

**FIGHTING
FOR SUMMER SCHOOL
ESSAY PUBLICATION
DEMOCRACY
IN EXILE**



FIGHTING FOR SUMMER SCHOOL ESSAY PUBLICATION DEMOCRACY IN EXILE

Imprint:

Publisher: Deutsche Gesellschaft e. V.
Editing: Katharina Fißmer and Dr. Christina Heiduck
Design: Frank Kirchner, Ultramarinrot

December 2024

The essays do not constitute an expression of opinion by the Deutsche Gesellschaft e. V. as project organiser or the Federal Foundation for the Study of the Communist Dictatorship in Germany (Bundesstiftung zur Aufarbeitung der SED-Diktatur) as funding body. The authors are solely responsible for the content of their statements. The Deutsche Gesellschaft e. V. and the Federal Foundation for the Study of the Communist Dictatorship in Germany distance themselves from all content that may be relevant under criminal or liability law.

CONTENT

PREFACE	4
THE PROJECT	4
THE ESSAYS	5
1) DIGITAL ACTIVISM AND RESISTANCE	7
Jasmin Ahadi: 'Woman, life, freedom': digital activism and the iranian diaspora's fight for justice in germany	7
Tsimafei Malakhouski: Information and communication technologies for civil resistance in exile: the case of belarus	16
Johan: Facilitating dissent: a case study of how chinese media overcame exile and engaged audiences amid the covid-19 pandemic	24
Mariam Botchorishvili: The dark side of digital technologies: suppressing exiled activism (the hong kong case)	32
2) IDENTITY AND PSYCHOLOGICAL CHALLENGES IN EXILE	39
Maria Grynevych: The journey of ukrainian refugee women: germany and poland	39
Tanja Korte: Lost in exile: identity loss as a form of political violence	49
Anamaria Soçe: The making of a refugee: storytelling in exile	58
3) DIASPORA DYNAMICS AND THEIR RELATIONSHIP TO THEIR HOME COUNTRIES	65
Sonja Taga: Echoes across borders: the albanian diaspora's journey from silent exodus to a tale of resilience	65
Nora Wacker: Unveiling the depths: examining the lack of inclusion in moldova's diaspora policies.....	73
Aysa Salmasi: (In-)Fighting for democracy in exile: overcoming a collective identity dilemma in the 'Woman, Life, Freedom' movement	80
4) ETHICS AND METHODOLOGY IN RESEARCH	93
Ekaterina Kolesnik: Investigating opposition in authoritarian states: what does it mean for research to be ethical?	93



PREFACE

Authoritarian and totalitarian states often suppress dissent through violence and surveillance, leaving limited and highly risky opportunities for resistance within their borders. For those who decide to protest, exile becomes not only a refuge, but also a platform for continuing the fight against oppression. Protests in exile hold particular significance, allowing activists to mobilize from a safer distance while remaining committed to the cause of freedom and justice. Such protests demonstrate resilience and innovation, leveraging new circumstances to challenge the political structures that made them flee.

Exile protests face unique challenges, including the need to bypass censorship, spread truthful information, and gain international attention and support. Globalization and digital technology have transformed how these movements operate, enabling global connections and amplifying their reach. However, digital tools also introduce vulnerabilities, such as cyberattacks and surveillance by authoritarian structures. The effectiveness of exile protests varies—some succeed in garnering international support and inspiring domestic resistance, while others face repression even abroad or struggle to gain momentum.

THE PROJECT

Funded by the Federal Foundation for the Study of the Communist Dictatorship in Germany (Bundesstiftung zur Aufarbeitung der SED-Diktatur), the Deutsche Gesellschaft e. V., the first all-German association dedicated to fostering German and European unity through political and cultural exchange, organised and conducted an interdisciplinary summer school. In August 2024, 15 MA and PhD students from different countries and various fields of study gathered together in Berlin in order to understand the dynamics, strategies and impacts of protest movements set off by people in exile. Scientific experts, contemporary witnesses and activists provided insights into the topic and discussed various aspects of protest in exile with the participants, such as: Who protests, when and why? How does mobilisation take place? Which forms do the protests take? How have they changed due to digitalisation and globalisation? What are the consequences and effects of diaspora protests, both in the country of origin and regarding the relationship between diaspora and domestic population? What is the protests' impact on receiving countries, especially in the context of International Relations?

After the lively and inspiring exchange during the summer school, the participants wrote essays based on their insights and their own research interests, the best of which are presented in this publication.

THE ESSAYS

These essays cover a wide spectrum of topics and can be divided into four categories: 1) Digital Activism and Resistance, 2) Identity and Psychological Challenges in Exile, 3) Diaspora Dynamics and their Relationship to their Home Countries and 4) Ethics and Methodology in Research.

1) DIGITAL ACTIVISM AND RESISTANCE

In the digital age, social media and technology play a vital role in enabling exiled communities to access information, foster activism, and resist oppressive political structures. Jasmin Ahadi's essay on the 'Woman, Life, Freedom' movement explores how Iranian diaspora groups in Germany used digital platforms for activism following Jina Mahsa Amini's tragic death. Similarly, Tsimafei Malakhouski's work on Belarusian exiles highlights how technology empowers civil resistance by circumventing censorship, fostering communities, and even hacking government systems. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Johan's study reveals how a Chinese exile media leveraged Instagram to sustain protest momentum through cyber interactions and real-world impact. Conversely, Mariam Botchorishvili's essay examines how oppressive states, as in Hong Kong, deploy digital tools to suppress exiled activists, underscoring the dual-edged nature of technology in modern resistance movements. Together, these essays illustrate the profound and complex role of digital technologies in both enabling and countering dissent in exile.

2) IDENTITY AND PSYCHOLOGICAL CHALLENGES IN EXILE

Under the theme of identity and psychological challenges in exile, Maria Grynevych's essay explores how cultural identity and psychological well-being shape Ukrainian refugee women's decisions to integrate into host countries like Germany and Poland or return home. She highlights how supportive policies and systems can ease integration and improve mental health. Tanja Korte delves deeper into the psychological toll of exile in 'Lost in Exile', identifying identity loss as a form of political violence inflicted by authoritarian regimes, exacerbating mental suffering. Adding to this perspective, Anamaria Soče's work on refugee storytelling emphasizes the importance of personal and collective narratives in resisting official silencing, helping refugees reclaim their identity and voice. Together, these essays shed light on how identity, psychological resilience, and self-expression are intertwined in the exile experience.

3) DIASPORA DYNAMICS AND THEIR RELATIONSHIP TO THEIR HOME COUNTRIES

Under the theme of diaspora dynamics and their relationship to home countries, three essays explore how diaspora communities maintain ties to their homelands while navigating life in exile—a relationship often central to their identity and activism, particularly during periods of political unrest. Sonja Taga's essay examines the Albanian diaspora in Italy, showcasing their transformation from silent migration to resilient integration while preserving strong connections to their homeland. Nora Wacker's study of Moldovan diaspora policies critiques their lack of inclusivity, revealing how homeland strategies often fail to address the diverse needs of expatriates, focusing narrowly on financial contributions. Meanwhile, Aysa Salmasi highlights the Iranian diaspora's activism, demonstrating how shared symbols, collective identity, and digital spaces drive organized protests against injustices in their homeland. Together, these perspectives reveal the intricate and often powerful links between diaspora communities and their countries of origin.

4) ETHICS AND METHODOLOGY IN RESEARCH

Under the theme of ethics and methodology in research, Ekaterina Kolesnik's essay examines the ethical challenges of studying opposition movements in authoritarian research contexts. Highlighting the risks of research endangering participants, she advocates for strict anonymity and researcher responsibility, offering critical insights for ethical practices in such contexts.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Taken together, the essays offer comprehensive insights into protests in exile, from processes of collective mobilisation to their effects as well as into the relationships between a diaspora and its home and host countries. We would like to thank all the participating students and early stage researchers, as well as scholars and experts, who contributed to the success of the programme and ensured a lively exchange. We would also like to express our sincere thanks to all the participants who provided us with their texts for publication, and to wish all the readers pleasant and insightful reading.

Finally, our gratitude goes to the Federal Foundation for the Study of the Communist Dictatorship in Germany for funding the summer school and thus enabling the Deutsche Gesellschaft e. V. to organise and realise the project.

Berlin, 05.12.2024

Katharina Fissmer and Dr. Christina Heiduck

Deutsche Gesellschaft e. V.

1) DIGITAL ACTIVISM AND RESISTANCE

JASMIN AHADI

Jasmin Ahadi is a PhD Candidate at the University of Cologne. Within her research, she focuses on diaspora activism in the context of the 'Woman, Life, Freedom' Movement. She holds a BA in French Philology and Islamic Science and an MA in Migration Studies.

'WOMAN, LIFE, FREEDOM': DIGITAL ACTIVISM AND THE IRANIAN DIASPORA'S FIGHT FOR JUSTICE IN GERMANY

Introduction

After the death of Jina Mahsa Amini in September 2022, protests spread around Iran and became known under the slogan 'Woman, Life, Freedom'. Since then, activists have been publicly opposing the regime of the Islamic Republic of Iran and actively protesting despite massive repression. However, the protests are not limited to Iran: in honour of Jina Mahsa Amini, and in solidarity with the peaceful protesters in Iran, the weeks following her death saw demonstrations organised worldwide in many major cities (Khosrokhavar, 2023, p. 14). In Germany, where the largest group of the Iranian diaspora in Europe is located, around 80,000 people gathered in Berlin in support of the protesters in Iran on 22 October 2022 (Zeit Online, 2022). These actions were often initiated by members of the Iranian diaspora. In this respect, the movement has spread beyond the national context of Iran into transnational spaces, which has been possible thanks to the 'transnational power of the internet' (Sorce and Dumitrica, 2022, p. 158).

So far, limited research has been conducted on diaspora activism within the 'Woman, Life, Freedom' Movement, although it has been recognised that the diaspora has played a significant role (Khosrokhavar, 2023, p. 13). This essay focuses on the aspect of digital activism within the Iranian diaspora in Germany and how different local diaspora groups in



Germany represent their cause (visually) on social media. For this purpose, three selected Instagram accounts based in Germany are analysed comparatively according to social media grounded theory. Before introducing and examining these three accounts, brief definitions of the terms 'diaspora' and 'diaspora activism' and an explanation of how these concepts are understood in the framework of this essay are provided. Subsequently, the main features of their Instagram accounts and posts are presented and discussed. Finally, a conclusion is drawn and the relevance of the findings for further research is demonstrated.

Definitions of Diaspora and Digital Activism

The term diaspora refers to a group of people with a common origin who live scattered in different countries and share the migration experience (Hartmann and Oghalai, 2023, p. 127). This essay follows Hartmann and Oghalai's (2023) understanding that diaspora goes beyond nation-state borders and migration-specific descriptions of identity. As people in the diaspora are linked to many political and social contexts that cannot be reduced solely to national contexts, they find themselves in a complex relational context (*ibid.*, p. 129). Grouping people with different experiences and characteristics into a single diaspora thus needs to be challenged, as the composition of the group is complex due to diverse cultural, ethnic and religious backgrounds and different experiences of exile or migration. Especially when dissidence and political persecution are the reasons for migration, new identities, specific political positions and alliances emerge through the combination of political and social struggles in the space between here and there (*ibid.*, p. 133).

It has been widely recognised by both scholars and politicians that diasporas can become important political actors in the fight for democracy and human rights, and that they have an influence on the affairs of their home country (Haase and Müller, 2012; Moss, 2020; International Organization for Migration, 2024). The sociologist Dana M. Moss, whose research focused on diaspora activism during the Arab Spring uprisings, states: 'Revolutions are rarely neatly confined to their places of origin, however. They also galvanize anti-regime activists in the diaspora around the globe [...]' (Moss, 2022, p. 2). Especially diasporas based in countries that seek to protect political rights have opportunities for transnational actions such as protesting, forming organisations and lobbying for political causes at both local and international levels (*ibid.*, p. 13). Moss identifies five main areas in which the diaspora can become active against the authoritarian regimes of their home countries: 1) the publication of information that regimes seek to repress, 2) the organisation of protests, 3) the creation of initiatives to prosecute torturers, 4) the demand for political actions and reforms from host country governments, and 5) the formation of diaspora organisations which often channel donations (Moss, 2020, pp. 15–16).

In order to overcome national contexts and gain global support, the internet and social media have played a crucial role. Digital activism, which can be defined as 'forms of collective action that engage political opponents primarily via online spaces and tactics' (Sorce and Dumitrica, 2022, p. 158), has become an efficient way to raise attention, organise protests, mobilise and disseminate information. However, it should be emphasised that online and offline activities are seamlessly intertwined (*ibid.*).

Contextualisation: The Case of the Iranian Diaspora and ‘Woman, Life, Freedom’

The Iranian diaspora is spread all over the world, with the largest number of Iranian migrants living in the United States (32%), Canada (14%), Germany (11%), the United Kingdom (6%), Sweden (5%) and Turkey (5%), primarily due to political repression and economic grievances (Azadi, Mirramezani and Mesgaran, 2020, pp. 4–9). Especially after periods of uprising, an increase in emigration can be observed, as many political dissidents are forced into exile. Likewise, with regard to Germany, the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees recorded an increase in asylum applications from people with Iranian citizenship following the ‘Woman, Life, Freedom’ uprising (Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge, 2024, p. 16). This ‘alternative Iranian map’ (Mohabbat-Kar, 2016, p. 12) extends beyond the borders of the Islamic Republic of Iran and has links and networks in those countries. This transnational network offers Iranians all over the world a sense of belonging and identification with a community (ibid., p. 13). Previous studies have shown that the diaspora is politically active and strongly committed to the interests of its home country but is fragmented due to differing political views (ibid., p. 10).

However, during the protests in September 2022, more people than ever before joined together in demonstrations, as the movement covered multiple issues and united groups, which also had an impact on the mobilisation of the diaspora (Khosrokhavar, 2023, p. 3). The movement was significantly influenced by the connection between Iranians inside the country and the diaspora (ibid., p. 14), which is also illustrated in a survey titled ‘Iranians’ Attitudes Toward the 2022 Nationwide Protests’ conducted by the Group for Analyzing and Measuring Attitudes in Iran (GAMAAN; see Maleki and Tamimi Arab, 2023). The survey identifies the main actions that were taken by people in the diaspora: participation in online protests (87%), followed by public demonstrations (52%), talks with representatives of the host countries (44%), financial support (33%), protest sit-ins (30%) and participation in seminars and lectures (28%) (ibid., p. 9). Although further research is needed to verify the data, this underscores online protest as the most popular form of action – a finding consistent with previous research on activism of the Iranian diaspora. During past protests, Iranians already made use of the digital space to amplify the voice of resistance to the global world as well as to unite the Iranian diaspora transnationally in supporting the movement (Ghorashi and Boersma, 2009, p. 687).

With this introductory background information in mind, we will now proceed to an in-depth examination of digital activism within the ‘Woman, Life, Freedom’ Movement, using the example of three Iranian diaspora groups in Germany.

‘Woman, Life, Freedom’ on Instagram: Three Diaspora Groups in Comparison

Methodology

On social media, ‘Woman, Life, Freedom’ has reached a level of international publicity and solidarity that has never existed before with respect to Iran (Walsh, 2024, p. 4). According to a study conducted by Walsh (2024), the movement was very successful on Twitter

and TikTok during the first weeks after Amini's death. However, an increase in new accounts with reference to 'Woman, Life, Freedom' could be observed on Instagram as well. Three of these newly created groups on Instagram, which are part of the diaspora in Germany, will be introduced and analysed in more detail in the following paragraphs. In order to approach the question of how certain diaspora groups present themselves and their cause on Instagram, the social media grounded theory presented by Halaweh (2018) is applied. By combining research on social media with grounded theory methods, he proposes a methodology called the 'observational model' (Halaweh, 2018, p. 159) that allows researchers to passively collect data from social media without interacting with users.

To carry out the analysis, a sample must be defined based on specific selection criteria (ibid., p. 160). The groups were selected based on the following criteria: 1) the creation of the account took place within one month after Amini's death, 2) their group name is obviously related to the 'Woman, Life, Freedom' protests in Iran, and 3) group members claim to be part of the diaspora. In addition, the three chosen groups appeared to be accounts with the highest number of followers. Due to the mass of images, videos and texts, and the limited textual framework, only a small sample of postings can be analysed. The sample comprises the first 30 posts of the respective accounts, which roughly corresponds to the period from the end of September to the beginning of November 2022, as these show the initial idea of their accounts and represent the immediate reactions after the death of Jina Mahsa Amini. In this analysis, the attention is primarily on the images and less on the associated texts, as Instagram is a platform that focuses on the visual (Cornet et al., 2017, p. 2475). All data and posts of the accounts presented here were retrieved on 17 October 2024. In the following, the profiles are briefly introduced before the results of the comparative analysis are presented.

The Profiles

The Instagram accounts that are the main subjects of this essay are @frauenlebenfreiheit_bonn (FLF Bonn), @fraulebenfreiheit_koeln (FLF Cologne) and @womanlifefreedom-collective (WLF Berlin). The FLF Bonn account was created by a group in Bonn and has 4,809 followers. It has the lowest number of followers in comparison with the other two groups, but was the most active in terms of published posts (509 in total). The second account, FLF Cologne, is based in Cologne, has 6,157 followers and has published 330 posts. The third group, WLF Berlin, is based in Berlin, has published 212 posts but has the widest reach with 24,000 followers.

First, it should be noted that all three group names contain an asterisk, which, in the German language, is a way of emphasising the representation and support of all genders. In the profile overview, the groups present themselves in different ways. On FLF Bonn's profile, the reference to Iran becomes clear in various ways: in the description, it is written, 'From Bonn and surroundings for freedom in Iran' (FLF Bonn, 2024a) and the profile picture depicts a helicopter in the background, symbolising the crash of former President Ebrahim Raisi (FLF Bonn, 2024b). Moreover, the colours of the Iranian flag (green, white and red) are generally used as a frame for their highlights. FLF Cologne's profile clearly shows

their connection to the LGBTQIA+ community, since the group claims to be a ‘colourful team from Cologne and surroundings’ (FLF Cologne, 2024), followed by the Pride flag emoji. Furthermore, the group uses the colours of the Pride flag as the background for their name. While both FLF Bonn and FLF Cologne mention their location explicitly within their name and profile description, WLF Berlin gives no direct indication. They define themselves as an ‘Autonomous Feminist Grassroot Supporting Jina’s Revolution’ (WLF Berlin, 2024), and their profile picture is a purple logo with white and orange lettering. These colours are also used in their profile highlights. As the colour purple stands for feminism, independence and freedom, it underlines their profile description.

Target Group and Mission

It is striking that the groups use different languages, which also define their respective primary audiences. In addition to their German account names, FLF Cologne and FLF Bonn mainly post in German. In an interview with a member of FLF Cologne, she states that it was important to her to build a bridge to the German-speaking community (FLF Cologne, 2023).

Because of their explicit references to location, it can be assumed that the main audience of both groups is the local population of Cologne and Bonn. WLF Berlin, however, addresses its followers in Farsi, English and German. The posts are usually written in all three languages, which underlines their aim of uniting activists across the world and ‘put[ting] aside political, ideological, and historical discrepancies’ (WLF Berlin, 2022a). While WLF Berlin strongly emphasises its feminist, intersectional and transnational character from the outset, FLF Cologne and FLF Bonn do not make clear statements on the positions of the group members. The only information provided in their initial posts is that they aim to show international solidarity and inform their members about demonstrations and rallies taking place in Cologne and Bonn.

The Postings

Initially, the main focus of the three groups is on the organisation and promotion of demonstrations. The posts often feature the colours of the Iranian flag, and the words woman, life and freedom are repeated in German, English, Farsi or Kurdish. However, WLF Berlin quickly changes the style of their posts by using their chosen colours and their own logo, which creates recognisability. FLF Cologne and FLF Bonn, on the other hand, do not adopt a standardised layout for their postings.

A common feature among the three accounts is that they each post photos of demonstrations and other protest actions taking place in their respective cities. Often featured are crowds of people holding banners with the face of Jina Mahsa Amini or slogans against the Iranian regime (e.g., FLF Bonn, 2022; FLF Cologne, 2022; WLF Berlin 2022). These types of images, which display activist behaviours and practices, can have an important impact on activism, according to Cornet et al. (2017, p. 2475). Additionally, in the photos of FLF Bonn and FLF Cologne, flags are visible; it is particularly noticeable that FLF

Cologne features the flag with the lion and sun symbol, which was used before the Iranian revolution in 1979 and is prohibited in Iran (McKeever, 2022). WLF Berlin, on the contrary, asks protesters deliberately not to bring any flags other than the Pride flag, as it could 'negatively affect the unity' (WLF Berlin, 2022c).

Another similarity among the three accounts is the posting of videos featuring shouts or chants from protesters to attract attention. For example, WLF Berlin (2022b) features parts of a song by the Iranian rapper Hichkas to announce a new demonstration, while in the videos of FLF Cologne and FLF Bonn, the song 'Baraye' by Shervin Hajipour is repeatedly played (FLF Bonn 2022b, 2022d; FLF Cologne 2022a, 2022b). Hajipour's song went viral after the beginning of the protests and has become the anthem of the 'Woman, Life, Freedom' Movement as well as in the diaspora (Deutschlandfunk, 2022). FLF Cologne also shares impressions of the 30th anniversary of the association *Arsch huh*, where thousands of people sing the song together in the Lanxess Arena in Cologne (FLF Cologne, 2022g). Moreover, FLF Cologne calls for participants to sing the song 'Another Love' together for the Caroline Kebekus Show, which is later broadcast on television (FLF Cologne, 2022c), reaching a larger audience. According to the social scientist Foroutan, music plays an important role within the protests, as it helps to maintain the resistance and reaches people outside the country (Deutschlandfunk, 2022).

Some of the groups' activities are also of an artistic nature or developed in collaboration with artists. FLF Bonn, for instance, uses the symbol of blood in many of its actions. By painting themselves red and holding signs with accusations against German politics and the EU, such as 'They kill us in your silence' (FLF Bonn, 2022a) or 'I was raped and Scholz just watched' (FLF Bonn, 2022c), protesters aim to attract attention and leave a lasting impression. A similar campaign is organised by FLF Cologne (2022f).

Finally, there is the aspect of cooperation with or reference to other groups and initiatives. FLF Cologne (2022d, 2022e), for example, shares a petition by the human rights organisation HÁWAR.help and appeals for support for a campaign by seiSTARK, a non-profit association in Cologne. FLF Bonn (2022e) organises a bicycle demonstration together with a group called Critical Mass Bonn, which regularly rides bicycles through the streets in protest. Similarly, WLF Berlin (2022a) announces the organisation of a joint march with the PS752 Flight Families Association, a non-profit organisation founded by the families of the victims of the Ukraine International Airlines Flight 725, which was shot down on 8 January 2020. The further cooperation of the two groups and their online mobilisation resulted in the organisation of the largest demonstration in Germany on 22 October 2022 (Zeit Online, 2022).

Conclusion and Outlook

The 'Woman, Life, Freedom' Movement, which originated in Iran, has attracted great international attention and has become active in countries outside Iran. Within the framework of new grassroots organisations and local groups, the diaspora has made a significant contribution to spreading the movement through both online and offline campaigns.

The analysis of three Instagram accounts within the framework of social media grounded theory reveals similarities in their content and focus but also slight differences. While FLF Bonn and FLF Cologne are more locally oriented and concentrate on organising activities at the community level, WLF Berlin addresses not only German-speaking people but also aims to unite Iranians transnationally.

With their accounts, they try to draw attention to the situation in Iran in various ways. Often, they use photos and videos of past events, showing crowds of people with banners and chanting songs to express their solidarity and document their actions. Certain symbols appear again and again, creating recognisability. Primarily, their online activism seems to be intended to encourage offline activities such as demonstrations or other types of protest actions. Cooperation with other groups and extensive promotion have led to larger crowds being mobilised, as was evident at the demonstration in Berlin.

This essay has provided insights into the potential of digital activism out of exile using the example of three Iranian diaspora groups based in Germany. Given the movement's relatively recent emergence and ongoing development, further research is required to classify the movement within the broader framework of transnational social movements. In a more comprehensive and extensive study, the focus could be expanded to include texts and hashtags and analyse how Instagram profiles have evolved over time. Moreover, personal conversations with the account holders could provide significant insights into their perspectives and political positions. In addition, future research could investigate how diaspora groups in other countries present themselves online and what transnational repression these groups are exposed to.

References

- ▶ **Azadi, P. and Mirramezani, M. and Mesgaran, M.** (2020) 'Migration and Brain Drain from Iran'. Stanford Iran 2040 Project Working Paper, 9. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- ▶ **Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge** (2024) 'Das Bundesamt in Zahlen 2023: Asyl, Migration und Integration'. Nürnberg: Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge. Available at: www.bamf.de/SharedDocs/Anlagen/DE/Statistik/BundesamtinZahlen/bundesamt-in-zahlen-2023.html?view=renderPdfViewer&nn=284738 (Accessed: 10 October 2024).
- ▶ **Cornet et al.** (2017) 'How Image-Based Social Media Websites Support Social Movements'. CHI Conference Extended Abstracts on Human Factors in Computing Systems: Explore, Innovate, Inspire (CHI EA '17). Denver, CO, 6–11 May. New York: Association for Computing Machinery, 2473–2479. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1145/3027063.3053257>.
- ▶ **Deutschlandfunk.** (2022) 'Der Song „Baraye“ – und welche Bedeutung die Musik für die Proteste im Iran hat', *Deutschlandfunk*, 4 November. Available at: www.deutschlandfunk.de/proteste-iran-musik-baraye-hajipour-100.html (Accessed: 18 October 2024).
- ▶ **Ghorashi, H. and Boersma, K.** (2009) 'The "Iranian Diaspora" and the New Media: From Political Action to Humanitarian Help', *Development and Change*, 40(4), pp. 667–691.

- ▶ **Haase, M. and Müller, B.** (2012) *Entwicklungspolitisch engagierte Migrantenorganisationen: Potenziale für die Integration in Deutschland? Forschungsbericht 14*. Nürnberg: Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge. Available at: https://www.bamf.de/SharedDocs/Anlagen/DE/Forschung/Forschungsberichte/fb14-migrantenorganisationen.pdf?__blob=publicationFile&v=7 (Accessed: 10 October 2024).
- ▶ **Halaweh, M.** (2018) 'Integrating social media and grounded theory in a research methodology: A possible road map', *Business Information Review*, 35(4), pp. 157–164.
- ▶ **Hartmann, M. and Oghalai, B.** (2023) 'Jenseits von Migration: Zur Wiedergewinnung des Diasporabegriffs', *Movements*, 7(2), pp. 125–137.
- ▶ **International Organization for Migration.** (2024) *Diaspora-Engagement*. Available at: <https://germany.iom.int/de/diaspora-engagement> (Accessed: 15 October 2024).
- ▶ **Khoshrokhavar, F.** (2023) 'The 2022–23 Social Protests and the Delegitimization of the Islamic Republic', *Freedom of Thought Journal*, 13, pp. 1–28.
- ▶ **Maleki, A. and Tamimi Arab, P.** (2023) *Iranians' Attitudes Toward the 2022 Nationwide Protests*. GAMAAN. Available at: www.gamaan.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/GAMAAN-Protests-Survey-English-Report-Final.pdf (Accessed: 15 October 2024).
- ▶ **McKeever, A.** (2022) 'Why Iran's flag is at the center of controversy at the World Cup', *National Geographic*, 29 November. Available at: www.nationalgeographic.com/history/article/iran-flag-symbolism-history-meaning-controversy (Accessed: 18 October 2024).
- ▶ **Mohabbat-Kar, R.** (2016) 'Identity and Exile. The Iranian Diaspora between Solidarity and Difference', *Publication Series on Democracy*, 40. Berlin: Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung. Available at: www.boell.de/sites/default/files/identity-a-exile_web.pdf (Accessed: 12 October 2024).
- ▶ **Moss, D. M.** (2020) 'The Importance of Defending Diaspora Activism for Democracy and Human Rights', in N. Schenkan et al. (eds.) *Perspectives on 'Everyday' Transnational Repression in an Age of Globalization*. Washington, D.C.: Freedom House, pp. 14–17.
- ▶ **Moss, D. M.** (2022) 'The Arab Spring Abroad: Diaspora Activism against Authoritarian Regimes.' Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- ▶ **Sorce, G. and Dumitrica, D.** (2022) 'Transnational dimensions in digital activism and protest', *Review of Communication*, 22(3), pp. 157–174.
- ▶ **Walsh, T.** (2024) 'TikTok as a site of social protest in Iran's Gen-Z uprising', *Discourse & Society*, 35(5), pp. 1–26.
- ▶ **Zeit Online** (2022) '80.000 Menschen bei Iran-Demonstration in Berlin', *Zeit Online*, 23 October. Available at: www.zeit.de/news/2022-10/22/solidaritaet-mit-protesten-im-iran-grossdemo-in-berlin (Accessed: 2 October 2024).

Instagram Posts

- ▶ **@frauenlebenfreiheit_bonn.** (2022a) 'Mittwoch, 21.09.2022, Altes Rathaus Bonn Sowie Platz der Vereinten Nationen [...]' [Instagram]. 13 October. Available at: www.instagram.com/p/CjpujRWIfjx (Accessed: 17 October 2024).
- ▶ **@frauenlebenfreiheit_bonn.** (2022b) 'Mittwoch, 12.10.2022, Altes Rathaus Bonn [...]' [Instagram]. 13 October. Available at: www.instagram.com/p/CjqoN2pP349/ (Accessed: 17 October 2024).
- ▶ **@frauenlebenfreiheit_bonn.** (2022c) '#iranrevolution2022 Gestern haben wir mit Hilfe zahlreicher Unterstützenden eine Kunstaktion am Domplatz in Köln veranstaltet. [...]' [Instagram]. 21 October.

Available at: www.instagram.com/p/Cj9-GxNjFBf/ (Accessed: 17 October 2024).

