



מרכז אליאנס ללימודים איראניים

מרכז משה דיין ללימודי המזרח התיכון ואפריקה



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From the Editors

The Doron Halpern Middle East Network Analysis Desk is happy to present the March issue of **Beehive**. In this issue, we reveal the nationalistic discourse surrounding the recent diplomatic incident between Turkey and Holland, and the extent to which it contributed to increased support for Erdoğan, shortly before the decisive referendum on changing the system of governance. In the spirit of International Women's Day, we also review the campaign on SNS to revoke the compulsory hijab in Iran, which has been in force since the Islamic Revolution, and examine how Egyptian women are using SNS in their struggle to improve their status in Egypt in ways that also influence the world beyond the internet.

Jesse Kaminski served as Assistant Editor for this issue.

Enjoy!

Turkey vs. Holland: Turkish Foreign Policy at the Service of Domestic Policy

Hay Eytan Cohen Yanarocak

On March 11, Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte issued orders to refuse to permit the landing of a plane carrying the Turkish foreign minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu to the Netherlands, and to block the path of Turkish Minister of Family and Social Policies Fatma Kaya in front of the Turkish embassy in Rotterdam. She was later deported. While the Turkish ministers sought to hold mass rallies in the Netherlands and other European countries to recruit support among the Turkish diaspora for changes in Turkey's system of government, Rutte feared that these gatherings could strengthen support for the radical right in the Netherlands just a few days before the elections for prime minister. What began as a diplomatic crisis between Turkey and the Netherlands, stemming from the conflicting interests of each country, continued as a means of gaining domestic support, with social networking sites (SNS) becoming a key tool for mobilizing the masses to the struggle.

On April 16, a referendum will be held in Turkey on potential reforms to the governing structure. The Yes Camp that advocates changing the system seeks to increase the power of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in an unprecedented way by entrusting him with the powers of the prime minister. On the other hand, the opposition No Camp is working to keep the parliamentary system intact. Whatever the decision, as long as Erdoğan continues to serve as Ankara's undisputed leader, the position of prime minister will likely continue to serve as a rubber stamp for his decisions. However, this does nothing to diminish Erdoğan's efforts in the aggressive campaign to ensure change in the system of government.

In addition to campaigning throughout Turkey, the Turkish president is working to strengthen his image among the country's citizens living beyond its borders. A law allowing Turkish citizens living abroad to vote in elections, but not in referenda, was passed in 2002. However, when Erdoğan saw the high percentage of support he received among the overseas electorate, 50% and 56% in his favor in the June and November 2016 elections¹ respectively, he signed an additional presidential decree in January 2017 permitting Turkish citizens abroad to vote in referenda as well.² In light of this decision, the Turkish Foreign Minister and the Minister of Family and Social Policies embarked on a campaign of persuasion in Europe, aimed at securing the support of Turks living there in the April referendum on proposed governmental reforms. Unsurprisingly, they chose to focus on Germany and the Netherlands, where there is a high concentration of eligible Turkish citizens totaling more than 1.5 million voters. However, Erdoğan's ambitions conflicted with the political interests of the current German and Dutch governments who are not interested in emphasizing the presence of foreigners in their countries for fear of strengthening the power of the right-wing parties. Therefore, they acted to prevent the Turkish ministers from

implementing their plan. Other European countries, including Austria, Denmark, and Belgium joined them.

Turkish users of SNS did not remain indifferent to events. Immediately after the news of the diplomatic incident was published, many called for people to go out and demonstrate in Rotterdam and at the Dutch embassy and consulates in Turkey. In the wake of these calls, hundreds of Turks gathered in the central square of Rotterdam with Turkish flags and protested against the decision of the Dutch government. The extreme right-wing leader Geert Wilders reacted harshly to the demonstrators, whom he called, “traitors who once again proved that they are not Dutch.” Meanwhile, Turkish crowds surrounded the Dutch embassy in Ankara, and blocked the main entrance gate of the Dutch consulate in Istanbul despite the strong police presence there.³ A Turkish demonstrator managed to reach the roof of the consulate and replace the flag of the Netherlands with the Turkish flag, declaring “*Allahu Akbar*” while doing so. The image of the protester on the roof of the consulate was shared tens of thousands of times, and became a symbol of Turkey’s victory over the Netherlands in the current campaign.



