

Friday, December 20, 2024



- Home
- NEWS ▾
- ANALYSIS
- OPINION
- BUSINESS ▾
- SOCIAL
- RELIGION
- ENTERTAINMENT ▾
- ENVIRONMENT
- TECHNOLOGY
- SCIENCE
- HEALTH
- ABOUT EURASIA REVIEW ▾
- CONTACT
- NEWSLETTER



Hanuts, more than anything else, embody Morocco for me. Photo Credit: Naima Sawaya

Hanuts: A Personification Of Moroccan Community – OpEd

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By **Naima Sawaya**

When I returned home last summer after spending two months in Meknes, I knew that the only souvenir my dad would want was food. He is not a gift person generally, but especially in relation to

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material goods, he would much rather buy his own. So instead I bought him a sampler of spices from Chefchaouen. I was convinced that these spices would be an absolute hit. But once again, it turned out that he did not need spices after all he could always just buy his own preferred ones on Amazon. But what did turn out to be an unequivocal hit was something that I spontaneously purchased on my last day in Morocco — *hanut* snacks.

Hanuts, more than anything else, embody Morocco for me. Not just because finding new snack foods is one of my favorite pastimes. Not just because I ate King Cookies for lunch everyday last summer (of course, I only did this to be economical). And certainly not just because the word “*hanut*” is so satisfying to say. Rather, what I find so exceptional is the ubiquitous and implicitly communal nature of this business model.

When I first came to Morocco one summer ago, *hanuts* were entirely unexpected. This year, I was prepared for the *hanut* experience. In fact, I had missed *hanuts*. What was unexpected this year, however, was seeing my reaction of a year ago reflected back to me by other people. What was the purpose of *hanuts*? Why were there so many *hanuts* on one block? And how was this even remotely a profitable business model? As I have been reflecting on these questions this trip, I have developed increasing appreciation for the business model which while focused on money making endeavors also seems to be implicitly capable of community building.

Question #1 — *Hanuts* exist to provide quick necessities to neighboring residents. Bread, delivered by a bakery each day, is one dirham. A liter of juice is ten dirham. And there are endless snacks for school children and wandering tourists (me), most of which are two dirham. This is the place that every family goes each morning and evening to buy bread, and the place where children run after school.

Question #2 — Every Moroccan family seems to have their preferred *hanut*. Yes, there are multiple on a street and yes, they

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largely sell the same products. I have not asked, but I imagine that the *hanut* that a family frequents speaks to who they are and what they prioritize. But beyond these preferences, *hanuts* are so imminently necessary to daily life that to have one in an area is vastly insufficient. In fact, in Meknes, the *hanut* owners would coordinate their vacations in order to ensure that no neighborhood was left entirely *hanut*-less.

Question #3 — To be honest, I am not entirely sure how this is a profitable business model. But if I were to posit a hypothesis, I would argue that *hanuts* do not seem to be in competition with each other, at least not in the overly aggressive way that American businesses are. The products which *hanuts* provide are absolutely essential and there is enough demand to go around, so much so that competition is not baked into the reality of commercial *hanut* life.

To say that *hanuts* are in every corner of Morocco is, in no way, an exaggeration. It is quite literally one of the defining features of Moroccan urban and non-urban landscapes and perfectly personifies the Moroccan quotidian. But more than that for me, the premise of this business model — the provision of basic necessities that are enmeshed into daily landscapes — enhances the Moroccan community and forms the basis of neighborhood life.

Naima Sawaya

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