- ▶ **@frauenlebenfreiheit_bonn.** (2022d) 'Jina Mahsa Amini, Du bist nicht gestorben. Dein Name wurde unser Code für Freiheit. Du wirst ewig leben! [...]' [Instagram]. 26 October. Available at: www.instagram.com/p/CkMQa1RjRce/ (Accessed: 17 October 2024).
- ▶ **@frauenlebenfreiheit_bonn.** (2022e) 'Freitag, 28.10.2022, 17:40 Uhr, Hofgarten. [...]' [Instagram]. 27 October. Available at: www.instagram.com/p/CkNtNzAj7D6/ (Accessed: 17 October 2024).
- ▶ **@frauenlebenfreiheit_bonn.** (2024a) 'Profile overview.' [Instagram]. Available at: www.instagram.com/frauenlebenfreiheit_bonn/ (Accessed: 17 October 2024).
- ▶ **@fraulebenfreiheit_bonn.** (2024b) '#Raisi #Helicopter #RestInPieces [...]' [Instagram]. 19 May. Available at: www.instagram.com/p/C7KU9qAsAQI/ (Accessed: 17 October 2024).
- ▶ **@frauenlebenfreiheit_koeln.** (2022a) 'Freiheit für Iran [...]' [Instagram]. 8 October. Available at: www.instagram.com/p/CjdjEy2vchx/ (Accessed: 17 October 2024).
- ▶ **@frauenlebenfreiheit_koeln.** (2022b) 'Baraye. Köln // 09.10.2022' [Instagram]. 9 October. Available at: www.instagram.com/p/CjgPFyyu6le/ (Accessed: 17 October 2024).
- ▶ **@frauenlebenfreiheit_koeln.** (2022c) "'Another Love" für Iran – Sing-Along Aktion [...]' [Instagram]. 11 October. Available at: www.instagram.com/p/Cjkaol4MfDA/ (Accessed: 17 October 2024).
- ▶ **@frauenlebenfreiheit_koeln.** (2022d) 'Frau. Leben. Freiheit. Gestern Nachmittag fiel der Startschuss zur Kampagne „Frau. Leben. Freiheit.“ [...]' [Instagram]. 20 October. Available at: www.instagram.com/p/Cj7sLjfsN9E/ (Accessed: 17 October 2024).
- ▶ **@frauenlebenfreiheit_koeln.** (2022e) 'Es ist normal, sich bei den Schlagzeilen und Bildern aus Iran überfordert und hilflos zu fühlen. [...]' [Instagram]. 26 October. Available at: www.instagram.com/p/CkLWM8MMT_N/ (Accessed: 17 October 2024).
- ▶ **@frauenlebenfreiheit_koeln.** (2022f) 'JIN, JIYAN, AZADI. Von Kurdistan bis Baluchistan, von Rasht bis Ahwaz, von Köln bis Teheran. [...]' [Instagram]. 6 November. Available at: www.instagram.com/p/Ckn5Ne7so8p/ (Accessed: 17 October 2024).
- ▶ **@frauenlebenfreiheit_koeln.** (2022g) 'Danke Köln! Danke @arsch_huh_zaeng_ussenander! [...]' [Instagram]. 10 November. Available at: www.instagram.com/p/Cky7TR5joFI/ (Accessed: 17 October 2024).
- ▶ **@frauenlebenfreiheit_koeln.** (2023) '@rosa_ariess spricht mit ihrem Bruder Nawid über ihr Leben, über die aktuellen Geschehnisse in Iran, [...]' [Instagram]. 17 April. Available at: www.instagram.com/p/CrJaLhNMiX/ (Accessed: 17 October 2024).
- ▶ **@frauenlebenfreiheit_koeln.** (2024) 'Profile overview.' [Instagram]. Available at: www.instagram.com/frauenlebenfreiheit_koeln/ (Accessed: 17 October 2024).
- ▶ **@womanlifefreedomcollective.** (2022a) '#ژینا_امینی #اتحاد_برلین #مهسا_امینی #solidarity_berlin #mahsaamini #zhinaamini.' [Instagram]. 27 September. Available at: www.instagram.com/p/CjAuMi4KvBI/ (Accessed: 17 October 2024).
- ▶ **@womanlifefreedomcollective.** (2022b) 'Feminists of the world, unite! Join the transnational solitary movement [...]' [Instagram]. 27 September. Available at: www.instagram.com/p/CjBdhcND-Kzg/ (Accessed: 17 October 2024).
- ▶ **@womanlifefreedomcollective.** (2022c) '#ژینا_امینی #اتحاد_برلین #مهسا_امینی #solidarity_berlin #mahsaamini #zhinaamini.' [Instagram]. 1 October. Available at: www.instagram.com/womanlifefreedomcollective/ (Accessed: 17 October 2024).
- ▶ **@womanlifefreedomcollective.** (2024) 'Profile overview.' [Instagram]. Available at: www.instagram.com/womanlifefreedomcollective/ (Accessed: 17 October 2024).

TSIMAFEI MALAKHOUSKI

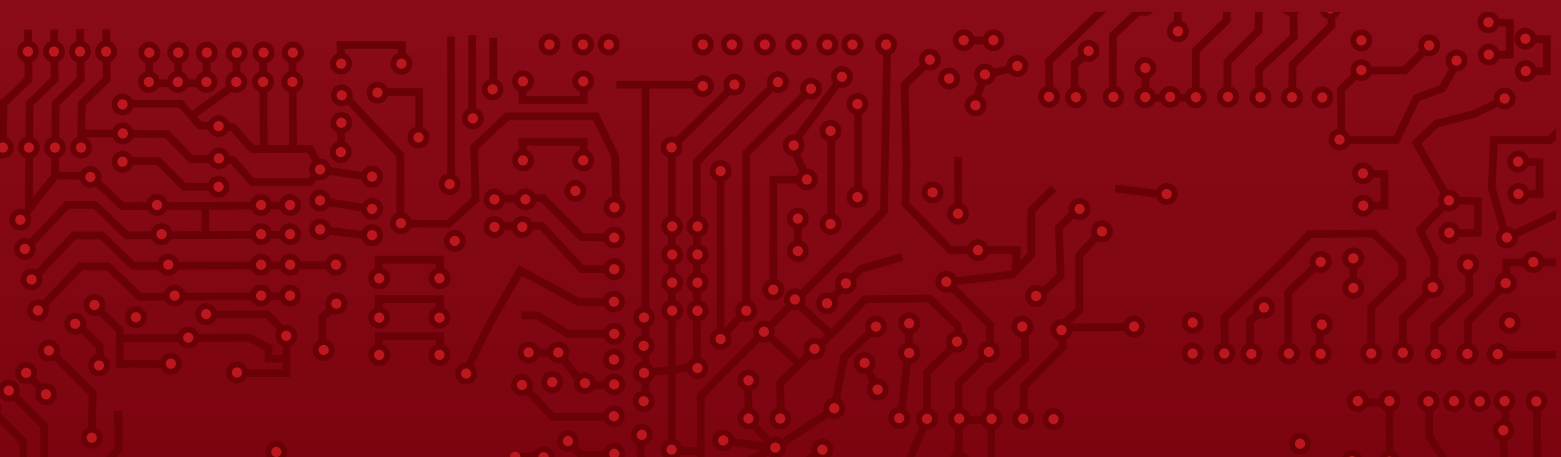
Tsimafei Malakhouski is an MSc candidate in the Social Science of the Internet at the Oxford Internet Institute. He is a pro-democracy activist, researcher and project manager at *Honest People, a Belarusian civil society organisation operating in exile in Poland.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES FOR CIVIL RESISTANCE IN EXILE: THE CASE OF BELARUS

Introduction

A decade ago, Howard and Hussain published *Democracy's Fourth Wave?* (2013), discussing the role of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in the Arab Spring. The internet at that time was widely seen as a liberation technology (Diamond, 2010) because it empowered pro-democracy activists under authoritarian regimes. The theoretical argument behind this effect is relatively straightforward: the internet and social media may facilitate protest mobilisation and reduce coordination costs for movements operating in autocracies (Jungherr, 2020). While the studies on the role of technologies in pro-democracy mobilisation often focus on street protests, literature on civil resistance suggests that for a movement to be effective, a street protest should be accompanied by other resistance tactics, like civil disobedience, parallel institution building, elite defections, and others (Chenoweth, 2021). These tactics might be vital when the situation is dire, state repression is severe, and many movement activists are exiled. We know little about how technologies may be utilised for these matters.

This essay addresses this gap by analysing the case of Belarus, focusing on how civil resistance movement activists and organisations leverage technologies to sustain the resistance, even from exile. The essay is structured as follows: the theoretical arguments surrounding civil resistance movements are introduced in the first section. The second section discusses the role of technology in these movements. The case of Belarusian civil resistance is introduced and analysed in the third and the fourth sections. The final section concludes.



Civil Resistance Movement

Unlike social movement studies, the literature on civil resistance takes an agentic approach to collective action. As a political practice, ‘civil resistance’ refers to methods of struggle that confront an adversary through collective action to build power and achieve political goals (Chenoweth, 2020). Civil resistance as a practice is closely related to democratisation under autocracies and is often addressed by the literature on this topic (Pinckney, 2020). Notably, the number of civil resistance campaigns nearly doubled between 2010 and 2019 compared to the previous decade (Chenoweth, 2020), with 62% of maximalist campaigns – those directly challenging regimes or claiming sovereignty – successfully achieving their goals between 1995 and 2006 (Chenoweth and Shay, 2022).

The discipline that studies civil resistance is closely related to social movement studies, though the two have distinct foci (Schock, 2013). While social movement studies emphasise structural factors, civil resistance prioritises agency. It highlights diverse methods beyond protests and demonstrations, including strikes, boycotts, noncooperation, parallel institutions, aid organisations, and others (Schock, 2005; Chenoweth, 2021).

Technologies for Civil Resistance

Scholars argue that ICTs in autocracies may help to mobilise people for anti-regime collective actions like protests and demonstrations. Those collective actions may lead to the regime’s collapse, ultimately leading to democratisation. Although historical data suggests that revolutions are not the most common way dictators are ousted (Svolik, 2012; Geddes, Wright and Frantz, 2018), the number of autocrats toppled by mass protests is increasing (Djuve, Knutsen and Wig, 2020). Furthermore, when mass uprisings overthrow autocratic regimes, they are four times more likely to result in democratic transitions than those that collapse due to military coups (Kendall-Taylor and Frantz, 2014). While not every anti-regime protest leads to the collapse of an authoritarian regime, and not every regime collapse results in democratisation, protests are significant because they are often the last resort for civil society under a dictatorship.

ICTs could be beneficial for civil resistance beyond street protest mobilisation. Civil resistance, for instance, can capitalise on the anonymity affordances of messengers to protect identities (Tucker, 2021; Wijermars and Lokot, 2022) and leverage social media algorithms to extend their reach. Activists may use digital petition platforms to engage the public, deploy bots to promote causes and utilise e-funding tools for financial support (George and Leidner, 2019). Practices such as hacktivism – hacking to achieve social or political goals (Jordan, 2002) – and DDoS attacks may leak the regime’s sensitive information and disrupt its infrastructure (Chenoweth, 2021). Additionally, civil resistance can deploy doxxing – the practice of publishing private information on the internet – against regime elites. Recent research suggests that modern social movements actively use data for advocacy and resistance (Schrock, 2016; Milan and Beraldo, 2024). Tactics like ‘analytic activism’ are also employed by movements to inform strategy development through supporter engagement and experimentation (Karpf, 2018, p. 2).

The Case of Belarus

Since 2020, and as of August 2024, approximately 65,000 people in Belarus have been detained for political reasons, with over 1,300 individuals still imprisoned and recognised as political prisoners (Viasna, 2024). More than 1,400 NGOs have been closed (Deutsche Welle, 2023), and the number of independent media outlets has decreased by half. In response to the mass repression, up to 600,000 people, including numerous media organisations, NGOs and other businesses, have fled Belarus (Zerkalo, 2024). In exile, the so-called Belarusian democratic forces, led by Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, have established parallel institutions such as the Coordination Council (a proto-parliament), the United Transitional Cabinet (a proto-government) and the Office of Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya as the 'president-elect'.

Commentators and scholars emphasise the role of technology in the events. Sometimes referred to as the Telegram revolution (Herasimenka *et al.*, 2020; Litvinova, 2020), the Belarusian protest made a case for mastering Telegram and other technologies for mobilisation and coordination of the protest, but also to compete in the unfair election (Batura, 2022). The role of technology remains crucial for continuing the resistance from exile. Belarus also appears in news headlines for the use of technologies against the movement, where the regime leverages internet shutdowns (Roth and Auseyushkin, 2020), censorship (Euronews, 2021), surveillance (Zhyrmont and Krapiva, 2021) and manipulation of information (Kuznetsova, 2023; Rudnik, 2024).

ICTs for Civil Resistance in Exile

Information Dissemination

Without a free press in Belarus, independent online media and Telegram channels have been crucial for information dissemination, serving the Belarusian public and the international community. During the 2020 protests, Telegram emerged as the dominant platform for spreading news and updates (Herasimenka *et al.*, 2020), with channels such as *Nexta Live* operating from abroad, reaching up to 2.1 million followers at its peak (TGStat, 2024). These channels operated as alternative media outlets, providing live coverage of protests, government repression and political developments. They relied heavily on user-generated content, often submitted anonymously through Telegram bots. This approach allowed ordinary citizens to contribute to the movement by sharing photos, videos and insider information with minimal risk (Kuryshko, 2020).

Mobilisation and Coordination

The Belarusian civil resistance movement has effectively harnessed ICTs to facilitate mobilisation and coordinate actions during the 2020 protests and in its ongoing operations from exile. Digital platforms like Telegram, YouTube and Instagram have become primary political and civic mobilisation tools. Telegram channels, moderated mostly from abroad, were instrumental in coordinating large-scale street protests. These channels provided

updates on protest logistics, issued real-time instructions and allowed protesters to adjust their actions based on the movement of security forces (Kingsley, 2020; Kuznetsova, 2023). This ability to coordinate from abroad has been vital in sustaining the movement's momentum despite the intense repression within the country.

Elites' Defection and Accountability

ICTs have also been pivotal in promoting accountability within the regime and among civil society actors. Various digital platforms have been used to encourage defection among regime elites and expose those complicit in human rights violations. For example, some platforms allowed public officials to anonymously express dissent or join verified communities through secure Telegram bots, thereby protecting their identities while enabling them to contribute to the resistance (Honest People, 2023; Reform.news, 2024a). These technologies have helped foster elite defections by providing a safe space for regime insiders to connect with opposition forces.

In addition to encouraging defections, digital platforms have been used to track and expose regime officials involved in electoral fraud and politically motivated repression. Some platforms aggregated and published data on election commission members, urging them to ensure fair vote counts (Golos, Honest People and Zubr, 2022). Others tracked politically motivated trials, exposing the judges and prosecutors responsible for imprisoning opposition activists. Hacktivist groups, such as the Cyberpartisans, have played a vital role in these accountability efforts. By hacking into state databases, the Cyberpartisans gained access to sensitive information about regime officials, including Belarusian secret service (KGB) agents, police informants and surveillance data (Cyberpartisans, 2024). This information has been used to expose the regime's surveillance capabilities, support investigative journalism and prevent regime infiltration into civil resistance organisations. Such actions have increased the pressure on regime actors and demonstrated the movement's ability to challenge the regime's narrative and hold it accountable for its actions.

Resilience in the Face of Repression

In the wake of the 2020 protests, as the Belarusian regime escalated its repressive tactics, the civil resistance movement turned to ICTs to build resilience and provide support to those affected by state violence. Digital platforms have been essential for offering legal, medical, psychological and financial assistance to individuals targeted by the regime. Several initiatives emerged to connect individuals in need with organisations and volunteers ready to offer help. One example is the platform LegalHub, which offers legal assistance to individuals facing politically motivated charges (Reform.news, 2024). Similarly, eZdorov'e [Engl.: eHealth] provides remote medical consultations for Belarusians affected by the political crisis, ensuring that those who cannot access healthcare in Belarus due to repression can still receive medical advice (Deutsche Welle, 2021). These platforms have been crucial in helping individuals navigate the complex legal and healthcare challenges posed by the regime's crackdown.

ICTs have also bolstered fundraising efforts. Several digital platforms have been created to raise funds for Belarusians facing political repression, covering legal expenses, fines and emergency relocation costs. Crowdfunding campaigns have utilised social media, online payment systems such as Facebook and PayPal, and cryptocurrencies (Huang, 2020). They have successfully raised over €5 million since 2020 to support political prisoners, their families and others displaced by the regime's actions. These digital initiatives have ensured that the movement remains resilient, even as repression intensifies (Owen, 2024).

Parallel Institutions

Belarusian democratic forces utilise technology to form parallel institutions in exile. One example is e-voting for the Coordinating Council, sometimes referred to as the pro-to-parliament in exile. The platform Belarus ID, used for voting, employs ID verification and decentralised blockchain while ensuring the security of voters in Belarus (Liber, 2024).

Hacktivism and Direct Actions

The Belarusian hacktivist group Cyberpartisans has been able to access state databases such as the passport data of all Belarusian citizens, employment and salary records, mobile phone numbers and real estate ownership details (Cyberpartisans, 2024). Cyberpartisans accessed classified data, including information on KGB spies, security officials, police informants, wiretapped phone conversations and CCTV footage (Bennett and Dixon, 2021). This data exposed the surveillance capabilities of Belarusian security services and is now utilised by investigative journalists and accountability projects to prevent infiltration into civil resistance organisations. Hacktivists' direct-action operations also aim to paralyse the work of government institutions and enterprises in Belarus (Cyberpartisans, 2024).

Conclusion

Information and communication technologies could significantly promote and facilitate pro-democracy resistance under authoritarian regimes. At the same time, technologies could be used by autocrats to surveil, censor and repress opponents. While the repression (both digital and analogue) may force the pro-democracy opposition to flee their countries, technologies allow them to continue the resistance even from exile. This essay analyses the case of Belarusian pro-democracy civil resistance sparked in 2020 and continuing to date. The study shows that ICTs may be leveraged for a variety of the movement's goals besides protest mobilisation. This includes information dissemination, elite defection, parallel institution building and direct action. Further studies should explore the interactive dynamic in using technologies by the pro-democracy opposition in exile and authoritarian regimes.

References

- ▶ **Batura, A.** (2022) 'How to Compete in Unfair Elections', *Journal of Democracy*, 33(4), pp. 47–61. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2022.0046>.
- ▶ **Bennett, D. and Dixon, R.** (2021) 'How Belarus's "Cyber Partisans" exposed secrets of Lukashenko's crackdowns', *Washington Post*, 15 September. Available at: https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/belarus-hack-cyber-partisans-lukashenko/2021/09/14/5ad56006-fabd-11eb-911c-524bc8b68f17_story.html (Accessed: 11 September 2024).
- ▶ **Chenoweth, E.** (2020) 'The Future of Nonviolent Resistance', *Journal of Democracy*, 31(3), pp. 69–84.
- ▶ **Chenoweth, E.** (2021) *Civil resistance: what everyone needs to know*. New York, New York: Oxford University Press.
- ▶ **Chenoweth, E. and Shay, C.W.** (2022) 'Updating nonviolent campaigns: Introducing NAVCO 2.1', *Journal of Peace Research*, 59(6), pp. 876–889. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/00223433221092938>.
- ▶ **Cyberpartisans.** (2024) *Belarusian Cyber Partisans: About Us, Cyberpartisans*. Available at: <https://www.by.cpartisans.org/en/about> (Accessed: 18 September 2024).
- ▶ **Deutsche Welle.** (2021) 'Belorusy o "e-zdorovye". Kto pomozhet repressirovannym vracham [Belarusians on "e-health." Who Will Help Repressed Doctors?]', *Deutsche Welle*, 11 March. Available at: <https://www.dw.com/ru/belorusy-o-e-zdorove-kak-pomogajut-repressirovannym-vracham/a-59710753> (Accessed: 10 September 2024).
- ▶ **Deutsche Welle.** (2023) '"Polovina unichtozhena". Chto s grazhdanskim obshchestvom Belarusi? ["Half is destroyed." What is happening to Belarusian civil society?]', *Deutsche Welle*, 27 November. Available at: <https://www.dw.com/ru/polovina-nko-unictozena-cto-s-grazhdanskim-obsestvom-v-belarusi/a-67549478> (Accessed: 23 September 2024).
- ▶ **Diamond, L.** (2010) 'Liberation Technology', *Journal of Democracy*, 21(3), pp. 69–83. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.0.0190>.
- ▶ **Djuve, V.L., Knutsen, C.H. and Wig, T.** (2020) 'Patterns of Regime Breakdown Since the French Revolution', *Comparative Political Studies*, 53(6), pp. 923–958. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414019879953>.
- ▶ **Euronews** (2021). 'TUT.BY: Independent Belarus media website blocked after raids', *Euronews*, 18 May. Available at: <https://www.euronews.com/2021/05/18/tut-by-independent-belarus-media-website-blocked-after-series-of-raids> (Accessed: 23 September 2024).
- ▶ **Geddes, B., Wright, J. and Frantz, E.** (2018) *How Dictatorships Work: Power, Personalization, and Collapse*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781316336182>.
- ▶ **George, J.J. and Leidner, D.E.** (2019) 'From clicktivism to hacktivism: Understanding digital activism', *Information and Organization*, 29(3), Article 100249. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.infoandorg.2019.04.001>.
- ▶ **Golos, Honest People and Zubr** (2022) *Report on the So-Called 2022 'Referendum' on Constitution in Belarus*. Available at: https://zubr.in/files/ref2022_en.pdf (Accessed: 9 September 2024).
- ▶ **Herasimenka, A. et al.** (2020) 'There's more to Belarus's "Telegram Revolution" than a cellphone app', *Washington Post*, 11 September. Available at: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2020/09/11/theres-more-belaruss-telegram-revolution-than-cellphone-app/> (Accessed: 9 September 2024).

- ▶ **Huang, R.** (2020) 'Dissidents Are Turning To Cryptocurrency As Protests Mount Around The World', *Forbes*, 19 October. Available at: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/rogerhuang/2020/10/19/dissidents-are-turning-to-cryptocurrency-as-protests-mount-around-the-world/> (Accessed: 4 September 2024).
- ▶ **Honest People.** (2023) 'Dialogue with the people', *Honest People*. Available at: <https://honestby.org/tpost/erxxg9crr1-dialogue-with-the-people> (Accessed: 19 August 2024).
- ▶ **Howard, P.N. and Hussain, M.M.** (2013) *Democracy's Fourth Wave?: Digital Media and the Arab Spring*. Oxford University Press. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199936953.001.0001>.
- ▶ **Jungherr, A., Rivero, G. and Gayo-Avello, D.** (2020) *Retooling Politics: How Digital Media Are Shaping Democracy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108297820>.
- ▶ **Jordan, T.** (2002) *Activism!: Direct Action, Hacktivism and the Future of Society*. London: Reaktion Books.
- ▶ **Karpf, D.** (2018) 'Analytic Activism and Its Limitations', *Social Media + Society*, 4(1), p. 205630511775071. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305117750718>.
- ▶ **Kendall-Taylor, A. and Frantz, E.** (2014) 'Mimicking Democracy to Prolong Autocracies', *The Washington Quarterly*, 37(4), pp. 71–84. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/0163660X.2014.1002155>.
- ▶ **Kingsley, P.** (2020) 'The 22-Year-Old Coordinating Protests in Belarus, From a Small Office in Poland', *The New York Times*, 4 September. Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/09/04/world/europe/belarus-blogger-poland-svetlov.html> (Accessed: 7 September 2024).
- ▶ **Kuryshko, D.** (2020) 'Belarus election: How Nexta channel bypassed news blackout', *BBC*, 12 August. Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-53753412> (Accessed: 10 September 2024).
- ▶ **Kuznetsova, D.** (2023) 'Broadcasting Messages via Telegram: Pro-Government Social Media Control During the 2020 Protests in Belarus and 2022 Anti-War Protests in Russia', *Political Communication*, pp. 1–22. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/10584609.2023.2233444>.
- ▶ **Liber, P.** (2024) "'Ne dumaiu, chto budut sotni tysiach". Pavel Liber — o novom prilozhenii dlia vyborov v Koordinatsionnyi sovet ["I don't think there will be hundreds of thousands." Pavel Liber — on the new app for elections to the Coordination Council]', *Zerkalo*, 14 May. Available at: <https://news.zerkalo.io/economics/68257.html> (Accessed: 16 September 2024).
- ▶ **Litvinova, D.** (2020) "'Telegram revolution": App helps drive Belarus protests', *AP News*, 21 August. Available at: <https://apnews.com/article/international-news-technology-business-ap-top-news-europe-823180da2b402f6a1dc9fbd76a6f476b> (Accessed: 28 April 2024).
- ▶ **Milan, S. and Beraldo, D.** (2024) 'Data in movement: the social movement society in the age of datafication', *Social Movement Studies*, 23(3), pp. 265–284. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14742837.2024.2331550>.
- ▶ **Owen, E.** (2024) 'How Ordinary Belarusians Are Helping Victims Of State Crackdown', *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, 20 September. Available at: <https://www.rferl.org/a/belarus-rights-prisoners-solidarity-aid-repression/33124822.html> (Accessed: 21 September 2024).
- ▶ **Pinckney, J.C.** (2020) *From dissent to democracy: the promise and perils of civil resistance transitions*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press (Oxford scholarship online).
- ▶ **Reform.news** (2024a) "'Honest People": Lena Zhivoglod on White Ribbons, Active Boycott, and New Opportunities for Civil Society in 2025', *Reform.news*, 7 July. Available at: <https://reform.news/honest-people-lena-zhivoglod-on-white-ribbons-active-boycott-and-new-opportunities-for-civil-society-in-2025> (Accessed: 14 September 2024).

- ▶ **Reform.news** (2024b) 'LegalHub: "We didn't seek legal assistance for a long time ourselves. That moment has come"', *reform.news*, 7 July. Available at: <https://reform.news/legalhub-we-didn-t-seek-legal-assistance-for-a-long-time-ourselves-that-moment-has-come> (Accessed: 24 August 2024).
- ▶ **Roth, A. and Auseyushkin, Y.** (2020) 'Will knocking Belarus offline save president from protests?', *The Guardian*, 11 August. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/aug/11/belarus-president-cuts-off-internet-amid-widespread-protests> (Accessed: 23 September 2024).
- ▶ **Rudnik, A.** (2024) 'Co-option of Technology', *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, pp. 1–28. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1525/cpcs.2024.2125064>.
- ▶ **Schock, K.** (2005) *Unarmed insurrections: people power movements in nondemocracies*. 1st edn. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press (Social movements, protest, and contention; v. 22).
- ▶ **Schock, K.** (2013) 'The practice and study of civil resistance', *Journal of Peace Research*, 50(3), pp. 277–290. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343313476530>.
- ▶ **Schrock, A.R.** (2016) 'Civic hacking as data activism and advocacy: A history from publicity to open government data', *New Media & Society*, 18(4), pp. 581–599. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444816629469>.
- ▶ **Svolik, M.W.** (2012) *The Politics of Authoritarian Rule*. 1st edn. Cambridge University Press. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1017/CB09781139176040>.
- ▶ **Tucker, J.** (2021) 'Beyond Liberation Technology? The Recent Uses of Social Media by Pro-Democracy Activists. *Elliott School of International Affairs*'. Available at: <https://pomeps.org/beyond-liberation-technology-the-recent-uses-of-social-media-by-pro-democracy-activists> (Accessed: 14 July 2024).
- ▶ **TGStat.** (2024) 'Subscriber growth – Telegram channel "NEXTA Live"', *TGStat*. Available at: https://by.tgstat.com/en/channel/@nexta_live/stat/subscribers (Accessed: 18 September 2024)
- ▶ **Viasna** (2024) 'Infografika: chetyre goda massovykh repressii' [Infographic: four years of mass repression], *Viasna*. Available at: <https://spring96.org/ru/news/115957> (Accessed: 23 September 2024).
- ▶ **Wijermars, M. and Lokot, T.** (2022) 'Is Telegram a "harbinger of freedom"? The performance, practices, and perception of platforms as political actors in authoritarian states', *Post-Soviet Affairs*, 38(1–2), pp. 125–145. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/1060586X.2022.2030645>.
- ▶ **Zerkalo** 'Skol'ko belarusov uexalo iz strany? Issledovateli nazvali tsifru v "500–600 tysyach" [How many Belarusians have left the country? Researchers mentioned a figure of "500–600 thousand"]', *Zerkalo*, 8 May. Available at: <https://news.zerkalo.io/economics/67856.html> (Accessed: 23 September 2024).
- ▶ **Zhyrmont, A. and Krapiva, N.** (2021) 'Four ways the international community can protect Belarusian civil society under attack', *Access Now*. Available at: <https://www.accessnow.org/how-to-help-protect-belarusian-civil-society/> (Accessed: 23 September 2024).

JOHAN (NAME CHANGED BY THE AUTHOR)

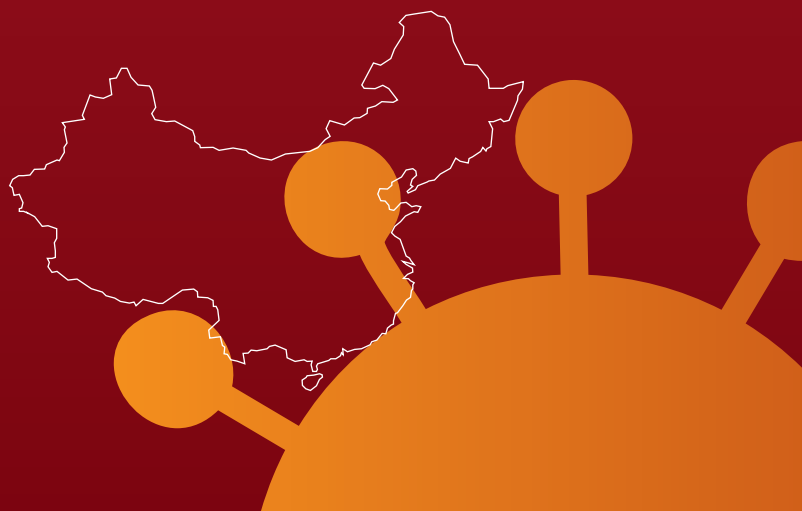
Johan is a Research Master's student, majoring in sociology at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam and a freelance writer. His research focuses on the Chinese diaspora, minority groups and democratic movements in China, especially developments since the COVID-19 pandemic.

FACILITATING DISSENT: A CASE STUDY OF HOW CHINESE MEDIA OVERCAME EXILE AND ENGAGED AUDIENCES AMID THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Introduction

The concept of 'exile' centres on the notion of separation or isolation from a community or society to which one once belonged (Forsdyke, 2009; Bublatzky, 2022). Exile media refers to media outlets that cannot function in the country relevant to their content, including those forced to leave or already established abroad for safety reasons (Cook, 2016; Hlinovská and Schutter, 2021). These outlets may involve contributors who have not fled themselves (Hlinovská and de Schutter, 2021). Conceivably, exiled media face challenges such as insecurity, inconsistent funding, limited audience outreach and access to reliable sources, alongside personal and professional difficulties (Hlinovská and de Schutter, 2021). This paper focuses on the challenge of audience outreach and mobilisation.

The online space offers an opportunity for exiled media to participate in social and political debates in their home country, disseminating information to domestic and international audiences (Nedelcu, 2019; Bublatzky, 2022; Kabir, 2023). Chinese exiled media, facing heavy censorship in China, have adopted unique operational strategies, with some establishing themselves on platforms like X (formerly Twitter), Instagram, YouTube and Facebook, all of which are blocked in mainland China. Although self-exiled from the outset, these media outlets continue to produce content pertaining to events and issues in mainland China, mainly targeting domestic audiences. Unlike media forced into exile, which already have an established user base, outlets founded abroad face inherent constraints in reaching audiences and must work harder to build a following.



This study examined Citizen's Daily CN¹ (CDCN), a Chinese exiled media outlet on Instagram. Launched on 15 March 2020, shortly after the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, CDCN had accumulated 73,000 followers by 21 September 2024. Notably, its audience engagement surged during the 2022 COVID-19 protests in China (the 'White Paper Protest')². Among Chinese pro-democracy social media accounts on Instagram, CDCN ranked as the second most-followed (see Appendix I for details). By analysing the number of likes on CDCN's posts, this study aims to understand how exiled media can overcome challenges in audience outreach and mobilisation.

