

# AN ARAB EXCEPTION?

## THE ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN TUNISIA'S DEMOCRATIC TRANSITION

27 JULY 2015



United Nations  
Educational, Scientific and  
Cultural Organization



UNESCO Chair on  
Comparative Research  
on Cultural Diversity and Social Justice



Australian Government



Council for  
Australian-Arab  
Relations

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The UNESCO Chair, Comparative Research in Cultural Diversity and Social Justice would like to acknowledge the support of the Council of Arab Australian Relations (CAAR) at the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Relations.

We acknowledge the traditional owners of the lands upon which Deakin University stands and we pay our respect.

# WELCOME

Dear Colleagues,

It is our pleasure to welcome you to our international symposium 'The Arab Exception? The Role of Civil Society in Tunisia's Democratic Transition'.

This symposium brings together international experts to explore the critical role of civil society organisations in Tunisia's transition to democracy.

Hosted by the UNESCO Chair, Cultural Diversity and Social Justice, in partnership with the Council of Arab-Australian Relations (DFAT), participants will address the ways in which women, youth, unions and civil society organisations participated in the revolution and supported the democratic processes that followed.

We look forward to your active participation and contribution to these important debates at our various sessions.

Best wishes,  
Fethi

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Fethi', with a stylized flourish underneath.

**Professor Fethi Mansouri**  
**Symposium Convenor and Chair**

## PROGRAM OVERVIEW

8:30 am	<b>Registration</b>
9:00 am	<b>Welcome</b> Professor Fethi Mansouri UNESCO Chair, Cultural Diversity and Social Justice  Professor Lee Astheimer Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research), Deakin University  Mr Roland Jabbour National Chairman, Australia Arab Chamber of Commerce and Industry
9:30 am	<b>Panel One: Critical Reflections on the Role of Civil Society in the Tunisian Revolution</b> <i>Civil Society and Democratic Consolidation in Post-Revolution Tunisia</i> Professor Fethi Mansouri  <i>Civil Society and Feminist Organisations' Networking Strategies</i> Assistant Professor Lamia Benyoussef  <i>Democratic Transition and Transitional Justice in Tunisia</i> Ms Ines Amri
11:00 am	<b>Tea Break</b>
11:30 am	<b>Panel Two: Women, Politics and Power</b> <i>Women of the Spring: The Problem-Solution</i> Professor Nejet Mchala  <i>Ennadha as a Neo-Islamist Political Party in Power (2011-2014)</i> Mr Tareq Chamkhi
12:30 pm	<b>Lunch Break</b>
1:30 pm	<b>Panel Three: Youth of the Revolution</b> <i>Tunisian Young Activists Experiences of Democracy, Participation and Trust in Political Parties</i> Professor Raoudha Ben Othman  <i>Tunisia's Assets in its Transition to Democracy: Women, Youth and Trade Unions</i> Dr Leila Ben Mcharek  <i>Awakened Identity Among Tunisian Youth Post Arab Spring</i> Dr Zouhir Gabsi
3:00 pm	<b>Q&amp;A Panel: Women in the Revolution</b>
4:00 pm	<b>Concluding Session</b>
4:30 pm	<b>Afternoon Tea and Departure</b>



## OPENING



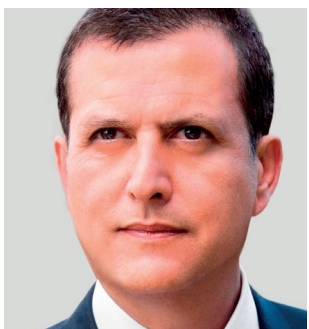
**Professor Fethi Mansouri**  
**UNESCO Chair, Cultural Diversity and Social Justice**  
**Director, Alfred Deakin Institute for Citizenship and Globalisation**  
**Symposium Convenor and Chair**

Professor Fethi Mansouri holds a Deakin University Alfred Deakin Research Chair in migration and intercultural studies and is the Director of the Alfred Deakin Institute for Citizenship and Globalisation. In 2013 he was appointed Chair-holder, UNESCO Chair in comparative research on 'Cultural Diversity and Social Justice'. He is the editor of the Journal of Intercultural Studies and founding co-editor of the international journal of Social Inclusion.