The picture on the left shows the Dutch flag that was later replaced by a Turkish flag, as seen in the picture on the right. Picture from Twitter.

Tension between the Netherlands and Turkey escalated following Erdoğan’s statement calling the Dutch prime minister a “fascist” and claiming that Europe was degenerating into Nazi Germany. The tension increased when Erdoğan further claimed that the West, as a whole, was working to revive the conflict between the “cross and the crescent.”⁴ These words intensified the heated discourse against Europe and the West, and the perception of Islamophobia. Strong criticism was also voiced by Turkish Prime Minister Binali Yıldırım, who presented the conduct of the Dutch and German leaders as an expression of their official opposition to the change of government in Turkey. According to Yıldırım, the Turkish people should prevent European interference in Turkey’s internal affairs. Unexpectedly, Turkey’s opposition leader, chairman of the secular Republican People’s Party (CHP) Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, supported the intensification of the measures against Europe, apparently in order to be seen as taking a clear stance on a foreign policy issue.

It was not for nothing that the leader of the opposition took this path. As in previous cases, Erdoğan once again proved that crisis with a non-Muslim foreign country strengthens his support among the Turkish people, a phenomenon well-known from the previous election campaign, during which Erdoğan had quarreled with Israel. In recent public opinion polls, the results were evident in a two percent increase in support for Erdoğan, as well as in the wide-ranging discourse in the Turkish SNS, in which the public expressed solidarity with the

government, with the publication of tweets such as “‘Yes,’ Europe is trembling”, “Fascist Holland”, and “The Nazi dogs can’t stand in front of us.”⁵ The SNS discourse included uploading photographs of young Turks stabbing oranges. The imagery behind the oranges is derived from the Dutch Royal House of Orange, and is more widely known from the jerseys that the national soccer team wears in international competitions.



Special Service for Demonstrators!
This is Russia. Look, this is France.
Paraguay. Don't Touch.
This is Holland!

As the storm subsided, secular-minded users began criticizing the behavior of supporters of Erdoğan's Justice and Development Party (AKP), presenting them as ignorant and as “sheep” incapable of independent thinking. A satirical video, distributed on WhatsApp and other networks, presented a “guide” for distinguishing between the Dutch flag and those of Russia, France, and Paraguay, to prevent the “sheep” from making mistakes and burning the wrong flag.

The diplomatic crisis between Turkey and the Netherlands, and European countries generally, illustrates how Turkey's foreign policy serves as a political lever for domestic policy, engendering increased support for Erdoğan. Turkey's foreign policy is influenced by multiple parameters related to the EU, including the delayed condemnation of the failed coup attempt there, the lack of real progress in the process of Turkey's accession to the EU, and the results of the UK referendum on departure from the EU. This is compounded by growing anti-Western discourse among the Turkish public. All of these contribute significantly to the hardening of Erdoğan's positions vis-à-vis the Europeans, which could pave the way for Turkey's withdrawal from the accession process and move it out of Europe's sphere of influence, an idea that Erdoğan has discussed in public. SNS played a key role in mobilizing the support of the Turkish masses for the struggle in Turkey and the Netherlands, encouraging them to take to the streets and protest on behalf of their homeland. However, even this mass support could not obfuscate the rivalry between Erdoğan's supporters who saw the dispute as an expression of Islamophobia and the secular camp that saw it as an unnecessary, blind following of the president.

Iranian SNS Users Protest Forced Hijab to Mark International Women’s Day

Dr. Raz Zimmt

International Women’s Day, which took place on March 8, provided Iranian human rights activists with an opportunity to renew their struggle towards repealing the law imposing the hijab on women in public places in Iran since the Islamic Revolution. The campaign was conducted mainly on social networking sites (SNS), similar to other civil struggles for women’s rights in Iran. In recent years, SNS have played a central role in raising public awareness of the discrimination against women in the Islamic Republic, and as a means of exerting pressure on the authorities, who find it difficult to remain indifferent to the ongoing processes of social and cultural change occurring in Iranian society.