This study of low-effort political engagement, such as liking and following, highlights three key insights: 1) simple actions can be sustained over time, embedding into daily routines (Bode, 2017); 2) low-cost engagement can evolve into deeper participation and build social media loyalty (Bode, 2017; Kabir, 2023); and 3) in China, even basic actions like following or liking may draw the attention of the government, showing that such acts carry risks (Gan and Xiong, 2024).

It begs the question: as an exiled media outlet established abroad, what strategies did CDCN employ to overcome its inherent constraints and reach its audience? Specifically, how did it leverage its influence to facilitate the White Paper Protest in China? This study seeks to answer the research question: what strategies has CDCN utilised to engage its audience and support the White Paper Protest in China?

Methodology and Data

This study adopts a case study approach, analysing CDCN's Instagram account as a representative of Chinese exiled media. Using both qualitative and quantitative methods, the research includes manual coding and categorisation of CDCN's posts, examining post frequency and likes received. Each post during the peak of the White Paper Protest was coded and categorised into two main groups – audience reach and mobilisation – each with subcategories based on the post's intention and direct influence. Quantitative analysis of likes provides insight into audience engagement with different content types.

Since its inception, CDCN's content has evolved significantly, initially focusing on news updates, dissident perspectives, satirical cartoons, memes and related materials. This study specifically analysed posts during the peak period of the White Paper Protest, from 1 October to 15 December 2022, covering a total of 130 posts over 76 days. This approach allows for an in-depth analysis of the strategies CDCN used to engage its audience and influence collective action.

¹ Citizens Daily CN, Chinese translation: 公民日报, link: <https://www.instagram.com/citizensdailyen/?hl=en>.

² China's prolonged and stringent zero-COVID lockdowns led to widespread public discontent, particularly as other countries reopened in 2022. On 24 November a deadly fire in Urumqi, Xinjiang, intensified public anger amid reports that lockdown measures may have trapped residents (Tian, 2022). Two days later, people gathered on Urumqi Road in Shanghai for a vigil, holding blank sheets of paper in silent protest against censorship (Wong and Williams, 2022). The movement quickly spread to cities such as Beijing, Chengdu and Hangzhou, becoming widely known as the White Paper Protest (Hall, Horwitz and Pollard, 2022; He, 2022).

Analysis

As exiled media, CDCN voices its claims through diverse posts within a de-territorialised, transnational public sphere, mobilising transnationally and effecting political change (Nedelcu, 2019). Each CDCN post analysed was summarised and categorised into specific types to identify distinct strategies (see Figure 1). As outlined previously, the content is divided into two main categories: 1) reaching a broader audience, and 2) mobilisation, analysing how CDCN encouraged followers to transition from online engagement to offline activism.

Each main category has subcategories to capture CDCN’s varied approaches. To expand audience reach, four subcategories were defined: a) memes – using humour or satire to engage and attract viewers; b) amplifying censored content – highlighting information censored in China for broader visibility; c) media reporting – offering factual updates on events in China; and d) building online communities–fostering a sense of belonging among followers and encouraging interaction. For mobilisation, two subcategories were identified: a) mobilisation for protests – encouraging participation in upcoming protests; and b) spreading protest endeavours – documenting protest activities, promoting awareness and solidarity across borders.

Analysing engagement levels across categories revealed specific patterns. Notably, posts categorised under ‘amplifying censored content’ received the highest average number of likes (6,937), indicating a strong audience response to content that counters censorship. Mobilisation-related posts also attracted higher than average engagement when compared to other subcategories underscoring a significant audience interest in action-oriented content during this period. In contrast, community-building posts received fewer likes on average (713), suggesting that the audience was less engaged with purely community-focused content. Although efforts to build an online community and organise followers by location may strengthen future offline mobilisation, these posts did not generate as much engagement as other types.

Category	Subcategory	Post Count	Likes (On Average)
Reaching a broader audience	1) Memes	16	2944
	2) Amplifying Censored Content	19	6937
	3) Media Reporting	7	3981
	4) Building Online Community	13	713
Mobilisation	1) Mobilisation for Protest	35	4582
	2) Spreading Protest Endeavours	39	4405
Total		129	4405

Figure 1: Engagement Metrics Across Content Categories

Apart from the overall engagement pattern, CDCN experienced significant engagement spikes around key protest events. The first peak occurred on 13 October 2022, when a protester hung banners on the Sitong Bridge in Beijing calling for reform, universal suffrage and the suspension of the zero-COVID policy (the ‘Beijing Sitong Bridge Protest’)³. Before this event, posting frequency was low, with only five posts, four of which were categorised as memes – which did not attract high engagement as suggested previously. However, the Sitong Bridge Protest ignited widespread public response, with the post immediately following the protest receiving 10,000 likes. On the same day, CDCN shared protest slogans and printable materials that garnered 15,000 likes. The following day, the account began posting images of global protesters displaying these materials. On 18 October, five days after the protest, CDCN launched the ‘Democracy Wall Project’⁴ to foster an online community among supporters.

It follows that those posts form a recurring four-phase cycle of audience engagement and mobilisation (see Chart 1): 1) attracting the audience with memes and other content – engaging followers through humour, satire or news, classified under ‘Memes’, ‘Amplifying Censored Content’ and ‘Media Reporting’; 2) mobilising for action – encouraging audience participation in upcoming protests, corresponding to ‘Mobilisation for Protests’; 3) amplifying protest visibility – sharing protest images and videos to reduce isolation and create visibility, classified under ‘Spreading Protest Endeavours’; and 4) building community connection – reinforcing community ties through projects like the Democracy Wall, classified under ‘Building an Online Community’.

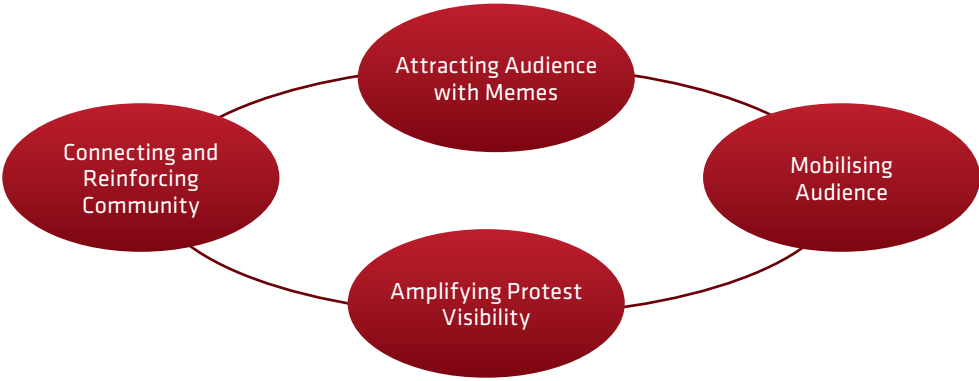


Chart 1: Four-Phase Cycle of Audience Engagement and Mobilisation

⁴ The Beijing Sitong Bridge protest took place on 13 October 2022, in Haidian, Beijing, where a man displayed banners on Sitong Bridge accusing President Xi of being a dictator. He proclaimed, ‘Say no to Covid PCR test, yes to food; Say no to lockdown, yes to freedom; Say no to lies, yes to dignity; Say no to the Cultural Revolution, yes to reform; Say no to great leader, yes to suffrage; Don’t be a slave, be a citizen. Remove the dictator and national traitor XI Jinping.’ Although he was quickly detained, images of his protest spread globally and the slogan became central to the White Paper Protest. The event also evoked memories of the 1989 Tiananmen pro-democracy protests, with the protester, now known as ‘Bridge Man’, drawing comparisons to the famous ‘Tank Man’ who stood against tanks during Tiananmen (Mao, 2022).

All posts with over 10,000 likes were directly related to protests or associated events, including posts following the Sitong Bridge Protest (13 October), an individual protester in Chongqing criticising the COVID lockdown on his residential compound (24 November)⁵, the Urumqi fire tragedy (24 November), and the White Paper Protest (27 November). These posts fit a pattern: first, introducing a pivotal event; second, mobilising followers for upcoming protests; and finally, amplifying visibility by sharing protest images. This cycle effectively engaged followers and maintained momentum for the protest movement (see Appendix II for detailed metrics).

Findings

In summary, CDCN employed a strategic blend of varied content types to overcome the challenges of audience engagement and mobilisation under exiled conditions. Each type of post served a specific purpose, sustaining daily engagement and maintaining audience interest across both routine and critical events. While audience engagement was lower with community-building content, CDCN demonstrated a robust mobilisation capacity during key events, sustaining momentum during significant incidents. Posts with over 10,000 likes were nearly all related to events in mainland China, emphasising that maintaining strong connections with domestic issues is crucial for exiled media to effectively engage and mobilise their audiences.

Discussion

This paper, relying on audience engagement as measured by the number of likes each post received, offers a preliminary understanding of how CDCN reached and mobilised its audience but also acknowledges its limitations. The narrow timeframe and exclusive focus on likes provide only a surface-level view of engagement. Future studies could explore follower growth trends or examine other engagement metrics, such as interactions within comments, to capture the effects of different types of posts more comprehensively. A broader analysis could yield deeper insights into how various content strategies shape audience behaviour and facilitate mobilisation in the context of exiled media.

⁵ The post features a video of a resident delivering a passionate speech against the COVID lockdown in his residential compound, quoting Patrick Henry's famous words, 'Give me liberty, or give me death!' The crowd hailed him as a 'hero' and temporarily freed him from police officers attempting to detain him. Although he was ultimately arrested, he later became widely known online as 'Chongqing Superman', and his speech circulated broadly on social media (Wang and Gan, 2022).

References

- ▶ **Bode, L.** (2017) 'Gateway Political Behaviors: The Frequency and Consequences of Low-Cost Political Engagement on Social Media', *Social Media + Society*, 3(4), pp. 1–10. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305117743349>.
- ▶ **Bublitzky, C.** (2022) 'Mobile Belonging in Digital Exile: Methodological Reflection on Doing 'Ethnography on (Social) Media Practices', *Media and Communication*, 10(3), pp. 236–246. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.17645/mac.v10i3.5379>.
- ▶ **Cook, C. E.** (2016). 'Fragile finance: The revenue models of oppositional news outlets in repressive regimes', *The International Communication Gazette*, 78(6), pp. 514–535. Available at: [doi:10.1177/1748048516640212](https://doi.org/10.1177/1748048516640212).
- ▶ **Feng, E.** (2022) 'How a deadly fire in Xinjiang prompted protests unseen in China in three decades', *NPR*, 28 November. Available at: <https://www.npr.org/2022/11/26/1139273138/china-protests-covid-lockdown-urumqi-beijing> (Accessed: 9 November 2024).
- ▶ **Forsdyke, S.** (2006) *Exile, Ostracism, and Democracy: The Politics of Expulsion in Ancient Greece*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, pp. 6–12. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781400826865>.
- ▶ **Gan, N. and Xiong, Y.** (2024) 'A dissident in Europe is enraging Beijing. Now Chinese police are coming for his social media followers', *CNN*, 18 March. Available at: <https://edition.cnn.com/2024/03/18/china/china-teacher-li-followers-police-questioning-intl-hnk/index.html> (Accessed: 9 November 2024).
- ▶ **Hall C., Horwitz J. and Pollard M. Q.** (2022) 'Clashes in Shanghai as COVID protests flare across China', *Reuters*, 27 November. Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/world/china/shanghai-hit-by-covid-protests-anger-spreads-across-china-2022-11-27/> (Accessed: 7 November 2024).
- ▶ **He, L.** (2022) "'White paper" protests: China's top stationery supplier says it's still selling A4 sheets', *CNN Business*, 29 November. Available at: <https://edition.cnn.com/2022/11/29/economy/china-white-paper-protests-stock-run-intl-hnk/index.html> (Accessed: 7 November 2024).
- ▶ **Hlinovská, A., and de Schutter, N.** (2021) 'Independent Media in Exile: A Research Report on Challenges Faced by Independent Media in Exile', *University College Maastricht*, Research Report. Available at: <https://kq.freepressunlimited.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Independent-Media-in-Exile-24.8.2021.pdf> (Accessed: 5 September 2024).
- ▶ **Kabir, P.** (2023) 'Civic Engagement in Exile: Exploring Social Media Presence of Dissidents From Bangladesh', *The International Journal of Press/Politics* 28(3), pp. 516–532. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/19401612211047200>.
- ▶ **Mao, F.** (2022) 'China's "Bridge Man" inspires Xi Jinping protest signs around the world', *BBC News*, 18 October. Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-63295749> (Accessed: 8 November 2024).
- ▶ **Nedelcu, M.** (2019) 'Digital Diasporas', in R. Cohen and C. Fischer (eds.) *Routledge Handbook of Diaspora Studies*. New York: Routledge, pp. 241–250.
- ▶ **Tian, Y.L.** (2022) 'Protests erupt in Xinjiang and Beijing after deadly fire', *Reuters*, 26 November. Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/world/china/huge-covid-protests-erupt-chinas-xinjiang-after-deadly-fire-2022-11-26/> (Accessed: 6 November 2024).
- ▶ **Universität Wien** (n.d.) 'The Chinese democracy movement of 1978–1981'. Available at: <https://pekinger-fruehling.univie.ac.at/en/the-chinese-democracy-movement-of-1978-1981/> (Accessed: 8 November 2024).

- **Wang, S. and Gan, N.** (2022) 'As anger rises and tragedies mount, China shows no sign of budging on zero-Covid', *CNN*, 25 November. Available at: <https://edition.cnn.com/2022/11/25/china/china-zero-covid-discontent-reopening-mic-intl-hnk/index.html> (Accessed: 9 November 2024).
- **Wong, T. and Williams N.** (2022) 'China Covid: Protests continue in major cities across the country', *BBC News*, 27 November. Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-63771109> (Accessed: 6 November 2024).

Appendix I

Ranking of top Chinese Pro-democratic Social Media Accounts on Instagram by Number of Followers:

Instagram Handle (Username)	Number of Followers	Description	Chinese Name	English Meaning
northern_square	98000	Media outlets & Community channel	北方广场	Square in the North
citizensdailyen	73000	Media outlets	公民日报	Citizen's Daily
whynot_wainao	55000	Media outlets	歪脑	Why not
cdt.404	24000	Archive of censored contents	中国数字时代	Digital Time China
whatsup_beijing	22000	Media outlets	北京怎么了	What's up Beijing
outsight_china	23000	Media outlets	看鉴中国	Outsight of China
feministchina	15000	Advocacy Social Media Account	女权中国	Feminism in China
rfamandarin	12000	Media outlets	自由亚洲普通话	Radio Free Asia Mandarin Channel
amnestychinese	10000	Advocacy Social Media Account	国际特赦组织中文	Amnesty International Chinese Channel
bumingbaipod	5935	Media outlets	不明白	I don't understand
chinese_documentary_	5725	Documentary Platform	中国纪录片	Chinese Documentary
lefrontdelaliberte	1859	Advocacy Social Media Account and Community Channel for Paris	自由广场	Liberal Square
women4china	1658	Advocacy Social Media Account	Women 我们	We, women
chrdnet	1146	Advocacy Social Media Account	中国人权捍卫者	Chinese Human Rights Defender
gonglaoxiaobao	1042	Advocacy Social Media Account	劳工小报	Labor Bulletin
404_china	845	Archive of censored contents	404 中国	404 China
songrenshangjie	285	Advocacy Social Media Account	怂人上街	From Fear to Action

Appendix II

Posts with over 10,000 likes during this time frame:

Date	Post Related Event	Language	Type	Likes	Link
13/10/2022	the Sitong Bridge Protest	Chinese	Media reporting	10000	https://www.instagram.com/p/CjprWixOPIS/?img_index=1
13/10/2022	the Sitong Bridge Protest	Bilingual	Mobilisation for upcoming protest	15000	https://www.instagram.com/p/CjqizyHuXvL/?img_index=1
24/11/2022	An individual protester in Chongqing	Chinese	Spreading protest endeavours	12000	https://www.instagram.com/p/CIWfkpQO_I/?img_index=1
25/11/2022	the Urumqi fire tragedy	English	Amplifying censored contents from mainland China	27000	https://www.instagram.com/p/CIzSMNPVgT/?img_index=1
26/11/2022	the Urumqi fire tragedy	Chinese	Spreading protest endeavours	12000	https://www.instagram.com/p/Clbh3_5Odrq/?img_index=1
27/11/2022	the White Paper Protest	Chinese	Amplifying censored contents from mainland China	18000	https://www.instagram.com/p/Clc-v4isW2Q/?img_index=1
27/11/2022	the White Paper Protest	Chinese	Mobilisation for upcoming protest	21000	https://www.instagram.com/p/ClHxQvuckK/?img_index=1
27/11/2022	the White Paper Protest	Chinese	Mobilisation for upcoming protest	19000	https://www.instagram.com/p/ClcHFeQO-lj/?img_index=1
27/11/2022	the White Paper Protest	English	Amplifying censored contents from mainland China	12000	https://www.instagram.com/p/ClcdBmDP_Zr/?img_index=1
28/11/2022	the White Paper Protest	Chinese	Spreading protest endeavours	10000	https://www.instagram.com/p/Clghfn4OaRv/?img_index=1
29/11/2022	the White Paper Protest	Chinese	Mobilisation for upcoming protest	12000	https://www.instagram.com/p/ClhkPBVqPPN/?img_index=1
29/11/2022	the White Paper Protest	Chinese	Mobilisation for upcoming protest	10000	https://www.instagram.com/p/ClIK7cQun11/?img_index=1
7/12/2022	An individual protester in UCLA	Chinese	Spreading protest endeavours	12000	https://www.instagram.com/p/Cl2rmgosaiS/?img_index=1

MARIAM BOTCHORISHVILI

Mariam Botchorishvili is an MA student in International Relations at Corvinus University of Budapest. She holds a BA in International Relations from the University of World Economy and Diplomacy in Uzbekistan. Her current research focuses on ethno-nationalism and Euroscepticism in the Black Sea region.

THE DARK SIDE OF DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES: SUPPRESSING EXILED ACTIVISM (THE HONG KONG CASE)

Introduction

In recent years, digital technologies have repeatedly proven useful for the work of activists in exile. Authoritarian governments have noticed this efficiency and begun to utilise these technologies to hinder the efforts of the activists abroad. As a result, a new form of transnational repression emerged, with digital technologies playing an essential role in its toolkit. The aim of this essay is to explore how these technologies are used as tools to suppress activism in exile and how these methods affect the lives of activists abroad. The essay will primarily focus on the case of Hong Kong dissidents in exile, since they have been subject to digital transnational repression for a considerable amount of time. Their experiences serve as a critical example of how authoritarian regimes exploit technology to silence dissent abroad.



Methods of Digital Transnational Repression

In 2020, China introduced a controversial national security law (NSL), which changed the constitutional relationship between itself and Hong Kong and challenged the latter's liberal status in at least two ways: a) it undermined the legitimacy of the Basic Law, which has guaranteed Hong Kong's autonomy and constrained the Chinese government; and b) it impaired the capacity of Hong Kong institutions, including the executive and judiciary, to protect individual liberties and autonomy from potential intrusions by the Chinese and Hong Kong governments (Chan, 2021). In the months following the adoption of the NSL, the majority of the pro-democratic opposition were arrested or fled the city, opposition groups of all types were shut down, and the media and universities were intimidated into remaining silent (Davis, 2022). Consequently, Hong Kong was transformed, with hundreds of thousands of residents leaving the city. Hong Kong Chief Executive John Lee Ka-chiu pledged to 'pursue [the targeted activists] for the rest of our lives even if they run to the ends of the earth' (Cunningham, 2024). As a result, numerous human rights and civil society organisations have reported cases of transnational repression and urged governments to respond to the intimidation of Hong Kong activists in exile (Uyghur Human Rights Project, 2024).

Nowadays, increasing diaspora activism can be observed in many parts of the world. Diaspora activists are defined as 'any émigré, exile, refugee, or emigrant advocating for social, economic, and political change in their country of origin' (Moss, 2020). In response to this phenomenon, digital authoritarianism has emerged, which refers to 'the use of digital information technology by authoritarian regimes to surveil, repress, and manipulate domestic and foreign populations' (Polyakova and Meserole, 2019, p.1). Studying examples of Hong Kong diaspora activists can help identify its most common methods.

One of the most prominent cases is that of Anna Kwok, one of eight overseas-based activists with a HK\$1 million bounty for her arrest. While she was an anonymous activist during the 2019 Hong Kong protests, she decided to publicise her identity in 2022 (HKDC, 2024). Currently, Kwok lives in the United States and serves as the Executive Director of the Hong Kong Democracy Council (HKDC), a Washington, DC-based non-profit organisation supporting Hong Kong's pro-democracy movement. After the announcement of the bounty, Kwok, who is the youngest and only woman on the list, reported a dramatic increase in online harassment, threats of sexual violence and hacking attempts (Taylor, 2023). In November 2023, Kwok (2023) published a post on social media announcing her plans to participate in a demonstration against Xi Jinping. As a result, she started receiving online threats within about 12 hours: some urging others to apprehend her, while others made threats of kidnapping. The threats are reported to have likely been coordinated since they originated from pseudonymous accounts that primarily interacted with each other and displayed the same image of Kwok's face on a Hong Kong Police Force wanted poster, promising a HK\$1 million reward for any information that could lead to her arrest (HKDC and SFT, 2024). In addition, the HKDC Executive Director claims that Hong Kongers can no longer like or share her posts due to their fear of leaving any traces online, as the regime is closely monitoring their activities (Taylor, 2023).

Another important case to mention is that of Chung Ching Kwong, a pro-democracy activist from Hong Kong who is currently working for the Inter-Parliamentary Alliance on China (IPAC). She is also the founder and former spokesperson of Keyboard Frontline, an organisation dedicated to monitoring online censorship and digital rights. Kwong was forced to leave Hong Kong after the adoption of the NSL to avoid arrest for her work advocating for democracy. After relocating to Europe, she has been involved in several pro-democracy campaigns, as a result of which she has become the target of numerous threats and even doxxing, with her personal phone number leaked online (Taylor, 2023). Additionally, after filing a petition on the 'Imposition of sanctions and other countermeasures due to the situation in Hong Kong' with the German federal parliament in 2020, Kwong (2020) stated that she experienced an increase in threats, particularly from individuals claiming to be civil servants of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR).

Transnational repression by the Chinese government has also reached activists residing in Australia. One example is the case of an activist under the pseudonym Horror Zoo, who openly criticizes Xi on social media and has assisted with organising protests in Melbourne in support of Hong Kong pro-democracy activists. Although she has never disclosed her true identity online, Beijing officials were nonetheless able to locate her parents and began harassing them, pressuring them to convince their daughter to cease her criticism of President Xi Jinping. Zoo also posted a video of a threatening call she received from a Chinese policeman sitting next to her father. In 2020, Zoo participated in a high-profile Zoom conference hosted by Zhou Fengsuo, the founder of the US non-profit organisation Humanitarian China. After the conference, the harassment of her parents intensified to the point where her father urged her to return home and turn herself in. In addition, the activist disclosed that there had been attempts to hack her Apple account, as she received alerts from a location in China (Gilbert, 2020).

It is also worth mentioning that, apart from activists, students living abroad are also being targeted. This has been illustrated in a report by Amnesty International (2024), which asserts that it has created the most comprehensive record of the Chinese government's transnational repression at foreign universities to date. The organisation conducted interviews with 32 students, 12 of whom were from Hong Kong and enrolled in universities in 8 different countries. As a result, a number of students claimed they were under surveillance by the Chinese government. Almost a third stated that their families had been harassed by government officials. Despite being abroad, nearly one-third of the students reported experiencing the same level of censorship on Chinese social media sites like WeChat as they would in mainland China. Some students were able to provide proof of digital surveillance; for example, police showed one student's parents transcripts of their private WeChat conversations with family members.

The above-mentioned cases illustrate the experience of numerous other exiled Hong Kong dissidents who have been targets of digital transnational repression by the Chinese government. After studying these examples, one can make assumptions about how digital

technologies are used as tools to silence activists in exile. First, the case of Anna Kwok indicates the use of online harassment as a method. Since she is a female activist, sexually violent insults are especially present in the toolkit. It is apparent here that even though social media platforms can be quite beneficial for the work of diaspora activists, they can also become a tool for harassment and abuse. Moreover, Chung Ching Kwong's case demonstrates that doxxing can be a method of repression, since publishing personal information can have dangerous consequences for the individual. In addition, with the example of Horror Zoo, it can be assumed that surveillance and tracking are utilised by the Chinese government to suppress the activities of dissident diaspora members. Finally, the case of Chinese and Hong Kong students living abroad demonstrates a number of mechanisms that might be used by the regime's authorities. Censorship is among the most commonly reported methods used to silence dissent.

Effects of Digital Transnational Repression on the Lives of Exiled Activists

It is evident that digital transnational repression has a variety of repercussions on the lives of activists in exile. This section will continue to examine the cases of the above-mentioned activists in order to identify some of the most common effects of the digital toolkit.

Firstly, diaspora members can be subject to surveillance, which violates their right to privacy. This is particularly evident in Horror Zoo's case. According to the activist, she is unaware of how the Chinese authorities managed to uncover her anonymous online identity, suspecting that they could have traced her IP address or even coerced someone close to her to reveal her identity (Gilbert, 2020). In addition, of the students interviewed by Amnesty International (2024), nearly half disclosed that individuals they believed were working for the state had taken pictures or videos of them during protests or other similar occasions. These beliefs were in fact supported by Amnesty's research, which showed a pattern of near-identical observations across various locations and settings, despite the fact that students were unable to produce conclusive evidence of these people's identities.

Secondly, digital transnational repression has an impact on the relationships between those in exile and their family members back home, since all the activists in question mentioned limiting or cutting contact with relatives for security reasons. To illustrate, both Anna Kwok and Chung Ching Kwong's family members were questioned in Hong Kong, which is why they had to cut off communication with them (Taylor, 2023). Furthermore, several of the interviewed students reported taking similar measures in order to protect their loved ones from being targeted by the Chinese government (Amnesty International, 2024).

Thirdly, exiled activists might face problems connected to their mental health as a result of living in constant fear of repression. Over 50% of the students admitted that they experienced mental health issues related to their fears, including stress, trauma, paranoia and depression (Amnesty International, 2024). Kwong also confessed that one becomes paranoid about what the authorities might deduce from whatever one posts online (Taylor, 2023). In addition, Anna Kwok, in her testimony to the House Select Committee on the Chinese Communist Party, highlighted that despite living in the United

States, she is still not free, but rather ‘trapped in the constant mental pressure of being hunted’ since she is wanted in Hong Kong (Cunningham, 2024). Similar experiences are also reflected in medical literature, where the use of security technologies by states has been linked to mental health challenges for ordinary citizens. Malik, Acharya and Humane (2024) found that people may experience increased stress when they are aware that they are under surveillance. This can have detrimental effects on pre-existing mental health disorders, especially anxiety and paranoia.

Furthermore, digital transnational repression can actually limit engagement in diaspora activism. While some people are prepared to face the consequences of repression, others might be too hesitant to take the risk. For example, in Anna Kwok’s case, the fact that some people stopped reacting to her posts out of fear of leaving any traces indicates that the mobilisation of people can be constrained by the government’s repressive activities online.

Moreover, some diaspora members are forced to resort to self-censorship for fear of being monitored by the Chinese authorities. Chung Ching Kwong does not wish to share any details of her life on social media and has become conscious of what she should avoid discussing online (Taylor, 2023). With regard to the students, more than 50% reported regularly self-censoring their posts on digital platforms due to potential monitoring by the Chinese government, even on foreign social media sites like Facebook, Instagram and X (Amnesty International, 2024).

It is also worth mentioning that some scholars studying digital transnational repression distinguish its unique effects on women in particular, suggesting that, in addition to the experiences of their male counterparts, online harassment directed at women frequently involves gender-based elements (Aljizawi and Anstis, 2022). This is quite evident in the Hong Kong case. Anna Kwok, for instance, reported receiving numerous threats of sexual violence and kidnapping (Taylor, 2023). Similarly, Chung Ching Kwong (2020) has posted online that she has been receiving threats, including those of physical and sexual abuse.

Overall, it appears that the effects of the digital repressive measures taken by the Chinese government extend not only to the work of the exiled activists, but also to their personal lives, often including their family members back home.

Conclusion

To conclude, it is clear that digital technologies have become an essential part of the transnational repression toolkit. It is with their help that state power can be extended beyond borders and threaten fundamental human rights, including the freedom of speech, the right to privacy, the freedom of assembly and association and the freedom of movement, *inter alia*. Digital repression also poses challenges to the enforcement mechanisms of international law since the nature of its effects on host state sovereignty has yet to be determined.

This essay has examined the cases of Hong Kong activists living in exile on different continents and identified some of the key mechanisms used by the Chinese government to suppress dissent abroad. These methods include surveillance and tracking, doxxing, online harassment, threats of physical and sexual abuse, hacking and censorship. In addition, it has been determined that some of the most common effects that these tools have on the lives of exiled dissidents include the violation of the right to privacy, breaking off relations with loved ones, mental health issues, limitation of engagement, self-censorship, as well as additional impact on women due to gender-based harassment. The experiences of the Hong Kong activists highlight the threat of digital transnational repression and provide us with a valuable insight into some of its methods and consequences. However, there is still room for further research into how these repressive tactics impact exiled activism in different contexts and how host governments could respond to them.

References

- ▶ **Aljizawi, N. and Anstis, S.** (2022) 'The Effects of Digital Transnational Repression and the Responsibility of Host States', *lawfaremedia.org*, 27 May. Available at: <https://www.lawfaremedia.org/article/effects-digital-transnational-repression-and-responsibility-host-states> (Accessed: 27 September 2024).
- ▶ **Amnesty International.** (2024) 'China: Overseas students face harassment and surveillance in campaign of transnational repression', *amnesty.org*, 13 May. Available at: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2024/05/china-overseas-students-face-harassment-and-surveillance-in-campaign-of-transnational-repression/> (Accessed: 27 September 2024).
- ▶ **Chan, C.** (2021) 'Can Hong Kong remain a liberal enclave within China? Analysis of the Hong Kong National Security Law', *Public Law*, pp. 271–292. Available at: https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3802681 (Accessed: 30 October 2024).
- ▶ **Cunningham, M.** (2024) 'Hong Kong's Transnational Repression Threatens Human Rights in America', *The Heritage Foundation*, 29 January. Available at: <https://www.heritage.org/asia/commentary/hong-kongs-transnational-repression-threatens-human-rights-america> (Accessed: 27 September 2024).
- ▶ **Davis, M.C.** (2022) 'Hong Kong: How Beijing Perfected Repression', *Journal of Democracy*, 33(1), pp. 100–115. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2022.0007> (Accessed: 30 October 2024).
- ▶ **Gilbert, D.** (2020) 'Chinese Police Are Making Threatening Video Calls to Dissidents Abroad', *VICE*, 14 July. Available at: <https://www.vice.com/en/article/chinese-police-are-video-calling-citizens-abroad-with-threats-not-to-criticize-beijing/> (Accessed: 27 September 2024).
- ▶ **HKDC.** (2024) 'Anna Kwok', *HKDC*. Available at: <https://www.hkdc.us/our-staff/anna-kwok> (Accessed: 27 September 2024).
- ▶ **HKDC and SFT** (2024) *Exporting Repression: Attacks on Protesters During Xi Jinping's Visit to San Francisco in November 2023*. Available at: <https://ccpexportingrepression.com/#user-content-fn-27> (Accessed: 27 September 2024).
- ▶ **Kwong, C.** (2020) [Twitter] 5 October. Available at: <https://x.com/chungchingkwong/status/1313056665579786241> (Accessed: 27 September 2024).

