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*Towards a Women's History of the New Left in Tunisia and Morocco. A Memorialization of Militancy and Political Violence*¹

Introduction

From post-independence era, Morocco and Tunisia were characterized by efforts to consolidate nation-building processes that often resulted in authoritarian reassessments detrimental to the youth and opposition forces that demanded greater political and social freedom. In Tunisia, under the rule of Habib Bourguiba (1957-1987), a façade of socialism and modernization concealed the harsh containment of dissidence. In this context, the Neo Destourian Party (renamed Parti socialiste destourienne in 1964) that had led the anti-colonial struggle emerged as the dominant political actor, functioning as a party-state that aligned its ruling apparatus with that of the state. Conversely, in Morocco, King Muhammad V (1957-1961)'s willingness to embrace multipartyism was intended to secure the monarchy's role as ultimate arbiter in the political system. After his early death, his son ascended to the throne as Hassan II;

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1 I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Anna Baldinetti for her valuable suggestions on the first version of the manuscript, and to Lucia Sorbera, who involved me in the panel SWANA Women's Memories of Intellectual and Political Activism in the Long Seventies at the IX Congress of the Italian Society of Women Historians (SIS, Palermo, 20–22 June 2024), an occasion on which an initial version of this article was presented.

his long reign (1961-1999) largely coincided with the repression of the Left and other opponents during what came to be known as the Years of Lead (1965-1995).

The New Left –an intellectual and radical political avant-garde rooted in student movements– emerged against the backdrop of the “Global Sixties” or the “Long Sixties/Seventies”. Broadly identified by historiography as a surge in global radical political activism and cultural experimentation, the reverberations of this period extended far beyond the chronological boundaries of those two decades.² In the Middle East and North Africa, the rise of the New Left was linked to the crisis of the dominant ideology of Nasserism following the defeat in the Six-Day War, as well as the decline of traditional socialist and communist parties. In Morocco and Tunisia, the New Left was strongly influenced by global currents of protest against imperialism, and was informed by Third-Worldism and transnational solidarity networks.³ In both Maghreb countries, under the regimes of Bourguiba and Hassan II, these movements, which explicitly sought to combat autocratic rule, faced brutal crackdowns that led to their eventual disintegration by the eighties.⁴

The rediscovery of the New Left is a fairly recent phenomenon that is also related to the greater availability of sources that have become accessible over the past few decades. From the early twenty-first century, it has become increasingly clear that women represented a consistent part of the New Left movements and were subject to severe repression and gender-based violence for their political activism. Since the post-2005 transitional justice process

2 Claudia Derichs, *1968 and the “Long 1960s”: A Transregional Perspective*, in Rachid Ouaisa, Friederike Pannewick, Alena Strohmaier (eds.), *Re-configurations. Contextualising Transformation Processes and Lasting Crises in the Middle East and North Africa*, Wiesbaden, Springer, 2021, pp. 105-115; Duco Hellema, *The Global 1970s: Radicalism, Reform, and Crisis. Decades in Global History*, New York, Routledge, 2018; Simon Hall, *Protest Movements in the 1970s: the Long 1960s*, «Journal of contemporary history», 43, 2008, n. 4, pp. 655-672.

3 George Nate, *Travelling theorist: Mehdi Ben Barka and Morocco from Anti-Colonial Nationalism to the Tricontinental*, in Laure Guirguis (ed.), *The Arab Lefts. Histories and Legacies, 1950s-1970s*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2020, pp. 127-147; Burleigh Hendrickson, *Finding Tunisia in the Global 1960s*, «Monde(s)», 11, 2017, n. 1, pp. 61-78.

4 Idriss Jebari, *The Rise and Fall of the Arab Left*, in Francesco Cavatorta, Lise Storm, Valeria Resta (eds.), *Routledge Handbook of Parties in the Middle East and North Africa*, London, Routledge, 2022, pp. 17-32; Emmanuel Alcaraz, *Écrire la prison politique sous Bourguiba. Le cas des détenus de l'organisation d'extrême-gauche Perspectives et Al-ʿāmil al-tounsi*, «Expressions maghrébines», 20, 2021, n. 1, pp. 139-158.

in Morocco and in post-2011 revolutionary Tunisia, there has been a renewed interest in women's political militancy and repression. Shared acts of commemoration, which have fostered the creation of collective works of memory, now enable a renewed engagement with this difficult chapter of Maghrebi history.

