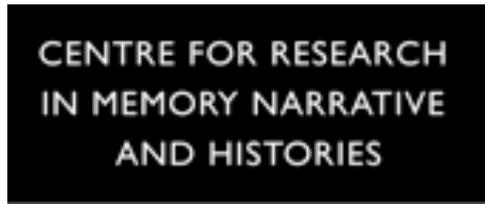




University of Brighton



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THE ARAB SPRING

Day Symposium to mark the 1st Anniversary of the Tunisian Revolution

Friday 13th January 2012 10am – 5pm (9.15 registration)

Board Room (M2), Grand Parade, University of Brighton

ABSTRACTS

James Livesey, University of Sussex

Echoes of the Bastille: Understanding the Tunisian Experience in the Context of the History of Revolutions

The “Arab Spring”, and in particular the Tunisian uprising that catalysed all the other outbreaks, emerged from a very long, cold winter, one that had seemed endless. Who could have predicted the effects that one man’s protest would have? Viewed from a year later and the dynamics of the revolutions in the Maghreb and the Middle East do conform to a very well-known pattern. The “ancient regime” of the states of North Africa and the Middle East faced revolutionary challenge precisely at the point they attempted internal reform; exactly the pattern of France and its satellites in 1789 and the Russian Empire and its dependencies in 1989. These analogies have driven commentators to look for other common elements. Some perceive a drift toward breakdown, terror and reaction, others look for analogues to the Jacobins, and find them among the Islamist parties. In this paper I will, hopefully, establish that while the history of revolutions does offer relevant points of analysis for the Arab Spring, the analogies are all unhelpful and derive from a misunderstanding of revolutionary dynamics.

Haifa Zangana, Writer, journalist

“Arab Spring in Baghdad; prospects and challenges”

On 25 February, 2011 six thousand Iraqis gathered in Tahrir Square (as well as thousands in the centres of other Iraqi cities) in response to a call for a 'Day of Rage', called by activists using social networks and by some Iraqi T.V channels abroad. The aim was to express public anger with Nouri al-Maliki's regime, which had failed to provide the services, jobs, and security promised during the elections. There were also calls for the full withdrawal of occupation forces at a time when al-Maliki's regime seemed willing to extend the presence of the US forces in Iraq beyond December 2011. Most mainstream media news coverage barely mentioned the latter demand, feeding the notion that protests were ignoring the importance of the occupation.

The number of protestors in the following weeks has dwindled gradually and the prospect of development in Tahrir square, at this point in time, is not yet clear. Here, I will argue that the relatively small scale gathering of protestors compared to Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen and Syria should not be underestimated since they are determined to continue despite facing the combined brutality of the US occupation (through direct or joint military interference), its proxy regime, an army of militias and US funded NGOs. Furthermore, resilient protestors, in the square and elsewhere, have to handle the negative if not damaging stands declared by some high clergy who maintain their authority via political parties within the regime.

Dr Dora Carpenter-Latiri University of Brighton

“Rewriting the Tunisian Constitution, debates on linguistic identity and room for change.

In Tunisia the first free elections for the 'Assemblée Constituante' have been won by Ennahdha (Islamist party), the CPR (Arab nationalist party) and Ettakatol (centre left). Debates around identity have given rise to acute tensions between the islamists and the moderate Muslim-secular parties. The issue of language has now appeared in the debates, with Ennahdha claiming that Arabic and only Arabic should be the language used by Tunisians. French has been accused by Rached Ghannouchi the leader the Islamist party of being a 'linguistic pollution' among Tunisians. Meanwhile the importance and general use of the 'Darja', the local variety of Arabic spoken in Tunisian, is ignored.

We would like to illustrate actual linguistic usage by Tunisians, particularly practices in social networks in the liberated post-revolution context and now, after the elections. We will also present the positions of the three leading political parties with regard to linguistic policies and assess the room for change, more specifically the possibility for the different roles that standard Arabic, Darja and French play to be acknowledged and supported by the state.

Mahmoud Ali Hamad, Researcher, Journalist

The uncertainty surrounding the nature of the political structure in the post Assad era is influencing the direction of the Syrian uprising. As the level of violence increases, the absence of credible political alternatives to the one party system by opposition groups in Syria is threatening the region with prolonged civil unrest, for that reason, a stabilisation process in Syria needs to start now to avoid a total political vacuum.

Despite the overall peaceful nature of the Syrian popular uprising, the lack of a road map to a clear and defined political future by the Syrian opposition might play in favour of a more radical element in the struggle against the Syrian regime. The continuing violence perpetrated by the regime has placed the proponents of peaceful protests in acute political difficulty as it undermines their view that this is the best way to overthrow the regime. Peaceful protest could take longer in bringing down the regime; however violence must be avoided as an alternative instrument for change.

Professor Nejet Mchala, Universite de Carthage, Tunis

Dis “oriented” Post Revolutionary Tunisia

This paper addresses the “orientalist” affects of veils and beards in post revolutionary Tunisia. Spurious for some, and a mark of authenticity for others, veils and beards are a sphinx like enigma in Tunisia. Ennahdha, the Islamist party, who was an absentee in the Spring revolution, won about 40% of the votes; the outcome has been disparaging for the postcolonial mournful secularists, who largely view it as a tragic foundational moment of the next civitas. Many pathways for reflections will be explored to elucidate the new phenomenon of the veil and the beard in Tunisia, among which the significance of colonialism in the light of Fanon’s analyses, which remain valid as critical format in that they accounts for the culturalist paradigm as a ferment of resistance; the postmodern condition, and its processions of simulations and simulacra in both East and West, here lifting from Baudrillard, Jameson an Zizek; the impact of local and global violence; and the more grave

signs and tokens of the formation of the closed circle of totalitarianism. In this paper, the outlook will essentially be grounded in the experiential and the immediate.

Nejet Mchala is a professor of cultural studies and critical theory at the University of Carthage Tunis. Former Head of the English Department at ISLT, presently head of the master's program on Cross Cultural Studies. Has published widely on topics of post-colonialism, feminism, critical theory and contentious global politics.

Karin Jaschke & Julia Winckler, University of Brighton,
Architectural Historian & Photographer

This set of photographs was taken by photographer Julia Winckler and architectural historian Karin Jaschke during a visit to Tunis in December 2009. We were struck by the omnipresence in the city of propagandistic images of the now-deposed Tunisian president Zine El Abidine Ben Ali. Ben Ali's benign smile and benevolent poses in pictures, posters, and wall paintings and the cheerfulness of the red and white bunting everywhere in town clearly belied the dire state of Tunisian democracy and civil society. At the same time it was a truthful illustration of the omnipresence of an autocratic, corrupt regime of twenty-odd years weighing down on the capital, the country, and its citizens. It was impossible to resist this iconographic excess: we found ourselves shooting photograph after photograph of images of Ben Ali, perhaps hoping that their serial documentation might somehow disclose and destabilise their phoniness and underlying evil.

Emir Ben Ayed, Photo-journalist

Emir Ben Ayed is a photo-journalist and artist. His photos are a political statement and a form of action for a better future in Tunisia. Emir Ben Ayed's work has been exhibited in Tunisia and also internationally in Paris, Brussels, Arles, Québec, Manchester and now Brighton. For the symposium, Emir Ben Ayed will show and comment on a selection of photos illustrating a whole year in the history of Tunisia, from the day a movement initiated by young people and the unemployed toppled the Ben Ali regime until the latest developments showing the confrontations between civil society and the radical Islamist groups.