- ▶ **Kwok, A.** (2023) [Twitter] 11 November. Available at: <https://x.com/AnnaKwokFY/status/1723423634684047661?s=20> (Accessed: 27 September 2024).
- ▶ **Malik, A., Acharya, S., and Humane S.** (2024) 'Exploring the Impact of Security Technologies on Mental Health: A Comprehensive Review', *Cureus*, 16(2): e53664. Available at: doi: 10.7759/cureus.53664 or <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC10918303/> (Accessed: 27 September 2024).
- ▶ **Moss, D.** (2020) 'The Importance of Defending Diaspora Activism for Democracy and Human Rights', *Freedom House Special Report*. Available at: <https://freedomhouse.org/report/special-report/2020/importance-defending-diaspora-activism-democracy-and-human-rights> (Accessed: 27 September 2024).
- ▶ **Polyakova, A. and Meserole, C.** (2019) 'Exporting digital authoritarianism: The Russian and Chinese models', *Brookings Institution*. Available at: https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/FP_20190827_digital_authoritarianism_polyakova_meserole.pdf (Accessed: 27 September 2024).
- ▶ **Taylor, L.** (2023) 'Hong Kong exiled activists silenced online as surveillance rises', *Context*, 2 October. Available at: <https://www.context.news/surveillance/hong-kong-exiled-activists-silenced-online-as-surveillance-rises> (Accessed: 27 September 2024).
- ▶ **Uyghur Human Rights Project.** (2024) 'UHRP Joins 80 Human Rights Organizations Urging Government Action in Response to Intimidation of Hong Kong Activists', *Uyghur Human Rights Project*, 20 December. Available at: <https://uhrp.org/statement/uhrp-joins-80-human-rights-organizations-urging-government-action-in-response-to-intimidation-of-hong-kong-activists/> (Accessed: 27 September 2024).

2) IDENTITY AND PSYCHOLOGICAL CHALLENGES IN EXILE

MARIA GRYNEVYCH

Under the supervision of Prof. Dr. Kreide, Maria Grynevych is conducting her doctoral research titled 'Exploring the Civic Identity of Ukrainian Refugee Women in Germany Amidst the Russian-Ukrainian War.' Her academic journey is supported by the Giessen Centre for Eastern Europe (GiZo) through the DAAD scholarship programme, 'Cultural, Humanities and Social Sciences Scholarship Program for Refugees.'

THE JOURNEY OF UKRAINIAN REFUGEE WOMEN: GERMANY AND POLAND

Introduction

The ongoing war in Ukraine has led to the displacement of millions of citizens, forcing many into refugee status in neighbouring countries such as Germany and Poland. This mass displacement presents significant challenges for integration into host societies and the negotiation of identity. Understanding these challenges is crucial for developing effective support mechanisms and policies that facilitate integration while addressing the emotional and social needs of refugees.



This essay forms part of my PhD research, titled ‘Exploring the Civic Identity of Ukrainian Refugee Women in Germany Amidst the Russian-Ukrainian War.’ The study analyses the experiences of Ukrainian refugee women in Germany, categorising them into three distinct groups based on their civic engagement and their decisions regarding whether or not to integrate into German society or return to Ukraine. By exploring their narratives, the research aims to uncover the factors that facilitate or hinder their integration into the host community and the influences shaping their decision to remain in Germany or return to Ukraine.

The essay presents initial findings from interviews conducted with 17 Ukrainian refugee women in Germany during 2023 and 2024. These interviews provide valuable insights into their personal experiences and perspectives, contributing to a deeper understanding of their civic identities and integration processes.

Concepts and Theoretical Framework

The phenomenon of forced migration and refugee integration has been extensively studied within the fields of sociology and anthropology. Berry (1997) explores acculturation strategies among immigrants, highlighting the challenges of cultural adaptation and identity negotiation. He identifies four acculturation strategies:

- ▶ **Assimilation:** adopting the host culture while abandoning the original culture.
- ▶ **Integration:** maintaining one’s original culture while also participating in the host culture.
- ▶ **Separation:** retaining the original culture and avoiding interaction with the host culture.
- ▶ **Marginalisation:** losing touch with both original and host cultures.

These strategies reflect varying degrees of cultural maintenance and contact with the host society, shaping immigrants’ adaptation processes and psychological well-being.

Baldassar (2014) examines guilt as a central emotion influencing the migration process among transnational families. The concept of ‘refugee guilt’ reflects the emotional burden carried by refugees who have escaped conflict zones, leaving behind loved ones. Baldassar confirms Baumeister et al.’s (1994) functions of guilt – which include relationship enhancement, behaviour influence, and inequity reduction – and situates guilt within broader cultural processes.

Guilt operates within family dynamics as a resource for less powerful members, such as women and the elderly, to elicit caregiving responses from those with more power – a dynamic commonly referred to as a ‘guilt trip’. Baldassar emphasises that guilt is deeply embedded in social and cultural contexts, arising from interpersonal relationships and shared moral obligations within families that expect reciprocal care. By viewing guilt as a relational and cultural phenomenon, she highlights its role in sustaining transnational relationships and the ongoing connections between migrants and their homelands.

The role of civic engagement in facilitating integration has also been emphasised by Putnam (2000), who posits that social capital and community involvement are critical for successful adaptation. Engaging in community activities fosters a sense of belonging and can ease the acculturation process for refugees. By building networks and participating in civic life, refugees can enhance their social capital, which supports both personal well-being and societal cohesion.

Current State of Research

In late summer 2022, over 11,000 Ukrainian refugees aged between 18 and 70 were interviewed across Germany as part of the IAB-BiB/FReDA-BAMF-SOEP survey – a joint research project by the Institute for Employment Research (IAB), the Federal Institute for Population Research (BiB), the Research Centre of the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF-FZ) and the Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP) at the German Institute for Economic Research (DIW Berlin) (IAB et al., 2023).

At the beginning of 2023, nearly 7,000 individuals from this group participated in a second wave of the survey to document their current living conditions and any changes since the initial data collection. According to preliminary conclusions from the survey, ‘social participation has made significant progress recently’ (Grabka, 2023), indicating a strong civic identity among those displaced. However, such progress ‘cannot be taken for granted’, as the situations in both Ukraine and Germany impact the living conditions of Ukrainian refugees (Kosyakova, 2023). Many face considerable uncertainty about their future, as the ongoing war in Ukraine leaves the outcome largely unknown.

As a result, more than a quarter of Ukrainian refugees expressed uncertainty about whether and how long they wish to remain in Germany. Approximately one-third would like to remain until the end of the war, while another third intends to remain for several years or even permanently. This presents a ‘mixed picture’ regarding refugees’ intentions to either stay or return.

The temporary protection for Ukrainians, currently limited until March 2026 (European Council, 2024), adds to this uncertainty. Nonetheless, at the beginning of 2023, 44% of refugees intended to remain in Germany longer term – defined as at least a few more years or even indefinitely – an increase of five percentage points from late summer 2022 (Grabka, 2023). Among those who do not wish to stay permanently, 38% plan to return to Ukraine, while another 30% aim to maintain close contact with Germany and live there intermittently. Family situation and social integration play significant roles in these decisions; refugees with partners living abroad are less likely to intend to stay permanently (Kosyakova, 2023). Conversely, those pursuing education or training opportunities, possessing strong German language skills and feeling welcomed in Germany are more inclined to consider permanent residence.

While recent research on Ukrainian refugees in Germany for 2024 is limited, insights from studies on Ukrainian refugees in Poland illustrate broader tendencies among displaced Ukrainians in Europe. The analytical report 'A Way Home' (Zaika and Vakhitov, 2024) provides valuable data on the demographics, emotional states and intentions of Ukrainian refugees in Poland. Ukrainian refugees in Poland experience strong feelings of homesickness and maintain a robust national identity. Despite challenges, many express a desire to return to Ukraine, influenced by factors such as age, income, language use and family ties. This reflects similar emotional dynamics observed by Baldassar (2014) and can be compared and contrasted with the findings of this study.

Methodology

Research Design

This study adopts a grounded theory approach, which is well-suited to exploring complex social processes such as migration and identity transformation (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Grounded theory allows for the development of theories based on data collected from participants, making it particularly suitable for understanding the nuanced experiences of refugee women.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data were collected using semi-structured, in-depth interviews conducted with Ukrainian refugee women residing in Germany. In-depth interviews are beneficial as they allow participants to express their thoughts and feelings freely, providing rich and detailed data (DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree, 2006). The semi-structured format offers flexibility to explore emerging themes while ensuring that key topics are covered.

The interviews focused on themes such as reasons for leaving Ukraine, experiences adapting to Germany, the role of support systems, and motivations and perspectives on potentially returning to Ukraine.

The analysis involved a three-stage process:

- ▶ **Individual Analysis:** identifying key themes within each participant's narrative.
- ▶ **Group Comparison:** exploring differences and similarities between the groups.
- ▶ **Combined Analysis:** synthesising findings to understand inter-group dynamics and common themes.

Sample Selection

The sample consists of 17 Ukrainian refugee women in Germany, divided among three groups:

- ▶ **Group 1:** women with an active civic position (i.e., those actively engaged in civic activities and community involvement).
- ▶ **Group 2:** women with an undefined civic position (i.e., those who are less engaged in civic activities and whose civic identity is still forming).
- ▶ **Group 3:** returnees, currently represented by one participant (i.e., women who have decided to return to Ukraine).

Participants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure a diverse representation of experiences and perspectives. This method allowed for the inclusion of individuals with varying degrees of civic engagement, professional backgrounds and personal circumstances. The sampling was based on the assumption that different levels of civic engagement and intentions regarding either staying or returning would influence the women's integration experiences and civic identity formation.

Although Group 3 consists of only one participant, her experience provides valuable insights into the factors influencing the decision to return to Ukraine. Including this group contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of the varied experiences among Ukrainian refugee women.

Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to ethical guidelines for research involving human subjects. Participants were informed about the study's purpose, procedures and their rights, including the right to withdraw at any time. Confidentiality was ensured through the use of coded identifiers (e.g., Participant 1), and all data were securely stored. All participants provided informed consent before participating in the study.

Results

General Findings

Across all groups, participants faced significant challenges related to language barriers, cultural adaptation and social and professional integration during their phase of arrival and settlement. These obstacles – such as difficulties in finding employment, navigating bureaucratic systems and overcoming language barriers – affected their ability to adapt to German society and influenced their decisions regarding whether to remain in Germany or return to Ukraine.

Comparisons with Findings from Poland

Similar challenges were identified among Ukrainian refugees in Poland. Refugees in Poland also faced language barriers and employment difficulties, with many being unemployed or working remotely for Ukrainian companies. The emotional state of refugees in Poland was marked by persistent homesickness, with over 60% experiencing this feeling continuously (Zaika and Vakhitov, 2024).

Group Analysis

Group 1: Active Civic Position

Participants in Group 1 maintained a strong Ukrainian identity despite their efforts to integrate into German society. They engaged in activities that reinforced their cultural heritage and expressed a desire to contribute to both their homeland and host country. Active community engagement and support networks facilitated resilience among these participants in coping with integration challenges and emotional stress, providing a sense of purpose and belonging. This engagement allowed them to represent and integrate their Ukrainian identity within new communities, fostering a shared sense of belonging and purpose.

For example: Participant 5, a 29-year-old stand-up comedian, organised Ukrainian-language events in Berlin, fostering community among refugees and promoting Ukrainian culture abroad. Similarly, Participant 4 engaged in social activism, integrating her Ukrainian identity into community efforts and seeking a sense of community through activism.

The strong national identity observed in Group 1 participants mirrors findings from the Polish study, where Ukrainians abroad often became more aware of their Ukrainian identity. The report noted that being in a new environment strengthened their connection to their homeland (Zaika and Vakhitov, 2024). This phenomenon can also be understood in the context of Baldassar's (2014) concept of guilt, where maintaining cultural connections serves as a way to manage feelings of separation from the homeland.

Group 2: Undefined Civic Position

Participants in Group 2 faced challenges in balancing their Ukrainian heritage with their new lives in Germany. They struggled with identity negotiation and experienced stronger feelings of 'refugee guilt' (Baldassar, 2014). These participants found it more difficult to establish social networks and integrate into the host society, possibly due to their lower levels of civic engagement, which limited opportunities for social interaction and community support.

For example: Participant 12 faced language barriers and social isolation while feeling a strong duty to support her homeland. Local NGOs, volunteer organisations and family played critical roles in providing support, but all the participants in Group 2 still experienced difficulties in social integration.

This heightened sense of guilt aligns with Baldassar's (2014) findings on the emotional burdens carried by migrants. In Poland, refugees and migrants reported feelings of homesickness and hope for the future. However, the Polish study found that Ukrainians abroad rarely felt guilty for leaving Ukraine, with low scores reported for this emotion (Zaika and Vakhitov, 2024). This contrasts with the stronger 'refugee guilt' observed among Group 2 participants in Germany, indicating variations in emotional experiences across different host countries.

Group 3: Returnee Experience

Participant 17's Decision to Return

The decision to return was heavily influenced by emotional ties to family and a personal commitment to the homeland. Concern for her husband's emotional well-being prompted Participant 17 to return, highlighting the influence of family dynamics on migration decisions. She initially intended her stay in Germany to be temporary, underscoring a persistent desire to return to Ukraine.

Participant 17's experience resonates with Baldassar's (2014) findings on the role of guilt and moral obligation in the migration process. Her sense of moral obligation toward her husband aligns with the concept of guilt operating within family dynamics. The emotional burden of being away from her spouse and her inability to perform expected familial duties may have contributed to her decision to return. This reflects Baldassar's assertion that guilt is deeply embedded in social and cultural contexts, arising from interpersonal relationships and shared moral obligations within families anticipating reciprocal care.

Comparisons with the Polish study show that approximately half of the refugees intended to return to Ukraine, influenced by factors such as age, income, language identity and family status (Zaika and Vakhitov, 2024). Those with a stronger national identity and feelings of homesickness were more likely to express a desire to return, mirroring Participant 17's experience.

Discussion

Common Themes

Across all groups, participants faced significant challenges related to cultural adaptation, particularly in language acquisition, which affected their social and professional integration in Germany. These findings align with Berry's (1997) exploration of acculturation strategies, highlighting the difficulties immigrants face in adapting to new cultural environments. Similar challenges were observed among Ukrainian refugees in Poland, where language barriers and cultural differences impacted their ability to find employment and integrate socially (Zaika and Vakhitov, 2024).

Maintaining a strong Ukrainian identity emerged as a common coping mechanism among participants, providing emotional support amidst the challenges of displacement. The participants' efforts to preserve their cultural heritage helped them navigate the complexities of adapting to a new society while retaining a sense of self. Access to community networks, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and family support was vital in facilitating adaptation and emotional well-being. This finding underscores the importance of social support in the adaptation process, as emphasised by Putnam's (2000) notion of social capital.

Influence of Civic Engagement on Identity and Belonging

A notable aspect of the findings is the influence of civic engagement on identity and belonging. Participants in Group 1, who actively engaged in civic activities, demonstrated enhanced integration and resilience. Their involvement in community events and activism not only reinforced their Ukrainian identity but also fostered connections within the host society. Civic engagement provided them with platforms to express their cultural heritage and contribute positively to their new communities. This supports Putnam's (2000) assertion that social capital and community involvement are critical for successful adaptation.

In contrast, participants in Group 2 experienced stronger feelings of 'refugee guilt' and faced difficulties in establishing social networks. The lack of civic engagement limited their opportunities to interact with others and build supportive relationships, which may have exacerbated feelings of isolation and guilt. This suggests that civic engagement plays a crucial role in mitigating negative emotions and facilitating integration by providing a sense of purpose and belonging.

Factors Influencing Return Intentions

Several factors influenced the refugees' intentions to return to Ukraine:

Age and Income: older refugees (those over 50 years old) with lower incomes were more inclined to consider returning home. This may be due to stronger ties to the homeland, challenges in adapting to a new culture at an older age and financial constraints affecting their ability to establish a stable life abroad. This is consistent with findings from the Polish study, which indicated that demographics such as age and economic status affect return intentions (Zaika and Vakhitov, 2024).

Family Considerations: participants with children continuing their education in Ukrainian schools demonstrated a stronger desire to return, highlighting the importance of familial ties and educational continuity in migration decisions.

Optimism About Ukraine's Future: refugees who were hopeful about the end of the war and the country's recovery were more likely to plan a return, reflecting the impact of personal outlook and national sentiments on migration choices.

Participant 17's experience exemplifies these factors. Her decision to return was driven by emotional and familial commitments, particularly concern for her husband's well-being. This illustrates how guilt and moral obligations can significantly influence migration decisions, reinforcing the interconnectedness of personal emotions and broader cultural expectations (Baldassar, 2014).

Conclusion

The integration processes among Ukrainian refugee women in Germany are significantly influenced by individual aspirations, civic engagement, emotional experiences and support systems. Active participation in civic and community activities enhances resilience and facilitates cultural adaptation, aligning with Berry's (1997) acculturation model. The experiences of participants from Group 1 demonstrate that maintaining one's cultural identity while engaging in the host society can lead to successful integration. This challenges the notion that cultural preservation hinders adaptation, supporting the argument that social capital and community involvement are critical for refugees' well-being (Putnam, 2000).

Emotional ties to family and homeland play crucial roles in decisions to return to Ukraine, reflecting the impact of transnational connections (Basch et al., 1994). Feelings of 'refugee guilt' and homesickness, as observed among participants, underscore the emotional burdens carried by refugees (Baldassar, 2014). These emotions influence not only personal well-being but also migration decisions, highlighting the need for support systems that address psychological needs.

To foster a sense of belonging and resilience among Ukrainian refugee women, it is essential to support civic engagement by encouraging participation in community activities and volunteering. This approach builds social capital and enhances integration, as evidenced by the positive outcomes among actively engaged participants (Putnam, 2000). Additionally, addressing emotional needs through psychological support services can help mitigate feelings of homesickness and 'refugee guilt', improving overall well-being (Baldassar, 2014).

Developing flexible integration policies that accommodate diverse intentions – whether refugees aim to integrate into the host society or plan to return home – is crucial. Such policies should acknowledge the fluidity of migration decisions and provide support regardless of long-term plans. Facilitating language acquisition through accessible language courses can help overcome barriers to social and professional integration, a critical step identified in both German and Polish contexts.

Supporting educational continuity by assisting refugees in maintaining their children's education – either in host country schools or through connections with Ukrainian educational institutions – can alleviate concerns influencing return intentions. By understanding and addressing these factors to improve integration and civic identity, policymakers and support organisations can better assist Ukrainian refugee women. Such comprehen-

sive support fosters a sense of belonging and resilience, benefiting refugees both in Germany and upon their return to Ukraine.

Future research could explore the long-term outcomes of integration efforts and examine the role of media in framing cultural communities, which may further inform policies and support mechanisms for refugees.

References

- ▶ **Baldassar, L.** (2014) 'Guilty feelings and the guilt trip: Emotions and motivation in migration and transnational caregiving', *Emotion, Space and Society*, 10, pp. 81–88.
- ▶ **Basch, L., Glick Schiller, N., and Szanton Blanc, C.** (1994) *Nations Unbound: Transnational Projects, Postcolonial Predicaments, and Deterritorialized Nation-States*. New York: Gordon and Breach.
- ▶ **Baumeister, R. F., Stillwell, A. M., and Heatherton, T. F.** (1994) 'Guilt: An interpersonal approach', *Psychological Bulletin*, 115(2), pp. 243–267.
- ▶ **Berry, J. W.** (1997) 'Immigration, acculturation, and adaptation', *Applied Psychology: An International Review*, 46(1), pp. 5–34.
- ▶ **DiCicco-Bloom, B., and Crabtree, B. F.** (2006) 'The qualitative research interview', *Medical Education*, 40(4), pp. 314–321.
- ▶ **European Council** (2024) 'Ukrainian refugees: Council extends temporary protection until March 2026', *Press release*. Available at: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2024/06/25/ukrainian-refugees-council-extends-temporary-protection-until-march-2026/> (Accessed: 21 November 2024).
- ▶ **Glaser, B. G., and Strauss, A. L.** (1967) *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research*. New York: Aldine de Gruyter.
- ▶ **Grabka, M. M.** (2023) 'Ukrainian refugees: Nearly half intend to stay in Germany in the longer term', *DIW Berlin*, 12 July. Available at: https://www.diw.de/en/diw_01.c.877322.en/ukrainian-refugees__nearly_half_intend_to_stay_in_germany_in_the_longer_term.html (Accessed: 20 August 2024).
- ▶ **Institute for Employment Research (IAB)**, Federal Institute for Population Research (BiB), Research Centre of the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF-FZ) and Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP) at *DIW Berlin*. (2023). *Refugees from Ukraine in Germany (IAB-BiB/FReDA-BAMF-SOEP Survey)*. Available at: <https://www.bamf.de/SharedDocs/ProjekteReportagen/EN/Forschung/Integration/projekt-ukr.html?nn=285460> (Accessed: 20 August 2024).
- ▶ **Kosyakova, Y.** (2023) 'Refugees from Ukraine face considerable uncertainty about their future', *IAB Forum*, 2 March. Available at: <https://www.iab-forum.de/en/refugees-from-ukraine-face-considerable-uncertainty-about-their-future/> (Accessed: 20 August 2024).
- ▶ **Putnam, R. D.** (2000) *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- ▶ **Zaika, N., and Vakhitov, V.** (2024) *Analytical Report: A Way Home—Returning Intentions of Ukrainian Refugees and Migrants*. Kyiv: American University Kyiv. Available at: <https://er.auk.edu.ua/items/29cde715-c045-412c-893d-dd38899ebb87> (Accessed: 17 October 2024).

TANJA KORTE

Tanja Korte completed her Bachelor of Arts in Sociology and Communication Science at the University of Münster in 2023. She is currently pursuing a Master's degree in Conflict Studies and Peacebuilding at the University of Osnabrück and works as a student assistant at the Institute of Social Sciences at Osnabrück University. During her studies, she developed a strong interest in sociological and political theory, the analysis of political violence and armed conflicts, and the behaviour of authoritarian regimes in the contexts of civil-military relations and political resistance. Following her Master's degree, she intends to pursue a PhD to investigate these fields further, aiming to gain a deeper and more specialised understanding of political and sociological phenomena and contribute to the scientific debate.

LOST IN EXILE: IDENTITY LOSS AS A FORM OF POLITICAL VIOLENCE

Introduction

Exile represents a 'sudden, violent rupture' (Cornejo, 2008, p. 335) in the personal biography of those affected. The life stories of first-generation exiles often reveal recurring themes such as the loss of job opportunities and social status (Al-Khaled, 2017, p. 48), the loss of contact with family members who remain in the home country (ibid., p. 30), and the loss of property in the home country. This abrupt deprivation of social status, property, social networks, employment, and other forms of stability constitutes a severe disruption in the personal lives of many – if not all – people living in political exile.

In extreme cases, 'the loss of all types of reference' (Cornejo, 2008, p. 334) can profoundly alter an exile's self-perception. It is not uncommon for exiles to eventually perceive themselves as 'people without an identity [transl. o. auth.; ohne Identität]' (Al-Refaie, 2017, p. 32) or as individuals who have lost their former identity after going abroad. Such ruptures in self-perception can manifest in severe experiences of 'emotional mourning and crisis' (Cornejo, 2008, p. 335), and in some cases even in the development of mental illness.

Home country regimes often exacerbate these feelings of identity loss through practices such as ‘property expropriation’ (Krawczuk and Dzhibladze, 2024, p. 15), where the exile’s assets that they left behind in the home country are confiscated and sold by the home country regime; ‘impediments to mobility’ (ibid., p. 10), through annulling passports and removing the exile’s home country citizenship; or ‘targeting a person’s family, loved ones, or business partners remaining in the country of origin’ (ibid., p. 11) to induce fear for loved ones in exile. This fear, as an intermediate step, is meant to cause exiles to retreat from activist activities. Through these actions, regimes play a significant role in further psychologically destabilising exiles and deepening ‘identity-related problems, conflicts, or tensions’ (Cornejo, 2008, p. 334) that exiles already face through the experience of exile itself. Often, regimes’ actions serve the concrete purpose of ‘silencing dissent’ (Krawczuk and Dzhibladze, 2024, p. 1) abroad: by immobilising exiles both literally and financially and by intimidating them into silence through threats to their networks in the home country, regimes can reach dissenters even if they have left and can, at best, avert activist activities.

While the practical methods and the very tangible goal of ‘silencing dissent’ (ibid., p. 1) are widely discussed and analysed by researchers, the psychological weakening of exiled individuals – particularly through the loss of identity that was mentioned earlier – as an important intermediate step in the process of silencing dissent by regimes is often overlooked.

This essay aims to analyse the argument that the induction of identity loss in exile can be considered a form of political violence by home country regimes. The analysis will focus on two aspects: the actions of the regimes that target the psychological well-being of exiled individuals and the psychological consequences of exile itself (albeit the line between these two is, at times, blurred). By examining the ways in which regimes humiliate, sabotage and repress exiles, alongside the inherent characteristics of exile (such as the loss of home, family, etc.), this work argues that identity loss in exile can be understood as a deliberate – albeit sometimes subtle – form of political violence aimed at immobilising dissenters and individuals in political exile (immobilisation, in this context, means the suppression of civic engagement and political activity through psychological pressure on the exiles).

In the first section, the psychological consequences of identity loss resulting from exile will be explored. This will include a brief description of the typical characteristics of exile-related identity loss as described by people in exile, including the ‘physical’ causes or manifestations of this loss (e.g. loss of property, social status, etc.). In the second section, the common actions taken by regimes to deepen and exacerbate this rupture in exiles’ identities to further their agendas and suppress exile mobilisation and opposition will be outlined. To cement the essay’s argument, the actions of the Belarusian regime towards people who have gone into exile, according to the iSANS working paper ‘Transnational repression in Belarus: A multifaceted instrument to silence the dissent’ published in 2024 by Natasza Krawczuk and Yuri Dzhibladze, will be used as an empirical analysis and ex-

ample. The paper provides its audience with several examples of identity-targeting home country violence practised by the Belarusian regime. Finally, the findings of the essay will be summarised to answer the question of whether identity loss in exile can be viewed as a deliberate act of political violence and, therefore, as another facet of transnational repression. Lastly, there will be an outlook for further research and the possible conclusions that recognising exile-induced identity loss might mean for host societies and the jurisdiction of the international community.

Psychological Consequences of Identity Loss in Exile

Defining Identity and Its Importance

To understand the correlation between exile and identity loss, one needs to define the term 'identity'. In his work, 'A Programme of Mental Health for Political Refugees: Dealing with the Invisible Pain of Political Exile', psychiatrist Jorge Barudy offers the following definition:

We use the term identity [...] to refer to the process which entails the formation of the conscious or unconscious image or group images which an individual has of himself / herself in a given moment and in a given context. Identity refers to many aspects of the person, and may be recognized by introspection as an internal visual or verbal representation, while it is recognized by others as an external assertion in words, facts, gestures and behaviours which is supposed to reflect in some way an internal representation (1989, p. 716).

The 'formation of the conscious or unconscious image [...] which an individual has of himself / herself' is of central importance when reflecting on the concept of identity: identity does not constitute itself in a vacuum; it is generated in specific contexts which often overlap, making the 'formation' (ibid.) of identity a complex phenomenon. Thus, the second part of the definition is just as important as the first and includes the social perspective on identity: the identity of an individual is recognised by others through 'external assertion in words, facts, gestures and behaviors' (ibid.). People's inward perceptions and definitions of themselves manifest in the way they talk, act and present themselves, allowing others to categorise them and ascribe certain characteristics and identity markers, which accumulate into the whole of someone's identity. Identity-constituting factors like nationality, culture, social class, race, gender, etc. can be seen as the referred 'given context' (ibid.), which gains meaning through pre-existing definitions and expectations. This environment of socialisation with 'different groups or systems to which an individual belongs serve as a reference or context for the formation of identity' (ibid.) is crucial for a person's feeling of belonging.

The Impact of Exile on Identity Loss

Before delving into the specific actions that regimes take to undermine and destroy the identity of exiles, it is crucial to acknowledge that the circumstance of involuntary exile itself can already ‘substantially affect the victim’s self-image and identity’ (Barudy, 1989, p. 719), and, hence, be seen as a threat to an individual’s identity.

Psychologist Marcela Cornejo describes the psychological effects of exile in her work ‘Political Exile and the Construction of Identity: A Life Stories Approach’ when reflecting on the emotional aftermath exiles faced during the Chilean coup d’état and the subsequent 17-year dictatorship under Augusto Pinochet. She describes some of the mental consequences as follows:

With regard to exile as a form of forced migration, it is possible to believe that its main objective is to violently break the personal history, the family and the social and cultural entourage. This sudden, violent rupture is primarily expressed as a loss of cultural roots, a complex state of emotional mourning and crisis: mourning for all the losses (relatives and friends as well as the professional, educational and social situation) and crisis caused by this radical rift in life and the resulting unbalance (2008, p. 335).

Exiles often describe the involuntary departure from their home country as a deep break from their original life; this can also be seen in the way that many Syrian women speak about their life in Germany after having been forced to flee from the civil war in their home country: one of them states, ‘the first part of my identity was already lost at the beginning of my journey [transl. o. auth.; da der erste Teil meiner Identität am Anfang der Reise schon verloren war]’ (Noor, 2017, p. 44), symbolising the ‘rupture’ (Cornejo, 2008, p. 335) of the sudden and involuntary change of one’s environment that Cornejo describes. The feeling of harsh and sudden change is emphasised by the fact that exile is accompanied by the loss of the ‘professional, educational and social situation’ (ibid.) as well as one’s ‘cultural roots’ (ibid.) within which people often have been socialised. In short, exiles do not only leave their physical possessions and familiar places behind, but also everything that had so far constituted the entirety of their cultural, economic, social and linguistic habitus. This loss is coupled with the sudden necessity to assimilate into the culture of the host society, often without having any prior experience of how to deal with people as a sudden stranger. Cornejo puts it as follows:

Exile implies and demands sociocultural reinsertion in the host societies, a process that entails changes and adaptations in lifestyle, social relationships, social status, personal history and, therefore, in the personal gratification that the new context may produce. Consequently, the present time is virtually non-existent, there is not a ‘here and now’, but instead a ‘there’ and ‘before or after’ (2008, p. 335).