As part of a broader scholarly interest in the rediscovery of global radical movements of the Arab Left,⁵ the issue of memory related to post-independence repression has been addressed from a national perspective, with a focus on either Tunisia or Morocco.⁶ This article, however, takes a regional and comparative approach, bridging a gap in the literature by incorporating a specular reading of the Tunisian and Moroccan New Lefts and their gender dimension. This approach sheds light on the convergent trajectories of radical militancy of Tunisian and Moroccan women and State repression, their subsequent re-engagement in human and women's rights, and, most recently, their commitment to preserving and transmitting the memory of New Left political activism.

The article examines the gendered transmission of memory, focusing on how former female militants have engaged in public and intimate acts of remembrance in recent years. Commemorative practices and intellectual production related to the restitution of activism and political violence are viewed as forms of "memory activism" – a concept that emphasizes the active role of individuals and communities in reclaiming narratives of past struggles and traumatic events.⁷ Drawing on archival sources, personal interviews, testimonies, and press materials, and tracing the evolving presence of women in the political and social arenas, this work offers a contribution to the rediscovery of the Maghreb's New Left and to women's commitment to preserve a gendered memory of political activism.

5 Fadi Bardawil, *Revolution and Disenchantment. Arab Marxism and the Bonds of Emancipation*, Durham, Duke University Press, 2020; Guirguis, *The Arab Left*.

6 Martina Biondi, *Gli anni di piombo in Marocco. Attivismo femminile, sinistra e memoria (1965-2005)*, Roma, Viella, forthcoming; Idriss Jebari, 'Illegitimate Children': *The Tunisian New Left and the Student Question, 1963-1975*, «International Journal of Middle East Studies», 54, 2022, n. 1, pp. 100-123; Larbi Chouikha, *Évoquer la mémoire politique dans un contexte autoritaire: «l'extrême gauche» tunisienne entre mémoire du passé et identité présente*, «L'année du Maghreb», 4, 2010, pp. 427-440.

7 Yifat Gutman, *Memory Activism: Reimagining the Past for the Future in Israel-Palestine*, Nashville, Vanderbilt University Press, 2017.

1. *Rebellious Youth: The New Left(s) in Tunisia and Morocco*

In a period marked by the global circulation of transnational struggles, anti-colonial ideals, and Marxist thought – particularly in its Leninist and Maoist variants – Morocco and Tunisia produced remarkably similar radical responses. In both countries, the New Left emerged as a political avant-garde aiming to overthrow the postcolonial Maghreb regimes, pursuing anti-capitalist and anti-bourgeois strategies of struggle⁸. These movements distanced themselves from the “revisionist” leftist parties associated with the Soviet Union, which they considered to be undermining proletarian internationalism. Most New Left militants came from a new generation that broke away from traditional leftist parties, such as the *Parti de la Libération et du Socialisme* and the *Union nationale des forces populaires* in Morocco as well as the *Parti communiste tunisien* and the *Parti socialiste destourienne*, which dismissively referred to the new groups as «groupuscules».⁹

Another common feature was that founding members included Jewish members who left the communist parties, succeeding in rallying dissident intellectuals and young activists. In 1963, Gilbert Nacacche, previously a *Parti communiste tunisien* member,¹⁰ established the Groupe d'étude et d'action socialiste tunisien in Paris, which was better known as the Perspectives movement based on the name of its review: «Perspectives tunisiennes».¹¹ After 1968, the Perspectivists abandoned Maoism –which aimed to mobilize peasants and workers– and embraced Marxism-Leninism and its focus on unifying mass struggles at a global level.¹² In Morocco, Abraham Serfaty, who had been a member of the *Parti de la libération et du socialisme*, founded the Marxist-Leninist group *Ila al-amam* in 1970. When he joined

8 *Stratégies et tactique. Débat interne inédit 1970-1972*, Tunis, Outrouhat, 1989, p. 9.

9 Bibliothèque de documentation internationale contemporaine de Nanterre, Fonds Othmani, ARCH 0105/28; Fonds Othmani, Parti socialiste destourienne, La vérité sur la subversion à l'Université de Tunis, 28 August 1968, pp. 7-19.

