



THE MOSHE DAYAN CENTER FOR MIDDLE EASTERN AND AFRICAN STUDIES

ALLIANCE CENTER FOR IRANIAN STUDIES



BeeHive

Middle East Social Media

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Volume 6, Issue 10, November 2018

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From the Editors

The Doron Halpern Middle East Network Analysis Desk is happy to present the November 2018 issue of Beehive. The issue begins with a review of the public discourse on Iranian social networks concerning the second round of sanctions led by the United States against the Islamic Republic. This discourse emphasizes the Iranian public's growing fear of worsening socioeconomic conditions and reservations about the American 'punishment policy.' We continue with a look at the ambivalence that the Kingdom of Morocco shows towards the principle of freedom of expression. While it supports it believing that such will grant it a potential foothold in the European Economic Community, the principle nevertheless diverges from the country's traditional conduct. This clash of values is reflected in the authorities' behavior vis-à-vis the socioeconomic protest movements that are currently very active on social networks in Morocco.

Enjoy!

Iranian Social Media Reacts to the Renewal of Sanctions

Dr. Raz Zimmt

Renewal of the sanctions on Iran in early November was the focal point of public discourse on Iranian social media. Although most of the responses reflected widespread disagreement with the policy that the US government has adopted towards Iran, it was also evident that the public is both concerned about the impact of the sanctions and skeptical of their effectiveness. The Iranian discourse likewise reflects opposing positions regarding the justification for sanctions, and the identity of the party ultimately responsible - the Iranian regime as a whole, led by the Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, the government of Iran under the leadership of President Rouhani, or the US government.

Following the withdrawal of the United States from the P5+1 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action nuclear agreement last May, in August the American government imposed a first round of sanctions. These included prohibitions on selling dollars, gold, precious metals, civilian aircraft and automobiles to the Islamic Republic. In early November, the US administration announced the imposition of another round of sanctions, focused on petroleum exports and the Iranian banking system. Eight countries (China, India, South Korea, Japan, Taiwan, Turkey, Italy and Greece) were granted six-month waivers from the sanctions against importing Iranian petroleum, but were asked to reduce the amount they import. The administration's announcement made it clear that the sanctions did not apply to humanitarian goods including food, agricultural inputs, medicine and medical equipment.¹ Senior government officials in Tehran attempted to minimize the importance of the sanctions, and claimed that their influence on Iran, which has experience in dealing with severe sanctions, would be limited.²

Responses on social media to the return of the sanctions were mixed. On one hand, many users expressed concern about the intensification of the economic and social distress that Iranian citizens suffer, and cast doubt on the ability of the Iranian government to deal with the renewed sanctions, even mocking the senior officials who declared that sanctions would not have any impact (see pictures). On the other hand, others minimized their importance and noted



**Picture 1: "The sanctions have no effect on citizens.
For the attention of merciful senior officials."
[From Twitter.](#)**

the limited ability of the American government to enforce strict sanctions without complete international cooperation. Using the hashtag, #USisIsolated, some users claimed that the US

government's decision to excuse eight countries from the sanctions on importing Iranian petroleum, and also exempt shipments to Afghanistan from the port of Chabahar in southern Iran is evidence of the enforcement difficulties that President Trump faces.

Similar to the reactions when sanctions were imposed on Iran in the past, the reaction to the current round reflected widespread public opposition to the use of economic sanctions as a means for achieving political goals, and more broadly to the imposition of Western dictates on Iran. Many users emphasize that – contrary to claims by the American government that the sanctions were intended primarily to harm the Iranian regime – their severe effects are felt mostly by ordinary citizens who have significantly less ability to deal with them than do senior government officials and their associates. Users were particularly angered at the claim that, because the sanctions do not include humanitarian goods, they do not harm ordinary citizens.

Responses accusing the American government of doing intentional harm to Iranian citizens were disseminated with the hashtags “Sanctions Target Me” and “Sanctions on Medicine” (تحریم_دارو). For example, one user tweeted: “I feel the cost of living, I face difficulties in my daily life, medication is limited. The American sanctions are directed against me.”³ Another user noted cynically that if there had been Twitter during the Second World War, the US State Department would have tweeted that dropping the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki was not directed against the citizens of Japan.⁴ Conversely, there are users who justify the claim of the American government that the sanctions do not include medicines and food, and accuse the Iranian regime of responsibility for the shortage of these products as the result of an intentional policy designed to marshal public support by using false propaganda.⁵

