


The Arab Spring Abroad: Diaspora Activism against Authoritarian Regimes

Dana M. Moss (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2021). Pp. 294. \$29.99 paper. ISBN: 9781108845533

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In 2012, Egyptians climbed the walls of the US embassy in Cairo and staged an unprecedented protest. Removing the American flag and demanding accountability, the protestors' outrage stemmed from an amateur film depicting the Prophet Muhammad in inflammatory ways, produced by members of the Coptic diaspora. Circulated on social media networks was a protestor's sign that read in English and Arabic: "I demand the expulsion of diaspora Copts from Egypt." While the sign's message may appear paradoxical, it speaks to the broader power asymmetries between diaspora action in Western contexts and homeland conditions. When thinking about transnational protest politics, then, how do those power asymmetries unfold, collapse, or become upended in the Arab uprisings?

Dana M. Moss's *The Arab Spring Abroad* tackles the lesser analyzed lens of diaspora movements and their impact on the homeland through leverage in the West, specifically among anti-regime diaspora members from Libya, Syria, and Yemen. The book weaves together her grounded focus on the theoretical and practical importance of transnational activism to seeing change in Middle Eastern homeland contexts and beyond. Through the concept "voice after exit," Moss attends to two parallel levels of analysis—most especially, zooming in on the localized politics of resistance and zooming out to the geopolitical possibilities of change from the perspective of Western imperial influence. Moss shows how diaspora members are not simply bound to the place of (re)settlement, but have lenticular views of concern and action. Instead of forcing a stark mark between undermining or fostering voice, Moss argues that exit's opportunity is conditional upon the intensity of "transnational repression" from homeland authoritarian regimes—in the form of surveillance, threats, and kin-harm at home—and secondly, through the continuation of homeland "divisive, partisan conflicts"; what Moss terms "conflict transmission" (p. 5).

To combat the threats of transnational repression and divisive intracommunal political disputes, *The Arab Spring Abroad* shows that diaspora activists must be able to effectively convert resources to their cause and "gain geopolitical support from states and other powerholders in order to become auxiliary forces for anti-authoritarianism" (p. 6). Moss admits here that without these two factors (and most especially the latter) diaspora mobilization will remain a voice in the streets or online, but have little effect in the homeland. The power circuits outlined by Moss are most overtly articulated in the latter half of the book which demonstrates the conversion of diaspora resources into social capital and fungible resources and shows how activists were also shaped by the degree of geopolitical support that their allies at home received from their "host-country governments and influential third parties, including states bordering the home-country, international institutions, and the media" (p. 202).

Part of Moss's broader intervention in this book is to extend the "dynamics of contention" beyond national boundaries and examine them as "transboundary" configurations (p. 28). As connected to her idea of "conflict transmission," Moss argues that focus on "host-country" contexts of racialization and discrimination—of the homogenization of Arabs and Muslims for the target of securitization—overlooks important differences among community members from her Yemeni, Syrian, and Libyan diaspora interlocutors that impact upon their politics. While focusing mainly on political difference (instead of religious/sectarian



difference), Moss indirectly shows the workings of geopolitical inclusions and racial-religious exclusions—which can also be understood as a function of empire.

While part of Moss's research took place in England (as well as homeland contexts such as Libya), much was also centered in the US. Advocacy in Washington, DC, by diaspora activists is a site of contestation where "conflict transmission" is translated and instrumentalized for imperial ends. For example, Coptic diaspora calls for American protection or advocacy sets up an unstable synergy between the security this affords and the insecurity it engenders. Coptic dependence on US conservative organizations that emphasize religious (and particularly Christian) difference and the evils of Islam and Muslim-majority rule amplify violence against Copts as a way of showing shared Christian kinship and heartfelt compassion for the persecuted yet ultimately such compassion is channeled through imperial means and for imperial ends. The focus on Islam and Muslim monstrosity as the root of violence has become a necessary feature of making Coptic discrimination legible in the diaspora with ever-increasing stakes, as evidenced from the 2012 embassy protests.

The need to gain "geopolitical support" heightens and intensifies the transmissions of these homeland conflicts. Moss details the strategies of the diaspora movements she follows in the wake of the uprisings but eschews a more specific accounting of the power dynamics that led to some contexts gaining importance over others. By framing the US as a context of settlement, rather than of imperial encounter, Moss does not explicitly name her interlocutors' entanglement in an unequal power relation that has reconfigured their lives. Activists have become "experts" in places like Washington, DC, "to provide intelligence and the legal and moral justifications for foreign intervention" (p. 42). Without "geopolitical support," Moss argues, "diaspora activists and their resources become caged inside host-country borders and their voices in homeland struggles are rendered into merely symbolic displays of support" (p. 201). Imperial conditions of possibility are made legible when diaspora activist struggles become useful to empire's frame of interest.