**Professor Lee Astheimer**  
**Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research), Deakin University**

Professor Lee Astheimer is the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research) at Deakin University. Professor Astheimer's role at Deakin is to provide academic leadership to advance Deakin's distinctive research and research training and promoting, both nationally and internationally. This includes research development, industry-focused research and commercialisation and research promotion.



**Mr Roland Jabbour**  
**National Chairman, Australia Arab Chamber of Commerce and Industry**

Mr Roland Jabbour is the Chairman of the Australia Arab Chamber of Commerce and Industry (AACCI). He has an extensive history of service to the community, and in promoting the development of partnerships between Australia and the Arab region, facilitating business and trade relations that work to promote stronger ties between Australia and the Arab world. Mr Jabbour is the recipient of many awards including an Australian Medal for service to the AUstralian community.

## Panel One: Critical Reflections on the Role of Civil Society in the Tunisian Revolution

### Civil Society and Democratic Consolidation in Post-Revolution Tunisia

The revolution that exploded on the international scene on 14 January 2011 in the North African country of Tunisia and quickly spread into Egypt, Libya and elsewhere, refutes Western arguments that Arabs are incapable of achieving political change through largely civilian popular uprisings. This paper will examine the nature and dynamics of the ensuing political transitions in the region focussing on the Tunisian model increasingly described as an 'Arab exception' in terms of democratic transition across the MENA region. But despite recent successes (drafting of the new constitution; hand over of power to a non-partisan government of technocrats; appointing an electoral council and successful general elections held late in 2014) Tunisia's transitional path remains affected by region-wide security challenges; the polarising rise of political Islam with its many manifestations; the systemic problems facing its ailing economy; and the underperforming weakened security forces. But it is the deep social and economic inequalities that are still threatening to derail the successful democratisation process as social injustice in all its manifestations are unlikely to engender a consolidation of democratic gains, and may instead lead to substantial political instability and social volatility. This paper will assess the critical role of CSOs in negotiating and stabilising this critical phase arguing that unlike other 'Arab Spring' countries, Tunisia's claim for 'exception' is indeed only understood in the context of a broader analysis of its civil society activism.

Professor Fethi Mansouri

Alfred Deakin Institute for Citizenship and Globalisation



Professor Fethi Mansouri holds a Deakin University Alfred Deakin Research Chair in migration and intercultural studies and is the Director of the Alfred Deakin Institute for Citizenship and Globalisation. In 2013 he was appointed Chair-holder, UNESCO Chair in comparative research on 'Cultural Diversity and Social Justice'. He is the editor of the Journal of Intercultural Studies and founding co-editor of the international journal of Social Inclusion. His most influential books include: *'Islam and Political Violence: Muslim Diaspora and Radicalism in the West'*, (2007); *'Political Islam and Human Security'* (2008); *'Identity, Education, and Belonging: Arab and Muslim Youth in Contemporary Australia'* (2008); *'Youth Identity and Migration: Culture, Values and Social Connectedness'* (2009); *'Australia and the Middle East: A Frontline Relationship'* (2011, second edition); and *'Migration, Citizenship and Intercultural Relations: Looking Through the Lens of Social Inclusion'* (2011). His most recent books include: *'Muslims in the*

*West and the Challenges of Belonging'* (2012); *'The Arab Revolutions in Context: Civil Society and Democracy in a Changing Middle East'* (2012); *'Global Perspectives on the Politics of Multiculturalism'* (2014) and *'The Multicultural Challenge'* (2015). Professor Mansouri's 2004 book *'Lives in Limbo: Voices of Refugees under Temporary Protection'* was short-listed for the 2004 Human Rights Medals and Awards.