10 Daniela Melfa, *Rivoluzionari responsabili: militanti comunisti in Tunisia (1956-93)*, Roma, Carocci, 2019, p. 55.

11 For the complete collection of the 25 issues of «Perspectives tunisiennes journal» (Dec. 1963 – Dec. 1971): <<http://perspectives50.tn/collection-complete-des-25-numero-de-la-revue-coperspectives-dec1963-dec1970/>> (11/25).

12 Alessia Carnevale, *Il movimento gauchista tunisino Perspectives - El-ʿamel et-tūnsī. Stampa clandestina, scritti dal carcere, immaginazione, memorie (1963-1981)*, in Anthony Santilli, Enrico Serventi Longhi (a cura di), *Stampa coatta. Giornalismo e pratiche di scrittura in regime di detenzione, confino e internamento*, Roma, All around, 2020, p. 353.

the editorial team of the avant-garde magazine «Souffles. Revue culturelle arabe du Maghreb», the publication became one of the main platforms for the diffusion of the ideals of the Moroccan New Left.¹³

Beyond intellectual circles, students were a crucial social basis of the Maghrebi New Left.¹⁴ In Morocco and Tunisia, control of student unions was central to the affirmation of the movements. At the XVIII congress of the Union générale des étudiants de Tunisie, held in Korba in August 1971, Perspectivists secured a majority over the representatives of the Parti socialiste destourienne for the first time. Following weeks of tension, assemblies, and strikes involving thousands of students calling for the Union générale des étudiants de Tunisie's independence from the Parti socialiste destourienne,¹⁵ the extraordinary congress held in Tunis in February 1972 culminated, on the 5th, with police intervention, arrests, and violence in what came to be known as "Black Saturday."¹⁶ In Morocco, the Marxist-Leninists secured a majority at the XV congress of the Union nationale des étudiants du Maroc in August 1972. However, the newly elected leadership was immediately arrested and the union banned.¹⁷

Despite the calls to broaden their political base and unite popular masses, the Moroccan and Tunisian New Left were marked by semi-clandestinity, coordination from exile, and, above all, internal fragmentation. Competing strategies shaped the approaches to struggle and alliances. In Morocco, alongside Ila al-amam, the Marxist-Leninist movement included 23 Mars, which opposed political violence and supported Morocco's annexation of the Western Sahara, and Li-nakhdum al-sha'b, which called for alliances

13 Moustafa Bouaziz, *Introduction à l'étude du mouvement marxiste-leniniste marocain (1965-1979)*, Paris, DEU Écoles des hautes études en science sociale, 1981, pp. 132-133.

14 Archives départementales de la Seine-Saint-Denis, Fonds Abdallah Zniber 409J/47, *Les circonstances de la naissance du mouvement marxiste marocain*, «Hiwar», n. 3. n. d., pp. 6-22; *La lutte des étudiants*, «Perspectives tunisiennes», November 1968, n. 19, pp. 10-13.

15 Bibliothèque de documentation internationale contemporaine de Nanterre, Fonds Othmani, ARCH 0105/15, *Nous étudiants de l'Université de Tunis, réunis en meeting général au campus universitaire le 2/2/1972 à 15h*, n. d.

16 Jebari, *Illegitimate Children*, pp. 119-120.

17 *La répression au Maroc*, «Souffles. Revue culturelle arabe du Maghreb», 2, October 1973, p. 7.

between peasants (*fellahin*) and workers.¹⁸ In the Tunisian case, opposition to what was perceived as the Perspectives movement's "entryism" into leftist parties¹⁹ led to the creation of El Chouala (The Spark) in France in 1974, which established itself in Tunisia the following year with the aim of unifying the Marxist-Leninist movement and founding a revolutionary party.²⁰

Alongside its ideological divisions, the New Left also faced intense repression. Beginning in the late sixties in Tunisia, and in the early seventies in Morocco, demonstrations and political activity were met with systematic campaigns of arrests and trials, even as the protests persisted. In September 1968, a trial was held in Tunis against 104 Perspectivists who had been arrested in March during massive demonstrations. This marked the onset of the large-scale repression that would continue throughout the late seventies.²¹ Branded as «ungrateful children»²² by Bourguiba, Tunisian and Moroccan militants alike faced mass trials that led to hundreds of convictions for «attacking State security».²³

