that the internal security forces of Hamas would attempt to thwart the demonstration and might come to make arrests. It is possible that these fears had a negative impact on the number of protesters, which totaled only a few dozen. Their fears were indeed validated when Hamas personnel in civilian clothing arrested several participants and confiscated photographers’ cameras. Many of the demonstrators reported on SNS that Hamas agents brutally subdued the demonstration, beating women and journalists who were only “attempting to make their voices heard.” One of the young people noted that the response of Hamas to the protests against its rule could have been

expected: “Anyone who expected Hamas to behave humanely towards the people is stupid. The history is clear but people are ashamed to read it.”⁵ Another young man from the Gaza tweeted, “The repression of April 29 is proof that Hamas considers us a people who are led by stick and sword. Any voice raised by the oppressed will be subdued and silenced.”⁶ Another Gazan tweeted wrote: “The crushing of April 29 proves that ‘the Gaza gang’ [Hamas] is incapable of accepting the Palestinian people and solving their problems.”⁷ Many of the above users criticized the behavior of Hamas and demanded an investigation.

In response to these developments, the Hamas internal security office used its Twitter account to declare that it had tried to provide optimal conditions for the demonstration, but once it became violent and endangered the public welfare it was necessary for the police to intervene. This explanation was received with disdain and disparagement on SNS. Many openly declared that the time has come to replace the Hamas government in the Gaza Strip, describing it as a dictatorial, military regime that tyrannically subjugates residents. One user sadly wrote, “How is it that only a few months ago we defended Hamas and considered it a force for resistance and the liberation of Palestine... Today we consider it a blind movement whose name we are unwilling to hear.”⁸ Another dared to state explicitly, “We want a revolution. We want to bring Hamas down. This is the truth.” Meanwhile another claimed that all residents of Gaza want to “pull down the corrupt idol from its ivory tower.”⁹

The follow-up discourse was dedicated to drawing conclusions from the failed demonstration; its ineffectuality can be attributed both to its low participant turnout and its dispersal before its scheduled end. Several users claimed that the location of the demonstration in Shuja’iyya caused its failure, because it is difficult to access from the south. It would have been better to demonstrate across from the legislature, where thousands of people would likely have gathered.¹⁰ The leaders of April 29 themselves noted on SNS¹¹ that they will continue to work on organizing additional demonstrations to enable people to speak and started the “Snowball” hashtag for this purpose.¹²

Studying the SNS discourse surrounding this demonstration shows the increasing dissatisfaction of many young people in the Gaza Strip with the leadership of Hamas, because of what they consider to be its unwillingness to create significant change in the Strip. From the perspective of young people who are not Hamas supporters, the party’s leadership is a group of self-serving parties concerned only with staying in office and protecting the interests of its allies. Moreover, the brutal response of its security forces to the protest only reinforced their impression that Hamas is a dictatorship that will not hesitate to use violence in order to silence critics, even if those voices are trying to express the distress of the Palestinian people, promote reconciliation, and not necessarily to change the current political structure.

Knockout in Gallipoli: Turkish Nationalism vs. Armenian Genocide

Hay Eytan Cohen Yanarocak

Appropriately for its time and place, most of the discourse on Turkish social networking sites (SNS) over the last month focused on events that occurred a century ago, in the Ottoman era. The main focal point of the ongoing, stormy debate was the “Armenian Genocide,” which is recognized as such by the Armenians themselves and by various countries, but very firmly and consistently denied by all governments of Turkey, past and present. Instead, they refer to that historical occurrence as “the events of 1915.” Although this subject unsurprisingly attracted the attention of Turkish SNS users, their primary interest was the centennial of the Ottoman Army’s victory over the allies in the Gallipoli campaign during the First World War. That did not happen by chance.

Many believed that Turkey’s formal expression of condolences for the Armenian lives lost during the First World War, published on April 23 of last year, would precede Turkey’s acceptance of the Armenian position. Turkey’s official stance on the subject for the 90 years prior was that the Armenians were simply exiled. However, despite last year’s softening, there has been no significant change in Ankara’s position. Although circles supporting the demand for recognizing the Armenian tragedy were cautiously optimistic last year, it was predictable that Turkey would not continue down that path; the only purpose of last year’s announcement was to contain the damage from the diplomatic tsunami expected on the centennial of the Armenian genocide.