## Civil Society and Feminist Organizations' Networking Strategies

Using Legee et al (2002) and Lake and Wong's (2009) process of political crystallization and network creation and relying on a series of interviews Dr. Nikolaos Zahariadis and I conducted in Tunisia in June 2015 with members of ATFD, feminist scholars and politicians, I examine in this paper not only the networking strategies of this feminist NGO, but also its capacity to attract members and reach out to voters both before and after the 2011 Revolution. Our goal is to determine what aspects of organizational networking are most and least effective in times of political upheaval.

Assistant Professor Lamia Benyoussef  
University of Alabama at Birmingham



Lamia Benyoussef is currently an Assistant Professor in the Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures at the University of Alabama at Birmingham. She holds a B.A. in English from L'École Normale Supérieure of Sousse in Tunisia and an M.A. and a Ph.D. in English from Michigan State University. Her areas of specialization are post-coloniality, feminist theory and African literature with a specific emphasis on the Maghreb. Prior to coming to UAB, she taught British, American, and postcolonial Literature at the University of Carthage and the University of the Center (Sousse) in Tunisia. Her current research is Tunisian women during W.W.II. She is author of the *Production of the Muslim Woman: Negotiating Text, History and Ideology* (Lexington Press 2005). Her most recent articles are 'Anne Frank Goes East: The Algerian Civil War and the Nausea of Postcoloniality in Waciny Laredj's *Balconies of the North Sea*' (2010), 'Teaching about Women and Islam in North Africa: Integrating Postcolonial Feminist Theory in Foreign Culture Pedagogy' (2011),

and a book chapter 'Is it the End of State Feminism? Tunisian Women During and After the 14 of January Revolution,' in *The Arab Revolutions in Context: Socio-Political Implications of the Middle East and Beyond*, Editors, Benjamin Isakhan, Fethi Mansouri, and Shahram Akbarzadeh, Melbourne University. In 2013, she published a co-authored article 'Islam in Tunisia in *Oxford Encyclopedia of Islam Online*' and made two contributions to The [Oxford] Encyclopedia of Islam and Women on women and cinema in the Maghreb and the history of Tunisian feminism. Her recent poetry appeared in *Contemporary African Women's Poetry*, an anthology compiled by Juliana Makuchi Nfah-Abbenyi and Anthonia Kalu, by Lynne Rienner Publishers (2013). Her most recent article, 'Year of the Typhus: Operation Torch through the Eyes of Tunisian Women, or How to Make the Holocaust an Arab Story?' appeared in the forum section of *The International Journal of Francophone Studies*.

## “Democratic Transition” and “Transitional Justice” in Tunisia

Post-January 14th Tunisia found itself with a legacy of human rights violations, political and financial corruption and new questions have been raised on how to redress the infringements of the past. At present, Tunisian public opinion is torn between two stances: those calling for accountability and reconciliation, and those calling for accountability and maximal prosecution of the perpetrators. Though we somehow succeeded in establishing a democracy in Tunisia, we are still lagging behind in terms of dealing with our Past (Acknowledgement, Reparation and Accountability). CSOs have been busy implementing democracy-building and capacity-building programs and very few have worked on having perpetrators accountable for past crimes and Human Rights Violations or challenging the Modern History of the country. CSOs assume that dealing with the Past is the mission of the IVD only (Truth and Dignity Commission). The results of the recent legislative and presidential elections reflect to some extent that people's Memory has been wiped out. Tunisians voted for iconic figures of the previous regime. This Amnesia can be explained by many facts but mainly the deterioration of the security, socio-economic sectors led people to feel nostalgic about the Past and choose candidates that they believe are the « Saviours » of the Nation. Thus, Tunisia's democracy is threatened by the risks of Amnesia because if something is forgotten, it means it can be recurrent.

