of the greatest surviving Cuban musicians of 1950s Havana or Mika Kaurismäki’s musical travelogue Moro no Brasil/Sounds of Brazil (2002).

For Johanni Curtet, it has been a real and gradual insight into Mongolian culture, beginning with learning the language, and it is through his eyes or rather his voice as a narrator that the film unravels. His apprenticeship is also ours. Overtone singing consists in simultaneously producing a vocal drone and overtone melody by contracting one’s throat and moving one’s tongue. Tserendavaa, a renowned Mongolian artist, is the main protagonist. He has been performing over the world since the 1970s, contributing to the development of overtone singing and its oral transmission, ensuring its continuing existence. It is the chain of transmission from generation to generation that particularly interests the young researcher in this documentary. The older singers that he meets at the beginning of the film are the living memory of this form of singing. Going to its sources, he tries to retrace the origin of the art of khöömii singing that has been transmitted from ear to mouth among herders over the span of centuries, but he is also particularly interested in the pedagogic techniques that are passed on between the master and his apprentice. The interaction between man and nature is particularly important, as it is influenced by sounds of nature such as wind, flowing water or birdsong.

There is hardly any literature on this topic and this document is therefore unique. The rare recordings put together in the DVD for this artistic project are captivating. Both a piece of musical history and a legacy for the generations to come, this documentary is as Johanni Curtet puts it ‘an incredible gift’ offered to us by the four masters and a jewel that plunges us into the magic of the Mongolian musical universe. It is a breath of fresh air in today’s musical industry.

Michaël Abecassis
The University of Oxford


The sparkle of the so-called Arab springs fired up from Tunisia in January 2010 where spontaneous demonstrations occurred as a reaction to the self-immolation of Mohammed Bouazizi, a street vendor whose vegetable cart was confiscated by the police. Bouazizi had resorted, in total despair, to setting himself ablaze; shortly dying in hospital from his burns. Such despair had been endured for long decades by a muzzled and helpless Tunisian populace whose dictatorial regime controlled with an iron fist. Bouazizi’s act was the wake-up call that gave Tunisians the valour to confront the establishment and bring it down to its knees following the flight of President Ben ‘Ali. This not only empowered the Tunisian people but also gave an
impetus to the whole Arab region which rose in revolutionary movements to bring down Arab dictatorships.

The world watched the news of an Arab world that was no longer static and an Arab people that were no longer afraid or inactive. An important feature demonstrated by the Tunisian case was that not all Arabs are the same – defeating the prevailing stereotype of a uniform Arab populace – and as such their aspirations are diverse as is their cultural identity and their understanding and interpretation of Islam.

It is precisely this that Nadia El Fani's film *Neither Allah, Nor Master* has attempted to demonstrate. The film/documentary is divided into five sections and begins by featuring demonstrations in the centre of Tunis after 23 years of dictatorship under Ben ‘Ali. The scene is that of Tunisia after the fall of Ben ‘Ali. The walls as well as people’s bodies are covered with graffiti as if they are so many shouting mouths which would like to speak volumes now that the wall of silence has been brought down. The atmosphere of the revolution fills the air with people still camping in the streets. The camera zooms in on members of the Democratic Women's Association who constantly challenge police orders and question every move they make. Their banners shout: ‘Piss off you swine’ and are backed up with angry voices unrelentingly repeating: ‘dégage!’, ‘we cleanse our land from filth’. The camera then zooms in on a group of Islamist men who claim that the Qur’ān is their constitution. The reaction from the women demonstrators is that they do not want an Islamist government though they do not deny that they are Muslim.

This passage, although played down by El-Fani, highlights the major problem faced by post-Ben ‘Ali Tunisia. Islamist voices, largely repressed under the old regime, are now working hard to hijack the revolution and position themselves as an alternative to the old establishment in the attempt to retrieve Tunisia’s suppressed Islamic identity.

Such conflicting views and the ensuing confusion, as well as the fear of wasting the revolution and losing the acquired political freedom, resulted in heated discussions between Islamists and secularists. Islamists capitalized on the confusion between secularism and atheism, while secularists maintained that they were both ‘secular’ and ‘Muslim’, a specific feature of Tunisian identity.

El Fani and the women democrats express their fear of the rise of Islamic extremism and the threat this poses to individual liberties in Tunisia. El Fani reflects on the beaches deserted by women who fear reprisals and on the changing social landscape and the new Islamic atmosphere with the Qur’ān being overheard, people praying in the streets and others fearful to eat in public during Ramadan.

El Fani discusses the issue of freedom of choice on whether to fast or not to fast during Ramadan. She interviews young people who do not fast for their views – here, a clear bias is evident as the views of those who choose to fast and who hold different
beliefs are not heard. In fact these are the new voices, previously unheard in Tunisia, and one would like to hear them too.

To conclude, *Neither Allah, Nor Master* portrays a Tunisia caught between its new Islamist tendencies that pose a threat to the tourism industry that is the backbone of its economy, and the democrats who fear for the loss of individual liberties and Tunisia’s unique and specific identity with the rise of Islamism. There is clear evidence of lack of the acceptance of difference: the right of Islamist women to veil and the right of non-Islamist women not to veil is just one example.

Zahia Smail Salhi
*The University of Manchester*

Col. 52 mns. Cat&Docs, 2014.

An intimate portrayal of the ramifications of gender reassignment, Israeli documentary *The Good Son* explores the cultural and familial pressures, real and imagined, which weigh on one transgender woman’s pursuit of identity. Twenty-two-year-old Or Bar, a closeted male-to-female transgender student who lives with her conservative parents in Tel Aviv, is saving up for gender reassignment surgery in Thailand. Unable to produce the thousands of dollars required for the trip and operation, Or fabricates an acceptance letter from Oxford University, manipulating her family into providing the outstanding funds. As her parents see her off at the airport, believing their son to be bound for England, Or boards a plane to Bangkok with filmmaker Shirly Birkovitz in tow. With only Birkovitz’s camera as witness, Or undertakes her surgery and recovery in secret.

*The Good Son*, partly filmed by Or before bringing Birkovitz on board to document her transition, begins with a series of brief, shaky home-camera extracts. In a form of video diary, Or nervously relates to the camera her loneliness, guilt at deceiving her parents and sadness at her confusing relationship with her own body. As the hand-held camera slips out of focus and trails off, skimming over faces and resting on walls and mundane objects, Or films herself crossing off days on a hidden calendar, whispering anxious monologues into the camera and even breaking the news of her fabricated studies to her overjoyed parents.

Once in Thailand, Birkovitz’s camera takes over, and films a radically transformed Or. Early scenes of her initial recovery from surgery are brutal and confronting. Yet subsequent, subtler scenes of her bonding with fellow transgender patients, tearfully revealing her situation to new friends and even her facial expression upon seeing her reflection for the first time after a salon makeover, capture Or’s deep need to realize her true self, and her joy at finally achieving it. Yet the crux of the film is Or’s unannounced return to Tel Aviv, and her tumultuous reunion with her unwitting family.