Users were divided among themselves as to the party responsible for the situation created by the return of sanctions. Many users place responsibility for their trying circumstances on the American government, particularly President Trump. They pointed to the historical animosity of the United States towards Iran, and mentioned the dozens of sanctions that



Picture 2: From a post uploaded to [Instagram](#).

have been imposed on Iran since the Islamic Revolution, by both Democratic and Republican administrations.⁶ Users identified as supporters of the regime launched a campaign that attacked the United States and Israel, which supports the sanctions policy of President Trump, using the hashtags, “Death to the US” and “Death to Israel.” According to one user, the US government has embarked on psychological warfare against Iran, and if the Iranians can win that struggle, they will be able to overcome the sanctions.⁷

Conversely, some users pointed an accusing finger at the Iranian government that, from their perspective, has not done enough in response to citizens’ distress. Among users identified with opponents of the regime, some of whom live abroad, there were voices calling to use the sanctions as a means for intensifying the struggle against the regime, in order to cause its collapse. One user called for Iranians to break out of their apathy lest they suffer the same fate as citizens in North Korea, Iraq and Venezuela who faced many years of economic distress and sanctions without taking action to bring down the regime that causes them great misery.⁸

It is evident that users’ responses to the renewal of sanctions largely reflect their political positions. Thus, for example, users identified supporters of President Rouhani and the pragmatist movement criticized the decision of the conservative Guardian Council to oppose the decision by the Iranian parliament (*Majlis*) regarding money laundering and financing terrorism. The proposed legislation was intended to meet the international demand that Iran comply with compulsory regulations in these matters and was passed shortly before the second round of sanctions were imposed. Conversely, opponents of the president repeatedly accused him of adopting a conciliatory policy that led to the nuclear agreement, in which Iran agreed to painful concessions without receiving anything in return. Some expressed total opposition to any possibility of acquiescing to American demands. One warned that surrendering to US demands would leave Iran helpless in the face of other leaders in the future, and encourage foreign intervention in its domestic affairs. He noted that, as an Iranian student studying in Europe, he suffered from the collapse of the Iranian currency, and was very well aware of the sanctions’ impact. Despite this, he opposes capitulation because a person who loses his honor can no longer be considered a true person.⁹

The return of sanctions re-ignited public discourse in Iran regarding foreign pressure on the country, its impact, and the identity of those responsible for the resultant decline in the domestic situation. This discourse, which is influenced by the political divide in the public, expresses disagreement with policies that are perceived as collective punishment and damage to national pride on one hand but also, on the other hand, concern about the high price inherent in the continued sanctions. It is too early to judge whether the Iranian regime will utilize the sanctions to recruit broad public support to oppose the West, as it did very

successfully in the past, or whether these sanctions will increase the feeling of despair among the public and feed the wave of protests that Iran has experienced in the last year.

The Role of Social Networks in Shaping the Identity of Economic Boycott Movements in Morocco

Sarah Hassnaoui

Freedom of expression is an especially important issue in Morocco because of the kingdom's desire to take steps that will move it closer to Europe, leading to improved economic cooperation with the continent, and possibly future incorporation into the European Economic Community. This policy began during the reign of the previous monarch, King Hassan II and now continues under his son, King Mohammed VI. For good reason, free speech is one of the central ideas in the new constitution adopted in 2011 as a response to the Arab Spring, out of a desire to stop its vicissitudes at the gate of the kingdom. Socioeconomic protest movements currently operating on social networks in Morocco skillfully take advantage of the freedom of expression allowed on these platforms to promote their interests, but they must simultaneously deal with the limitations imposed by the government, thus highlighting the gap between policy and reality.

The chief discourse on social networks in Morocco currently deals with three visible protest movements focused on socioeconomic issues. The first and most prominent is the Hirak Movement, led by the Amazigh people (Arabic for "people of freedom"), an ethnic group of 15-20 million people in the Middle East and North Africa, who are also known as "Berbers." The Amazigh community in northern Morocco numbers between 15,000 and 20,000 people, and is considered the largest and most important of the Amazigh groups, *inter alia*, because of its historical opposition to King Hassan II. The roots of this opposition reach back to the Rif War in the 1920s, when Spain fought against Berber separatist forces who were struggling for independence in North Morocco. The Rif War marked the Amazigh population in the northern part of the country as a combative opposition, and dictated the attitude of the Moroccan monarchy towards them ever after. North Morocco suffers from ongoing neglect, and the Rif region lacks infrastructure. Solutions to these problems are central demands of the Hirak movement.