As Cornejo points out, the experience of knowing a time ‘before’ (ibid.) circumstances beyond one’s control forced a person to relocate their lives into a society often completely alien to them and knowing the time ‘after’ (ibid.) can be both disturbing and mentally

challenging. This is evident in the observations of Barudy, who collected and categorised several of the emotional patterns and typical lines of thought that exiles frequently express when sharing the psychological effects of their experience in medical settings: 'Patients express a subjective personal feeling that something deep has changed in their perception of themselves' (Barudy, 1989, p. 716), which mirror themes frequently featured in the work, 'Female Voices in Exile' (2017), published by Yasmine Merei: expressions such as "I am not the same person as before" "everything changed for me after that" "I don't recognize myself. I was not like this before" (Barudy, 1989, p. 719), are recurring themes that many exiles express and that can often lead to symptoms of psychological distress, including depression, PTSD, psychosomatic disorders or psychosexual disorders (ibid., p. 716). Thus, 'political violence (persecution, torture, [as well as] exile) may provoke an exogenous and forced change in the person's identity' (ibid., p. 719), which can have severe psychological consequences.

Regimes' Actions to Deepen Identity Loss in Exile

The following interim conclusion can be drawn: exile in and of itself already has a strong impact on the identity and self-perception of the exiles. As Cornejo states: 'placing the individual under new circumstances where s/he must face other people and contexts that differ from the usual, this experience calls for a series of readaptations, new strategies to face them and new identities' (2008, p. 335). This often has severe psychological consequences that can become pathological (Barudy, 1989, p. 716). However, this is only the impact of exile itself – this does not yet include what home country regimes do to deepen the existential rift in the exiles' self-perception. These will be discussed in the following sections.

Common Actions by Home Country Regimes – The Example of Belarus

Based on the working paper 'Transnational repression in Belarus: A multifaceted instrument to silence the dissent' by Natasza Krawczuk and Yuri Dzhibladze (2024), I will list some of the practices relevant to my argument before discussing their effects on the identities of exiles in the essay section 'Impact on Exiles' Identities'. The Belarusian regime under Alexander Lukashenko is known 'to suppress the voices of activists and ordinary people who were forced to leave the country' (2024, p. 1). Through several measures of transnational repression, 'which occurs when states reach across borders to silence dissent by those living in exile', the Lukashenko regime is 'among the top ten states practicing' oppression across borders 'to silence the dissent' (ibid.) abroad.

Physical tactics that the Belarusian regime uses to suppress dissent among its diaspora, such as attempted murder, abduction and the misuse of the Interpol system to detain dissenters in exile (Krawczuk and Dzhibladze, 2024, pp. 6–8), are methods used not only to re-transfer exiles back into the home country, but also to rid themselves entirely of unwanted voices of opposition. While these practices are the most visible violations of human rights perpetrated by the Belarusian regime, this essay focuses on the less traceable methods that not only immobilise exiles, but also deepen the 'sudden, violent rupture' (Cornejo, 2008, p. 335) that exile itself already entails for the identity and mental health of involuntary exiles.

The first measure by home country regimes that falls under this category is naming ‘targeted exiled individuals in the government-drawn lists of “foreign agents”, “extremists” or “terrorists”’ (Krawczuk and Dzhibladze, 2024, p. 8). Exiles mentioned in such lists are not only threatened with ‘prosecution abroad’ (ibid.) but are also deterred from accessing their bank accounts and travelling back to the home country (ibid.). Along with this is the action of ‘stripping Belarusians abroad of their citizenship’ (ibid., p. 9), if they fall under the category of regime-defined domestic terrorism. By removing the basic rights of being a country’s registered citizen (removing passports, freezing bank accounts and listing exiles as traitors of the nation) regimes cement the cut of the exile’s ‘roots’ (Cornejo, 2008, p. 335) through administrative measures that prevent them from travelling back to their home countries. Additionally, the practice of ‘opening criminal investigation and holding trials in absentia’ (Krawczuk and Dzhibladze, 2024, p. 14) hinders exiles from returning home, mainly because it has been made possible to sentence dissenters to death in the home country – even ‘in absentia’ (ibid.) and without a fair trial.

Related to this are several ‘impediments to mobility (such as passport cancellation and denial of consular services [...])’ (ibid., p.10). These measures make it difficult – if not impossible – for exiles to settle into their new lives abroad: the regime-imposed constraints severely affect exiles’ ‘ability to live, travel, work, and access essential services such as medical care’ (ibid., p. 10) in host societies and effectively render them stateless persons who are neither fully embedded in the administrative system of the host country nor that of their home country. To go a step further, some regimes actively freeze exiles in this status of being ‘in-between’ through annulling their passports and making it impossible for them to travel or settle into the host society. An example of this is Decree No. 278 (Revera Law, 2023) issued by the Lukashenko regime in December 2023:

Diplomatic missions of Belarus abroad were to stop issuing new passports to Belarusians abroad and renew the old ones. The decree affected the estimated 200,000 to 500,000 Belarusians who live in exile. It requires those citizens who need to obtain a new passport or renew the current passport, to return to Belarus to process their documents. Obviously, in Belarus they may face an arrest and political prosecution if they are alleged to be critics of the government (Krawczuk and Dzhibladze, 2024, p. 10).

Another tactic already mentioned is the practice of harassing or threatening an exile’s family or social network who still remains in the home country: ‘Coercion-by-proxy constitutes the actual or threatened use of physical or other sanctions against an individual within the territorial jurisdiction of a state for the purpose of repressing a target individual residing outside its territorial jurisdiction’ (ibid., p. 11). This tactic is frequently used by the regime in Belarus (ibid., pp. 12–13). Such a practice not only explicitly attempts to keep exiles from ‘speaking out’ (ibid., p. 12) out of fear for their loved ones, but it also attempts to alienate the exiles from their network in their home country. An example of this is the case of Belarusian writer Sasha Filipenka, whose father was arrested in reaction to having published regime-critical articles while in European exile: ‘Filipenka announced [...] in his blog: “My father was taken away. ‘Say ‘thank you’ to your son,” they said to my mother’ (ibid., p. 12).

The Belarusian regime also engages in the ‘hacking of e-mail and social media accounts’ (ibid., p. 13), often messaging exiles threats or engaging in ‘smear campaigns, malicious complaints to platforms about accounts and posts’ (ibid., p. 13) of exiles, deepening the feeling of being unwanted in the home country and community.

Another approach aimed at severing the personal history and connection of exiles to their home countries is ‘property expropriation’ (ibid., p. 15). Even if not permitted by Belarusian law, ‘the authorities sold the apartments of opposition politicians’ (ibid., p. 15). Some of these practices are even uploaded online to, on the one hand, daunt the people who originally owned these properties and, on the other hand, ‘intimidate civil society’ (ibid., p. 15) showing the threatening consequences of open dissent.

Impact on Exiles’ Identities

It is evident that each of the measures taken by the Belarusian regime serves the goal of ‘silencing dissent’ (Krawczuk and Dzhibladze, 2024, p. 1) through more profound and calculating means than the physical – and thus costly – dimensions of persecution, such as arrest, murder or abduction, might superficially suggest (ibid., pp. 6–8). Keeping an exile from re-entering their home country for a long period of time through the looming threat of execution, torture or arrest, and confiscating and selling their properties, cements the feeling of ‘loss’ (Cornejo, 2008, p. 335) in a physical dimension that mirrors the sentiments of many exiles. Regimes do not only play an active role in removing the economic capital of dissenters; they also attempt to sever ties between exiles and their networks in the home country through ‘coercion-by-proxy’ (Krawczuk and Dzhibladze, 2024, p. 12), tactics designed to make others suffer through loss of community and (national) identity for the exile’s actions against the regime. As Barudy puts it, exile, along with ‘political persecution, imprisonment, [and] torture’ (1989, p. 717), belongs to ‘extreme situations, which operate, in a cruel and violent way, against the basic needs of being confirmed as human beings by other human beings’ (ibid.).

In the worst cases, the accumulated actions of regimes condemn exiles and their loved ones to a deepened severity of the already existing psychological struggles exiles face through the experience of exile itself. By actively taking steps to erase exiles’ ‘cultural roots’ (Cornejo, 2008, p. 335) and their ties to ‘relatives and friends as well as the professional, educational, and social situation’ (ibid.), it is evident that the resultant possibility of experienced identity loss is also a tactic used by regimes to intimidate and, in line with psychological oppression, break exile dissenters. Recognising the identity loss that exiles endure – further exacerbated by the deliberate actions of regimes that deepen this psychological rift and experience of loss – as an act of political violence is crucial, manifesting itself in depression, PTSD, psychosomatic disorders, or psychosexual disorders (Barudy, 1989, p. 716).

Conclusion

Both political exile and the loss of identity suffered because of it, as well as the actions of oppressive home country regimes, must be recognised as acts of deliberate political violence. To hold perpetrators accountable in the International Court of Justice, it is essential to acknowledge the psychological damage and suffering inflicted by these regimes on the mental states of exiles. Such recognition is crucial for host societies and states to formulate effective measures that counteract these harmful effects.

While the outcomes of identity loss may not be as immediately visible as the physical scars of torture, assassination attempts or abductions, they profoundly affect the psychological well-being of those who advocate for reforms and freedom while in political exile. Identity loss should be understood not only as a potential consequence of exile but also as a calculated strategy by regimes intent on silencing and disempowering exiles.

This essay has demonstrated how regimes deliberately employ various tactics to intensify the identity crisis faced by exiles, thereby advancing their objectives of repression and control. These actions significantly exacerbate the mental distress of exiled individuals, resulting in severe psychological consequences. To deepen our understanding of the effects of identity loss in exile, further research is essential. For instance, conducting interviews with exiles could help identify the specific characteristics and definitional criteria of the psychological consequences associated with identity loss. Additionally, exploring how exiles cope with this identity loss and the mechanisms they use to alleviate the associated suffering presents an intriguing area for further study that this essay has yet to explore.

Moreover, achieving international recognition of identity loss as psychological harm and a form of political violence could lay the groundwork for legal action in the International Court of Justice. Such proceedings could involve establishing psychological impact assessments as evidence, alongside testimonies from mental health professionals and exiles themselves, to illustrate the systematic nature of these violations. This recognition could ultimately lead to binding resolutions or legal precedents that obligate states to address and mitigate the impact of identity loss in political exile.

In conclusion, addressing the issue of identity loss in exile necessitates a multidisciplinary approach that combines psychological support with policy changes aimed at safeguarding the rights and well-being of exiles. By recognising the erasure of identity as a form of political violence, we can foster more effective interventions and support systems to assist exiles in rebuilding their lives and identities.

References

- ▶ **Al-Khaled, K.** (2017) 'Wann werden wir wieder Ärzte sein, wie zuvor?', *Female Voices in Exile*, 1, pp. 48–49. Available at: <https://womenforcommonspheres.org/female-voices/Issues/no-1/>.
- ▶ **Al-Refaie, H.** (2017) 'Eine Identitätslose Frau aus Syrien', *Female Voices in Exile*, 1, pp. 32–39. Available at: <https://womenforcommonspheres.org/female-voices/Issues/no-1/>.
- ▶ **Barudy, J.** (1989) 'A programme of mental health for political refugees: Dealing with the invisible pain of political exile', *Social Science & Medicine*, 28(7), pp. 715–727. Available at: [https://doi.org/10.1016/0277-9536\(89\)90219-0](https://doi.org/10.1016/0277-9536(89)90219-0).
- ▶ **Cornejo, M.** (2008) 'Political exile and the construction of identity: A life stories approach', *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology*, 18(4), pp. 333–348. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1002/casp.929>.
- ▶ **Krawczuk, N. and Dzhibladze, Y.** (2024) 'Transnational repression in Belarus: A multifaceted instrument to silence the dissent'. *iSANS – the International Strategic Action Network for Security Working Paper*. Available at: https://isans.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/transnational_repression_belarus_isans_10.06.2024.pdf (Accessed: 31 August 2024).
- ▶ **Noor, S. M.** (2017) 'Versuche, ein neues Leben aufzubauen', *Female Voices in Exile*, 1, pp. 44–45. DOI: <https://womenforcommonspheres.org/female-voices/Issues/no-1/>.
- ▶ **Revera Law** (2023) 'Review of Decree No. 278 "On the Procedure for Issuing Documents and Performing Actions"', *Revera*, 6 September. Available at: <https://belarus.revera.legal/en/info-centr/news-and-analytical-materials/1345-ukaz-no278-o-poryadke-vydachi-dokumentov-i-soversheniya-dejstvii-rb/> (Accessed: 8 November 2024).

ANAMARIA SOČE

Anamaria Soče is an MA student of European Studies at the University of Graz. She holds a BA in Political Science from the University of Zagreb. Her work primarily focuses on political journalism in Croatia. Her academic and research interests lie in minority rights, migration studies and the influence of artificial intelligence on social issues.

THE MAKING OF A REFUGEE: STORYTELLING IN EXILE

Introduction

Art, especially storytelling, has been used by exiled activists to raise awareness for their struggles; as a framing device, it can be a powerful tool for evoking emotions in audiences and for creating personal connections with the issue at hand. Evidently, new media has made it possible for art created by activists to reach broader audiences and has evoked emotional responses and spurred support for their respective causes. In addition, the development of new mediums and options for sharing personal experiences has had an impact on the way the use of storytelling by activists has developed.

Since the dominant narratives surrounding displaced persons are often created externally, public opinion is shaped by contradicting ideas about the displaced. This externalisation can also lead to the dehumanisation of displaced individuals. Storytelling has been used as a tool to challenge these existing narratives, countering dehumanising and dangerous perceptions by sharing real-life experiences. The three main narrative approaches discussed in this essay are collaborative narration, individual narration and a combined approach.

Notable contemporary examples of storytelling from exile include: the projects *Refugee Tales* and *ARENA* (Archive of Refugee Encounter Narratives), which centre on teamwork; the magazine *Female Voices in Exile*, which collects individual stories from women through workshops; and Behrouz Boochani's book *No Friend but the Mountains*, in which he combines his own experiences with the stories of fellow detainees on Manus Island. Each example approaches storytelling in exile through a different frame: *Refugee Tales* and *ARENA* utilise collaborative narration; *Female Voices in Exile* collects stories with individual narration; and Behrouz Boochani combines these two frames while also incorporating journalistic narration into the storytelling.



By examining the three distinct approaches, I will compare how these narrative frames challenge the dominant, externalised narrative surrounding refugees and displaced persons, and I will explore the use of storytelling by exiled individuals through a literature analysis. The paper is divided into two parts: an examination of the paradox created through externalised narratives of displacement and an analysis of the three narrative frames observed in refugee storytelling. This will serve to support the thesis that distinct narrative frames – including collaborative narration, first-person narration and combined narration – can challenge dominant, externalised narratives about displaced individuals.

Narratives of Displacement

The concept of framing refers to ‘the process by which people develop a particular conceptualization of an issue or reorient their thinking about an issue’ (Chong and Druckman, 2007, p. 104). Through framing, activists and marginalised groups can engage in politics and garner support for their cause (Swerts, 2015; Cabaniss, 2019). Within narrative framing, storytelling can be a powerful tool. In addition to mobilisation and legitimisation of political action, storytelling can aid in identity work (Swerts, 2015, p. 346). Displaced individuals can therefore use storytelling to build an identity and change the dominant narrative surrounding their cause.

Being a refugee is tied to narrative, since ‘asylum and refugee status hinge on stories; on their reception and evaluation as well as the ways they resonate with broader cultural discourse on identity and belonging’ (Saltsman and Majidi, 2021, p. 3). The narratives and definitions surrounding refugees and displaced persons are usually formed externally. The figure of the refugee is not defined by the individuals in question, but rather formed through public discourse. Furthermore, the narratives surrounding them are based in inconsistencies, as the ‘process of refugees being “written into existence” by political and state actors is (...) fundamentally based on a set of contradictory expectations and attributes, such as being conceived as “victim” and “threat” all at once’ (Kohlenberger, 2023, p. 25). These contradictions further alienate the refugee and are recognisable not only within the terminology defining the refugee’s identity but also in the public perception of the refugee figure.

Displaced individuals are often defined by the circumstances of their displacement and categorised as economic migrants or refugees. This distinction is arbitrary (ibid., p. 34) and will be set aside to analyse the use of storytelling by displaced people, regardless of whether their circumstances would be considered ‘voluntary migration’. The purpose of not categorising refugees into groups is to overcome external narratives based on these distinctions and instead focus on narratives by displaced people about themselves. In line with this, the terms used in this paper for people who do not live in their home region are ‘refugee’ and, more generally, ‘displaced person’.

Judith Kohlenberger calls this the ‘refugee paradox’ and defines it as ‘a set of policy expectations and narratives around the figure of the refugee as vulnerable [...], yet self-sufficient [...]; a victim of their circumstances, yet a role model of integration and economic success in the host society’ (2023, p. 23). This paradox, which both shapes and is shaped by public opinion, results in the refugee being denied their own forms of expression. As they are refused their own narratives, ‘the only “tales” about them become those told by others, spun by media and political debates, such as the one on “burden sharing”’ (ibid., p. 32).

Moreover, external stories about refugees tend to dehumanise them. Denying individuals the ability to define their own existence thus renders them into ‘mere recipients of alms and arbitrary acts of mercy – because they are outside of citizenship or between two citizenships’ (ibid., p. 40). Combating this perception, then, is not only a question of re-claiming the narrative, but also an effort to humanise the refugee.

In order to challenge the existing externalised narratives surrounding displaced individuals and avoid falling into Kohlenberger’s refugee paradox, it is necessary to bring the shared experiences of these individuals to the forefront. In doing so, ‘refugees’ own life writing can serve as a powerful corrective to their narrative construction as danger to or nuisance for the nation state’ (ibid., p. 38). While resisting the dominant narratives around refugeehood, it is crucial to re-centre the focus on the refugees themselves. To achieve this shift in perspective, ‘it is essential to step back and let storytelling and the creation of stories play a more leading role’ (Saltsman and Majidi, 2021, p. 15). Therefore, storytelling by exiled and displaced individuals is a powerful tool for creating a narrative around their experiences and countering society’s preconceived notions.

Storytelling Frames of Activism in Exile

There are many different approaches to storytelling as a tool and a form of expression for activists and displaced individuals. Through analysing the aforementioned examples, three distinct narrative frames become evident. As mentioned, *Refugee Tales* and ARENA employ collaborative narration, *Female Voices in Exile* presents stories through individual narration and Behrouz Boochani blends both methods while incorporating journalistic narration.

When it comes to collaborative narration, displaced persons work with writers to share their personal stories: in the case of *Refugee Tales*, they cooperate with authors; in the ARENA project, their stories are interpreted by students (Ramsey-Kurz, 2023; Mayer, 2023). While the two projects differ in their choice of collaborators, they share the common element of collaboration and emphasise the crucial role of trust in the dialogue process.

Refugee Tales is a UK-based project that tells the stories of displaced individuals who are stuck in detention indefinitely while seeking asylum. By publishing stories based on the real-life testimonies of displaced individuals, the project utilises collaborative narration where ‘established writers create a space in which the stories of those who have been

detained can be safely heard, a space in which hospitality is the prevailing discourse' (Refugee Tales, no date). The collaborative nature of this project supports their goal of promoting the stories of displaced people, while making listening 'an act of welcome' (ibid.).

Through collaboration between authors and refugees, *Refugee Tales* aims to re-centre 'the process of storytelling as an act of remembrance, recording, testimony, and, most crucially, recognition' (Mayer, 2023, p. 137). Such cooperation relies fundamentally on trust to avoid issues arising from power imbalances (ibid., pp. 134–136). Mayer argues that *Refugee Tales*' use of collaborative narration shows 'how public perceptions and cultural discourses can be altered, or at least diversified' (ibid., p. 138). By utilising the social standing of established writers, the project introduces otherwise untold stories into the dominant narrative. Cooperation, in this case, serves as a tool for the authors, who use their active interpretation to connect with displaced individuals and create a means for the public to engage in this act of reinterpretation.

ARENA is an initiative started at the University of Innsbruck that connects English-studying students with refugees to document their experiences (Ramsey-Kurz, 2023). Through the *ARENA* collaboration, students and refugees build a partnership that fosters trust, enabling 'an increasingly creative form of remembrance' (ibid., p. 161). Ramsey-Kurz argues that narrative-building through partnership and the act of narration can liberate these stories from dominant political discourse, creating a space where 'refugee experience becomes negotiable in terms not prescribed by the dominant discourse on immigration' (ibid., p. 162).

As the students and the refugees built trust amongst one another, their collaboration allows for the development of creativity and understanding in a safe space. In these safe spaces, the narrative is no longer shaped by the public perception of the figure of the refugee, rather it is moulded by the cooperation on which the project is founded and the trust that comes from it (Ramsey-Kurz, 2023). This newly found freedom from the dominant discourse, which comes from the act of collaborative narration, is key in understanding how storytelling confronts the public perception of displaced individuals. By giving displaced individuals the chance to shape their own narrative, the idea of them being passive recipients of sympathy is dismantled.

The magazine *Female Voices in Exile* is published by the non-profit organisation Women for Common Spaces, founded by Yasmin Merei. Through workshops in which Arab women discuss and write about their experiences and opinions, the magazine collects and publishes their stories in German and Arabic (Women for Common Spaces, no date). *Female Voices in Exile* is an example of first-person narration. The organisation aims to increase the visibility of migrant women in German society by foregrounding women's voices; their objective is to reduce 'the distance between these women and the media, civil society and political decision-makers in Germany' (Women for Common Spaces, no date).

The freedom given to the participants of the workshops, while maintaining a support system for the women, is key in their successful self-expression. Additionally, *Female Voices in Exile* allows women to express themselves without a mediator, as they record their personal experiences in their native language (Women for Common Spaces, no date). The Women for Common Spaces organisation provides exiled women 'with a safe space for free expression, in which they can articulate and share their stories and challenges to collectively find solutions' (Ragab, 2020, p. 204). Through this organisation, exiled women can share previously unheard stories, and, because the magazine is published online, the public has the opportunity to read these narratives, much like in *Refugee Tales*. Although an intermediary is involved later in the process when their works are translated into German for publication in the magazine, and collaboration occurs through dialogue in the workshops, their independence in storytelling is evident. This differs from *Refugee Tales*, where the stories are interpreted through the work of another author. The individual narration applied in this case clearly re-centres displaced individuals, thereby re-humanising the individual.

While Behrouz Boochani also maintains his independence and interacts with a mediator in the form of a translator, his approach is complex. As both a poet and a journalist, he offers different narrative framing in his work. In a disclaimer preceding his book, *No Friend but the Mountains*, two distinct claims are asserted that provide a basis for understanding Boochani's approach to storytelling. The first is a declaration that the book is 'a truthful account of the experience of Australia's Manus Island Regional Offshore Processing Centre' (Boochani, 2018, p. 25). This statement is followed by the claim that none of the detainees described in the book are based on a particular person; to hide their identities, 'they are composite characters: a collage drawn from various events, multiple anecdotes, and they are often inspired by the logic of allegory, not reportage' (Boochani, 2018, p. 25).

The disclaimer provides a particularly clear description of the artistic and narrative framing in Boochani's approach to storytelling, as it is both an honest firsthand account and a story rich in allegory shaped by the author. This approach, while protecting the identity of the other detainees, also embodies the art of storytelling: it is real life intertwined with art. His unique approach to storytelling allows for a greater degree of agency, 'Boochani's first-person account reminds us that asylum seekers and refugees are not disposable objects, but active agents who should be treated in a more humane and ethical way' (Royo-Grasa, 2021, p. 1). As a refugee, and a voice for fellow detainees from Manus Island, Boochani actively combats the tactic used by host countries, in this case Australia, wherein migrants are criminalised and shown as a threat to the security of the population, turning them into the feared Other (ibid.). He exposes inhumane treatment and calls for cooperation in fighting injustice (ibid.), which, in turn, challenges society's passive outlook on the treatment of refugees. His pointed approach disputes both the dominant narratives surrounding the figure of the refugee, and the 'refugee paradox', exposing the inhumane policies of host countries.

Attempting to give voice to the problems displaced individuals face can have the unintended consequence of commodifying their suffering. This, in turn, can result in the public becoming 'passive consumers' who are 'content with practising compassion from a safe distance' (Ramsey-Kurz, 2023, pp. 162–163). Each of the three types of narration avoids this pitfall by re-centring the displaced individuals through different approaches: the collaborative, the individual and the combined perspectives. Focusing on the stories of displaced individuals challenges the dominant narrative of the refugee as a passive figure. Contrary to the refugee paradox, displaced individuals can both reclaim agency in the public's perception of them and define themselves as active members of society through storytelling.

Conclusion

Through the art of storytelling, many activists have found their voice and raised awareness surrounding the social injustices they have faced. Considering the abundant use of this tool, it is necessary for academia to engage in the topic of storytelling as a form of political action. In understanding how storytelling is used by exiled individuals, their role in challenging dominant externalised narratives becomes clear. The narratives surrounding refugees and migrants are largely constructed externally, and often reflect contradictions. Judith Kohlenberger identifies this phenomenon as the 'refugee paradox', highlighting how the roles refugees have in society and the way they are viewed by the society contradict each other. These contradictory perceptions often dehumanise refugees, reducing them to passive victims or problems for society. Kohlenberger argues that this external storytelling both strips refugees of their agency and emphasises the importance of allowing displaced individuals to tell their own stories.

Each narrative frame is used to re-centre the stories of refugees has a distinctive approach to achieving this. Collaborative narration offers a unique possibility for establishing dialogue and trust, allowing for the development of a safe space in which displaced persons can share their experiences. Individual narration affords refugees the ability to write about their experiences without a mediator. The blended method ensures that the narrative is shaped by the refugee, while also sharing the experiences of other displaced individuals within the story itself.

Each approach to narrative framing has the common objective of re-centring refugee's stories and challenging the dominant, extrinsically shaped narratives. Subsequently, each of the approaches challenges a different aspect of the dominant narrative due to their tools, structure and focus. Collaborative narration, in the case of *Refugee Tales* and *ARENA*, creates a safe space, through trust and cooperation, for displaced individuals to share their stories outside of the dominant narrative; it also invites the public to join in this act of reinterpretation through the act of listening. Individual narration, in the case of *Female Voices in Exile*, narratively re-centres displaced individuals by removing the interpreter, allowing for a deeper re-humanising and reclaiming of agency. Lastly, Boochani actively exposes the problems with dominant narratives and the dehumanisation they cause. As a displaced person writing about both his and his fellow detainees' experiences, he crafts

a unique and direct criticism of the treatment of displaced individuals. By foregrounding refugees' lived experiences in any of the three observed methods, their personal narratives can challenge societal misconceptions and offer a counterpoint to the stigmatising discourse that frames them as burdens.

References

- ▶ **Boochani, B.** (2018) *No friend but the mountains: writing from Manus prison*. Sydney: Pan Macmillan Australia. Translated from farsi by Omid Tofighian.
- ▶ **Cabaniss, E.** (2019) "'Shifting the Power": Youth Activists' Narrative Reframing of the Immigrant Rights Movement', *Sociological Inquiry*, 89(2), pp. 482–507. Available at: [Doi: 10.1111/soin.12292](https://doi.org/10.1111/soin.12292).
- ▶ **Chong, D. and Druckman, J.N.** (2007) 'Framing Theory', *Annual Review of Political Science*, 10(1), pp. 103–126. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.polisci.10.072805.103054> (Accessed: 29 September 2024).
- ▶ **Kohlenberger, J.** (2023) 'The Refugee (Tale) Paradox: Narratives of Vulnerability and Aspirationality', *The European Journal of Life Writing*, 12, pp. 23–50. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.21827/ejlw.12.41229> (Accessed: 29 September 2024).
- ▶ **Mayer, S.** (2023) 'Decentring the Author: Refugee Tales and Collaborative Life Narrative as Activism', *The European Journal of Life Writing*, 12, pp. 125–145. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.21827/ejlw.12.41233> (Accessed: 29 September 2024).
- ▶ **Ragab, N.J.** (2020) 'Diaspora mobilisation in a conflict setting: The emergence and trajectories of Syrian Diaspora Mobilisation in Germany'. Doctoral Thesis, Maastricht University, Maastricht. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.26481/dis.20200424nr> (Accessed: 29 September 2024).
- ▶ **Ramsey-Kurz, H.** (2023) 'A Difficult Passage to Navigate: From Asylum Story to Refugee Tale', *The European Journal of Life Writing*, 12, pp. 146–170. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.21827/ejlw.12.41234> (Accessed: 29 September 2024).
- ▶ **Refugee Tales.** (no date) *Books*. Available at: <https://www.refugeetales.org/books> (Accessed: 29 September 2024).
- ▶ **Royo-Grasa, P.** (2021) 'Behrouz Boochani's No Friend but the Mountains: A Call for Dignity and Justice', *The European Legacy*, 26(7–8), pp. 750–763. Available at: [Doi: 10.1080/10848770.2021.1958518](https://doi.org/10.1080/10848770.2021.1958518).
- ▶ **Saltsman, A., and Majidi, N.** (2021) 'Storytelling in Research with Refugees: On the Promise and Politics of Audibility and Visibility in Participatory Research in Contexts of Forced Migration', *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 00, pp. 1–17. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/feab071> (Accessed: 29 September 2024).
- ▶ **Swerts, T.** (2015) 'Gaining a Voice: Storytelling and Undocumented Youth Activism in Chicago', *Mobilization: An International Quarterly*, 20, pp. 345–360. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.17813/1086-671X-20-3-345>.
- ▶ **Women for Common Spaces.** (no date) *Über uns*. Available at: <https://womenforcommonspheres.org/about-us/> (Accessed: 29 September 2024).

3) DIASPORA DYNAMICS AND THEIR RELATIONSHIP TO THEIR HOME COUNTRIES

SONJA TAGA

Sonja Taga is an international relations graduate from Corvinus University of Budapest with comprehensive training across various sectors, including NGOs, government institutions and international organisations. With a focus on global issues like governance, law and security, she is passionate about using her knowledge and skills to contribute to meaningful research, advocacy and policy development in international affairs.

ECHOES ACROSS BORDERS: THE ALBANIAN DIASPORA'S JOURNEY FROM SILENT EXODUS TO A TALE OF RESILIENCE

Introduction

The migration patterns and political advocacy of diaspora communities are crucial to understand contemporary social and political dynamics. This paper uses a qualitative approach focusing on news articles, NGO reports, academic papers and media representation to explore how identity and perception are shaped within the Albanian diaspora, particularly in Italy. The unique historical, cultural and socio-political context between Albania and Italy, which is characterised by waves of migration and evolving cultural exchanges, provides a rich background for this exploration. By examining media representations, the paper aims to address the question: *How do historical and contemporary migration trends shape the identity and integration process of the Albanian diaspora in Italy?*

Understanding the Concept of Diaspora

The concept of diaspora – often defined as communities of emigrants and their descendants maintaining strong ties to their countries of origin – is nuanced and complex. While the term often suggests a shared sense of belonging, it is essential to recognise that not all migrants are part of a diaspora, and not all diaspora members have migrated themselves. The strength of attachment to one's homeland can vary widely across individuals and generations, making diaspora communities diverse and complex (GFMD, 2024). This complexity has not hindered growing interest in diaspora engagement, driven by global interconnectedness. The 2008 economic crisis, for instance, highlighted the vulnerability of nations to global economic fluctuations, prompting governments and organisations to leverage diaspora networks for mutual benefit (Euskadi.eus, 2015).

