



CALL FOR PAPERS

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
as part of the research program funded by the European Research Council
When Authoritarianism Fails in the Arab World (WAWAW)

TUNIS, 15, 16 AND 17 OCTOBER 2014

**«THE ROLE OF DIASPORAS, MIGRANTS and EXILES IN THE ARAB
REVOLUTIONS and POLITICAL TRANSITIONS»**

- . Deadline for sending abstracts: 15 May 2014
- . Deadline for sending full papers: 15 July 2014
- . Deadline for confirming attendance: 15 September 2014

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Rationale of the conference

Following the 2010/ 2011 Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions, protest movements and political transitions in the Arab World have attracted a great deal of media coverage and academic attention -with many scientific and cultural events (conferences, symposiums, workshops) trying to make sense of the events.

However, the **role of diasporas, binationals and exiles in the for and against regimes mobilisation** has been widely overlooked. The primary focus of social science researchers and public decision makers has been on Arab “domestic actors”, on the role of state powers (United States, Russia and China), and the strategic regional stakes (domino effect). More often than not, this perspective has ignored the involvement of diasporic actors, migrants and exiles in the socio-political transformations of the Arab world. **As a result, migrations and diasporas represent a blind spot of the studies of the Arab revolutions**, even though many transition governments stem from the ranks of these actors. In the cases where regimes fell, economic migrants and political exiles expressed their rekindled feeling of national belonging, leading us to think of Anderson concept of “long-distance nationalism”¹ in host countries, precisely where it was not encouraged. In the rest of the Arab World in crisis

¹ Anderson, Benedict (1998). Long Distance Nationalism. In B. Anderson (Ed.), *The Spectre of Comparisons: Nationalism, Southeast Asia and the World* (pp. 58-74). London: Verso.

(Syria, Bahrain etc.), the exile opposition is an essential component of the dissenting political field.

The term “diaspora” is theoretically complex and has been the object of many academic debates; it is understood here, in an encompassing yet rigorous manner, as “a certain type of social formation, stemming from large migratory movements, identifiable through original features that make it clearly distinguishable from any other form of ethnic regrouping that international migration can create” - these features being “a permanent state of dispersion, that goes hand in hand with a certain rooting in host societies” and “a common feeling of identity, which is ethnic in character, that proceeds from a self-representation of the disseminated community as an entity sharing a common history and culture.”²

Until the 2011 political upheavals, the research agendas of academics and international experts tended to minimize the political interest and involvement of diasporas in their countries of origin. Undoubtedly, there were political opponents in exile, forming an active minority. Yet, across the Mediterranean shores, the bulk of migrants was studied mainly, - with a few exceptions, such as the Egyptian Copts-, through the prism of economics, migration policies and integration in host societies. The fundamental assumption was that of *distanciation/ disjunction* with the political scenes of the countries of origin. Their sense of belonging to the country they had left behind boiled down to symbolic, exotic or touristic dimensions, with no real grounding in Arab societies. As a result, studies focused on the economic dimension, that is the questions of partnership in development and migrants remittances. However, the political dimension, namely the involvement of migrants and exiles in the public life of their countries of origin, was almost absent. Not only was it repressed by authoritarian regimes that maintained their surveillance on nationals abroad, it was also neglected by the European Union and the national states that have been preoccupied above all with issues of integration. All this combined to strengthen the idea, largely spread by the regimes, that migrants are apolitical and exile opposition has no appeal nor representative power.

The newly visible engagement of Arab diasporas, migrants and exiles in the pro- and anti-regime movement in 2011 and in political transitions, raises a number of new questions in the field of migration in/from the Arab world: how did the 2011 rupture and the new range of possibilities it opened present the conditions under which “long-distance nationalism” can be created and shaped, beyond the limited circles of political exiles? How did the uprisings, their repression as well as the authoritarian regaining of control confer a new relevance and salience to opposition groups abroad? How do the regimes manage the relations with these transnational actors?

Recent events have shown how diasporic actors can connect spaces, how they test and open new fields for political struggle, mobilization and public expression, which authoritarian regimes usually shut down. They offer a rare opportunity for researchers to examine in the Middle East phenomena that have been observed elsewhere, such as the multiple identities of migrants and binationals and strategies to mobilise transnational resources, whether by state or non-state actors, while moving away from the authoritarian-spread idea that migrants can belong to only one national political space, an idea that has already been losing considerable ground.