Against this backdrop, Ankara chose to adopt a position that recognizes the Armenians’ deaths while placing responsibility for them on Armenian gangs, who the Turks claim purposely instigated conflict between the Ottomans and the Armenians by forming an alliance with Russia against the Ottoman Empire. In other words, Turkey is attempting to market the idea that the Armenian disaster was a tragedy affecting both sides and not genocide enacted by one people on another.

The warring narratives received wide coverage on Turkish SNS on April 24, 2015, the Memorial Day commemorating the Armenian Genocide. Numerous users called on the Turkish government to recognize the genocide, using slogans like “Turkey – recognize Armenian Genocide” and “I apologize to the Armenians.” Many shared pictures documenting the killing and exile of the Armenians.¹³ Many Turks were joined in this discourse by Turkish citizens of Kurdish origin, who also apologized to the Armenians, because of the many testimonies stating that Kurds cooperated with the Ottoman government in the events of 1915. The supportive messages from Kurdish users of SNS were augmented by the leader of the Kurdish HDP party Selahattin Demirtaş, who declared that his party recognizes the Armenian Genocide.¹⁴

As the SNS discourse about the Armenian tragedy spread by use of international hashtags,¹⁵ and the involvement of Turkish users increased. Users who identified with the Armenian tragedy changed their profile pictures to the forget-me-not flower (pictured) that has become a symbol of the Armenian tragedy.¹⁶ On the other side were users identified with the nationalist MHP party and, in a more moderate tone, activists from the ruling AKP party. The common denominator presented by this front (who are ordinarily found on opposing sides of the political spectrum), was denial of the Armenian narrative of the events and doubts about the very existence of the Armenian Holocaust. “Where all of those Armenians buried?” tweeted some.¹⁷ Others were not content to ask questions and declared, “The Armenian Genocide is an imperialist lie” promulgated by world powers who themselves have been guilty of genocide throughout history, and therefore must not preach morality to Turkey.¹⁸ Even more extreme were the users who circulated photographs of Ogün Samast, the assassin of leading Armenian journalist Hrant Dink, who did nothing more than express the Armenian position in the Armenian newspaper Agos, which is published in Turkey. The pictures were accompanied by a threat: “If you want a genocide, we will all become Ogün Samast, don’t worry.” These users did not hesitate to label those Turks who apologized to the Armenians as traitors.¹⁹



As expected, the strident discourse surrounding the Armenian Genocide was a thorn in the side of the Turkish government which, as noted, had anticipated international political echoes last year on the centennial. Therefore, they decided to spin the media and redirect attention to the Ottoman victory in the battle of Gallipoli.

In addition to national ceremonies commemorating the Turkish soldiers who fell, held every year on March 18, the government of Turkey decided this year to adopt April 25, ANZAC Day (when Australia and New Zealand remember their fallen from the Gallipoli campaign), as the primary national commemoration of the 100th anniversary of the legendary battle.



The manipulative use of ANZAC Day was particularly conspicuous because the ceremonies were scheduled for April 24, with the same day as the commemorations of the Armenian genocide. This forced the world to decide between two ceremonies, the Turkish one in Gallipoli and the Armenian one Yerevan, Armenia. In order to justify the one day deviation from ANZAC Day and forestall criticism, the ceremonies in Gallipoli lasted until midnight and beyond, ending on April 25, so it could be claimed they were indeed held on the appropriate day. The discourse surrounding the Armenian tragedy thus found itself in competition with a government-initiated display of nationalism. Many Turks did not remain apathetic to the memory of the victory at Gallipoli, which is considered a cornerstone of Turkish nationalism, and shared historic photographs of Ottoman soldiers and national flags

(see picture).²⁰ Those users who actually participated in the memorial ceremonies in Gallipoli and at the mausoleum of Atatürk, founder of the Republic, in Ankara also shared photographs of those events.

The Twitter war between the Armenian tragedy and the victory at Gallipoli represents the prevailing ambivalence in Turkish discourse surrounding the events of 1915. It includes criticism of the established historical narrative regarding the Armenian tragedy while adopting that narrative regarding the battle of Gallipoli. The prevailing patriotic spirit surrounding Gallipoli was able to dampen, to a large extent, the subversive influence of the Armenian Genocide. In other words, ANZAC Day served as a way to protect Turkish nationalism and legitimized the ceremonies in the international sphere, partially ameliorating Turkey's diplomatic isolation with regards to the Armenian genocide. The media's emphasis on the presence of Prince Charles and the prime ministers of Australia and New Zealand at the ceremonies is also evidence of the intentional timing of the victory celebrations. There is no doubt that the government's move was designed to spin the media to work against the recognition of the Armenian Genocide by the presidents of Russia and France, who attended the ceremony in Yerevan. With this brilliant decision the government demonstrated its strength and signaled to the world, and especially to Armenia, that it is not isolated.

