



From Revolution to Exile: Arab Diaspora Politics in a Post-2011 Context

Organizing Committee: Fanny Christou (UI), Isabel Ruck (CAREP), Sarah Anne Rennick (ARI)

Event Date & Time: Thursday, January 30 2025 from 8:45am to 6:30pm

Venue: Centre Arabe de Recherche et d'Etudes Politiques (CAREP), 12 rue Raymond Aron, 75013 Paris

Online: https://us06web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_wn5kjt0lRimdLzjvLJNhkg

Argument

In his article “The ‘diaspora’ diaspora”, Brubaker (2005) discusses the proliferation of the use of the term “diaspora” in the literature and criticizes the widespread tendency to treat it as a fixed entity, arguing that the term, like nation-state, refers to a hybrid and fluid “category of practice, project, claim and stance”. Brubaker cites Gabriel Sheffer’s work to illustrate this problem (Sheffer 2003: 245 in Brubaker 2005: 10), arguing that such a conceptualization of diaspora communities as “bona fide actual entities” often fails to recognize “the heterogeneity of diasporas” (Brubaker 2005: 10). In addition, the term diaspora is used to define various transnational communities (Tölölyan 1991: 4-5), but these communities also refer to the movement of migrants between different geographic places and political spaces, allowing the circulation of capital through ideas and behaviors, building an “identity of its own” (Bruneau 2011). These resources are important in migrants’ places of origin and can become convertible and legitimate in new societal contexts through strategies, initiatives, and practices that they create and develop in the host society. It is in this tension between diasporas, home and host societies that Tölölyan recognizes when suggesting that “where once there were dispersions there now is diaspora.”

Most of the literature still considers diasporas as examples of transnational communities, meaning that they belong to two or more societies at the same time and display multiple forms of identification (Gorman and Kasbarian 2015). Nevertheless, with the outbreak of the Arab uprisings in 2010-2011, diasporas from the Middle East and North Africa region were confronted with new forms of contentious politics and transnational repression across spaces (Dukalskis et al., 2024; Tsourapas, 2021), thus endorsing new challenges and questioning their agency, to the point that some have spoken about a “Diaspora Spring”

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(Khan, 2012). In addition, significant environmental hazards also forced millions of people to flee the region, with climate change interlinked with the conflicts that arose in the region (Kelley et. Al. 2015; Johnstone & Mazo, 2011). Finally, one cannot ignore that among the post-Arab uprising diasporas formation, millions of people from the region already constituted groups of exiles, often stateless, due to ongoing conflicts (Palestinians, Kurds, Saharaouis, to quote just a few).

Consequently, various forms of diasporic engagement emerge in the aftermath of the Arab uprisings with potential “back home effects” that have been addressed in the literature (Brand, 2016; Colombo & Gozzini, 2021; Féron & Baser, 2022). These groups on the move, facing various barriers, borders and boundaries, sometimes stateless, challenge the meaning of diasporas as conflict entrepreneurs (Brinkerhoff, 2011). According to Moss, “conflict transmission” refers to “the ways in which divisive home-country politics are reproduced in diaspora communities through members’ biographical and identity-based ties” (Moss, 2022). With the proliferation of armed and protracted social conflicts, the permanent forced displacement of significant numbers of people has been framed in the global North as a 'crisis' and a 'problem'. This has contributed to the formulation of various biopolitical solutions to ensure sustainable democracies but also to renewed perceptions of the aporia or passivity of migrants. This essentialization, through an increased demonization and scrutinization of Muslim and migrant populations in Europe (Mohiuddin, 2019; Motilla, 2018; Stokes-Dupass, 2017; Lazaridis & Khursheed, 2015), where securitization of migration policies becomes a priority and focusing on violence at the expense of the everyday, foreground their conflict experiences and ignore other aspects of diasporic narratives of mobilization.

Against this background, research on the role of diasporas post-2011 has generated interesting insights but has suffered from the persistence of disciplinary boundaries and from the lack of intersectional comparative case-studies. There is an urgent need for academics and activists working on migration and political engagement in exile to rethink the notion of diaspora and the transnational dynamics across spaces, thus contributing to developing new theoretical / conceptual perspectives and practical toolkits. This one-day seminar thus intends to contribute to exploring the complex ways in which diasporas engage in various contexts with the conflicts “back home” and their repercussions in the countries of their settlement while exploring new and alternative forms of engagement. The main goals are twofold. First, the seminar seeks to reflect on opportunities to find novel approaches that can help deconstruct the concept of diasporas and their political roles through empirical case-studies from the MENA post-2011. Second, the seminar aims to explore the original practical toolkits that have been designed by the diasporas from the MENA post-2011 to address the challenges of how to make politics in a post-Arab uprising context.