While repression dismantled the New Left movements in the Maghreb, exiled militants in France sought to revitalize them.²⁴ A

18 Said Oujjani, *Munazzama 23 Mars al-marksiiya al-lininiyya. Al-taqrir al-tawjihi* [Marxist-Leninist Organization March 23. Guidance Report], «Hiwar mutamaddin [Civic Dialogue]», 18 January 2013 <<https://www.ahewar.org/debat/show.art.asp?aid=341450>> (08/25); Abdelkader Chaoui, *Al-yasar fi al-Maghrib, 1970-1974* [The Moroccan Left, 1970-1974], Rabat, Manshurat 'ala al-'aqaill, 1992, p. 15.

19 Bibliothèque de documentation internationale contemporaine de Nanterre, Fonds Othmani, ARCH 0105/11, Un programme de trahison, n. d. pp. 6-19.

20 *Ibidem*, Al-Choula. Min ajli nashr al-marksiiya al-lininiyya wa-bulwara al-wa'ia al-dimuqrati al-watani [The spark. To spread Marxism-Leninism and the crystallization of a national democratic consciousness], Special number, August 1974, n. p.

21 International Institute of Social History in Amsterdam, Bro 7927, Groupe d'études et d'action socialiste tunisien, Procès de Tunis. Mémoires de militants, December 1968, pp. 3-32; International Institute of Social History in Amsterdam, Socialist International Archives, ARCH 01340, Principaux procès d'opinion, n. d., n. p.

22 Sophie Bessis, 'Perspectives': *l'effervescence tunisienne des années 1960*, in Philippe Artières, Michelle Zancarini-Fournel (coord.), *68, une histoire collective (1962-1981)*, Paris, La Découverte, 2015, p. 121.

23 Bibliothèque de documentation internationale contemporaine de Nanterre, Fonds Othmani, ARCH 0105/07, Un seul combattant suprême: le peuple, n. d., pp. 11-12.

24 International Institute of Social History in Amsterdam, Bro 79127, Groupe d'études et d'action socialiste tunisien, À la lumière du procès du G.E.A.S.T.: les acquis et les perspectives de la lutte révolutionnaire en Tunisie, June 1969.

new edition of the Moroccan magazine «Souffles» was launched in Paris, publicizing the arrests, violations, and trials. At the same time, Tunisian exiles created Amil al-Tounsi (The Tunisian Worker) movement and published a newspaper by the same name. While reaffirming the rejection of both U.S. imperialism and the sclerosis of Soviet Stalinism, Amil al-Tounsi sought to rebuild international alliances between students and workers from abroad.²⁵

2. *Women Militants and Carceral Repression*

Numerous young women participated actively in the Tunisian and Moroccan New Left.²⁶ Students and early-career teachers and professors, these militants belonged to the first generation of women who had gained access to higher education and played a crucial role in critiquing the structural issues of postcolonial regimes. Joining New Left groups opened up opportunities for critical dialogue and social activism. Female activists often came from families with a militant background. For instance, the brother of Moroccan militant Saida Menebhi, Abdelaziz, was president of the *Union nationale des étudiants du Maroc*, while her sister Khadija was also involved in Ila al-amam. In Tunisia, Dalila Mahfuz was introduced to the movement by her brother, and Sassia Rouissi's sisters and a brother, were also Perspectivists like her.²⁷

Female militants took part in clandestine meetings, participated in sit-ins and demonstrations, and distributed leaflets at universities. Some of them became politically active abroad. For example, Amel Ben Aba, who studied at the Sorbonne in Paris, became involved in both the Perspective movement and the feminist movement, and was arrested upon her return to Tunisia.²⁸ In Morocco, Saida Menebhi and Tijania Fertat, two women who successfully rose through the levels of Ila al-amam movement, led cells composed of men. They also established a female sub-cell within Ila al-amam to integrate

25 Bibliothèque de documentation internationale contemporaine de Nanterre, Fonds Othmani, ARCH 0105/2, Al-'amil al-tunsi, Bayan bi-munasab ghurra mai [Statement on the occasion of May 1st], n. d., pp. 1-8.