SNS in the Struggle for Animal Rights in Iran

Dr. Raz Zimmt

The circulation of a video documenting the killing of stray dogs in the southern Iranian city of Shiraz stirred a public storm in recent weeks, and led to an unprecedented mobilization by activists for animal rights in the Islamic Republic. The video shows dogs being killed by lethal injection while the corpses of many other dead dogs lie by the side of the road.²¹ Animal rights activists claim that contractors employed by the industrial park in Shiraz used acid to kill the dogs and were paid per dog killed. Following complaints by many citizens, a senior municipal official in Shiraz announced that the city would launch an investigation of the events.²²



Thousands of social network (SNS) users responded angrily to the events in Shiraz, and expressed shock at the distressing video. They demanded that those responsible for killing the dogs be punished and even wished for their deaths, claiming that their actions were not only inhumane but also un-Islamic. They created a hashtag “dog killing” that was used, *inter alia*, for reports on protests organized following the events. Animal rights activists also launched a Facebook page “We demand punishment of those responsible for killing dogs in Shiraz,” that accumulated several thousand likes.²³ The protests that began on SNS quickly spread to the streets, and members of animal welfare organizations held several demonstrations in major cities across Iran to protest the killing of the dogs. Several hundred activists gathered in Shiraz to demand that the people responsible be identified and brought to trial. They stressed that if stray dogs must be killed, it should be done under veterinary supervision, and in a manner that does not cause pain. They also called for establishing a shelter for stray dogs.²⁴



In light of the strident public response, Iranian authorities also entered the fray. The Director General of the Ministry of Environment in Fars province said that the video had been handed over to the judiciary, and a formal complaint has been filed on the matter.²⁵ The Vice President and head of an environmental organization, Masoumeh Ebtekar, joined a protest in Tehran. She thanked the demonstrators and declared that animal abuse is unacceptable under any circumstance. She noted that Iranian legislation concerning animal abuse is inadequate and promised to address the issue personally.²⁶ The discourse surrounding the abuse of stray dogs also reached news sites, which condemned the killing of the dogs and stressed that Islam rejects abuse of animals and requires human beings to treat all creatures as they deserve. An article published on the website Farda drew from Islamic law, stating that even animals have feelings and that humans must ensure their

needs and rights, and avoid causing them unnecessary suffering and cruelty.²⁷ Alongside condemnations of the incident in Shiraz, some media outlets expressed reservations about the reactions of some animal welfare activists, describing them as exaggerated. For example, the site Tabnak referred dismissively to the protesters who used slogans such as: “I am also dog” and “Don’t kill me,” claiming that people should not be compared to dogs. The site also criticized the authorities who joined the protest instead of formulating ways to prevent recurrences of similar incidents in the future, and wondered why no similar protest arose following other serious incidents of damage to the environment, such as air pollution or destruction of the Khuzestan forests and swamps.²⁸

The outrage that erupted following the killing of dogs in Shiraz reflects a recent change in how Iranian society relates to animals. This change is evident in the recent attitudes towards raising pets. Owning dogs, which is forbidden by Shi’ite law because they are unclean (“*najis*”), was long considered an expression of harmful Western influence. Since the Islamic Revolution, it is been considered problematic by the authorities. In 2010, a high-ranking conservative cleric, Ayatollah Naser Makarem Shirazi, issued a ruling (“*fatwa*”) forbidding the keeping of dogs as pets. In response to a query asked in the context of increasing pet ownership in large cities, he ruled that Islam considers dogs unclean and called raising them a “blind imitation” of the West, where some people “love their dogs more than their wives and children.”²⁹ In light of the growing number of dog owners, internal security forces have also intensified their enforcement of laws against dogs and their ownership. In 2014, some conservative members of the Majlis proposed imprisonment, fines, and 74 lashes as punishment for walking a dog on a public street.³⁰