Ms Ines Amri

Organisation Volonté et Citoyenneté



Ms Ines Amri, a Teacher-turned-to-NGO-Professional, is the Founder of Organisation Volonté et Citoyenneté (Will and Citizenship Organization). She has occupied the position of CEO/ President from May 2012 till August 2014. In the First General Board Assembly, Ines was elected as the Vice-President, charged with Projects and Fundraising. Ines has recently been a Visiting Scholar at the Institute of the Study of Human Rights (ISHR) at Columbia University in the City of New York. She is currently the Head of Research and Project Manager of “Nsina?” (Did We Forget?), a documentary funded by Columbia University and Bosch Foundation through which she seeks to create a platform of dialogue where dealing with the Past 55 years of oppression is at the core of the national debate and to launch a participatory action research project with the victims and their families in Tunisia. Ines has been a Legislative Fellow, one of the four Tunisian delegates to work for the US Congress for a month. She has been placed at the office of

Congresswoman Betty McCollum (Minnesota-4). Ines was appointed to serve as a member of the International Jury of the Plural+ Video Festival 2013, put on by the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM). Ines is an alumnus of the International Visitor Leadership Program (IVLP) as she was nominated by the US Ambassador in Tunis to represent Tunisia in “The Role of NGOs in Promoting Global Women's Issues Program”. She has also been a certified ESL teacher since 2008 at the Tunisian Ministry of Education. She is an avid reader of Literature and traveller.

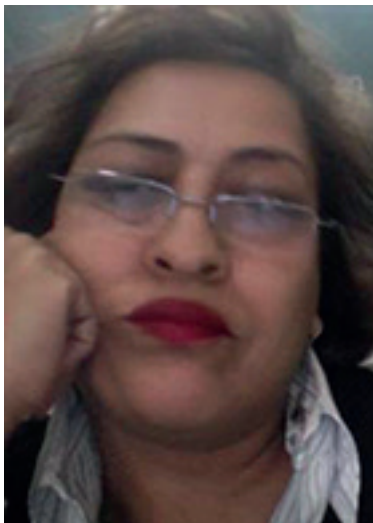


## Panel Two: Women, Politics and Power

### Women of the Spring : The Problem-Solution

January 14, 2011 was a radical demand for equality, freedom and citizenship. The orphaned revolution invalidated hierarchies and at the same time unveiled long evaded historical fractures and ideological contentions. The totalitarian State, which acted as a monopolistic normalizer and regulator gave in to a transitional void made of queries on patterns of governance that involved new types of civil actors and voices, long muted in the name of a forceful social cohesion. Central to these queries is the identitarian question subsuming in its essence, women and gender relationships. The 1956 post independence Code of Personal Status, a resultant of a historical Tunisian reformist exegetic process reconciling modernity and enlightened Islam, taken up formally by the modern State as a strategic vehicle of emancipation of both gender is questioned by Islamists, who, invoking cultural relativism and at times essentialism, demand that Chari'a precepts be implemented to ward off Western contamination and globalization effects. A long battle is awaiting women of "spring and street"; now faced with precariousness of their assets and the urgency to constitutionalize their rights, considering that the "Parity" Constituent Assembly women are not necessarily guarantors or spokeswomen of the rights of women or men.

Professor Nejet Mchala  
University of Carthage



Professor Nejet Mchala is a Professor of English and critical theory at The Institut Supérieur des Langues de Tunis, University of Carthage. Phd in Comparative Studies from La Sorbonne, Paris. Head of the postgraduate program in Cross Cultural Studies. Teaching and research in postmodernity and postcoloniality, Maghrebian Literature and Film. She is presently editing a collection of essays titled *Dis-Orient-ed express*. She has recently published research on the Tunisian revolution in (2012) 'Re-inventing Wor(l)ds' in *The Arab Revolution in Context*, and (2014) 'The post Revolution Tunisian Subject, Citizen or Believer', In *Democratization and Citizenship Discourses in the MENA Region*.