Along with an opening introduction to address the novelty of the post-2011 MENA diasporas, this seminar is structured around four key panels. A first panel, entitled “Rethinking diaspora

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politics post-2011: new theoretical perspectives”, aims to address the conceptual challenges in dealing with diasporas and transnational dynamics across spaces after the Arab uprisings. It seeks to question the role of post-2011 diasporas in acting as peacemakers or peacebreakers back home. Building upon this first panel, the second and third panels aim to address the new and alternative forms of engagement that have been developed in diaspora after 2011. We will explore the new forms of political engagement as well as alternative processes of mobilization, drawing on specific empirical case studies. Finally, a fourth panel, “Political repercussions of Diaspora mobilizations”, will be an opportunity to reflect on transnational dynamics through the effects of diaspora mobilization across spaces, thus questioning the “back home effect” and engaging with the role of diasporas in host societies.

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PROGRAMME

8:45am | Registration

9:00am | Welcome speech by Salam Kawakibi (Executive Director of CAREP Paris) & Nadim Houry (Executive Director of the Arab Reform Initiative, ARI)

9:15am - 9:30am | Introduction: What is new about post-2011 MENA diasporas ?
Sarah-Anne Rennick, Arab Reform Initiative, ARI

9:30am - 10:30am | Panel 1 - Rethinking diaspora politics post-2011: new theoretical perspectives

Moderator : Sarah Anne Rennick, ARI

Post-2011 Arab diasporas require new theoretical considerations, particularly around the peace-conflict nexus and the evolving state-diaspora relations. The Arab Spring and subsequent conflicts have shifted how these diasporas engage with both their homelands and host countries. The peace-conflict nexus highlights how diasporas are involved in both supporting peacebuilding efforts and, at times, fueling conflict through political remittances or advocacy. Additionally, the traditional state-diaspora relationship is being rethought, as many Arab states view their diasporas as either a threat or a resource, leading to changing dynamics of repression, co-optation, or mobilization. These shifts demand a more nuanced understanding of the role of post-2011 Arab diasporas in global politics.

Speakers :

- **Elise Féron, Tampere University:** New approaches to diaspora politics post-2011
- **Gerasimos Tsourapas, University of Glasgow:** New theories, Old regimes ? Arab Diasporas and Authoritarian Politics After 2011

10:30am - 12:30pm | Panel 2 - New forms of political diaspora engagement

Moderator: Elise Féron, Tampere Peace Research Institute

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New forms of diasporic political engagement have expanded through diverse mechanisms. The concept of "at home abroad" reflects how diasporas maintain deep political ties to their homeland while integrating into host societies. External voting rights have empowered diaspora members to influence homeland elections, allowing them to participate directly in shaping political outcomes. The humanitarianization of diasporic space emphasizes diasporas' role in providing aid and relief during crises, linking them to homeland welfare beyond politics. Group dynamics and transnationalization enable collaboration across borders, creating collective political action. Political opportunity structures in host countries shape how diasporas engage, offering avenues for advocacy and influence.

Speakers :

- **Thibaut Jaulin, Sciences Po:** Diffusion and practice of external voting in Arab countries.
- **Nora Jasmine Ragab, IES Abroad, Berlin / Independent Researcher:** Syrian and Palestinian diaspora mobilizations in Berlin : a comparative perspective.
- **Thomas Fibiger, Aarhus University, Denmark:** Silencing the voice of Bahrain? Regime-critical media and Bahrain's London diaspora.

12:30pm - 2pm | Lunch break

2pm - 4pm | Panel 3 - Alternative forms of political diaspora engagement

Moderator: Isabel Ruck, Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies Paris

Alternative forms of diasporic political engagement are increasingly shaped by digital and creative platforms. Social media has become a vital space for diasporas to organize, mobilize, and amplify their political causes, bypassing traditional media channels and engaging global audiences. Archiving plays a critical role in preserving collective memories and documenting political struggles, ensuring that the diaspora's voice is recorded and accessible for future generations. Art and culture, including music, visual arts, and literature, offer powerful mediums for expressing political dissent and identity, fostering solidarity across borders while challenging dominant narratives both in the homeland and host countries. These creative avenues offer diasporas a means of influence that transcends conventional political participation.