Simultaneously, there has been increasing public awareness of animal rights, and activists have initiated several actions using SNS. In 2009, several Iranian bloggers joined the struggle against animal abuse. It began at the initiative of blogger Mino Zabari, who demanded that the head of the broadcast authority at the time, Ezzatollah Zarghami, stop broadcasting television programs that include cruelty to animals, and instead produce programs that educate the public by showing kindness to animals and nature.³¹ Another blogger protested the killing of stray dogs in Tehran and shared his personal experience – the authorities shot and killed a dog and six puppies he was caring for. He wondered how it might be possible to find a more efficient solution to the problem of stray dogs, possibly by establishing shelters for them, which would also provide several thousand new jobs. Alternately, it would be possible to limit breeding rather than shedding blood.³²

In the last year, Facebook has become the principal PR tool used by animal welfare activists. In March 2015, a video showing a dog being abused to death by being dragged behind a moving car was shared on the web and received angry responses from users. Animal welfare activists identified the owner of the car in the video, and filed a complaint against him with the authorities.³³ Animal rights activists also launched a Facebook page dedicated to the struggle against animal abuse, including the killing of stray dogs, keeping animals in

inappropriate conditions, and hunting wild animals.³⁴ The struggle for animal rights has joined other civil society campaigns being conducted on SNS, including those for environmental issues that Beehive has covered in the past.³⁵ Increased use of SNS to promote a wide variety of civil goals reflects a growing awareness and willingness of Iranian citizens to join these campaigns, which transcend the virtual and move into the streets.

¹ For the complete, Arabic text of the petition, see:

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1tV_bfHWF2qENmsEIQayN49k4WAWTtuv7SVGU2uHCEmU/viewform

² #نارلين_29

³ <https://www.facebook.com/QudsN/posts/908248039252098>

⁴ #يوم_الشعب

⁵ <https://twitter.com/KareemQaddura/status/593352495755239424>

⁶ https://twitter.com/Hussein_Gaza/status/593353008441856000

⁷ <https://twitter.com/KareemQaddura/status/593352495755239424> ,
<https://www.facebook.com/29palestineday/posts/1584970968428577>

⁸ <https://twitter.com/AlaadinAsqouli/status/593441655526596608>, 29.4.15

⁹ <https://twitter.com/AlaadinAsqouli/status/593441655526596608>, 29.4.15

¹⁰ <https://www.facebook.com/29palestineday/posts/1584970968428577>

¹¹ #الحراك_مستمر, <https://www.facebook.com/QudsN/posts/908248039252098>,

https://www.facebook.com/hashtag/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%83_%D9%85%D8%B3%D8%AA%D9%85%D8%B1

¹² #بكرة_التلج

¹³ #ErmeniSoykiriminiTaniTurkiye #ErmenilerdenözürDiliyorum #sayfo1915

¹⁴ “Demirtaş Ermeni Soykırımı var dedi”, En Son Haber January 19, 2015,

<http://www.ensonhaber.com/demirtas-ermeni-soykirimi-var-dedi-2015-01-19.html> [Accessed: May 13, 2015]

¹⁵ #ArmenianGenocide #ErmeniSoykırımı

¹⁶ #unutmabeniciçeği

¹⁷ #OkadarErmeniyiNereyeGömdük

¹⁸ #ErmeniSoykırımıEmperyalistBirYalandır

¹⁹ ermeni soykırımı samast

²⁰ #Gallipoli2015 #Canakkale2015 #Anzac100 #şehitler #Gallipoli100 #Canakkale100YıllıkDestan

²¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vg7OIZqF6As>

²² <http://goo.gl/bwLMn3>.

²³ <http://goo.gl/H6YRiy>

²⁴ <http://goo.gl/ys1p0q>

²⁵ <http://goo.gl/vLOH8j>.

²⁶ <http://goo.gl/pCjXuu>.

²⁷ <http://goo.gl/rdd0Nf>.

²⁸ <http://goo.gl/fLxShf>.

²⁹ <http://goo.gl/2ue63L>.

³⁰ <http://goo.gl/h8IIYA>

³¹ <http://goo.gl/CaKlg8>.

³² <http://goo.gl/wgkKWC>.

³³ <http://goo.gl/oJbl3w>.

³⁴ <http://goo.gl/UZ7cg7> , <http://goo.gl/isL4Vd> , <http://goo.gl/YpyHxE>

³⁵ <http://goo.gl/sJrOzi>.