## Ennahda as a Neo-Islamist political Party in Power (2011-2014)

Ennahda, the political wing of one of the more prominent Arab neo-Islamist movements, was the first Islamic party to win a free election after the Arab Spring and the first Islamic party in modern Arab history to lead a freely elected government. Notably, Ennahda was also the first Arab Islamist party ever to share power with a secular party. By early 2014, it had become the first Islamist-led government to relinquish power peacefully, political unrest notwithstanding. In this paper, Ennahda is evaluated on the basis of three criteria in order to determine whether it is capable of participating in and furthering the democratic transition in Tunisia. The first criterion, involving moderation, examines Ennahda's attitudes towards democracy, an open society and the free market economy, Tunisia's non-Islamic political parties, and generally, tolerance of differing religious and political points of view. The second criterion examines Ennahda's management of the post-revolution economic crisis. Has Ennahda been successful in resolving some of the country's urgent economic problems during its relatively short time in power during the transitional period? Does Ennahda have the ideological and intellectual capacity for formulating viable economic policies once in power? The third criterion relates to Ennahda's actions and reactions to Jihadi Salafism in particular its terrorist threats, which has become the main challenge for post-Ben Ali Tunisia.

In addition, it is likely that civil society elements have played an integral role in the mobilisation of a strong front anti Ennahda. This has led the later to adjust its stance on key issues e.g. the constitution; consensus politics; power handover to the Jomaa government. This paper will investigate whether Ennahda has been able to exhibit ideological pragmatism as well as political flexibility to remain a significant player in domestic politics or not.

Mr Tarek Chamkhi  
Murdoch University



Mr Tarek Chamkhi earned his Bachelor's degree in Political & Administrative sciences at Lebanese University (Lebanon) in 1995, and his Master's Degree in politics from Murdoch University (WA) in 2015 and is enrolling for his PhD at the moment. His main academic interests are in Islamism, Geopolitics and broader International relations. He started his career as a journalist in 1993 and contributed to major Arab newspapers in the Middle East during the 1990s and early 2000s. Tarek has published numerous articles and opinion pieces, as well as several academic papers (in Arabic and English) and several books in Arabic.

## Panel Three: Youth of the Revolution

### Tunisian Young Activists Experiences of Democracy, Participation and Trust in Political Parties

The aim of this paper is to investigate Tunisian young activists' views and experiences of democracy, participation and trust in political parties. 36 young activists were interviewed in groups of 4-6 in 2011, 2013 and 2014. Data revealed that though these young activists are happy with their newly won freedom and voice, they show signs of lack of trust of the political elite and of the parties. These young people who described themselves as the «guards of the revolution» in 2011, and who complained that politicians have stolen their revolution in 2013, admit in 2014 that contrary to what they expected, the Tunisian revolution simply ended in a rotation of regime elites. The young activists report feelings of alienation and exclusion within parties as none of them has managed to get into key decision making position. They describe parties as lacking transparency and democracy where the same old corrupt methods, cronyism, loyalty and favouritism are still being in use. They do not see any of the existing parties as able to defend the youth vision for a better democratic Tunisia. They think that they are more useful in opposition as they are still able to lead and organise different forms of street protests.

Professor Raoudha Ben Othman  
Tunis University of Tunis



Professor Raoudha Ben Othman teaches linguistics at the University of Tunis. She has researched aspects of quality in higher education and published widely on it both academically and in local papers. After the Tunisian revolution, she has researched women and young people conceptions of democracy and democratic transition.

## Tunisia's Assets in its Transition to Democracy: Women, Youth and Trade Unions

The 2011 Tunisian revolution came to have a domino effect throughout the region as insurrections affected Egypt, Libya, Syria, Bahrain and Yemen. Four years later, Tunisia stands out as an exception as it emerged as the first democracy in the Arab world while in all the other Arab Spring countries the uprisings did not engender democratic outcomes. This talk will highlight the role of women, youth and trade unions in keeping the democratic transition on track and in bringing it to fruition (new constitution and institutional transition).