The perceived feeling of marginalization and alienation on the part of Rif region residents is made evident, for example, by the response of one member of the Amazigh community to a post claiming that residents of the region do not consider themselves Moroccans: "The Rif was flooded with blood, marginalized, pursued, and pushed aside by King Hassan II. People who demonstrated for their rights were beaten and sent to jail; it is no wonder that they feel different."¹⁰ Comments like these show that the online space plays an important role in developing the Amazigh identity that the Hirak movement strives to inculcate, among other goals. The movement uses many Twitter accounts, of which some are apparently fictitious accounts supposedly created in the name of private individuals. Hirak uses these accounts to disseminate information and pictures regarding the movement's activists who have been

jailed because of their opposition to the regime, and denounce the authorities for allegedly abusing them.

The online comportment of the other two movements promoting discourse on socioeconomic protest in Morocco is more moderate; they use social network to distribute and share information about the socioeconomic situation in the kingdom, but are careful not to attack the king directly. One of these movements lacks an official name but some users call it the “Boycott Movement in Morocco.” It was launched on Facebook as a protest against the high cost of living and the country’s large socioeconomic gaps. This movement focuses on boycotting three leading, expensive brands of food, which have become symbols of the economic gaps in Morocco: Sidi Ali mineral water, Afriquia oil, and Danone yogurt. The campaign against Danone alone was retweeted 37,000 times in four months,¹¹ and some supporters use the brand’s name to identify with the movement they call “Boycott Danone.” Recently commentators have broached the possibility that it is actually a political movement organized for the purpose of attacking local politicians, although they did not bring any evidence to support this claim.¹² The third movement, Hrig, emerged against the background of frustration with the economic situation in the kingdom. It promotes a campaign that encourages people to emigrate from Morocco to Spain, which for the Moroccan public represents Europe in general. Encouraging emigration is perceived as an alternate way to express criticism of the authorities.

These three protest movements represent the same goals, which include striving for change and reform in the political and economic realms, while criticizing the economic weakness and significant social gaps between the upper and lower classes in Morocco. The ability of these movements to present their messages is evident in the fact that these issues are currently at the heart of public discourse online. A supporter of the Hirak movement who tweets as “Karima Experience” wrote cynically: “So modest are the clothes of the so-called ‘King of the Poor’! All members of @RoiMohammedVI enjoy this extremely expensive and lavish lifestyle at the expense of taxpayer... That’s why the Moroccan people are suffering from poverty!”¹³ This comment was accompanied by a picture of the King of Morocco and another of a teenager sleeping in the streets (see picture). Another response, written in French, read: “Moroccans boycott products exported by wealthy Morocco,”¹⁴ as a way to concretize the class differences in the kingdom.



Picture 3: "Clothing of 'the King of the Poor!'" Showing a picture of the King of Morocco accompanied by one of a teenager sleeping in the street, [from Twitter](#).

International human rights organizations also support these three protest movements, as do Moroccans living abroad. The latter commonly use hashtags like “#boycott” to disseminate information regarding gatherings and events outside of Morocco on social networks, as well as publishing ‘selfies’ that express their solidarity with the struggle.¹⁵ The broad engagement of the Moroccan diaspora in Europe and Canada can be explained by the close connection that the expatriates maintain with their country, particularly since they and their children are still considered Moroccan citizens.

The Moroccan authorities have taken several steps to increase their supervision and control of network spaces,¹⁶ including the economic boycott movement. One example is the conviction of journalist Hamid El Mahdaoui in late June for “not denying an attempt to harm the security of the state.” Mahdaoui was charged after a telephone conversation about the Hirak movement with a Moroccan living in Holland. In that conversation the expatriate declared his interest in hiding weapons in his car and smuggling them into Morocco. The journalist was convicted and sentenced to three years in jail. This incident demonstrates the Moroccan authorities’ desire to prove that their control can reach beyond the country’s borders,¹⁷ and to limit the activity of Moroccan citizens who criticize the government.¹⁸ These steps also represent defiance directed at Holland in particular because it has accused the Moroccan authorities of violating human rights in the Rif region, and has refused to cooperate with Morocco on issues related to Moroccans with dual citizenship living there. The trial was part of a larger framework of investigative and legal activities that the government is taking in order to limit the online activity of Hirak.¹⁹

In a country where citizens have avoided openly discussing sensitive subjects since the reign of King Hassan II, online spaces are useful forums for discussing public issues in a way that exposes the public to the political and socioeconomic weaknesses of Morocco, and to criticism of the regime. Many Moroccan users at home and abroad have been recruited for the socioeconomic protest movement. Although the struggle against luxury food brands has borne fruit,²⁰ it is too early to judge the success of the Hirak and Hrik movements. For their

part, the Moroccan authorities are monitoring and supervising online activities, as well as enacting laws intended to halt Internet trends such as the economic boycott movement.