Speakers :

- **Houda Mzioudet, Independent researcher:** Liminality, resistance and active engagement: the case of the Libyan diaspora in the UK.
- **Dima Saber, Meedan/ Independent Researcher:** Our memory belongs to us: Towards a better engagement with the mnemonic potential of crowd-sourced images produced in times of war.

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- **Ruba Totah, University of Mainz:** Negotiating “Home” Borders: Syrian and Palestinian Syrian Artists in Europe.
- **Özlem Belçim Galip, University of Oxford:** Art, gender and migration in the Kurdish Diaspora. Intellectual and Cultural production in Europe.

4pm - 4:30pm | Coffee break

4:30pm - 6:30pm | Panel 4 - Political repercussions of diaspora mobilizations

Moderator: Fanny Christou, Swedish Institute of International Affairs

The political repercussions of diaspora mobilizations are far-reaching and complex, involving several intertwined dynamics. A critical aspect is the competition among diaspora communities for political and economic resources. Moreover, transnational repression by authoritarian regimes further complicates diaspora mobilizations. These regimes may employ surveillance, threats, or even violence to suppress political activism abroad, aiming to prevent diasporas from undermining their domestic control. Political remittances—financial, social, and ideological contributions from diaspora members to their home countries—also play a significant role. These remittances often support political movements, civil society organizations, or opposition groups, influencing political developments in the homeland. While remittances can empower local actors, they can also deepen divisions by reinforcing polarized political narratives. Finally, diaspora mobilizations are deeply intertwined with the host state's foreign policy. Diaspora communities often seek to shape the host country's diplomatic stance towards their homeland, particularly during times of conflict or crisis. Some host governments may align with diaspora interests if they serve broader geopolitical goals, while others may suppress diaspora activism to maintain diplomatic relations with the home country. This convergence of competition, repression, political remittances, and foreign policy considerations shapes the landscape of diaspora politics, with profound implications for both the homeland and host state.

Speakers:

- **Dana Moss, University of Notre Dame, Indiana:** Transnational repression of diaspora mobilizations (via ZOOM).
- **Oula Kadhum, SOAS:** Iraqi diasporas, the nation and state-building from afar.
- **Elsayed E. Abdelhamid, University of Manchester:** Diaspora in Transition: Post-2013 Egyptian Exiles in Istanbul and the shifting Egypt-Turkey relations.
- **Fiona Adamson, SOAS:** (participation to be confirmed)

6:30pm | Conclusion

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BIOGRAPHIES

Elsayed E. Abdelhamid

Elsayed E. Abdelhamid is currently a PhD candidate in Social Anthropology at the University of Manchester. His doctoral dissertation is an ethnography of the pursuits of stability (istikrar) among post-2013 Egyptians exiles in Istanbul and Amsterdam. He worked as a researcher at The Aleppo Project, as part of CEU's Shattuck Center on Conflict, Negotiation and Recovery. His research interests include politics of exile, state configurations, legacies of political violence and the Arab revolutions.

Fanny Christou

Fanny Christou is a Post-Doctoral Researcher in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) Programme at the Swedish Institute of International Affairs (UI) and a member of the Special Research Programme for International Studies. She earned her PhD in geography in December 2017 from the Université de Poitiers, the American University of Beirut and Sciences Po Paris. Her doctoral research focused on the political mobilization of the Palestinian diaspora in Sweden, with a particular interest in Palestinian migrations from Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, and the occupied Palestinian territories to Northern Europe, exploring what it means to "be Palestinian" today. She is also an associate researcher at Migrinter, Université de Poitiers, and the Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies in Paris (CAREP) and has professional experience at the International Organization for Migration.

Özlem Belçim Galip

Özlem Belçim Galip is research fellow at the School of Geography and the Environment at the University of Oxford. She holds a PhD in Kurdish Studies from the University of Exeter, having studied Kurdish artistic and literary narratives in Turkish Kurdistan and its European diaspora. Her research interests are new social movements, Kurdish-related research from gender and anthropological perspectives, aesthetic and cultural practices, and intellectual activity with a gendered lens. She is particularly interested in visual and material culture, urban, digital, and sensory ethnography. She is the author of *Imagining Kurdistan: Identity, Culture and Society* (I.B. Tauris, April-2015) and *Civil Society versus State* (Palgrave Macmillan, Dec-2020). Her new book *Gender and Migration in the Kurdish Diaspora: Intellectual and Cultural Production in Europe* has recently been published.