² Cuche, Denys, « Diaspora », *Pluriel-Recherches. Vocabulaire historique et critique des relations interethniques*, Cahier n° 8, Paris, L'Harmattan, 2001, p. 14-23.

This international conference aims to inquire into the ways in which diasporas, migrants and exiles have participated in the political changes at work in the Arab world. Participants are invited to move away from the dichotomy between domestic and international spaces for engagement.

This topic is part and parcel of the scientific forum created by the WFAW program that seeks to analyze the recomposition of Arab political scenes in the light of the changes brought about by the fall of some authoritarian regimes and the legitimacy crisis of the remaining ones.

Suggested themes

Five themes were selected to guide those willing to participate in the conference:

- **Theme n°1 - Activist legacies and political activities in diaspora (societies, parties and organisations):** in the aftermath of the 2011 Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions and the subsequent protest movements in the Arab world -whatever their end results, numerous associations and societies, whether political or not, were set up by binationals, migrants and new and former exiles, who now seek their recognition in the host and in the home countries. However, these new organisations do not come out of the blue: they build on the legacy of existing ones, which pioneered the struggle abroad. This theme will then identify what is new and was at stake in transnational mobilisations.

- **Theme n°2 - The *returnees*, role and involvement of migrants and exiles in political transitions:** the recomposition of political scenes has made possible the temporary or definitive return of migrants and former exiles to their home country. The returnees sometimes play a central role in the political transition as they are given responsibilities in political parties, in the new-elected assemblies or portfolios in the governments, for instance in Egypt and Tunisia. The focus here will therefore be on the trajectories through which these new actors fit back into the new national politics as well on the assertion/contestation of legitimacy drawn from the exiles' experience of "ostracisation" abroad for the exiles.

- **Theme n°3 - The migrants' participation in the electoral and constitutional processes:** under the authoritarian regimes, migrants considered voting in their home countries as useless and irrelevant to them, so that the electoral turnout and mobilisation were particularly low. Today, the voting of nationals and binationals abroad, the voters' attitudes and behaviours has taken on a new prominence that is worth being examining.

- **Theme n°4 - Constitutional debates and public discussion surrounding the status of binationals in their country of origin:** the new presence of binationals and former exiles on the national political scenes has raised public controversies, and the legitimacy of their actions has been questioned. These debates have been reflected in the new constitutional bodies leading to the production of legal texts, intended to define the conditions of *inclusion* and *exclusion* into the polity, as well as nationality and citizenship as a whole. Here, the main focus would be on the debates dealing with the politics/identity nexus and on the normative production (decrees, laws, articles of the constitutions etc.) that can widen or restrict the access of binationals to power and rights.

- **Theme n°5 - Flight, exile et new political asylums:** revolutionary processes and their violent handling have generated new waves of exile and flight. Western countries have traditionally welcomed certain types of exiled opposition (such as the anti-Iranian revolution diaspora). However, it has all too often been forgotten that Arab countries are also destinations for exile, and have increasingly been favoured owing to their linguistic, cultural and geographical proximity, not to mention restrictive asylum policies in the West. Unlike the Western asylum systems, the acceptance of exiles in various Arab countries has not been studied. Moreover, beyond the Arab region, it would be worth examining the policies of Turkey and Iran, both of which have welcomed a large number of Arab political opponents and political refugees fleeing repression.

Conditions for registering and participating in the conference

The conference is open to MSc/MA students, PhD candidates, researchers and academics, irrespective of their nationality. Working languages will be French, English and Arabic. The selected participants are responsible for making sure that their travel documents (passports, visas...) are compliant with the Tunisian immigration law.

Travel (economic fare), accommodation (two nights) and food expenses will be covered by the organisation of the conference. However, participants should be covered by a health and repatriation insurance.

Selected presenters must send abstracts and papers within the allocated timeframe, upon which their final registration will depend.

Following the conference, the participants will send their fully-revised paper (25,000 to 40,000 signs -spaces included) to be published as proceedings in a scientific journal.