As part of the campaign to increase awareness of the coercive nature of the law and concomitant harm to the rights of women in Iran, Iranian users articulated their opposition to the requirement, and presented it as a manifestation of how the Islamic regime oppresses women. They claimed that the right to choose what to wear is a basic human right, one that is currently denied to half of the Iranian population. One comment read, “As long as the hijab is forced, Iran is one big prison.”⁶ Others stressed that the imposition of the veil harms not only women, but Iranian society as a whole, by portraying men as weak creatures who are unable to look at women’s hair without it arousing their urges.⁷

The virtual campaign peaked on March 8, when thousands of Iranian users flooded Twitter with tweets using the hashtag “No Forced Hijab” in English and Persian. Reactions included the sharing of photographs and videos documenting the activities of the Iranian law enforcement forces responsible for implementing the Islamic dress code. The campaign also included images from the struggle of women against the policy of mandatory hijab initially declared by the leader of the Islamic Revolution, Ayatollah Khomeini, in March 1979 following his ascension to power.



Logo of the No Forced Hijab Campaign

Along with the many expressions of support the campaign received, there was a discussion about focusing on the hijab as the main issue of International Women’s Day. Some users stressed that Iranian women suffer from discrimination and oppression in many other areas, and therefore it is wrong to focus on the struggle against the imposition of the hijab. One user referred, for example, to discrimination against women in the areas of divorce, custody of children, and the right to travel abroad without her husband’s permission. Another ⁸

pointed out that restricting the struggle for women’s rights to the issue of hijab oppresses women who are denied many other substantive rights.⁹ The reactions reflect a debate that has occupied Iranian human rights activists in recent years, revolving around whether it is right to focus the struggle to promote women’s rights in Iran on the hijab, or whether it is preferable to focus on other issues, especially changing the laws that discriminate against women in the Islamic Republic.



Pictures documenting the internal security services enforcing hijab in public places. Picture from Twitter.

Although most of the responses expressed strong opposition to forced hijab, there were other voices of religious-minded users who were in favor of the law. One of the users, who identifies on Twitter as a cleric living in the Shiite religious center of Qom, claimed that the enforcement of the veil is not an imposition of an opinion, but law enforcement similar to other laws practiced worldwide, comparing it to the law that forbids eating in public during the month of Ramadan. Although these are ¹⁰ only a few voices, they seem to indicate that Iranian users who hold conservative worldviews are joining discourse on SNS and recognize the networks’ potential to spread their worldview and mobilize public support. This is a marked change from previous years, when the Iranian networks, especially Facebook and Twitter, which are blocked by the authorities, were dominated by users with reformist and liberal views.

The struggle against the imposition of the hijab is part of a comprehensive campaign in recent years in Iran to change legislation that discriminates against women in various fields, including legal status, rights in marriage and divorce, and integration into public and political positions. This campaign reflects the social and demographic changes taking place in Iran, and affects the public struggle to eliminate discrimination against women in the Islamic Republic. Thus, for example, in September 2015 there were widespread protests on SNS after the captain of the Iranian women’s football team, Niloufar Ardalan, was legally prevented from travelling abroad to participate in the Asian championship because of her husband’s opposition. In response, Iranian human rights activists launched an online PR campaign calling for changes to legislation that discriminates against married women when they travel abroad. SNS also played a central role in the struggle to increase the representation of women in the Iranian Majlis, in which there were only nine women (out of 290 representatives) prior to the parliamentary elections in February 2016. The struggle ¹¹ ended with a limited but noteworthy achievement: the number female representatives in the Majlis increased to seventeen.

The impetus for the struggle against the enforcement of the Islamic dress code for women is widely considered to be the initiative of an exiled Iranian journalist in London, Masih Alinejad. In May 2014, she launched a Facebook page called, “The Stealthy Freedom of Women in Iran,” where she called on Iranian women to document themselves without a hijab and share their pictures on Facebook. In less than two months, the Facebook page accumulated close to 500,000 “likes,” and thousands of Iranian women uploaded photographs of themselves in public places with their heads uncovered.¹²

The opposition of the religious establishment has so far prevented a significant improvement in the legal status of Iranian women. However, support for women’s struggle, both in cyberspace and beyond, has not escaped the attention of senior officials in the government and religious establishment. President Rouhani’s support for reducing the enforcement of the Islamic dress code attests to the authorities’ recognition of the growing gap in social and cultural issues between the religious establishment and the public. Even if this recognition is not immediately translated into legislative changes, the discourse on SNS increases the authorities’ awareness of the social and cultural shifts taking place in Iranian society, especially among young people, which obligate them to reevaluate their policy towards women. As a result, SNS have become a window through which the processes of social change taking place in Iran are filtered, and form a lever pushing the authorities to adjust their policies accordingly.