Dr Leila Ben Mcharek  
University of Western Australia



Dr Leila Ben Mcharek is an honorary research fellow at the Centre for Muslim States and Societies at the University of Western Australia. She was born in Tunisia, obtained her PhD in Cultural Studies from the Paris 3-Sorbonne-Nouvelle University, and won a Fulbright Fellowship and a Visiting Scholar position at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars in Washington, DC. She has taught at two Tunisian universities. She has held positions at the British Embassy in Tunis and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in Tunis. Her research is currently focussed on aspects of the Tunisian revolution within the Arab Spring context, and on the emergence of radical Islam post Arab Spring, including women jihadism.



## Educated Youth in Tunisia: Awakened Identity and Challenges After the Arab Spring

The Arab spring has had a fundamental impact on the nation of Tunisia in almost all aspects, socially, culturally, politically, linguistically and above all individually. With the new-found freedom, many Tunisians find it much easier to claim their 'repressed' identity. This identity manifests itself under many facets namely through self-categorization and social identification. The choice of Tunisian youth, as source of the data, is a valid one because it adequately embodies the social changes in post-Arab spring; after all the demise of Ben-Ali's era was essentially ignited by the young Bouazizi and motivated by the deregulation of social media which was essentially the electronic ammunition at the hands of Tunisian youth.

This research was based on surveying almost one hundred youth chosen from four Tunisian regions, northern, coastal, central and southern aiming at giving an accurate snapshot of identity supposing that geography plays its own role in shaping people's perception.

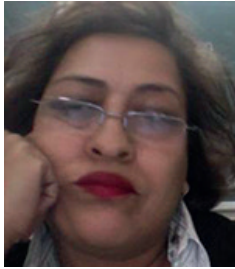
This paper seeks to explain and discuss the complex nature of identity in the context of revolution, whether it is changing, being challenged and whether its consciousness after the Arab Spring has been awakened.

Dr Zouhir Gabsi  
Deakin University



Dr Zouhir Gabsi is a lecturer in Arabic studies at Deakin University, Melbourne, Australia. His research focuses on Berber studies, language in contact situation, language teaching and learning and more recently Islamic Discourse. Two recent papers under review discuss Islamophobia from an Islamic Perspective.

## Q&A Panel: Women in the Revolution



Professor Nejet Mchala, *University of Carthage*

Professor Raoudha Ben Othman, *Tunis University of Tunis*

Assistant Professor Lamia Benyoussef, *University of Alabama at Birmingham*

Ms Ines Amri, *Organisation Volonté et Citoyenneté*

Dr Leila Ben Mcharek, *University of Western Australia*

## **ABOUT THE UNESCO CHAIR COMPARATIVE RESEARCH IN CULTURAL DIVERSITY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE**

The University Twinning and Networking (UNITWIN) Program was launched in 1992. Since then, the program has seen the establishment of hundreds of UNESCO Chairs and UNESCO networks. The central purpose of the UNESCO Chair program is to build capacity and promote international co-operation through the exchange of knowledge and resources in the fields of education, science, culture and communication. Indeed, one of the key goals of the UNESCO Chair program is to foster effective dialogue which acknowledges and respects the value and integrity of all peoples and culture. Professor Mansouri has expressed that one of his many goals as UNESCO Chair, Cultural Diversity and Social Justice will be ensuring cultural diversity is accepted and embraced as a core tenet of humanity. There will also be a special focus on issues confronting African Diaspora communities, migrant youth and women. The research program implemented under the auspices of the Chair will be multi-disciplinary in its approach and comparative in its application, investigating the manifestations and implications of diversity and justice domestically, regionally and at the international arena.

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