As diasporas grow in influence, they play an increasingly active role in political and advocacy efforts, engaging with governments, the media and the private sectors to advocate for their homelands. While historically limited by geographic distance, many diaspora communities now have a significant presence in both their host and home countries. However, the effectiveness of such advocacy relies on informed and unified efforts, as fragmented approaches can reduce impact (Newland, 2010). Despite this, not all diaspora members are involved in advocacy; some may choose full assimilation into their host countries, while others maintain active participation in their diaspora communities. This divergence can lead to tensions within the community regarding identity and expectations of involvement (*ibid.*).

This internal diversity within diasporas creates challenges around representation, with competing factions often claiming to speak on behalf of the entire community. For policymakers, determining who genuinely represents the diaspora's interests becomes difficult, especially in situations where there are divisions, such as during civil conflict. To avoid accusations of favouritism or manipulation, it is essential that policymakers carefully assess who they engage with and ensure equitable representation of the diaspora (Migration Policy, 2010). Ultimately, engaging effectively with diaspora communities requires a thoughtful, inclusive approach that takes into account their diverse perspectives and ensures that their contributions are recognised and utilised for the benefit of both host and origin countries.

Tracing the Historical Journey and Migration Trends

The Albanian diaspora is shaped by more than just economic migration; it is deeply connected to Albania's turbulent history, particularly during the 20th century. A significant moment in history was the communist rule of Enver Hoxha from 1945 to 1985. Hoxha's regime was marked by extreme political repression and economic control, leading Albania into deep isolation compared to other Eastern European countries (Domachowska, 2019). To maintain power, Hoxha's government imprisoned, executed or exiled thousands of citizens. Private property was confiscated, religious institutions were closed and cultural and intellectual life was subordinated to the state's socialist agenda (Britannica, 2024).

This oppressive political climate prevented any opposition movement until the student-led protests of December 1990, which marked a turning point in Albania's history (Domachowska, 2019).

Following the collapse of communism in 1990, Albania experienced one of the largest migrations in its history. Under Hoxha's regime, international migration was strictly prohibited, with migration considered treason, punishable by death or imprisonment. However, after Hoxha's death and under the leadership of his successor, Ramiz Alia, migration restrictions gradually eased. As Albania's economy deteriorated and extreme poverty worsened, thousands were forced to flee, marking the beginning of mass migration (Duro, 2023). For many, migration was driven by the need for survival – escaping political repression, economic stagnation and the isolation they had endured under the regime. The first major wave of migration in 1991 saw thousands of young men fleeing to Italy in search of freedom and better opportunities. For many, migration served as a form of political resistance against the authoritarian regime. The collapse of the 1997 pyramid schemes reignited migration, with over 100,000 leaving in search of economic stability (Goxha, 2016).

The experiences of these earlier generations contrast sharply with the motivations of more recent migrants. Today, migration is largely driven by the pursuit of economic opportunities, educational attainment and family reunification, with Germany, the USA and Italy being the top destinations (King, 2018). Unlike their predecessors who were escaping survival challenges and political oppression, newer generations view migration as a means of enhancing their social and human capital, seeking better quality of life and personal advancement abroad. This shift highlights the diversity within the Albanian diaspora. Examining these distinct motivations provides a clearer understanding of how different generations of the diaspora engage with civil society and perceive their place within it. Italy, as one of the top destinations for Albanian migrants, stands out as a significant case study to observe this shift.

Italy: A Vibrant Case Study in Diaspora Dynamics

Italy's longstanding historical ties with Albania make it a key destination, offering both geographical proximity and cultural familiarity. The Arbëreshë community, which traces its roots back to the 15th century, represents one of the earliest waves of Albanian migration to Italy. These early migrants, fleeing the Ottoman invasion, established a distinct cultural identity in southern Italy and contributed significantly to Italian society (Ministry of Labour and Social Policies, 2022). Their communities, established through land grants for military service, have remained largely insulated, keeping their language, culture and traditions intact for generations (Lubonja, 2017). This historical foundation of migration established a complex relationship between the two countries, one shaped by both co-operation and conflict.

From 1939 to 1943, Italy colonised Albania, investing in its infrastructure while portraying Albanians as willing participants. Even after Albania regained its independence, Italians continued migrating there for work and family reasons (Paoli, 2022). However,

this narrative masked the reality of exploitation. Albanians were often treated as subordinates and subjected to racial discrimination. Fascist propaganda depicted them as primitive and criminal, justifying Italy's control over Albania's natural resources, such as oil and chrome, to fuel its war machine (Bego, 2023). After the fall of Italian rule, the communist regime in Albania imposed strict censorship, including a ban on foreign media, in order to suppress outside influences and maintain control. Despite these efforts, Italian television gained popularity among Albanians, offering a glimpse into the Western world, and exposing the failures of the regime (Paoli, 2022). This exposure to Western media reflected the deep desire for change and a better future, which were only amplified after the collapse of communism. The economic, social and political instability that followed exacerbated these issues, resulting in widespread hardship. By the early 1990s, hundreds of thousands of Albanians began seeking better opportunities abroad, often resorting to illegal migration. A significant exodus occurred in August 1991 in the ports of southern Italy. Although they were allowed to disembark for humanitarian reasons, many were later sent back home (Assembly.coe, 1992). The instability reached its tragic peak in 1997, with the Otranto tragedy. Amid an uprising sparked by the collapse of pyramid schemes, an Albanian ship carrying 142 people collided with the Italian naval vessel *Sibilla*, resulting in the deaths of 57 people, including young children. This event symbolised the extreme risks migrants faced in their pursuit of a better life abroad (TopChannel, 2023). This tragic chapter highlights the ongoing struggles of Albanians seeking refuge and better prospects, a journey that continued as they established new lives in Italy.

As we shift focus to the new generation of migrants, it becomes clear that they have largely integrated into Italian society while maintaining their distinct cultural heritage. Unlike many other immigrant groups, Albanians have not relied heavily on ethnic media or cultural associations to preserve a strong sense of identity. Instead, they primarily consume news and entertainment from Italian television, which has facilitated their integration and contributed to their overall success in Italy. This ability to navigate their new lives has been supported by the strong social networks and friendships they have built within their communities (Mai, 2006).

However, the role of Italian media is complex, playing a dual role in shaping perceptions of the diaspora. While it serves as a key source of information, it often reinforces negative stereotypes, contributing to social exclusion and a distorted image (*ibid.*). The media's influence is particularly significant given the size and growth of the Albanian community in Italy, which, as the second-largest group of non-EU nationals, has reached 396,918 registered residents as of 1 January 2022 (Sanna et al., 2022). To further understand the experiences and the integration of this growing community, the International Organization for Migration (2021) conducted a study, surveying 631 participants across various sectors, including agribusiness and cultural preservation.

The findings revealed that about 50% of respondents had gained Italian citizenship, indicating successful integration. Despite economic challenges, many feel their situations have improved over the past decade. While most do not intend to relocate or return to Albania, those involved in cultural preservation express interest in returning due to emerg-

ing opportunities. However, 34% express interest in investing back home, but bureaucratic obstacles and a challenging business environment deter many, with over 80% lacking any ties to Albanian associations in Italy (IOM, 2021).

The evolving relationship between the diaspora and their homeland, despite obstacles, becomes even more crucial as the Albanian diaspora prepares for the 2025 elections, where their political influence is expected to be significant. Recent events in Milan have demonstrated their desire for voting rights, though effective mechanisms for voting from abroad remain undeveloped. Both the ruling party and the opposition in Albania struggle to engage the diaspora residing in various Western countries. The unpredictability of their voting patterns poses a challenge, as diaspora votes could account for over a quarter of the electorate (Musabelliu, 2024). While political parties engage in a blame game, questions linger regarding the political awareness and trust these emigrants have in the political parties.

In addition to their political aspirations, a few members of the diaspora consider returning to Albania, where their experiences and resources could positively impact the country. Returning migrants bring valuable human, financial and social capital, yet they face challenges in accessing professional opportunities. Financial resources are particularly vital, given Albania's limited credit system; while savings from abroad may not fully cover business needs, they can help secure initial loans. Furthermore, social networks built abroad aid returnees in managing cross-border relationships, sourcing materials and pursuing retraining (Chaloff, 2008). The cultural and linguistic initiatives within the diaspora further emphasise the importance of maintaining connections to Albania, especially as members of the community navigate political involvement and the possibility of returning, both of which are crucial for sustaining their influence and identity abroad.

Current support from some municipal authorities for cultural and linguistic initiatives within ethnic Albanian communities includes EU-funded programmes that facilitate cooperation with Italy. These initiatives help preserve cultural identity, particularly as language connects younger generations to their heritage. While Albanian is taught in schools, dialects like Arbërisht differ from standard Albanian, complicating cultural preservation. Despite interest, younger generations often prefer Italian or local dialects, leading to Arbërisht's decline (Minority Rights Group, no date). Regardless of the challenges of living outside their homeland, many diaspora members continue to view themselves as part of their country's national identity and socio-political landscape. However, dual loyalties often lead to suspicion in host countries, where governments fear diasporas may act as 'enemies within' or security threats, fuelling racism and discrimination. The debate continues over whether strong ties to one's homeland hinder integration, with some arguing they prevent assimilation (Center on Migration, Policy, and Society, 2005). Initially, Albanians faced such challenges in Italy, where they were often viewed with suspicion and linked to criminality, but over time, the diaspora integrated more fully, shifting public perception toward greater acceptance, and recognition of their contributions to Italian society.

As their integration deepens, diasporas are better positioned to influence not only perceptions but also policies, allowing them to expand their advocacy efforts across borders. Diasporas direct their advocacy efforts not only toward their countries of origin but also toward their host countries and international organisations. First-generation migrants tend to focus more on their homeland governments, but their descendants become more integrated into their host societies (Migration Policy, 2010). Diasporas, contributing significantly to both their host societies and countries of origin, leverage human, social, economic and cultural capital. By engaging these resources, they facilitate knowledge transfer, support global development and create a dynamic exchange that benefits both contexts. Programmes designed to support this dual mobilisation foster economic growth, reduce poverty and stimulate trade through remittances and investments, demonstrating the power of diaspora-driven initiatives (IOM, 2013).

Moreover, cultural capital represents another critical resource, encompassing the globalisation of ideas and knowledge. This cultural exchange not only aids their acceptance into new societies but also enriches the cultural landscape of their host nations (ibid.).

The Albanian diaspora in Italy, for instance, has made significant contributions across various sectors, demonstrating successful integration and cultural impact. In the music industry, artists like Erald Meta, an Albanian-Italian musician, have gained recognition in Italy with their blend of pop melodies and dance beats. Elhaida Dani, winner of *The Voice of Italy* in 2012, has carved out a career in both music and theatre, including playing Esmeralda in *Notre-Dame de Paris* (AllMusic, no date; EurovisionUniverse, 2015). Albanian athletes such as Thomas Strakosha and Etrit Berisha have earned recognition for their performances in Italian football, while dancers Kledi Kadiu and Klaudia Pepa have made their mark on Italian television, particularly on the show *Amici* (IMDb, no date). These individuals, alongside writers, artists and professionals from the Albanian community, have significantly shaped the perception of Albanians in Italy, illustrating the diaspora's valuable contributions to Italy's cultural, artistic and sports landscape.

Conclusion

The Albanian diaspora in Italy has significantly evolved over the years, reflecting broader socio-political changes in both Albania and Italy. The historical context of migration during the communist era, marked by limited movement and a focus on survival, contrasts sharply with the present, where the diaspora engages in political advocacy and cultural integration.

The findings indicate that the Albanian diaspora has transitioned from a marginalised community to one that is well integrated into Italian society. Moreover, the diaspora's ability to maintain transnational ties with Albania has fostered a sense of solidarity and collective identity, leading to a dynamic relationship with both their homeland and host country.

In conclusion, the Albanian diaspora in Italy exemplifies the transformative power of migration, highlighting how communities can adapt, advocate and succeed across borders. Recognising these dynamics enhances our understanding of how diasporas contribute to cultural exchange and community-building in a globalised world.

References:

- ▶ **Allmusic.** (no date) 'Ermal Meta'. Available at: <https://www.allmusic.com/artist/ermal-meta-mn0002479611#biography> (Accessed: 24 November 2024).
- ▶ **Assembly.coe.int.** (1992) 'Report on the exodus of Albanian nationals' (Doc. 6555). Rapporteur: Mr Böhm, Germany, CDU. Available at: <https://assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/X2H-Xref-ViewHTML.asp?FileID=6888&lang=EN> (Accessed: 3 October 2024).
- ▶ **Bego, F.** (2023) 'Italy still views Albania through a colonial lens', *BalkanInsight*, 17 July. Available at: <https://balkaninsight.com/2023/07/17/italy-still-views-albania-through-a-colonial-lens/> (Accessed: 6 November 2024).
- ▶ **Britannica, The Editors of Encyclopaedia.** (2024) 'Enver Hoxha'. Available at: <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Enver-Hoxha> (Accessed: 6 November 2024).
- ▶ **CESPI.** (2021) 'Mapping and Profiling of Albanian Diaspora: An economic and social survey in five Italian regions. Overview of the situation in France and Belgium', *International Organization for Migration (IOM), Geneva*. Available at: <https://publications.iom.int/books/mapping-and-profiling-albanian-diaspora> (Accessed: 27 September 2024).
- ▶ **Chaloff, J.** (2008) 'Albania and Italy: Migration policies and their development relevance. A Survey of Innovative and "Development-Friendly" Practices in Albania and Italy', *Centro Studi di Politica Internazionale*. Available at: https://www.cespi.it/sites/default/files/documenti/wp_51-albania_and_italy-chaloff.pdf (Accessed: 25 November 2024).
- ▶ **Domachowska, A.** (2019) 'Albanian migration as a post-totalitarian legacy', *Studia Migracyjne – Przegląd Polonijny*, 2(172), pp. 87–100. Available at: DOI: 10.4467/25444972SMPP.19.016.10842 or <https://ejournals.eu/czasopismo/smpp/artikul/albanian-migration-as-a-post-totalitarian-legacy> (Accessed: 25 November 2024).
- ▶ **Duro, C.** (2023) 'Albanian migration during the period of communism, based on economic and political factors', *International Journal of Economics, Commerce and Management*, 11(9), pp. 215–226. Available at: <https://ijecm.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/11913.pdf> (Accessed: 29 September 2023).
- ▶ **Eurovision Universe.** (2015) 'Elhaida Dani'. Available at: <https://www.eurovisionuniverse.com/encyclopedia/elhaida-dani/> (Accessed: 26 November 2024).
- ▶ **Euskadi.eus.** (no date) 'Why Diaspora Matters'. Available at: https://www.euskadi.eus/contenidos/informacion/03_congreso2015/es_intro/adjuntos/aikins_en.pdf (Accessed: 13 October 2024).
- ▶ **Global Forum on Migration and Development.** (2024) 'Roundtable 3: Diasporas as actors of economic, social and cultural development'. Available at: https://www.gfmd.org/sites/g/files/tmzbd11801/files/documents/france2023/roundtables/GFMD%20GRT%203%20-%20Background%20paper%20Final_EN.pdf?EN (Accessed: 15 February 2024).
- ▶ **Goxha, J.** (2016). 'Migration in the early '90s: Italy coping with Albanian illegal emigration', *European Scientific Journal*, 12(11), pp. 254–264. Available at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.19044/esj.2016.v12n11p254> (Accessed: 15 November 2024).

- ▶ **IMDb.** (no date) 'Klaudia Pepa: Biographical Information'. Available at: <https://www.imdb.com/name/nm9263893/bio/> (Accessed: 15 October 2024).
- ▶ **International Organization for Migration.** (2013) 'Diaspora Ministerial Conference, 18 and 19 June 2013: Diasporas and Development: Bridging between Societies and States'. Available at: https://www.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbdl486/files/migrated_files/What-We-Do/idm/workshops/IDM-2013-Diaspora-Ministerial-Conference/Background-Paper-2013-Diaspora-Ministerial-Conference-EN.pdf (Accessed: 25 November 2024).
- ▶ **Gërdëshi, I. and King, R.** (2018) New trends in potential migration from Albania. Published by Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, Office Tirana. Available at: <https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/albanien/15272.pdf> (Accessed: 26 November 2024).
- ▶ **Lubonja, E.** (2017) The Arbëresh Culture: An Ace in the Hole, in the Heart of Calabria. Doctor of Philosophy. Florida Atlantic University. Available at: https://fau.digital.flvc.org/islandora/object/fau%3A39770/datastream/OBJ/view/The_Arb__resh_Culture__An_Ace_in_the_Hole__in_the_Heart_of_Calabria.pdf (Accessed: 16 November 2024).
- ▶ **Mai, N.** (2006) 'The Albanian Diaspora-in-the-Making: Media, Migration and Social Exclusion', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 32(4), pp. 543–561. Available at: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13691830500058737> (Accessed: 25 October 2024).
- ▶ **Minority Rights Group.** (no date) *Albanians in Italy*. Available at: <https://minorityrights.org/communities/albanians-2/> (Accessed: 5 October 2024).
- ▶ **Ministry of Labour and Social Policies.** (2022) *The Albanian Community in Italy: Migrant Population Annual Report, Executive Summary*. Available at: <https://integrazioneimmigranti.gov.it/AnteprimaPDF.aspx?id=6139> (Accessed: 29 September 2024).
- ▶ **Musabelliu, M.** (2024) 'Albania external relations briefing: Albanian diaspora, Greece, Italy, and the politics of migration', *China-CEE Institute Weekly Briefing*, 73(4), pp. 1–9. Available at: https://china-cee.eu/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/2024er05_Albania.pdf (Accessed: 6 June 2024).
- ▶ **Newland, K.** (2010) *Voice After Exit: Diaspora Advocacy*. Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute. Available at: <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/sites/default/files/publications/diasporas-advocacy.pdf> (Accessed: 5 November 2024).
- ▶ **Paoli, G.** (2022) 'The Albanian Migration of 1991'. Available at: <https://eumomi.sp.unipi.it/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/GIANLUCA-DELEO.pdf> (Accessed: 10 October 2024).
- ▶ **Sanna, V. S., Coletti, R., and Ferro, A.** (2021) 'La comunità albanese in Italia: caratteristiche e sfide tra immigrazione e integrazione. Il caso della Lombardia e dei lavoratori altamente qualificati', *Annali del Dipartimento di Metodi e Modelli per l'Economia, il Territorio e la Finanza*, 1, pp. 81–105. DOI: 10.13133/2611-6634/758. Available at: https://rosa.uniroma1.it/rosa02/annali_memotef/article/view/758/640 (Accessed: 28 September 2024).
- ▶ **Top Channel.** (2023) 'Otranto Tragedy'. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FTXvD-qMEknA&ab_channel=TopChannelAlbania (Accessed: 10 October 2024).
- ▶ **Vertovec, S.** (2005) 'The Political Importance of Diasporas', *Centre on Migration, Policy and Society Working Paper*, 13. University of Oxford. Available at: https://www.compas.ox.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/WP-2005-013-Vertovec_Political_Importance_Diasporas.pdf (Accessed: 19 September 2024).

NORA WACKER

Nora Wacker is a student of social sciences at Humboldt University in Berlin. She currently works at the Global Governance Unit of the Social Science Research Center Berlin (WZB). She is interested in electoral behaviour, diaspora politics, and processes of autocratisation and democratisation. In her spare time, she is involved in Luftbrücke Afghanistan and is part of the editorial board of PolisReflects, a student-run journal on current international affairs.

UNVEILING THE DEPTHS: EXAMINING THE LACK OF INCLUSION IN MOLDOVA'S DIASPORA POLICIES

Introduction

In today's globalised world, the study of diaspora politics in countries of origin is becoming increasingly important, yet it has received limited attention. As more people leave their home countries, it becomes crucial to understand the relationship between diaspora communities and the governments of their home states. Consequently, the significance of effective diaspora politics has become a prominent topic in political discussions worldwide (Adamson, 2016). This article uses the Republic of Moldova as a case study to analyse the extent to which the government strives for and implements policies for inclusive engagement with its diaspora. Considering Moldova's population of approximately 3.5 million, it has one of the highest emigration rates globally, with around one million Moldovans residing outside the country (European Union Global Diaspora Facility [EUGDF], 2024).

Given its significant size, the diaspora has the potential to meaningfully influence the country's political processes and decisions. This underlines the Moldovan government's dependence on the relationship with its global diaspora (Rusu, 2012). Such influence is especially important considering that the Republic of Moldova is a hybrid democracy facing various political challenges. In international comparison, the Republic of Moldova is also characterised by a large heterogeneous diaspora that is spread across the globe (EUGDF, 2024). Thus, inclusion plays a crucial role in strengthening the ties with its diverse diaspora since, in inclusive policies, various perspectives are considered. This essay will, therefore, analyse the inclusivity of the Moldovan government's diaspora policy through the research question: *To what extent is the Moldovan government's diaspora policy inclusive?*

To address this question, the essay first conceptualises what constitutes an inclusive diaspora policy, then introduces the Moldovan diaspora, and subsequently reviews the government's diaspora policies for inclusion. The methodological approach utilises literature analysis of previous research on Moldova's diaspora policies and focuses specifically on current political measures. With this approach, the essay examines the extent of inclusion of the Moldovan government's diaspora policy. Specifically, the central hypothesis is that the entirety of the Moldovan government's diaspora policy is not inclusive.

The Moldovan Diaspora

The term *diaspora* has been conceptualised in different ways in the relevant literature. One common aspect of these concepts is that they encompass a combination of permanent and temporary migrants (Rusu, 2012). However, diaspora concepts tend to differ in the complexity of the criteria used to determine which people belong to the diaspora group – for example, how many generations of migrants' descendants are included in the diaspora. This essay uses a simple and inclusive definition that can be applied in the Moldovan context: diaspora refers to 'an imagined community dispersed from a professed homeland' (Vertovec, 2009, p. 5), which comprises immigrants and their descendants (Gamlen et al., 2019). It should be noted that the Moldovan government itself has provided a definition of the Moldovan diaspora that aligns with the diaspora definition used in this essay:

Persons originating from Moldova and residing abroad who are united by their ethnicity, roots and common ancestors from the Republic of Moldova and who realize their origin, but given various circumstances happen to be outside of the historical homeland and by that have become representatives of Moldovan (Enachi, 2023, p. 68).

Since the declaration of Moldova's independence on 27 August 1991, it has become a major migrant-sending country (Prague Process, 2015). Today, the top destination countries are Russia, Italy and Romania (ibid.). The common characteristics of the Moldovan diaspora can be summarised as follows: the emigrants are from urban rather than rural areas (Prague Process 2015). Also, women are more likely to emigrate than men, and young adults are more likely to leave than the elderly (ibid.). These migration flows are driven by a variety of political, economic and social factors (Stemmer, 2011). In the years after 1991, there were already high levels of emigration, mainly for financial reasons (Duşciac, 2011). Over the following decades, ongoing economic challenges and the promise of work and education abroad have continued to drive emigration (Stemmer, 2011; International Organization for Migration, 2017). Furthermore, family-related and, less frequently, political reasons often lead to emigration (ibid.). In recent years, the diaspora accounted for about 39% (2006) to 14% (2024) of Moldova's GDP (Duşciac, 2011; EUGDF, 2024), highlighting its significant economic impact.

Moldova's Diaspora Policy and Institutions

Diaspora policy is defined as an approach of a state centred on the 'activities and discourse aimed at reaching out and engaging with their nationals abroad [...] through symbolic nation-building, institution-building and provision of a set of rights and obligations' (Arkilic, 2016, p. 12). The Moldovan government is said to have a comprehensive understanding of the potential influence exerted on the economic future by the diaspora, which can affect the general well-being of the citizens of Moldova (Enachi, 2023). In general, Moldovan diaspora policies are relatively comprehensive and detailed by global standards (EUGDF, 2024). Citizens have the right to dual citizenship, and the general right to vote also applies *de jure* to citizens residing abroad. Diaspora members can exercise their right to vote from

abroad in embassies and consulates (Rosca, 2019). Over the past two decades, the number of destination countries from which diaspora members can vote has steadily increased (Enachi, 2023).

Moreover, Moldova's diaspora policy includes three diaspora institutions. Diaspora institutions can be defined 'as formal state offices in executive or legislative branches of government dedicated to the affairs of emigrants and their descendants' (Gamlen et al., 2019, p. 493). One of these institutions is the *Diaspora Relations Bureau*, established in 2012, which is responsible for the development of diaspora-related policies (BRD, 2024a). It collaborates with diaspora members for effective policy shaping. Another institution is the *Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European Integration*, which is responsible for using its extensive diplomatic missions to improve relations between the diaspora and the government (Government of the Republic of Moldova [GRM], 2024). A further institution is the *Inter-Ministerial Committee*, established in 2017, which works closely with the *Diaspora Relations Bureau* (GRM, 2017). Its tasks include the formulation of the national diaspora strategy and the coordination of all initiatives in the field of migration and diaspora (EUGDF, 2024).

Diaspora Policy and Inclusion

In general, the concept of inclusion describes the availability of and access to various resources by different social groups in different contexts (Zilla, 2022). Inclusion is practiced successfully when as many people as possible are given the opportunity to express their interests, and these interests are actively taken into account (Young, 2002). Thus, inclusion plays a special role in democratic systems (Zilla, 2022); due to the democratic principles of equality and freedom, successful inclusion is a prerequisite for a successful democracy. Furthermore, inclusion also functions as an achievement that is constantly restored in democracies through democratic processes (ibid.). While universal suffrage is seen as a central act of inclusion (ibid.), inclusive representation also plays an important role in democracies (Hayat, 2013). Thus, ensuring adequate representation of marginalised groups is a crucial challenge for democracies today (ibid.). Hayat further emphasises that within inclusive representation, the represented population should be actively involved in political processes, e.g., in decision-making. In the context of the policy-making process, inclusiveness is characterised by ensuring that as many population groups as possible are included (OECD, 2013). While political inclusion has already been studied in relation to various underrepresented groups (Homola, 2019), the political inclusion of diasporic nationals in democracies has received little research attention to date. However, some countries' diasporas have great political potential; for example, some have certain political rights, such as the right to vote in their home countries. In addition, diasporas represent an important economic force for some states due to their remittances. While the actual opportunities for diasporas to participate in political processes are limited compared to the population residing in their home country, states are developing programmes to strengthen ties with their diasporas. The Republic of Moldova provides a number of such programmes and thus stands out in a global comparison. In addition, the Moldovan diaspora is characterised by its diversity: '[It] is spread out across different parts of the world, in different societies,

with different, quite opposite political and socio-economic values' (Rosca, 2019, p. 162). The question then arises as to what extent Moldova can respond to the diversity of its diaspora through state policy measures. From a normative perspective, the diverse interests of the diaspora must be adequately represented in the home country.

How Inclusive is Moldova's Diaspora Policy?

The central argument supporting the hypothesis that the entirety of the Moldovan government's diaspora policy is not inclusive would be that the majority of the policy measures are targeted toward diaspora members who are currently working or seeking employment opportunities. Because these measures exclusively address the interests and needs of a certain section of the diaspora, they do not fulfil the requirement of inclusion concerning the entirety of the heterogeneous diaspora. One diaspora policy initiative targeting only the working diaspora members is the *DAR 1+3 Programme*, which runs from 2019 to 2025 (EUGDF, 2024). Its goal is to optimise Moldova's economy by using the economic, financial and human resources of its diaspora (ibid.). Another initiative with a similar target group is the annual *Diaspora Days* (EUGDF, 2024). It promotes cooperation between the diaspora and the Moldovan population through activities such as business seminars, workshops and exhibitions. Furthermore, an innovative diaspora measure targeting business professionals is the *Diaspora Connect* platform, launched in 2020 and modelled after the work-related platform LinkedIn (Diaspora Connect, 2024). Its goal is to foster business relationships between Moldova's diaspora professionals and their counterparts in Moldova (ibid.). Additionally, the initiative *Pare 1+1 - Program on Attracting Remittances into the Economy* is targeted at working diaspora members whom it encourages to send remittances to Moldova (EUGDF, 2024). Accordingly, the initiative's main purpose is to handle the investments from the diaspora and co-finance diaspora-led businesses (ibid.). Yet another example of a diaspora-oriented initiative targeting the workforce is the recently initiated *National Program Diaspora for 2024-2028*, which aims to leverage the diaspora's capital for the growth of Moldova's economy (GRM, 2023). To achieve this, the initiative focuses on young professionals and university graduates. For example, one-on-one meetings are held with young professionals to highlight the opportunities that returning to Moldova could offer (ibid.). It also produces targeted advertisements promoting benefit programmes for graduates of foreign universities considering returning to Moldova, with the aim of encouraging them to return and promote financial and academic contributions to the country (ibid.). Also, the *Diaspora Engagement Hub Grants Programme* targets return initiatives for professionals residing abroad by offering them financial support if they move to Moldova and connecting them with job opportunities (European Training Foundation, 2021). These programmes lack inclusivity, as they primarily target diaspora members in the labour market, leaving those who do not or cannot work without access to these initiatives.

However, there are further diaspora policy measures that target groups that are often neglected by governments' diaspora policies: The *Diaspora. Origin. Return* measure specifically targets the youth of the second diaspora generation (BRD, 2024b). Its main goal is to tighten the relationship between Moldova and diasporic children through various ac-

tivities like youth camping trips (ibid.). Establishing specific programmes for children is essential in inclusive policymaking, as minors are a vulnerable group with specific needs distinct from adults (Kulynch, 2001). Another policy aims to increase the participation of diasporic women in the labour force. The *Diaspora Engagement Hub*, which generally targets all working professionals in the diaspora, offers financial and non-material grants to women seeking to enhance their economic and social conditions (BRD, 2024a). Given the discrimination women face in the labour market, such programmes are vital for promoting equal working opportunities. These measures demonstrate the government's efforts to include different diaspora groups within Moldovan society and its political sphere.

Another counterargument is the national diaspora strategy's broad focus on the diverse concerns of the entire diaspora. The *National Diaspora Strategy 2015-2025* outlines key goals for the government-diaspora relationship (Enachi, 2023). Its primary aim is to deepen the cooperation between diaspora institutions and the diaspora while also seeking to: a) build trust in the Moldovan government and uphold fundamental rights for the diaspora, b) foster the diaspora's support of Moldova's economy, and c) recognise the diaspora's human capital (ibid.). Even though economic motives are significant, the strategy emphasises support for all diaspora members, reflecting an inclusive approach that acknowledges their heterogeneity and aims to strengthen ties with the entire diaspora.

Inclusion is a key element of democracy, which, normatively, should be practiced in elections. Moldova provides fundamental political rights to its entire diaspora, including the right to vote from abroad and diasporic representation in its national parliament. The voting right exists de jure for every diaspora member who is at least 18 years old and holds Moldovan citizenship. Notably, Moldova is the only European country that, since 2019, allows parliamentary representatives for 14 electoral constituencies representing its diaspora (Diaspora for Development, 2021). A comparable regulation exists only in seven other countries, such as Cabo Verde, Ecuador and Lebanon (ibid.). This shows that while economic interests shape many Moldovan diaspora policies, the electoral framework is inclusive regardless of members' economic contexts.

