



# **Distant Proximity:**

## **A comparative analysis of migrant netizen engagement before and during the Arab Spring**

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**Ph.D. thesis defence on 8 May 2017**

### **Abstract**

The spread of the internet and migration are key dimensions associated with globalization and range among the most salient challenges of our times. Looking at the intersection of these two phenomena, this dissertation explores how the internet enables citizens of non-democracies living abroad to partake in the political discourse and online campaigns in their home countries. How does the fact of living in non-authoritarian countries affect the migrant's position inside their online community? Using concepts from the contentious politics literature, I examine why migrant netizens adopt different roles in online campaigns in the years leading to and during the Arab uprisings at the examples of Tunisia and Morocco. I draw upon multiple empirical strategies including an analysis of web crawls of the Tunisian and Moroccan blogospheres, in-depth interviews with a number of key actors and frame analysis. I find that migrants were among the pioneers of political blogging, are well-integrated in their respective blogosphere and often occupy central positions. Political opportunity structures matter, thus the relative absence of repression allows migrants to act as radical mobilizers in highly repressive regimes like Tunisia. In contrast to that, migrant netizens in slightly more liberal settings like Morocco are less of a driving force than an equal partner in online discussions and campaigns, even if they might provide additional resources and establish contacts with international actors. Finally, the frame analysis reveals that radical migrant bloggers are likely to suffer from a lack of credibility due to their relative immunity to repression, unless they adapt their frames to the concerns of the wider blogger community, thereby enabling the creation of a broad coalition.



**Jury:** Olivier Roy (EUI/RSCAS), Hanspeter Kriesi (EUI) (Supervisor) Johanne Kübler (candidate), Fiona Adamson (SOAS, Univ. London), Alexandra Segerberg (Univ. Stockholm)

**Bio:** Johanne Kübler studied at McGill University (Canada) and Sciences Po Paris, from which she holds an M.A. in Comparative Politics with a specialization on the Middle East. During her time at the EUI, she also worked as a research associate at the BORDERLANDS Project hosted by the Robert Schuman Centre. The interplay between internet, politics, protest and participation in the Middle East are at the core of her research interests.