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Oula Kadhum

Oula Kadhum gained her doctorate at Warwick University in July 2017 having been awarded a PhD fellowship on the ERC funded 'Diasporas and Contested Sovereignty' project. Following her PhD she completed a Post-Doctoral Research Fellowship on the ERC funded 'Alterumma' Project at the University of Birmingham and Lunds University. She has taught undergraduate Comparative Politics at the University of Warwick and International Relations at SOAS, University of London and International Migration at postgraduate level at the London School of Economics and Political Science. Her work has been published with journals including International Affairs, Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, Global Networks and the British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies.

Salam Kawakibi

Salam Kawakibi is a political science researcher and the director of the Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies in Paris (CAREP). Previously the deputy director of the Arab Reform Initiative, he is also an associate professor at Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne University and serves as president of the Initiative for a New Syria association. Holding advanced degrees in economics, international relations, and political science from the universities of Aleppo and Aix-en-Provence, he served as a senior researcher at the University of Amsterdam's faculty of political science from 2009 to 2011. From 2000 to 2006, he directed the French Institute of the Near East (Ifpo) in Aleppo. He is a member of the advisory board of the Mediterranean Citizens' Assembly Foundation (FACM) and part of the editorial team for the journal Confluences Méditerranée. He also sits on the advisory board of the organization Ettijahat-Independent Culture. At CAREP, Salam Kawakibi currently leads the research program on Europe and the Arab world.

Dana Moss

Dana Moss is an Associate Professor of Sociology at the University of Notre Dame. Her research and teaching focus on power and resistance, including the transnational repression of diaspora and refugee communities by authoritarian regimes. Her award-winning book, *The Arab Spring Abroad: Diaspora Activism Against Authoritarian Regimes* (Cambridge, 2022) explains the emergence and impacts of anti-regime diaspora mobilization during the 2011 uprisings in Libya, Syria, and Yemen. In the 2010s, Dana also helped to run The Yemen Peace Project, a non-profit organization dedicated to educating Western audiences about Yemeni politics, culture, the arts and film. Her current research focuses on how members of the military resist participating in violence during wartime.

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Houda Mzioudet

Houda Mzioudet is a Freelance researcher on Tunisian and Libyan affairs focusing on transitional justice, post-conflict Libyan transition, minority and diaspora groups of North Africa and post-Arab Spring democratic transition.

Élise Féron

Élise Féron is a Docent and senior research fellow at the Tampere Peace Research Institute, Tampere University in Finland. She is an invited professor at the University of Turin (Italy), the Academic School of Yerevan (Armenia), Sciences Po Lille (France) and the University of Coimbra (Portugal). Her main research interests include feminist peace research, diaspora politics, and the multiple entanglements between conflict, violence and peace. She has almost three decades of experience researching these issues in the South Caucasus, the Balkans, Eastern Congo, Burundi, Rwanda, Northern Ireland and Cyprus, among other places.

Thomas Fibiger

Thomas Fibiger is associate professor in Arab and Islamic studies at Aarhus University. He holds a Ph.D. in anthropology from Aarhus University (2010), based on several rounds of ethnographic fieldwork in Bahrain, focused on religion, politics and uses of the past. More recently he has been involved in collaborative research projects on Shia Islam and on sectarianism, based on new fieldwork in Kuwait and Bahrain (2013-17). Since 2018, he has been part of the research project 'Mediatized Diaspora' based at Copenhagen University, working with Bahrainis in London and in Denmark, of which this article is a product.

Nadim Houry

Nadim Houry is a human rights lawyer with extensive experience working in the Middle East and North Africa. He is currently the Executive Director of the Arab Reform Initiative (ARI), a leading regional think tank based in Paris, Beirut, and Tunis, dedicated to social justice, democratic reforms, and institutional accountability. Prior to joining ARI, Nadim Houry spent 13 years at Human Rights Watch (HRW), where he founded and led the Beirut office for a decade before becoming the director of HRW's terrorism and counterterrorism program. Throughout his career, his research has spanned a wide range of issues, including enforced disappearances and freedom of expression.