26 Bessis, 'Perspectives', p. 122.

27 Dalila Mahfuz, *Narodnaja* [Narodnaja], in Haifa Zangana (ed.), *Banat al-siyasa* [Daughters of politics], Tunis, Éditions Zanooby, 2020, p. 63; Sassia Rouissi, *Bahathan 'an siyasa* [In search of politics], in Zangana, *Banat al-siyasa*, p. 126.

28 Amel Ben Aba, *Tajriba haya* [A life experience], in Zangana, *Banat al-siyasa*, pp. 35-36.

Marxist-Leninist thought with a feminist Marxist perspective.²⁹ If the role of women in the New Left was meant to be integral to the struggle for a more just society, female militants still challenged the assumption that women's rights could be subsumed under the broader category of "the masses" and, therefore, should not be considered as having their own specific insights. Similarly, women began to question their role in the Perspectives, movement.³⁰

In many cases, women were forced into political clandestinity. While women in the Perspectives movement managed to continue their political work in hiding,³¹ those in *Ila al-amam* often remained in complete isolation for extended periods. For example, Sassia Rouissi continued to coordinate the activities of the families of political prisoners from her clandestine location, handling communications with comrades abroad, as well as with lawyers and foreign journalists.³² Another Tunisian militant, Aisha Ben Mansour, worked clandestinely for the movement for over a year and a half before her arrest in 1973.³³ Initially, the repression did not result in a large number of women being imprisoned; however, they were targeted by the subsequent waves of arrests. In Tunisia, dozens of female militants of the New Left were imprisoned between the late sixties and the mid-seventies, whereas in Morocco women were predominantly arrested during the political crackdowns of 1977-78.

In Casablanca, New Left women were initially brought to the secret detention center known as *Derb Moulay Cherif*, where they were blindfolded and subjected to harsh torture sessions. In Tunis, women were taken to the third floor of the Ministry of the Interior, where they endured both psychological and physical violence, including sexual abuse, threats, and insults. Torture methods included suspension from the ceiling and beatings, with pregnant women also subjected to these brutal acts.³⁴ When Dalila Mahfuz was arrested

29 Interview with Tijania Fertat, Rabat, 3 June 2022.

30 Interview with Zeineb Cherni, Tunis, 26 February 2025.

31 Interview with Tijania Fertat, Rabat, 3 June 2022.

32 Rouissi, *Bahathan 'an siyasa*, p. 139.

33 Aisha Ben Mansour, *Sajina siyasiyyain raqm 362* [Political prisoner number 362], in Zangana, *Banat al-siyasa*, p. 162.

34 Bibliothèque de documentation internationale contemporaine de Nanterre, Fonds Othmani, ARCH 0105/38, Comité tunisien d'information de défense des victimes de la répression. Dossier spécial. Répression 1973-1974, Juillet 1974; BDIC, Fonds Othmani, ARCH 0105/36, Comité tunisien d'information et de défense des victimes de la répression, *Venez-vous faire cuire en Tunisie*, 1st April 1974, p. 3.

for her involvement in student protests, in March 1972, she was still a secondary school student. After her release, she continued her activism, gathering sensitive documents at home. In February 1975, she was re-arrested and subjected to severe torture. Frequent fainting spells during these torture sessions meant she had to be hospitalized three times.³⁵ Among the women who had been detained since 1973, Salwa Frouch, a native of Sfax, was tortured and placed in isolation.³⁶ Salwa Ayadi, a schoolteacher, was hospitalized twice at the Tunis military hospital, while Amel Chaabouni was subjected to la «balançoire», a procedure by which the prisoner is bound by the wrists and suspended between two planks before being tortured.³⁷

Zainab Cherni joined the Perspectives movement in 1970 when she was a postgraduate student at the Sorbonne. She helped defend political detainees by drafting appeals and writing articles. She was arrested in November 1973, upon her return to Tunisia, and subjected to the «roast chicken» torture, in which she was hung by her wrists and knees and beaten.³⁸ This was the same torture that Moroccan 23 Mars militant Latifa Jbabdi described in her prison account.³⁹ Indeed, in both Morocco and Tunisia, women were subjected to the same forms of torture as men, but also endured gender-specific violence. As Zainab Cherni remarked, «they wanted to scratch our femininity».⁴⁰ In arbitrary detention, New Left women were deprived of basic necessities, such as sanitary items for their menstrual periods.⁴¹ Additionally, Moroccan carceral bio-politics

35 Mahfuz, *Narudnaja*, pp. 65-69.

36 *Qui sont les victimes de la répression qui comparaissent devant la cour de sûreté de l'État*, «Al-ʿamal al-tounsi - Special répression», August 1974, n. 36 p. 15.