As the discussion on geopolitical support argues, especially, diaspora movements will not be influential simply by mobilizing on behalf of freedom and democracy. Rather, they have to "market themselves" by "deploying discursive frames and messages that resonate with trending geopolitical interests and values" (p. 205). And even beyond this, Moss writes that activists do not generate major shifts in geopolitical strategy. Rather, it is the long-standing interests of empire and the ability to connect with political actors and powerholders that have the power to execute action; as the author argues: "the potential of transnational movements to undermine authoritarian regimes is—in conjunction with resource conversion ... largely dependent on the support of states and geopolitical powerholders" (p. 222).

Moss proposes that diaspora movements use and should continue to leverage their contexts abroad in the West to promote democracy and freedom at home. She also admits the irony of this configuration—that the ongoing war on terror impacts Middle Eastern communities' civil liberties in the US and their ability to advocate on behalf of the homeland to support democracy, human rights, and humanitarian relief. However, the global dimensions of the war on terror also impact on the proliferation of weapons and political meddling that directly effects the lives of those in the homeland. Advocacy at empire's heart pumps imperial blood to the centers of homeland contexts of devastation and destruction from Yemen to Syria, and Iraq to Egypt. Focusing on the conditions of power—in how diaspora actors gain influence in the halls of the US Congress and among government contractors that promote the military industrial complex—is vital for understanding how transnational protest movements obtain attention and why, and also how they impact upon homeland conditions. One Coptic interlocutor in questioning their deployment of the minority concept as well as human rights rhetorically asked in Cairo: "What will make the Coptic cause legible to Western audiences? We use whatever gains traction!"


The Arab Spring Abroad is an important intervention on the transnational dynamics of Arab Spring protest movements and the impact of diaspora contexts on homeland

conditions. It intimately tracks how diaspora communities can and have had influence over foreign policy and advocacy networks from London to Washington, DC. The book is also a cautionary look into how geopolitical support and resource conversion in diaspora contexts matter to the homeland—especially in their potentials for influence and possibilities of injury.

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Subcontractors of Guilt: Holocaust Memory and Muslim Belonging in Postwar Germany

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Esra Özyürek's book *Subcontractors of Guilt: Holocaust Memory and Muslim Belonging in Postwar Germany* explores significant and timely questions around migration, anti-Semitism, and the role of Holocaust memory in the making of postwar German national identity. Focusing on the recently formed Muslim-only anti-Semitism and Holocaust education programs, Özyürek offers fresh insights on the complex and multifaceted ways in which Turkish and Arab-background Muslims negotiate German Holocaust memory and shoulder its weight as a proof of belonging to German society “while bearing the brunt of racism in the country” (p. xiii). Her analysis reveals how “the ideological labor” of remembering the Holocaust and performing this memory becomes of a way of deciding who belongs to the majority German society and who is to be excluded or is granted conditional entry to the postwar German social contract. Investigating the political implications of the roles assigned to Middle Eastern/Muslim-background Germans in Holocaust memory discussions, Özyürek discusses the trends of externalizing anti-Semitism from Germany and subcontracting the guilt of the Holocaust to Muslim-background Germans who do not adhere to the exceptionalist rules of Holocaust memory and point out that different forms, modalities, and historical experiences of racism can be read together to expand anti-racist imaginaries.

Özyürek's book relies on an extensive ethnographic study in Germany where she attended various Holocaust education programs, training sessions, and study visits to Auschwitz designed for Muslims in Berlin, Duisburg, and Dortmund. Moreover, she observed tenth-grade history classes in a mixed-track high school catering mostly to non-German-background students in Berlin. She also conducted semi-structured interviews with Holocaust educators regularly teaching Muslim minorities and Turkish- and Arab-background German Muslims on their relationship to German history. Based on this meticulous ethnographic fieldwork, Özyürek exposes how the foundational narrative of postwar German society based on Holocaust memory culture regards ethnic Germans as “having reached their destination of redemption and re-democratization” and non-ethnic Germans, especially German Muslims, as less able to learn the ethical lessons of empathy, tolerance, and democracy in relation to Holocaust memory (p. 2). Throughout the book, Özyürek convincingly demonstrates that racializing processes and discourses are at work in Holocaust memory culture, revealing that they project anti-Semitism upon Muslim migrants by accusing them of being “unable to relate to