Conversely, this right to vote from abroad is de facto only practicable in some states with polling stations (Rosca, 2019), and the lack of these stations results in long journeys for diaspora members. Voting would be more inclusive if postal voting (or e-voting) were allowed, as this would make voting as accessible as possible. This would enable diaspora members to vote from any country without travel. Establishing at least one polling station in each destination country could also enhance inclusion, but this approach may be less feasible due to the required resources and effort compared to postal voting.

Conclusion

In summary, Moldova's diaspora policies are disproportionately tailored to working members of the diaspora and, thus, not entirely inclusive. These measures are inclusive only to a certain extent. While some groups, like women and second-generation youth, are acknowledged through specific measures, others – such as retirees, third-generation youth,

LGBTQIA+ individuals and disabled diaspora members – are overlooked. This supports the central hypothesis that the Moldovan government's diaspora policy is only partially inclusive. Analysing the policies shows that the government is acting based on economic considerations: it does not aim for an inclusive diaspora policy; instead, it seeks to economically leverage the diaspora's resources. Most measures focus on working diaspora members, aiming to strengthen relationships, support their careers and enhance the Moldovan economy through the diaspora's academic, financial and professional contributions. Even initiatives that target specific groups, such as diaspora youth and women, primarily aim to foster good relations with these groups in order to tap into their resources, as seen in the efforts to promote diaspora women's professional careers. This focus on economic interests limits inclusive engagement with all diaspora citizens, often neglecting marginalised groups. Given the diaspora's significant size relative to Moldova's population, it can wield considerable influence over the country's political processes. Therefore, pursuing a more inclusive diaspora policy would not only secure broader support for the government in the diaspora but also fulfil the government's normative responsibility to address the needs of all citizens, particularly marginalised ones. In the future, implementing more measures for neglected diaspora groups would also strengthen their sense of belonging to Moldova and improve their relationship with the government. Including Moldova's diverse diaspora in the political sphere is also crucial for addressing the challenges facing this young democracy, such as divisions over EU membership and the relationship with Russia. Engaging the entire diaspora can enhance political stability and national cohesion, supporting democratic processes.

References

- ▶ **Adamson, F. B.** (2016) 'The Growing Importance of Diaspora Politics', *Current History*, 115(784), pp. 291–297.
- ▶ **Arkilic, A.** (2016) *Between the Homeland and Host States: Turkey's Diaspora Policies and Immigrant Political Participation in France and Germany*. Austin: University of Texas at Austin Press.
- ▶ **BRD (Biroul Relatii cu Diaspora).** (2024a) *Diaspora Engagement Hub*. Available at: <https://brd.gov.md/program/diaspora-engagement-hub/> (Accessed: 20 November 2024).
- ▶ **BRD (Biroul Relatii cu Diaspora).** (2024b) *Diasporal Originii Reveniri (DOR)*. Available at: <https://www.dor.md> (Accessed: 22 November 2024).
- ▶ **Diaspora Connect.** (2024) *O diasporă puternică este o diasporă conectată*. Available at: <https://diasporaconnect.md/> (Accessed: 25 September 2024).
- ▶ **Diaspora for Development.** (2021) *Voting Matters: Diaspora Parliamentary Representation, Diaspora for Development Future Forum*. Available at: <https://diasporafordevelopment.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Voting-matters-diaspora-parliamentary-representation-EN-1.pdf> (Accessed: 24 September 2024).
- ▶ **Dușciac, D.** (2011) 'Moldovan Diaspora Organizations: An Asset for the Country's European Integration.' *Presentation at the GFMD Workshop in Paris: Mainstreaming Migration into Strategic Policy Development Chisinau*. Moldova – 12–13 October. Paris: Global Forum on Migration & Development. Available at: https://www.gfmd.org/sites/g/files/tmzbd1801/files/documents/gfmd_swiss11_moldova_presentation_dusciac.pdf (Accessed: 24 September 2024).
- ▶ **Elsässer, L., and Schäfer, A.** (2023) 'Political inequality in rich democracies', *Annual Review of Political Science*, 26(1), pp. 469–487.

- ▶ **Enachi, A.** (2023) 'Diaspora lobbying European future for the Republic of Moldova. Case study: Participation of Moldovan diaspora in the last presidential elections.' *Диаспоры в современном мире: региональный контекст и потенциал для устойчивого развития страны происхождения [Diasporas in the contemporary world: regional context and potential for sustainable development in the country of origin]*. 21 December 2017–22 December 2021, Chişinău. Chişinău: Print-Caro SRL, pp. 67–74. Available at: https://ibn.idsi.md/sites/default/files/imag_file/67-74_20.pdf (Accessed: 20 November 2024).
- ▶ **European Training Foundation.** (2021) *Skills and Migration Country Fiche Moldova*. Available at: https://www.etf.europa.eu/sites/default/files/202111/etf_skills_and_migration_country_fiche_moldova_2021_en_0.pdf (Accessed: 24 September 2024).
- ▶ **European Union Global Diaspora Facility (EUGDF).** (2024) *Diaspora Engagement Map*. Available at: <https://diasporafordevelopment.eu/interactive-map/> (Accessed: 25 September 2024).
- ▶ **Government of the Republic of Moldova (GRM).** (2017) 'Government Decree No. 725 of September 14, 2017, On the Mechanism of Coordinating the State Policy in the Fields of Diaspora, Migration and Development'. *CIS Legislation*. Available at: <https://cis-legislation.com/document.fwx-?rgn=100484> (Accessed: 22 November 2024).
- ▶ **Government of the Republic of Moldova (GRM).** (2023) *Guvernul a Aprobat Programul National 'Diaspora' Pentru Anii 2024–2028 [The Government Approved the National 'Diaspora' Programme for the Years 2024–2028]*. Available at: <https://gov.md/ro/content/guvernul-aprobat-programul-national-diaspora-pentru-anii-2024-2028> (Accessed: 23 September 2024).
- ▶ **Government of the Republic of Moldova (GRM).** (2024) *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Moldova: Mission Statement*. Available at: <https://mfa.gov.md/en/content/mission-statement> (Accessed: 27 September 2024).
- ▶ **Hayat, S.** (2013) 'Inclusive Representation', *Raisons politiques*, 2013/2 (50), pp. 115–135.
- ▶ **Homola, J.** (2019) 'Are parties equally responsive to women and men?', *British Journal of Political Science*, 49(3), pp. 957–975.
- ▶ **International Organization for Migration.** (2017) *Extended Migration Profile of the Republic of Moldova 2010–2015*. Chisinau: International Organization for Migration.
- ▶ **Kulynych, J.** (2001) 'No Playing in the Public Sphere: Democratic Theory and the Exclusion of Children', *Social Theory and Practice*, 27(2), pp. 231–264.
- ▶ **Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development OECD.** (2013) 'Government at a Glance 2013'. *Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development*. Available at: https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/governance/government-at-a-glance-2013_gov_glance-2013-en (Accessed: 27 September 2024).
- ▶ **Rosca, A.** (2019) 'The Political Voice Of Diaspora: An Analysis Of External Voting Of Moldovan Migrants', *Journal Of Eastern European and Central Asian Research*, 6(1), pp. 161–178.
- ▶ **Prague Process.** (2015) 'Republic of Moldova. Migration Profile Light. Prague Process'. Government of the Republic of Moldova. Available at: https://www.gfmd.org/sites/g/files/tmzbd11801/files/pfp/mp/md_mpl_2015_en_final.pdf (Accessed: 24 September 2024).
- ▶ **Rusu, R.** (2012) 'The impact of Diaspora on political processes in Republic of Moldova', *Administrarea Publică*, 4, pp. 103–110.
- ▶ **Stemmer, A.** (2011) *The Republic Of Moldova And The Migration: Migration And Its Risks And Opportunities For The European Union*. Konrad Adenauer Stiftung International Reports. Available at: https://www.kas.de/c/document_library/get_file?uuid=6df80a4c-4967-8f1f-2499-443bf4f8f-b87&groupId=252038 (Accessed: 17 September 2024).
- ▶ **Young, I. M.** (2002) *Inclusion and democracy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- ▶ **Zilla, C.** (2022) 'Defining democratic inclusion from the perspective of democracy and citizenship theory', *Democratization*, 29(8), pp. 1518–1538.

AYSA SALMASI

Aysa Salmasi is a recent graduate of the MSc Political Science program at the University of Amsterdam. She completed her bachelor's degree at the University of Ottawa, obtaining joint honours in political science and public administration. She is currently a research assistant for the *Migration Politics Journal* and a junior researcher focusing on social movement and diaspora studies.

(IN-)FIGHTING FOR DEMOCRACY IN EXILE: OVERCOMING A COLLECTIVE IDENTITY DILEMMA IN THE 'WOMAN, LIFE, FREEDOM' MOVEMENT

Woman, Life, Freedom: A Movement Ignited by Indignation

On 13 September 2022, a 22-year-old Kurdish woman named Jina (Mahsa) Amini was arrested and taken into custody by Iran's notorious 'morality police' – formally known as the Gasht-e-Ershad – for 'improperly' wearing her hijab (McGrath, 2022). Three days after her arrest, Jina died in custody on 16 September 2022, with reports substantiating that the morality police 'had subjected her to torture' and ultimately 'beat Amini to death' (McGrath, 2022; Amnesty International, 2023). Ignited by Jina's untimely death, a series of nationwide protests erupted in Iran, considered to be 'the largest and most long-lasting protest movement in Iran since the Revolution of 1979' (Khalili, 2023, p. 134). Empowered by the slogan that came to embody the essence of this movement – Woman, Life, Freedom (WLF) – protests in Iran persisted for over five months, occurring 'non-stop, day and night' (Tohidi, 2023, p. 31).

Beyond sparking nationwide outrage, this powerful slogan resonated deeply with Iranians living abroad, invigorating the diaspora to mobilise in solidarity with the protests in Iran, and joining their steadfast opposition to the Islamic Republic (Abdolkhosseini, 2023). Bringing Iranians from varying political, ideological, socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds together, the WLF Movement illustrated an unprecedented occurrence of unity for this diaspora (Bayat, 2022). Large-scale solidarity protests, rallies and demonstrations erupted globally – with tens of thousands of Iranians in the diaspora mobilising in over 150 cities across Europe, North America and Australia (Iran International, 2022). This remarkable demonstration of mass mobilisation was particularly striking given the well-documented accounts of fragmentation and polarisation in the Iranian diaspora, ushering in the optimism of a 'huge potential for radical political action' (Rivetti, 2023, p. 555; Esfandiari, 2022).



Unfortunately, the WLF Movement's initial momentum of unity dissipated, as historical contentions and persistent infighting within the Iranian diaspora eroded the movement's sense of solidarity (Razavi, 2023). Eloquently expressed by Iranian scholar Nasrin Rahimieh (2023), 'At the height of the protests, when the end of the theocratic regime appeared realistic, the Iranian diaspora became more fractured' (p. 749). Nevertheless, it remains crucial to understand how the Iranian diaspora mobilised in the WLF Movement and to identify what mechanisms facilitated collective action for this fragmented diaspora. Examining the intricate dynamics of collective action in this deeply polarised diasporic activist base offers valuable insight into the mechanisms fostering unity amid fragmentation, informing future movements characterised by diverse activist bases, and challenging traditional theories that posit collective identity as the foundation for collective action (e.g., Olson, 1965; Goffman, 1974).

This essay offers a preliminary exploration of how collective action emerged during the WLF Movement despite the absence of a salient collective identity within the Iranian diaspora. Expanding on existing literature, this paper identifies three key factors that help explain this phenomenon: 1) a prevailing sense of injustice and shared grievances uniting a diverse base of activists, 2) the centrality of shared symbols and movement messaging in facilitating collective action, and 3) the role of digital technologies and social media in enabling collective action by amplifying shared grievances and movement symbolisms. Accordingly, this preliminary analysis identifies notable gaps in the discourses on collective identity and collective action, highlighting the need for further studies into the factors shaping mobilisation dynamics in diverse and polarised activist bases.

Bridging Divides: Navigating Collective Identity and Collective Action in the Iranian Diaspora

Transcending questions of *how* mobilisation emerges and focusing instead on *why* mobilisation occurs, scholars of social movement studies (SMS) developed the theory of collective identity to address the notable gap between movement cohesion and collective action (Polletta and Jasper, 2001; Snow, 2001). Defined in these terms, collective identity refers to the dynamic processes of constructing a shared action system – 'involving the cognitive definition outlining the goals and environment of action, the activation of relationships, and the emotional investment of individuals' (Melucci, 1996, pp. 70–71). Critiquing the notion that collective identity is a given by introducing a dimension of boundary-making, SMS scholars such as Melucci (1989) contend that it is conflict, rather than shared interests, which provides the basis for solidarity and cohesion. Thus, the process of constructing a collective identity simultaneously establishes 'what we are' and 'what we are not' (Melucci, 1989, p. 35).

For social movements, establishing a robust collective identity fulfils multiple strategic functions that support the movement's longevity and sustain long-term activism. Collective identity plays a critical role in intertwining the frames, discourses and ideologies of a social movement with the social psychology of individual activists, thereby strengthening their engagement and commitment to the movement's objectives (Valocchi, 2009). Activists are more likely to coordinate and engage in large-scale efforts when they perceive themselves to be an integral part of a united, collective front. By cultivating a sense of belonging and solidarity, collective identity generates unity and cohesion among activists – essential for effective and enduring mobilisation (Polletta and Jasper, 2001). Relatedly, a salient collective identity serves as a potent motivational source for mobilisation, as activists' shared experiences and emotions regarding their perceived injustice transform personal grievances into collective action (Fominaya, 2010; Goodwin, Jasper and Polletta, 2001).

Acknowledging that collective interests alone do not necessarily result in mobilisation, it is important to examine how collective action emerges and functions, as participation in movements inherently requires some form of collective action (Heckathorn, 1996; Gaidytė and van Stekelenburg, 2023). Based on the voluntary cooperation of individuals, collective action refers to the 'action[s] taken together by a group of people whose goal is to enhance their status and achieve a common objective'; it also encompasses the strategies aimed at addressing shared grievances through political activism (Klandermans, 2004, p. 53). Within this framework, Klandermans (2004) distinguishes two processes facilitating the dynamics of collective action – convincing (consensus mobilisation) and activating (action mobilisation) (Klandermans, 2004; 2022). Combined, these collective action processes constitute the core mechanisms needed to pursue social change.

Incorporating framing theory, Benford and Snow (2000) advanced the collective action discourse by introducing 'collective action frames' and examining the struggle over meaning-making work in social movements. Defined as 'the resultant products of framing activities within the social movement arena', collective action frames are 'relatively coherent sets of action-oriented beliefs and meanings that legitimize and inspire social movement campaigns and activities' (Snow, Vliementhart and Ketelaars, 2019). Specifically, collective action frames are constituted by three core framing tasks: 1) diagnostic framing, which identifies the problematic aspect of social life that requires change and pinpoints the entity responsible for the problematised state of affairs, 2) prognostic framing, which involves developing frame-consistent tactics for carrying out the proposed solution(s) to the problem, and 3) motivational framing, which acts as the 'call to arms' to take action by highlighting the severity and urgency of the identified problem (Benford and Snow, 2000).

Striving for social change, both collective identity and collective action are considered key factors for the effectiveness of social movements – empowering activists to unite and amplify their voices to maximise the impacts of their protest efforts (DeMarrais and Earle, 2017). In the context of the Iranian diaspora, its collective identity is characterised by deep fractures and prevalent polarisation, 'split along ideological, as well as along social,

ethnic, and religious lines' (Mohabbat-Kar, 2016, p. 169). Significantly, Iranian studies scholars have identified a discernible pattern: the diaspora transports, replicates and reinforces its historical identities regardless of where Iranians resettle (McAuliffe, 2008). In doing so, fragmentation is not only reproduced but is further intensified in the diasporic context (Fozi, 2021). In light of these observations, the WLF Movement exemplified how deep-rooted, historical divisions were briefly surmounted – successfully bringing activists from diverse backgrounds together in protest against the Islamic Republic's tyranny.

Having established the foundational concepts underpinning this essay, the processes of collective action and collective identity will be applied to explain the mass mobilisation of the Iranian diaspora – examining how collective action emerged during the WLF Movement, even in the absence of a salient collective identity.

A Shared Sense of Injustice: The Emotional Catalyst Fortifying the Iranian Diaspora's Collective Action

Recognising that a social movement's central objective is to present a compelling case outlining the 'injustice' of a specific condition, this element serves as a powerful mobilising force for enabling collective action (Polletta and Ho, 2009, p. 191). The 'injustice frames' of social movements, as described, offer a two-fold explanation: they identify the event or aspect of social life requiring change and attribute responsibility to a particular actor or organisation. (Snow, Vliegenthart and Ketelaars, 2019). This, in turn, unites activists from diverse backgrounds around a common cause – a shared injustice – effectively differentiating an 'us' from 'them' (Polletta and Ho, 2009, p. 191) and embodying the 'righteous anger that puts fire in the belly and iron in the soul' (Gamson, 1992, p. 32).

Critical for fragmented activist bases – such as the case of the Iranian diaspora during the WLF Movement – heightened emotions of injustice become 'the "glue" of solidarity' (Collins, 1990, p. 28). By mobilising diverse groups en masse, the pivotal role of emotions in social movements is regarded as 'one of the products of collective action' (Jasper, 1998, p. 415). These mechanisms of mobilisation, rooted in an entrenched sense of injustice reinforced by shared grievances, catalyse the emotional resonance of a social movement in supporting collective action (Goodwin and Jasper, 2006). Coalescing activists from diverse backgrounds around a shared emotional narrative, the recognition of a shared injustice not only amplifies a sense of urgency in addressing the social condition in need of change but also directs accountability towards a specific actor (Jasper, 1998).

The Iranian diaspora's political activism during the WLF Movement exhibited the complexities of conceptualising collective action in the context of a fragmented collective identity. Challenging prevailing notions of collective action, during the WLF Movement, the Iranian diaspora demonstrated an ability to effectively mobilise and achieve tangible outcomes despite its fractured composition. United in their ardent opposition to the Islamic Republic's brutality and in their demands for justice for the girls and women of Iran, the Iranian diaspora's mass mobilisation in the early weeks of the WLF Movement was formidable (Wintour, 2022). The monumental Berlin demonstration on 22 October 2022 –

which drew 80,000 Iranian activists from across Europe, the United States and Canada – illustrated the exceptional capacity for collective action within this fragmented diaspora (Strack, 2022; Malherbe and Hafezi, 2022). Furthermore, the Iranian diaspora’s activism extended to the digital sphere, with the extensive use of social media garnering international support for the WLF Movement under the hashtag #MahsaAmini – which exceeded 80 million mentions on X (Twitter) during the movement (Mehtar, 2023; Rezai, 2024).

Beyond organising rallies and protests, the Iranian diaspora leveraged its political influence, effectively transforming its advocacy efforts into significant political outcomes. In the United States, the Iranian diaspora’s coalition efforts prompted policymakers to remove the Islamic Republic from the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (Nichols, 2022; Salartash, 2022). Furthermore, with bipartisan support from the United States Congress, the Iranian diaspora successfully advocated for the passage of the Mahsa Amini Human Rights and Security Accountability Act (MAHSA Act) in response to the Islamic Republic’s severe clampdown on protesters (Aram, 2022). In addition, the collective efforts of the Iranian diaspora were instrumental in the approval of a key legislative decision in Canada – leading to the imposition of ‘sweeping sanctions’ on tens of thousands of Iranian officials and members of the Revolutionary Guard (Bell, 2023). This constituted a landmark decision since Canada rarely invokes these regulations on such a mass scale (Canadian Press, 2022).

In the WLF Movement, the centrality of shared grievances – intensified by the diaspora’s collective agreement on the Islamic Republic’s culpability in unleashing cruel and lethal forces against the Iranian people – proved to be an essential mobilising factor. Indisputably, Jina’s tragic death was a transformative event for the Iranian diaspora’s mobilisation and became the greatest locus of unification for this deeply polarised community (Block, 2023). Additionally, the Islamic Republic’s unrelenting, brutal crackdown on protesters – resulting in over 500 fatalities and over 22,000 arrests since Jina’s death – further enraged the Iranian diaspora, creating a resounding collective narrative of injustice (Gambrell, 2024). The emotional charge generated by Jina’s death and the ensuing violence against protesters resonated deeply within the Iranian diaspora, fostering a sense of solidarity and overcoming historical divisions at the outset of the WLF Movement.

Messaging Matters: The Role of Shared Symbols and Rituals for Promoting Collective Action

In the landscape of SMS, symbols concurrently serve as impactful motivational forces – channelling many grievances under common objectified images – and facilitate the meaning-making and framing processes defining a movement’s narrative (Awad and Wagoner, 2020). Functioning as visual and physical embodiments of the charged emotions of injustice, social movement symbols exemplify what Tilly (2004) characterises as WUNC – worthiness, unity, numbers and commitment – necessary components for fostering effective collective action. In the WLF Movement, symbols acted as powerful catalysts for galvanising collective action within the Iranian diaspora, creating a profound collective resonance in framing the movement’s objectives and uniting the diverse base of activists under the same messaging (Tilly, 2004).

Much like Mohamed Bouazizi, the Tunisian street vendor whose self-immolation became 'a powerful symbol of structural injustices' in propelling the Arab Spring, the widely circulated footage of Jina collapsing at the Vozara detention centre, along with photos of her lying unconscious in the hospital, sparked outrage within the Iranian diaspora (Awad and Wagoner, 2020; de Hoog and Morresi, 2022). Moreover, in the wake of Jina's death, the subsequent photos and videos of girls and women being brutally attacked by the Gasht-e-Ershad during their protests further intensified resentment against the Islamic Republic, forging a powerful sense of unity in the Iranian diaspora (Greer, 2022). This shared narrative attributing culpability to the Islamic Republic for inciting widespread violence – reinforced by visual symbols of oppression – facilitated collective meaning-making in the Iranian diaspora's mobilisation.

In addition to the distressing footage of Jina, which became a stark symbol of injustice, the Iranian diaspora engaged in a profound act of collective solidarity through the symbolic gesture of hair-cutting in support of the girls and women of Iran (Alkhaldi and Ebrahim, 2022). This gesture carried particularly powerful connotations in Iranian culture and tradition, as women cut their hair in 'an expression of collective mourning' (Valli, 2023). Transformed beyond a symbol for grieving, during the WLF Movement, the act of cutting one's hair embodied an act of resistance and 'revealed Iranian women's deep disenchantment faced with the violence that led to the obligation to wear the veil' (Chafiq, 2022). In line with Goodwin and Jasper's (2006) findings, movement mobilisation can be enhanced through gestures and rituals – such as the act of cutting one's hair – synchronising movement activities and developing 'symbolic and moral representations' of collective identity (Goodwin and Jasper, 2006).

Most significantly, the rallying cry of the movement – 'Woman, Life, Freedom' – and Jina Amini's name became prominent symbols driving the collective action of the Iranian diaspora. Rooted in Kurdish feminist philosophy, the origins of 'Woman, Life, Freedom' – 'Jin, Jiyan, Azadî' in Kurdish – exemplify the symbolic resistance of Kurdish peoples against prevalent cultural marginalisation, state violence and patriarchal oppression (Zandi, 2022). Representing everything that the Islamic Republic is against, 'Woman, Life, Freedom' embodies the core values of equality, autonomy and dignity for all – a message that unified Iranians across ethnic, social and political lines (Askew, 2023). Additionally, the name Jina Amini became a symbol of freedom and resistance from the WLF Movement's inception, highlighting the importance of the intersectionality of ethnic and gender-based oppression in Jina's legacy (Bayram and Mohtasham, 2022).

Bolstered by the powerful symbolism of images and videos of Jina, footage of the courageous girls and women in Iran protesting defiantly despite facing severe repression and the collective act of hair-cutting, and fortified by the movement's rallying cry, the WLF Movement underscored the impact of symbols in mobilising collective action within a fragmented movement base. Instead of relying on a singular, salient collective identity to drive collective action, the WLF Movement strategically centred its mobilisation efforts around unifying symbols – channelling shared sentiments of grief, outrage and solidarity within the many diverse factions of the Iranian diaspora. Functioning as potent tools in

the WLF Movement's collective action framing, symbols simultaneously amplified the Iranian diaspora's grievances by encouraging mass sympathy towards the movement's objectives, while promoting personal identification amongst movement participants (Goodwin and Jasper, 2006).

Digital Enablers of Collective Action: Amplifying Shared Grievances and Symbols in Virtual Spaces

Contemporary social movements are increasingly characterised by their ability to coordinate and promote movement activities through information and communication technology (ICT) platforms (Spier, 2017). Utilising digital technologies and social media, contemporary movements such as Occupy Wall Street, Black Lives Matter and the #MeToo Movement, exemplify a global phenomenon wherein social media has emerged as a formidable political force in driving collective action (Margetts et al., 2015). Notably, social media platforms are rapidly transforming activists' political communication and interactions in social movements in nondemocratic states with heavy censorship laws and minimal media diversity (Qin, Wu and Strömberg, 2021). Investigating the 2014 pro-democracy Umbrella Movement in Hong Kong, scholars examined how the 'modern, decentralized, networked' composition of this movement (Frosina, 2021) 'generated new attention and created digital space for activism' (Agur and Frisch, 2019). As such, and especially relevant for movements in autocratic states, digital technologies and social media can circumvent the mobilisational barriers imposed by repressive governments.

In contemporary social movements, digital technologies and social media function as collective action enablers, allowing movements to overcome traditional barriers to mobilisation in two distinct ways. Firstly, by providing real-time information about a movement's activities, social media has enhanced 'the perceived viability of political mobilizations' and the 'potential benefits of joining' a movement (Margetts et al., 2015). Secondly, social media has allowed activists to disseminate information at an unprecedented rate – broadening the transnational visibility of shared media content, experiences and perspectives – and expanding the possibilities of undertaking collective action (Margetts et al., 2015). Taken together, the information-sharing capacity and visibility-enhancing features of social media have been instrumental in mobilising collective action in virtual spaces.

During the WLF Movement, the Iranian diaspora's use of digital technologies and social media fostered a virtual space of solidarity – enabling activists to rally around their shared grievances and amplify the movement's messages without necessitating a cohesive collective identity. Despite frequent internet shutdowns and persistent attempts by the Islamic Republic to intercept digital communications between activists in Iran and those abroad, this 'tech-savvy' diaspora was successful in virtually mobilising activists during the WLF Movement (Fox, 2023). Though encompassing broad – and often conflicting – political orientations, the Iranian diaspora's unified purpose in supporting Iranian activists and magnifying their concerns about the violent repression by the Islamic Republic illustrates the nuances of collective action in this fractured diaspora (Mathews, 2022). Utilising digital technologies and social media, the Iranian diaspora was able to transcend

prevailing ideological divides by creating powerful virtual networks that amplified the voice of protesters in Iran and globally circulated shared symbols of resistance from within Iran.

Significantly, the Iranian diaspora's digital activism during the WLF Movement created a 'third space' for facilitating collective action – redefining the diaspora's identity narrative and political agency (Kenari, 2023). Digitally produced media and resistance artwork were instrumental in the diaspora's production of an alternative narrative which distinctly separated Iranians into two groups, 'namely "us", the Iranians and "them", the current Iranian state' (Kenari, 2023). As enablers of collective action, social media's narrative-making capabilities allowed the Iranian diaspora to briefly bridge political and ideological differences by elevating messages and symbols of shared grievance. Furthermore, social media – as 'the site of evidence of the regime's violence' – reinforced the diaspora's collective antagonisms against the Islamic Republic, successfully distinguishing the regime as the primary perpetrator of violence against the Iranian people (Lamensch, 2022).

Rethinking Mobilisation: Lessons from the 'Woman, Life, Freedom' Movement

Fuelled by the fervent outrage over Jina Amini's murder at the hands of the Islamic Republic, the Iranian diaspora's mobilisation during the 'Woman, Life, Freedom' Movement showcased an unprecedented occurrence of solidarity in a diaspora riddled with fragmentation (Wright, 2022). Inspiring tens of thousands of Iranians in the diaspora to mobilise and protest in solidarity with the activists in Iran, the 'Woman, Life, Freedom' Movement 'offered a golden opportunity for the opposition abroad' (Azizi, 2024). However, in an unfavourable turn, what commenced as a charged and united front in solidarity with the protests in Iran, advocating for women's rights and seeking regime change, the Iranian diaspora's unity progressively deteriorated along political and ideological lines (Rahimieh, 2023). Though unfortunate, this outcome was not entirely unanticipated, given that 'the Iranian community in exile suffers from a major identity crisis and lacks a unified sense of national identity that binds Iranians together' (Mobasher, 2006, p. 100).

Be that as it may, the WLF Movement established that impactful mobilisation and collective action can emerge even in the absence of a salient collective identity among activists. Instead of the traditional mechanisms of collective identity and collective action, the Iranian diaspora's activism during the WLF Movement underscores the evolving composition of contemporary, transnational social movements – challenging traditional theories in SMS and paving the way for novel areas of exploration. As such, the phenomenon of the WLF Movement's mobilisation can be characterised by three key factors: 1) a shared sense of injustice uniting a diverse base of activists, 2) the centrality of shared symbols and messaging in facilitating collective action, and 3) the consequential role of digital technologies and social media as collective action enablers, fortifying shared grievances and amplifying shared symbols in virtual spaces. Together, these three factors demonstrate how shared emotional responses to perceived injustice, alongside shared symbols and movement messaging on the Iranian diaspora's distinct narrative creation on digital platforms, fostered collective action – despite a unified, cohesive collective identity.

However, there remain significant gaps in understanding how a shared sense of injustice operates within fragmented social movements and how such grievances are framed in the context of pre-existing polarisation. Furthermore, current studies lack the insight into examine the long-term effects of collective action rooted in shared grievances and the distinct role of digital technologies and social media in sustaining these efforts over time. Thus, future research is encouraged to explore how the emotional resonance of shared grievances and injustice contribute to – or detract from – collective action capacities in fragmented contexts and how the framing of grievances and injustices is shaped in diverse activist-based settings. Investigating the dynamics of collective action in this way and – recognising the importance of continuity for social movements' longevity (Della Porta and Diani, 1999) – could illuminate how the initial shock and outrage of the Iranian diaspora can be sustained in the long term.

As such, key questions remain about how long-term commitment can be nurtured over time and the extent to which shared emotional narratives can contribute to the formation and sustainability of collective identity. By exploring these questions, activists can enhance their repertoire of actions and gain a deeper understanding of mobilisation strategies to foster unity in future social movements.