Thibaut Jaulin

Thibaut Jaulin is Academic Advisor and Lecturer at PSIA. He holds a PhD in Political Science from the University Paul Cezanne (Aix-en-Provence). His research focuses on migration and diaspora policies in the MENA region and in Sub-Saharan Africa. He has led

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and coordinated research projects at the Migration Policy Centre (European University Institute), the Centre for International Studies (Sciences Po) and the African Diasporas Chair (Sciences Po Bordeaux). He was also an asylum officer at the French Asylum Office (OFPRA).

Nora Jasmin Ragab

Nora Jasmin Ragab is an independent migration scholar based in Berlin. Her research interest lies in the intersections of diaspora mobilization, conflicts, and socio-political dynamics of displacement. Her academic work often lies at the interface of research, policy and practice and seeks to inform various institutions and stakeholders. Nora has conducted several studies on Syrian, Palestinian, Jordanian and Tunisian diaspora mobilization in various locations such as Germany, Europe and the WANA region, investigating how social and political transformations in the country of origin, as well as factors and developments in residence countries shape the trajectories of transnational mobilization of diaspora actors. She is passionate about the development of methods and concepts to promote spaces of self-empowerment and civic organizing. At IES Abroad Berlin, Nora teaches courses on a diverse range of migration related topics and the international politics of the WANA region. Nora is a co-founder of the Palestinian Feminist Archive Berlin, a feminist and anti-colonial collective that has come together to archive Palestinian history in Germany.

Sarah-Anne Rennick

Sarah Anne Rennick holds a dual Ph.D. in Political Science from Lund University and the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales. She is the Deputy Director for Research at the Arab Reform Initiative. She is also an Affiliated Researcher at the Centre for Advanced Middle Eastern Studies - Lund University, and a lecturer in international relations at the American Graduate School in Paris. Her research focuses on social movements and contentious politics, democratization and re-autocratization, and peace and conflict studies, with a particular emphasis on youth. She also works on Arab diaspora mobilization and transnational/translocal political remittances, and their impact on the creation of new identities, solidarities, and political practices in both host and home sites.

Isabel Ruck

Isabel Ruck is a political scientist with an area focus on the Middle East. She currently serves as Head of Research and Scientific Coordination at CAREP Paris. Since 2012, she has been a lecturer at Sciences Po Paris. Between 2018 and 2019, she also worked as a project officer of the Forccast program, an initiative for excellence in innovative education supported by the French Ministry of Higher Education, Research, and Innovation. In addition, Isabel has taught in the Global BBA program at ESSEC Business School, which she joined in 2017. Previously, she worked as a project manager for a consulting firm advising the European Commission in Brussels. She has seven years of doctoral research experience in

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international relations at Sciences Po Paris and a Master degree in International Conflict Analysis from the University of Kent / Brussels School of International Studies.

Dima Saber

Dima Saber is a researcher and writer on media depictions of conflict and on the role of archival records in identity building processes, focusing primarily on the work of political activists in post-revolution and conflict countries such as Lebanon, Egypt, Syria, Yemen, and Palestine. She was, until late 2022, a Reader in Media & Cultural Studies and Associate Director for External Funding and Research Development at the Birmingham Centre for Media and Cultural Research. She holds the position of Chief Program Officer at Meedan, leading the organization's community impact programs, and providing technology, media literacy training and capacity building supports to independent media organizations and human rights activists in over 45 countries across Asia Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean, North Africa/Western Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa regions.

Ruba Totah

Ruba Totah is an experienced anthropology and social history researcher who employs grounded approaches. Her Dissertation is titled 'Cultural Transnationalism and the Arab Uprising: Migrating Artists from Syria to Europe' brings new conceptualisations, leading to fresh dialogue on theories of migration, transculturalism, theatricality, gender, religion and class. Her interest in examining transnationalism, intercultural and cross-cultural spaces of performing arts from an anthropological and philosophical perspective situates her analysis within cultural criticism theory. Her recent interest in Performing rituals of church communities around Jerusalem contributes to an anthropological approach to analyzing the history of ethnomusicological practice.

Gerasimos Tsourapas

Gerasimos Tsourapas is a Professor of International Relations at the University of Glasgow. He is also the Chair of the Ethnicity, Nationalism, & Migration Studies (ENMISA) Section of the International Studies Association, as well as the Editor-in-Chief of Migration Studies (Oxford University Press). He works on the international relations of the Middle East and the broader Global South, with a particular focus on the politics of migrants, refugees, and diasporas.

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