37 Bibliothèque de documentation internationale contemporaine de Nanterre, Fonds Othmani, ARCH 0105/36, Comité tunisien d'information et de défense des victimes de la répression, Venez-vous faire cuire en Tunisie, 1st April 1974, p. 2.

38 Zeineb Cherni, *Wa li-Antighun' ab'ad 'adida* [Antigone has many dimensions], in Zangana, *Banat al-siyasa*, pp. 90-95.

39 Latifa Jbabdi, *al-Makhfar, wa al-ta'dhib wa al-sijn wa al-jalladun. Shahadat Latifa Jbabdi* [Secret detention and torture, prisons and executioners. Testimony by Latifa Jbabdi] in Fatna El Bouih (ed.), *Hadith al-ʿutama* [Tale from the darkness], Casablanca, Le Fennec, 2001, p. 127.

40 Cherni, *Wa li-Antighun' ab'ad 'adida*, p. 98.

41 Ben Aba, *Tajriba haya* [A life experience], p. 41; Susan Slyomovics, *The Performance of Human Rights in Morocco*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005, p. 135.

sought to erase their gender identity by renaming them as males, since the authorities refused to accept female political subversion.⁴²

After the brutal initial period of detention, women were moved to civil prisons. In Tunisia, the Perspectivists were placed in the Manouba prison for women –ironically known as the «Palace of the Princesses»⁴³ where the women experienced strong solidarity, sharing the pain of imprisonment but also moments of joy. As Aisha Ben Mansour recalled: «We experienced strong periods of solidarity. We lived through our pain together and feared for each other, but at the same time, we sang and laughed together and learned to love despite our differences».⁴⁴ Most Moroccan female prisoners of the New Left formed the «Meknès group», named after the civil prison in which they were detained. However, they were held without trial and not informed of their legal rights. This led them to pursue their struggle from within the prison walls, organizing collective hunger strikes.⁴⁵

In Tunisia, Salwa Frouch joined two other cellmates in a hunger strike to protest against the brutal treatment of Amel Chaabouni in 1974.⁴⁶ During a hunger strike in 1975, Dalila Mahfuz's health severely deteriorated. The prison authorities attempted to force-feed her, but she was eventually hospitalized and released in July 1976.⁴⁷ Saida Menebhi died in December 1977 in Casablanca following a collective hunger strike. Her death sparked an outpouring of grief by the Moroccan Left. Saida left behind a collection of poems, letters, and a sociological essay on prostitution, all written while in prison and later published in Paris.⁴⁸ This was one of the first accounts of brutal carceral repression during the Years of Lead.

42 Martina Biondi, *Body, Gender, and Pain in Moroccan Prison Memoir* *Hadīth al-Atama*, «META – Middle East Topics & Arguments», 14, 2020, pp. 77-88.

43 Ben Mansour, *Sajina siyasiyyain raqm 362*, p. 158.

44 *Ibidem*, p. 153.

45 Interview with Fatna El Bouih, Casablanca, 19 March 2022.

46 *Qui sont les victimes de la répression qui comparaissent devant la cour de sûreté de l'État*, «Al-ʿamal al-tounsi - Spécial répression», August 1974, n. 36 p. 23.

47 Mahfuz, *Narudnaja*, pp. 78-79.

48 Saida Menebhi, *Poèmes, lettres, écrits de prison*, Paris, Comité de lutte contre la répression au Maroc, 1978.

3. *Beyond the Prison: Emerging Movements for Women's and Human Rights*

The prolonged detention of militants pushed many female activists to campaign for their release, fueling a growing transnational movement in defense of the human rights of political prisoners. In this context, Simone Lellouche-Othmani played a pivotal role in building a solidarity network for incarcerated militants of the Tunisian New Left. Born in 1938 in La Goulette, to a Jewish family of French nationality, Simone Lellouche was expelled from Tunisia in 1968 after the arrest of her fiancé, Perspectivist leader Ahmed Othmani. Sentenced in absentia to six years in prison at the September 1968 trial, she was later allowed to return to Tunisia to marry in 1970 following her fiancé's release.⁴⁹ After his renewed detention in January 1972, she became increasingly isolated from the Perspectives movement.⁵⁰ Her new arrest in January 1972 provoked indignation among university students. This did not however block her definite expulsion from Tunisia the following month. In 1974, while in Paris, she received yet another conviction in absentia, a twelve-year jail sentence.⁵¹