Year of the Egyptian Woman

Dr. Michael Barak

In March, three events related to women took place in Egypt, including International Women's Day, Egyptian Women's Day, and Mother's Day, which sparked a lively debate¹³ on social networking sites (SNS), especially among women, about the status of women under the regime of Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi. The discourse is characterized by cautious optimism in light of the regime's willingness to promote the issue, along with a certain degree of pessimism about the discriminatory treatment of women in Egyptian society, and the effort required to bring about a change in consciousness.

President al-Sisi declared 2017 the "Year of Egyptian Women." The stated goals for the year include implementation of a national strategic plan to empower women in Egypt, encouraging their integration into government and civil institutions, and enhancing social awareness about their contribution to economic growth, thereby improving society and national development. The year 2030 was set as the target year, by which women are meant to have been integrated into all areas of employment, including decision-making. On March 16, Egyptian Women's Day, al-Sisi declared the importance of the plan for the prosperity of Egypt and pledged to allocate 250 million Egyptian pounds for this purpose.¹⁴

Several official online campaigns were launched as part of the effort to empower women in Egypt, the most prominent "*al-Ta al-Marbouta* [the suffix that marks Arabic nouns and adjectives as feminine] the Secret of Your Power" was launched in October 2016. It is a¹⁵ joint effort of the National Council for Women in Egypt¹⁶ and the UN Women's Network.¹⁷ Its videos, interviews and other materials on the contribution of women to Egyptian society have been viewed 15 million times to date.¹⁸ For example, they highlighted the appointment of Nadia Abdu as governor of the Beheira district, which made her the first female governor in Egyptian history. In this and other campaigns, there has been an attempt to combat phenomena such as female circumcision, and sexual harassment, violence-based gender¹⁹ against women. Most Egyptian MPs support the campaign, which has been praised by²⁰ many women who attribute this achievement to al-Sisi.

In contrast to the praise that women and men share for the Egyptian president's contribution to the struggle for the advancement of the status of women in the country, female supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood have continued discourse condemning the regime. They claim that al-Sisi's position is illusory, pretending as if he promotes women's rights, while in practice he oppresses women's freedom of expression and denies their rights. They also claim that the status of women in Egypt has deteriorated since Morsi's ouster in 2013. On the Facebook page "Women against the Revolution," female supporters

of the Muslim Brotherhood collected propaganda materials including pictures of detained women and documentation of women’s demonstrations against the regime.

An example of a real change credited to the struggle for the advancement of the status of Egyptian women was a large-scale protest campaign launched on March 6 against advertising posters displayed by an Egyptian company on the streets of Cairo to sell bottles of oil. One of them shows a woman with a bowed head and the caption: “Are you an older single woman [*a’anis*]?” The poster asked older, single women to share their feelings and difficulties using the tag “You are the example.”²¹ Users of SNS accused the company of contempt for single women.²²



Advertising poster: Are you an older, single woman?

Several wondered why the campaign did not focus on the increase in the number of unmarried men. Others emphasized that male society in Egypt should change its judgmental position vis-à-vis older, single women and that offensive terms against women, like “*a’anis*” should be removed from the discourse. Another user commented that the marketing campaign expresses “a cultural collapse that constitutes a threat to [Egyptian] society, more than a military defeat.” In response to the protest, the head of the Society for the Protection of Consumer Rights ordered the immediate removal of the offensive signs on the grounds that they contained inflammatory and antagonistic messages in contravention of the Consumer Protection Law. The company itself issued an apology, but clarified that the campaign’s goal was to combat prejudice against women.²³