¹ @SecPompeo, Twitter.com, 12 November 2018.

<https://twitter.com/SecPompeo/status/1059482041585156096>. Last accessed 15 November 2018.

² "Rouhani says new U.S. sanctions have no effect on Iran economy," *Reuters*, 10 November 2018.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-iran-usa-sanctions-rouhani/rouhani-says-new-u-s-sanctions-have-no-effect-on-iran-economy-idUSKCN1NFOA9>

³ @mSalarAhmadi, Twitter.com, 8 November 2018.

<https://twitter.com/mSalarAhmadi/status/1060511865254694918>. Last accessed 15 November 2018.

⁴ @Zekipedia, Twitter.com, 5 November 2018.

<https://twitter.com/zekipedia/status/1059541163873579008>. Last accessed 15 November 2018.

⁵ @IranSecularism, Twitter.com, 7 November 2018.

<https://twitter.com/IranSecularism/status/1060049378625363968>. Last accessed 15 November 2018.

⁶ @MiladMsd, Twitter.com, 7 November 2018. <https://twitter.com/MiladMsd/status/1060167132531617792>.

Last accessed 15 November 2018.

⁷ @safdarzade, Twitter.com, 4 November 2018.

<https://twitter.com/safdarzade/status/1059103720741527555>. Last accessed 15 November 2018.

⁸ @Jamesharabb, Twitter.com, 5 November 2018.

<https://twitter.com/jamesharabb/status/1059491368106713088>. Last accessed 15 November 2018.

⁹ @SarrafSaeed, Twitter.com, 5 November 2018.

<https://twitter.com/SarrafSaeed/status/1059566707931602946>. Last accessed 15 November 2018.

¹⁰ @un_rifain, Twitter.com. 21 October 2018. Last accessed 24 November 2018.

¹¹ Soufiane Chahid, "A French study tries to find out the origins of the Boycott," *TelQuel*, 7 October 2018.

Available at https://telquel.ma/2018/10/07/une-etude-francaise-tente-de-percer-les-origines-du-boycott_1612987. Last accessed 8 October 2018.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ KarimaExperien1, Twitter.com, 10 August 2018. Available

at <https://twitter.com/KarimaExperien1/status/1028166003732168704>. Last accessed 28 November 2018.

¹⁴ @rahjosk, Twitter.com, 25 July 2018. Available

at <https://twitter.com/rahjosk/status/1022078244894519297>. Last accessed 28 November 2018.

¹⁵ See, for example: @SolidarityHirak, Facebook.com. Available at

https://www.facebook.com/pg/SolidarityHirak/photos/?ref=page_internal. Last accessed 28 November 2018.

¹⁶ Rica Ancari, "The Interior ministry wants to end the diffusion of videos showing the crossing in patera" *TelQuel*, 19 September 2018. Available at https://telquel.ma/2018/09/19/linterieur-veut-mettre-fin-a-la-diffusion-de-videos-montrant-des-traversees-en-pateras_1611146. Last accessed 12 October 2018.

¹⁷ The Redaction, "The Journalist Hamid El Mahdaoui condemned to three years of prison" *TelQuel*, 29 June 2018. Available at https://telquel.ma/2018/06/29/le-journaliste-hamid-el-mahdaoui-condamne-a-trois-ans-de-prison_1601017. Last accessed 24 August 2018.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ See Rica Ancari, "The Interior ministry wants to end the diffusion of videos showing the crossing in patera".

Rida Ancari, « L'Intérieur veut mettre fin à la diffusion de vidéos montrant des traversées en pateras », *Telquel*, 19.09.2018, https://telquel.ma/2018/09/19/linterieur-veut-mettre-fin-a-la-diffusion-de-videos-montrant-des-traversees-en-pateras_1611146. Last accessed 8 October 2018.

²⁰ See Soufiane Chahid, "A French study tries to find out the origins of the Boycott," *TelQuel*, 7 October 2018.

Available at https://telquel.ma/2018/10/07/une-etude-francaise-tente-de-percer-les-origines-du-boycott_1612987. Last accessed 8 October 2018.