References

- ▶ **Abdolhoseinzadeh, S.** (2023) 'The Iranian diaspora in the protests: From divergence to convergence', *JURIST*, 30 January. Available at: <https://www.jurist.org/features/2023/01/30/the-iranian-diaspora-in-the-protests-from-divergence-to-convergence/> (Accessed: 28 September 2024).
- ▶ **Agur, C. and Frisch, N.** (2019) 'Digital Disobedience and the Limits of Persuasion: Social Media Activism in Hong Kong's 2014 Umbrella Movement', *Social Media + Society*, 5(1). Available at: <https://doi-org.proxy.uba.uva.nl/10.1177/2056305119827002> (Accessed: 24 September 2024).
- ▶ **Alkhaldi, C. and Ebrahim, N.** (2022) 'Iranians Cut Their Hair in Protest Against the Death of Mahsa Amini', *CNN*, 28 September. Available at: <https://edition.cnn.com/2022/09/28/middleeast/iran-hair-cutting-mime-intl/index.html> (Accessed: 23 September 2024).
- ▶ **Amnesty International.** (2023) *What happened to Mahsa/Zhina Amini?* Available at: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2023/09/what-happened-to-mahsa-zhina-amini/> (Accessed: 12 October 2024).
- ▶ **Aram, S.** (2022) 'Iranian-Americans have discovered their voice. Their activism will only grow stronger.', *Atlantic Council*, 10 September. Available at: <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/iransource/iranian-americans-activism-women-life-freedom-nsgiran/> (Accessed: 22 September 2024).
- ▶ **Askew, J.** (2023) 'Words Have Power: What Are the Origins of Iran's Protest Chant "Woman, Life, Freedom"?'', *Euronews*, 11 January. Available at: <https://www.euronews.com/2023/01/11/words-have-power-what-are-the-origins-of-woman-life-freedom-iran-protest-chants> (Accessed: 2 October 2024).
- ▶ **Awad, S. H. and Wagoner, B.** (2020) 'Protest symbols', *Current Opinion in Psychology*, 35, pp. 98–102. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2020.03.007> (Accessed: 15 October 2024).
- ▶ **Azizi, A.** (2024) 'The Fiasco of Iranian Diaspora Politics', *New Lines Magazine*, 22 April. Available at: <https://newlinesmag.com/argument/the-fiasco-of-iranian-diaspora-politics/> (Accessed: 28 September 2024).

- ▶ **Bayat, A.** (2022) 'A New Iran Has Been Born — A Global Iran', *New Lines Magazine*, 26 October. Available at: <https://newlinesmag.com/argument/a-new-iran-has-been-born-a-global-iran/> (Accessed: 22 September 2024).
- ▶ **Bayram, S. and Mohtasham, D.** (2022) 'Iran's protesters find inspiration in a Kurdish revolutionary slogan', *NPR*, 27 October. Available at: <https://www.npr.org/2022/10/27/1131436766/kurdish-roots-iran-protest-slogan> (Accessed: 19 September 2024).
- ▶ **Bell, S.** (2023) 'Dozens with ties to Iranian regime caught by Canada's sanctions', *Global News*, 7 December. Available at: <https://globalnews.ca/news/10131369/dozens-with-ties-to-iranian-regime-caught-by-canadas-sanctions/> (Accessed: 25 September 2024).
- ▶ **Benford, R. D. and Snow, D. A.** (2000) 'Framing processes and social movements: An overview and assessment', *Annual Review of Sociology*, 26, pp. 611–639. Available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/223459> (Accessed: 2 October 2024).
- ▶ **Block, D.** (2023) 'I'll Burn You Alive', *Politico*, 22 April. Available at: <https://www.politico.com/news/magazine/2023/04/22/iran-diaspora-harassment-00092598> (Accessed: 14 September 2024).
- ▶ **Chafiq, C.** (2022) 'In Iran, "cutting hair is a symbolic gesture rallying rebels against the Islamic regime"', *Le Monde*, 22 October. Available at: https://www.lemonde.fr/en/opinion/article/2022/10/22/in-iran-cutting-hair-is-a-symbolic-gesture-rallying-rebels-against-the-islamic-regime_6001351_23.html (Accessed: 21 September 2024).
- ▶ **Canadian Press** (2022) 'Canada adds new sanctions against Iran as crackdown on protests continues', *The Globe and Mail*, 16 November. Available at: <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/politics/article-ottawa-imposes-new-iran-sanctions-over-drones-for-russia-human-rights/> (Accessed: 25 September 2024).
- ▶ **Collins, R.** (1990) 'Stratification, emotional energy, and the transient emotions', in T.D. Kemper (ed.) *Research Agendas in the Sociology of Emotions*. New York: Suny Press, pp. 27–57.
- ▶ **De Hoog, N. and Morresi, E.** (2022) 'Mapping Iran's unrest: how Mahsa Amini's death led to nationwide protests', *The Guardian*, 31 October. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/ng-interactive/2022/oct/31/mapping-irans-unrest-how-mahsa-aminis-death-led-to-nationwide-protests> (Accessed: 22 September 2024).
- ▶ **Della Porta, D. and Diani, M.** (1999) *Social Movements: An Introduction*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- ▶ **DeMarrais, E. and Earle, T.** (2017) 'Collective Action Theory and the Dynamics of Complex Societies', *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 46(1), pp. 183–201. Available at: <https://www.annualreviews.org/docserver/fulltext/anthro/46/1/annurev-anthro-102116-041409.pdf?expires=1733688642&id=id&accname=guest&checksum=E15D6347B7C66F831CCB1273FED14152> (Accessed: 2 October 2024).
- ▶ **Esfandiari, H.** (2022) 'The Tenacity of Young Iranians in the Protest Movement', *The Washington Institute*, 29 November. Available at: <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/tenacity-young-iranians-protest-movement> (Accessed: 22 September 2024).
- ▶ **Fominaya, C. F.** (2010) 'Creating Cohesion from Diversity: The Challenge of Collective Identity Formation in the Global Justice Movement', *Sociological Inquiry*, 80(3), pp. 377–404. Available at: <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/20795296/> (Accessed: 28 September 2024).
- ▶ **Fox, M.** (2023) 'The Iranian Diaspora Collective's Bold Quest to Enable Youth Activists', *Forbes*, 20 September. Available at: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/meimeifox/2023/09/20/the-iranian-diaspora-collectives-bold-quest-to-enable-youth-activists/> (Accessed: 4 October 2024).

- ▶ **Fozi, N.** (2021) 'A Fragmented and Polarized Diaspora: The Making of an Iranian Pluralist Consciousness in Malaysia', *Diaspora*, 21(2), pp. 231–258. Available at: <https://utppublishing.com/doi/abs/10.3138/diaspora.21.2.2021.05.14.1> (Accessed: 24 September 2024).
- ▶ **Frosina, S.** (2020) 'Digital Revolution: How Social Media Shaped the 2019 Hong Kong Protests', *ISPI*, 8 June. Available at: <https://www.ispionline.it/en/publication/digital-revolution-how-social-media-shaped-2019-hong-kong-protests-30756> (Accessed: 29 September 2024).
- ▶ **Gambrell, J.** (2024) 'Iran is responsible for the “physical violence” that killed Mahsa Amini in 2022, UN probe finds', *PBS News*, 8 March. Available at: <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/world/iran-is-responsible-for-the-physical-violence-that-killed-mahsa-amini-in-2022-un-probe-finds> (Accessed: 21 September 2024).
- ▶ **Gamson, W. A.** (1992) *Talking Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- ▶ **Goffman, E.** (1974) *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- ▶ **Goodwin, J., Jasper, J. M. and Polletta, F.** (eds.) (2001) *Passionate Politics: Emotions and Social Movements*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- ▶ **Goodwin, J. and Jasper, J. M.** (2006) 'Emotions and Social Movements', in Stets, J. E. and Turner, J. H. (eds.) *Handbooks of Sociology and Social Research*. New York: Springer, pp. 611–635.
- ▶ **Greer, S.** (2022) 'Outrage Over Video Showing Apparent Police Brutality In Iran', *RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty*, 2 November. Available at: <https://www.rferl.org/a/iran-protests-police-brutality/32112590.html> (Accessed: 19 September 2024).
- ▶ **Heckathorn, D. D.** (1996) 'The Dynamics and Dilemmas of Collective Action', *American Sociological Review*, 61(2), pp. 250–277. Available at: <https://ndg.asc.upenn.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Heckathorn-1996.pdf> (Accessed: 9 October 2024).
- ▶ **Iran International** (2022) 'Iranian Diaspora Holding Human Chains Around Globe to Support Protests', *Iran International*, 29 October. Available at: <https://www.iranintl.com/en/202210295024> (Accessed: 22 September 2024).
- ▶ **Jasper, J. M.** (1998) 'The Emotions of Protest: Affective and Reactive Emotions in and around Social Movements', *Sociological Forum*, 13(3), pp. 397–424.
- ▶ **Kenari, A.** (2023) 'Social Media in the Diaspora: An Exploratory Approach Towards Identity Formation of the Iranian Diaspora'. *History, Culture, and Heritage, AHM Conference 2023: Diasporic Heritage and Identity*. Amsterdam, 15–17 March 2023. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, pp. 209–218. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.5117/978904856222/AHM.2023.023> (Accessed: 16 October 2024).
- ▶ **Khalili, M.** (2023) 'From “Green Movement” to “Woman, Life, Freedom”': Continuity and Change in the Evolution of the Protest Movement in Iran', *Protest*, 3(1), pp. 133–140.
- ▶ **Klandermans, B.** (2004) 'The social psychology of protest', in Della Porta, D. and Diani, M. (eds.) *The Handbook of Social Movements Across Disciplines*. New York: Springer.
- ▶ **Klandermans, B.** (2013) 'Consensus and Action Mobilization'. In Snow, D., Della Porta, D., Klandermans, P.G., and McAdam, D. (eds.) *The Wiley-Blackwell Encyclopedia of Social and Political Movements*. Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, pp. 251–253. Available at: ISBN (Electronic) 9780470674871, ISBN (Print) 9781405197731.
- ▶ **Lamensch, M.** (2022) 'In Iran, Women Deploy Social Media in the Fight for Rights', *CIGI*, 16 November. Available at: <https://www.cigionline.org/articles/in-iran-women-deploy-social-media-in-the-fight-for-rights/> (Accessed: 5 October 2024).

- ▶ **Malherbe, L. and Hafezi, P.** (2022) 'Tens of thousands march in Berlin in support of Iran protests', *Reuters*, 24 October. Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/irans-guards-warn-cleric-over-agitating-restive-southeast-2022-10-22/> (Accessed: 22 September 2024).
- ▶ **Mathews, S.** (2022) 'Rapid response': How Iran's tech-savvy diaspora is mobilising to support protesters', *Middle East Eye*, 28 September. Available at: <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/iran-diaspora-tech-workers-mobilising-support-protesters> (Accessed: 27 September 2024).
- ▶ **Margetts, H. et al.** (2015) *Political Turbulence: How Social Media Shape Collective Action*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. Available at: https://press.princeton.edu/books/hardcover/9780691159225/political-turbulence?srltid=AfmB0or5eZ7dnXe_LzowUOVrTEmvFLbTh9btJIm-qSqWJZE9hors8VPJ (Accessed: 29 October 2024).
- ▶ **McAuliffe, C.** (2008) 'Transnationalism Within: Internal Diversity in the Iranian Diaspora', *Australian Geographer*, 39(1), pp. 63–80.
- ▶ **McGrath, M.** (2022) 'Mahsa Amini: The Spark That Ignited A Women-Led Revolution', *Forbes*, 6 December. Available at: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/maggiemcgrath/2022/12/06/mahsa-amini-the-spark-that-ignited-a-women-led-revolution/> (Accessed: 21 September 2024).
- ▶ **Melucci, A.** (1989) *Nomads of the Present: Social Movements and Individual Needs in Contemporary Society*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.
- ▶ **Melucci, A.** (1996) 'The Process of Collective Identity', in *Challenging Codes: Collective Action in the Information Age*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (Cambridge Cultural Social Studies), pp. 68–86.
- ▶ **Mehtar, S.** (2023) 'The number of Mahsa Amini's hashtags on Twitter exceeded 80 million', *Pixstory*, 28 September. Available at: <https://www.pixstory.com/story/the-number-of-mahsa-amini-s-hashtags-on-twitter-exceeded-80-million/150012> (Accessed: 22 September 2024).
- ▶ **Mobasher, M.** (2006) 'Cultural Trauma and Ethnic Identity Formation Among Iranian Immigrants in the United States', *American Behavioral Scientist*, 50(1), pp. 100–117. Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/240282493_Cultural_Trauma_and_Ethnic_Identity_Formation_Among_Iranian_Immigrants_in_the_United_States (Accessed: 18 September 2024).
- ▶ **Mohabbat-Kar, R.** (2015) 'Identity and Exile: The Iranian Diaspora Between Solidarity and Difference', *Publication Series on Democracy*, Volume 40. Heinrich Böll Foundation in co-operation with Transparency for Iran. Available at: https://www.boell.de/sites/default/files/identity-a-exile_web.pdf (Accessed: 22 September 2024). ISBN 978-3-86928-146-9.
- ▶ **Nichols, M.** (2022) 'Iran ousted from U.N. women's group after U.S. campaign', *Reuters*, 15 December. Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/iran-likely-be-ousted-un-womens-body-2022-12-14/> (Accessed: 22 September 2024).
- ▶ **Olson, M.** (1965) *The Logic of Collective Action: Public Goods and the Theory of Groups*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- ▶ **Polletta, F. and Ho, M. K.** (2009) 'Frames and their consequences', in Goodin, R. and Tilly, C. (eds.) *The Oxford Handbook of Contextual Political Analysis*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 187–209.
- ▶ **Polletta, F. and Jasper, J. M.** (2001) 'Collective Identity and Social Movements', *Annual Review of Sociology*, 27(1), pp. 283–305.
- ▶ **Qin, B., Wu, Y. and Strömberg, D.** (2021) 'Social Media and Collective Action in China', *CEPR Working Paper*, DP16731. Available at: https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3976832 (Accessed: 1 October 2024).
- ▶ **Rahimieh, N.** (2023) 'Politics of Vengeance in Iranian Diaspora Communities', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 55(4), pp. 749–753.

- ▶ **Razavi, S.** (2023) 'Discord in the Diaspora: Agonism in the 'Woman, Life, Freedom' Movement for Democracy', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 55(4), pp. 754–758.
- ▶ **Rezai, Y.** (2024) 'Performing Iran online: Digital poetics and feminist activism in the 'Woman, Life, Freedom' movement', *Journal of Gender Studies*. Advance online publication. pp. 1–18. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09589236.2024.2386058>.
- ▶ **Rivetti, P.** (2023) 'Writing in Turbulent Times. Introduction to the Roundtable on the 2022–23 Iranian Protests', *Iranian Studies*, 56(3), pp. 553–556.
- ▶ **Salartash, R.** (2022) 'The Iranian diaspora's powerful use of media in Iran's human rights crisis', *Human Rights First*, 14 December. Available at: <https://humanrightsfirst.org/library/the-iranian-diasporas-powerful-use-of-media-in-irans-human-rights-crisis/> (Accessed: 17 September 2024).
- ▶ **now, D. A.** (2001) *Collective Identity and Expressive Forms. Research Monograph Series*, 1(7). UC Irvine: Center for the Study of Democracy. Available at: <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/2zn1t7bj> (Accessed: 17 September 2024).
- ▶ **Snow, D.A., Vliegenthart, R. and Ketelaars, P.** (2019) 'The framing perspective on social movements: Its conceptual roots and architecture', in Snow, D.A., Soule, S.A., Kriesi, H. and McCammon, H.J. (eds.) *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Social Movements*. 2nd edn. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley Blackwell, pp. 392–410. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119168577.ch22>.
- ▶ **Spier, S.** (2017) *Collective Action 2.0: The Impact of Social Media on Collective Action*. Chandos Social Media Series. Cambridge, MA: Chandos Publishing. Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/322616574_Collective_Action_20_The_Impact_of_Social_Media_on_Collective_Action (Accessed: 22 October 2024).
- ▶ **Strack, C.** (2022) 'Iran rights protest in Berlin draws thousands', *Deutsche Welle*, 22 October. Available at: <https://www.dw.com/en/thousands-honor-jina-mahsa-amini-at-iran-protest-in-berlin/a-63527862> (Accessed: 17 September 2024).
- ▶ **Tilly, C.** (2004) *Social Movements, 1768–2004*. 1st edn. New York: Routledge.
- ▶ **Tohidi, N.** (2023) 'Iran in a transformative process by Woman, Life, Freedom', *Freedom of Thought Journal*, 13, pp. 29–57. Available at: <https://journals.iranacademia.com/public/journals/1/issues/13/14-Tohidi-En.pdf> (Accessed: 17 September 2024).
- ▶ **Valli, E.** (2023) 'The Symbolism of Cutting Hair in Iranian Protest Posters', *Grapheine*, 16 June. Available at: <https://www.grapheine.com/en/graphic-design-en/symbolism-cut-hair-iranian-protest-posters> (Accessed: 28 September 2024).
- ▶ **Valocchi, S.** (2009) 'The Importance of Being "We": Collective Identity and the Mobilizing Work of Progressive Activists in Hartford, Connecticut', *Mobilization*, 14(1), pp. 65–84.
- ▶ **Van Stekelenburg, J. and Gaidytė, T.** (2023) 'Social Movements and the Dynamics of Collective Action', in Huddy, L., Sears, D. O. and Levy, J. S. (eds.) *The Oxford Handbook of Political Psychology*, 3rd edn. (online edn., Oxford Academic, 18 September 2023). Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780197541302.013.25> (Accessed: 15 September 2024).
- ▶ **Wintour, P.** (2022) "'Women, Life, Liberty': Iranian Civil Rights Protests Spread Worldwide', *The Guardian*, 1 October. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/oct/01/women-life-liberty-iranian-civil-rights-protests-spread-worldwide> (Accessed: 2 October 2024).
- ▶ **Wright, R.** (2022) 'Iran's Protests Are the First Counter-revolution Led by Women', *The New Yorker*, 9 October. Available at: <https://www.newyorker.com/news/daily-comment/irans-protests-are-the-first-counterrevolution-led-by-women> (Accessed: 20 September 2024).
- ▶ **Zandi, J.** (2022) 'Why It's Vital to Center Kurdish Voices in the 'Woman, Life, Freedom' Movement', *Time*, 23 November. Available at: <https://time.com/6236067/mahsa-amini-jina-iran-kurdish-identity/> (Accessed: 1 October 2024).

4) ETHICS AND METHODOLOGY IN RESEARCH

EKATERINA KOLESNIK

Ekaterina Kolesnik is an MA student in the Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology at Central European University in Vienna. She previously received an MA in Art History and a BA in Philosophy. At Central European University she researches the contemporary Russian Left.

INVESTIGATING OPPOSITION IN AUTHORITARIAN STATES: WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR RESEARCH TO BE ETHICAL?

Qualitative research in the social sciences, which includes interviews, fieldwork and ethnography, emphasises the responsibility of the researcher toward their informants. The ethics of qualitative methods tend to emphasise the importance of safety and comfort that ought to be provided to them. However, the way ethical rules are typically formulated does not take into account the complexity of diverse research fields. In this regard, authoritarian settings stand out as particularly hostile environments for the concept of 'ethics' as it is usually understood in social sciences. Thus, in 2014, a number of academic journal editors issued a Data Access and Research Transparency (DA-RT) statement, which required researchers to demonstrate data availability or notify the editor if the data was restricted. This statement granted journals the right to decline a paper for publication if the demand for data transparency was not met (DA-RT, 2015-6). This statement provoked a discussion on whether these requirements are adequate for qualitative research in restricted fields, where data transparency can endanger both researchers and informants (Ahram and Goode, 2016; Glasius et al., 2018). Although attempts to homogenise field research requirements seems to be highly contested, this case highlights the tension between transparency and safety in suppressive contexts (Glasius et al., 2018, p.3). It also shows that, from the normative perspective of social sciences, research in authoritarian settings does not always align with conventional 'ethics' frameworks and requires a specific understanding of how to be 'ethical'. Thus, the question remains: how can research in authoritarian states be ethical?



This question becomes even more challenging if the research focuses on oppositional activities within an authoritarian state. In this case, not only is the safety of researchers and informants at risk, but also the safety of exposing oppositional activity as a whole. Publishing a paper on oppositional mobilisation and action means that it could potentially be instrumentalised by the state's repressive regime. Research could serve as a useful roadmap for repression if obtained by the authorities. Can such an investigation be ethical at all?

Is It Ethical to Research the Opposition in Authoritarian States?

To answer this question, it is necessary to first clarify the use of the word 'ethical'. In this paper, ethical research is research that does not endanger its participants or harm them in any way.

The potential for research to harm the environment being studied is not limited to authoritarian contexts. A well-known example is Nancy Scheper-Hughes' investigation of an Irish rural community and her reflection on the outcomes of her research, which demonstrates how participant observation can disrupt the lives of the observed community. Her book *Saints, Scholars and Schizophrenics: Mental Illness in Rural Ireland* (1979) was based on a one-year ethnographic study of everyday communal life in an Irish rural town, focusing on why so many people in Ireland were being diagnosed with mental illness. When Scheper-Hughes returned to the town 20 years later, she was met with brutal hostility: people were hurt by her research focusing on the negative aspects of their lives and by being portrayed in an unpleasant way. Reflecting on this experience and acknowledging the mistakes that were made during the research, the author writes: 'Anthropology is by nature intrusive and it entails a certain amount of symbolic and interpretive violence to the "native" peoples' own intuitive, though still partial, understanding of the world' (Scheper-Hughes, 2000, p. 127). If intrusiveness and interpretive violence are inherent to anthropological research, a broader question arises: is fieldwork research, with its disruption of community life and publication of specific interpretations of this life, ethical? Although such interruptions can be harmful, they can also bring about positive changes in society's understanding of certain issues. For instance, by investigating mental illness and the decline of Irish rural communities, Scheper-Hughes produced significant knowledge about the connection between the two and its implications for society as a whole.

This example illustrates that the question of whether research should be conducted is, in fact, a question of whether the intrusion of research is justified. Reflecting on his research into regime change in Zimbabwe, Alexander Rusero asks whether conducting research in an authoritarian state is 'worth the gamble' (Rusero, 2022). For Rusero, the answer is a definitive 'yes', as investigating authoritarian settings, despite all the difficulties and dangers, is an important mission for gaining knowledge about the hardships people endure, so they can potentially be alleviated (Rusero, p. 122). Reflecting on his research experience in Iran, Shervin Malekzadeh highlights another reason for investigating authoritarian states. Conducting fieldwork in such contexts is crucial for debunking myths about these settings and fostering a more nuanced understanding of their complexities

(Malekzadeh, 2016, p. 873). Research into the opposition in authoritarian states can provide us with valuable insights into the complexity of political life in authoritarian states and how the conditions of this life might be changed.

How to Conduct Ethical Work in Authoritarian States

Having established the importance of researching opposition in authoritarian states, the question becomes not whether to conduct the research, but ‘how’ to do so ethically. Therefore, it is important to investigate the measures that scholars should and can take when conducting research in this context. In this section, I will highlight some specifics of authoritarian settings that influence the ethics of such research.

The Presence of the State

One key characteristic of authoritarian settings is the potential danger posed by state authorities. Researcher Michael Gentile, who has conducted research in various post-socialist authoritarian contexts, writes: ‘The greatest risk is being unaware of the risks: the secret services – being secret – tend to conceal their presence or interference’ (Gentile, 2013, p. 432).

When questioning whether research on opposition informs the authoritarian state about oppositional practices, we must first determine what influences the state and identify the specific sources of this information. Each authoritarian state has its own context and unique logic of operation, which cannot be fully understood due to the inherent lack of transparency. Therefore, researchers cannot predict whether their research will attract the interest of the authorities. Notably, this uncertainty about the degree of oppression and function of suppressive authorities is itself an important tool of repression (Glasius et al., 2018, p. 115). At the same time, as Janine A. Clark points out, researchers conducting studies in Middle Eastern authoritarian states often describe what they call ‘the looming smell’ of the secret police (Clark, 2006, p. 418). Thus, although the presence of the state cannot be anticipated in advance, certain knowledge of the field or indirect evidence may hint at the authorities’ potential interest in a research topic.

Sensitive Questions

A deep understanding of the context is necessary not only for developing an intuition about possible reactions from the authorities but also for navigating sensitive topics during questioning. Guzel Yusupova, who studied ethnicity in the Republic of Tatarstan in Russia, noticed her informants becoming anxious when questions potentially related to politics were asked (Yusupova, 2019). When one respondent expressed their opinion on a potentially sensitive topic, she chose not to seek clarification to avoid possible risks for the individual and to maintain a calm atmosphere during the interview (ibid., p. 1470). ‘If excessive caution results in losing important narratives, touching potentially sensitive topics could result in the termination of the interview’, Yusupova writes (ibid., p. 1472). To detect sensitive topics, researchers must have a thorough understanding of how repres-

sion functions within the state. Although investigating opposition activity places informants who are part of the opposition in potential danger, carefully navigating the sensitivity of questions is crucial for ensuring their safety and comfort.

Adjusting the General Rules: Anonymity

General guidelines for conducting interviews typically include anonymising informants. In authoritarian settings, however, this is not just a matter of privacy but also of safety. Michael Gentile, when discussing the potential dangers of such fieldwork, specifically emphasises the importance of describing informants as broadly as possible because ‘secret services’ may use specific details of the interviewee’s description to identify them (2013, p. 427). Another example of the specific challenges of the anonymisation process in authoritarian settings is the consent form. General requirements for written consent before interviews may not work in this context, as they can pose a danger to interviewees, making oral consent a better option (Glasius et al., 2018, p. 100). Thus, the potential interference of the state adds another dimension to the need for anonymising informants, requiring research ethics to be adjusted to the specific situation.

Taking Responsibility

Studying revolutionary action, including oppositional mobilisation against an authoritarian state, usually comes with a junction between scholarship and practice (Beck et al., 2022). As a result, ‘scholars and revolutionaries can find themselves – wittingly or unwittingly – as agents of change’ (ibid., p. 187). This intersection between research and political practice points out the specific ethical considerations of scholarly practice. Therefore, writing about opposition in an authoritarian state means accepting the potential risks to both yourself and your informants and taking responsibility for your position in the field.

Thus, Janet Elise Johnson, who studied gender violence in Russia, suggests that researchers take responsibility for their own safety: ‘Not all information is worth the risk it might take to obtain’ (2009, p. 322). She advises that in difficult situations, it is better to aim for being a ‘good-enough researcher’ rather than a perfect one (ibid.). If it feels like the research question is too dangerous to investigate, it should be changed. Researchers should never disregard their own safety, especially when working in dangerous fields of study.

The presence of a researcher is not a neutral factor; it can influence both the dynamics of the field as well as the safety of the participants. Lee Morgenbesser and Meredith L. Weiss, in their 2018 article, ‘Survive and Thrive: Field Research in Authoritarian South-east Asia’, map out the specific challenges of working in such a context. In the case of participant observation, they write:

Respect those you are studying: they are citizens and vulnerable, no specimens. If they ask you not to attend an event, or to stay well in the background, know that you may compromise not only your own reception but also their safety and the event's success, should you disregard that request (Morgenbesser and Weiss, 2018, p. 397).

It is important to recognise the potential boundaries of your research based on safety restrictions for the participants.

Erica Chenoweth, who investigates political violence, discusses various contexts in which research can be potentially dangerous to people in the field, even after its completion. They describe how their public lectures or interactions in an authoritarian country can inadvertently harm activists within that country (Chenoweth, 2020, pp. 271–272). Reflecting on their own research experience, they state:

We cannot control the way people use our work once it is published, whether or not we engage with various constituencies. As such, the question is not whether to engage but how to engage, with who, and to what ends (*ibid.*, p. 273).

We cannot control how our work may be used by authorities, but we can ensure that it is conducted as safely as possible for both informants and scholars.

Conclusion

Research in authoritarian states is important work that can provide a unique understanding of the complexities of authoritarian contexts and potentially contribute to positive change. However, authoritarian settings cannot be homogenised into a single set of operating principles. Each fieldwork context requires its own set of rules for conducting ethical research. Researchers can better orient themselves by paying close attention to the specific mechanisms of repression (e.g., identifying potentially dangerous topics) and to the environment around them (e.g., looking for indirect evidence of state presence). The specificity of the context may require adapting general ethical rules to the situation: what is considered less appropriate in democratic contexts – for example, oral consent being less desirable than written consent – can be a safer option for informants in authoritarian states. A crucially important aspect of conducting research in this field is reflecting on your own positionality: how it influences the safety of participants, your own safety and the boundaries that should not be crossed. Researching a highly politicised field also comes with a high possibility of involvement in political action, making it essential to acknowledge this as a challenge to the ethical dimensions of the researcher's position in the field.

Studying authoritarian contexts comes with a greater responsibility for assessing the ethics of research. This responsibility becomes even more important when it comes to researching opposition in authoritarian states, requiring careful preparation for ethical challenges and their potential solutions.

References

- ▶ **Ahram, A.I. and Goode, J.P.** (2016) 'Researching Authoritarianism in the Discipline of Democracy', *Social Science Quarterly*, 97(4), pp. 834–849.
- ▶ **Beck, C. J., et al.** (2022) 'Ethics in Revolution(ary) Research', in Beck, C. J., et al. *On Revolutions: Unruly Politics in the Contemporary World*. New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 174–188.
- ▶ **Chenoweth, E.** (2020) 'On Research that "Matters"', in Krause, P. and Szekely, O. (eds.) *Stories from the Field: A Guide to Navigating Fieldwork in Political Science*. New York: Columbia University Press, pp. 267–276.
- ▶ **Clark, J. A.** (2006) 'Field Research Methods in the Middle East', *PS: Political Science and Politics*, 39(3), pp. 417–423.
- ▶ **DA-RT.** (2015–6) *The Journal Editors' Transparency Statement (JETS)*. Available at: <https://www.dartstatement.org/2014-journal-editors-statement-jets> (Accessed: 3 November 2024).
- ▶ **Gentile, M.** (2013) 'Meeting the "organs": the tacit dilemma of field research in authoritarian states', *Area*, 45(4), pp. 426–432.
- ▶ **Glasius, M., et al.** (2018) *Research, Ethics and Risk in the Authoritarian Field*. Basingstoke: Springer Nature.
- ▶ **Johnson, J. E.** (2009) 'Unwilling Participant Observation among Russian Siloviki and the Good-Enough Field Researcher', *PS: Political Science and Politics*, 42(2), pp. 321–324.
- ▶ **Malekzadeh, S.** (2016) 'Paranoia and Perspective, or How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Start Loving Research in the Islamic Republic of Iran', *Social Science Quarterly*, 97(4), pp. 862–875.
- ▶ **Morgenbesser, L. and Weiss, M. L.** (2018) 'Survive and Thrive: Field Research in Authoritarian Southeast Asia', *Asian Studies Review*, 42(3), pp. 385–403.
- ▶ **Rusero, A.** (2022) 'Worth the gamble? Access to information, risks and ethical dilemmas in undertaking research in authoritarian regimes: the case of Zimbabwe', *Critical African Studies*, 14(2), pp. 110–123.
- ▶ **Scheper-Hughes, N.** (2000) 'Ire in Ireland', *Ethnography*, 1(1), pp. 117–140.