Another network campaign was launched on March 24, focusing on the struggle against the sexual harassment of women in Egypt. The campaign was initiated by a group of students from the Higher Institute of Dramatic Art, who uploaded photographs taken by Egyptian photographer Marwa Ragheb to protest the silence of Egyptian society in the face of the disturbing phenomenon. On her Facebook page, Rajab claimed, “the reason [for harassment] is not clothing or visual, the reason is not my being part of society, your silence can be the reason ... your silence [encourages] sexual harassment.”²⁴



Poster from the campaign against sexual harassment. Accusations directed at women, like “Your dress is skimpy” and “You are the reason” are written on the men’s forearms

In conclusion, it is clear that Egyptian women view SNS as an important platform for their empowerment, as a means for managing the struggle to change their status, and a channel for raising awareness of their contributions to society - a trend that is supported by the government. This struggle is not restricted to SNS alone, but also manages to spill over into

the real world and influence the public space. This is made clear by the pressure on commercial entities to carefully consider offensive messages against women, as well as decision-makers who are increasingly willing to listen to online protests from the public. Simultaneously, the Muslim Brotherhood supports attempts to create an alternative discourse in which the Egyptian government's support for women is presented as politically motivated with the goal of broadening their base of popular support and without any real intention to improve the status of women in Egypt.

¹ 7 Haziran Genel Seçim, Milliyet, <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/secim/2015/yurtdisi/>; 1Kasım Genel Seçim, Milliyet, <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/secim/1Kasim/yurtdisi/>

² "Yurt dışında yaşayan 1 milyon kişiye referandumda oy kullanma imkanı," Sputnik, January 9, 2017 <https://tr.sputniknews.com/politika/201701091026696408-anayasa-degisikligi-referandum-yurtdisi-secmen-oy/>

³ #Hollanda #Rotterdam

⁴ #HilalileHaçlıMücadelesi #İslamofobi

⁵ #EvetAvrupaTitriyor #FascistNetherlands #FascistRutte #NaziİTleriYıldırılmazBizleri

⁶ https://twitter.com/M_H_Bamdad/status/840195251335778309.

⁷ https://twitter.com/saba_s_h/status/839401803775008769.

⁸ <https://twitter.com/ElilOla/status/839762192685797376>.

⁹ <https://twitter.com/sinBasid/status/839720455346905088>.

¹⁰ <https://twitter.com/MHozeH/status/839562535426789388>.

¹¹ Raz Zimmt, "Campaign to Increase the Representation of Women in the Iranian Majlis." Beehive vol. 3, issue 11, December 2015: <http://dayan.org/content/beehive-campaign-increase-representation-women-iranian-majlis>

¹² Raz Zimmt, "The Stealthy Freedom of Iranian Women: Battle of the Hijab on SNS." Beehive vol. 23, issue 6, June 2014: <http://dayan.org/file/16397/download?token=OybOaNAo>

¹³ #اليوم_العالمي_للمرأة

¹⁴ March 21, 2017:

<http://sis.gov.eg/UP/2017%20%20%D8%B9%D8%A7%D9%85%20%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B1%D8%A3%D8%A9%20%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B5%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A9.pdf>

¹⁵ #النساء_المربوطة; #سرس قوتك

¹⁶ Link to the organization's Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/ncwegyptpage>

¹⁷ Link to the organization's Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/unwomenegypt>

¹⁸ <http://www.elwatannews.com/news/details/1948848> March 16, 2017.

¹⁹ #كفاية_ختان_بنات; #ختان_البنات_جريمة; #لا_للختان; #اليوم_العالمي_لمكافحة_ختان_الإناث; #ضد_ختان_الإناث

²⁰ See the video at: <https://www.facebook.com/UnfpaEgypt/videos/1090365131009145/>

²¹ #انتي_المثل;

https://www.facebook.com/hashtag/انتى_المثل

²² According to a government survey in 2016, there are currently 44 million women living in Egypt, of whom 13 million are of marriageable age but have not yet married.

²³ : 7.3.17 <https://www.facebook.com/maya.morsy.370/posts/1276749542403556>;

<http://www.elmwatan.com/192160>

²⁴

https://www.facebook.com/pg/MarwaRaghebPhotography/photos/?tab=album&album_id=1662294827242456;

#سكوتك_تحرش