In Paris, Simone Lellouche-Othmani maintained an intense correspondence with international journalists and human rights activists,⁵² becoming one of the most energetic members of the *Comité International pour la sauvegarde des droits de l'homme en Tunisie*.⁵³ Established in the wake of the 1968 Tunis trial, the *Comité International pour la sauvegarde des droits de l'homme en Tunisie* aimed to obtain amnesty for political prisoners, safeguard their rights, and improve

49 Bibliothèque de documentation internationale contemporaine de Nanterre, Fonds Othmani, ARCH 0105/38, Simone Lellouche, épouse Ben Othman Raddaoui, 26 October 1977.

50 *Ibidem*, ARCH 0105/64, *Conversation avec Simone - Simone Lellouche-Othmani, une tunisienne, citoyenne de deux rives*, «Mémoire & Horizon - Special number», April 2007, p. 45.

51 Michael Ayari, *Le prix de l'engagement politique dans la Tunisie autoritaire. Gauchistes et islamistes sous Bourguiba et Ben Ali (1957-2011)*, IRMC – Karthala, Tunis and Paris, 2016, p. 123.

52 Bibliothèque de documentation internationale contemporaine de Nanterre, Fonds Othmani, ARCH 0105/38, Simone Lellouche's letter to Livia Cagnani (Amnesty International Italy), 18 Avril 1976; Simone Lellouche's letter to John Humphrey (Amnesty International London), 1975; Simone Lellouche's letter to Susane Hahne, 1st February 1974.

53 Burleigh Hendrickson, *Decolonizing 1968: Transnational Student Activism in Tunis, Paris, and Dakar*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2022, p. 53.

conditions of detention.⁵⁴ Notably, alongside Gilbert Naccache's mother, Lellouche-Othmani appealed to the UN Secretary-General with regard to the human rights violations in Tunisia.⁵⁵ In addition to her husband and fellow militants,⁵⁶ she also advocated for the case of Aisha Ben Abed, a history teacher who had strengthened ties between the Perspectives groups in Tunis and Paris.⁵⁷ Arrested in 1972, Ben Abed was placed in solitary confinement, while her fiancé, Noureddine Ben Khader, was detained with Ahmed Othmani.⁵⁸

Simone Lellouche-Othmani's vicissitudes mirror those of Christine Daure-Serfaty in Morocco. After marrying the founder of Ila al-amam movement Abraham Serfaty while he was in prison, she too was expelled to France, where she became a crucial link between Morocco and France for the defense of political prisoners' rights. She supported prisoners' wives and collaborated with the *Comités de lutte contre la répression au Maroc*, which were established in France and Belgium in the second half of the seventies. These committees focused on the plight of political prisoners, documenting arrests, trials, and abuses, and amplifying the appeals of families and detainees.⁵⁹ While Tunisia had begun granting amnesties to political prisoners as early as 1968, leading to the release of almost all New Left prisoners by 1980 – Ahmed Othmani was eventually released in 1979⁶⁰ – repression in Morocco persisted much longer. Indeed, many

54 Bibliothèque de documentation internationale contemporaine de Nanterre, Fonds Othmani, ARCH 0105/28 bis, *Comité International pour la Sauvegarde des Droits de l'Homme en Tunisie*, «Bulletin» n. 1, n. d. p. 1.

55 *Ibidem*, ARCH 0105/38, Simone Lellouche's and Emma Naccache's letter to UN General Secretary, 11 November 1977.

56 *Ibidem*, Simone Lellouche's letter to the Ministry of Interior, Paris, 29 June 1968.

57 Ayari, *Le prix de l'engagement*, p. 195.

58 Bibliothèque de documentation internationale contemporaine de Nanterre, Fonds Othmani, ARCH 0105/38, Simone Lellouche's letter to Christina Swahn, 4 December 1973.

59 Bibliothèque de documentation internationale contemporaine de Nanterre, Fonds Association de soutien aux comités de lutte contre la répression au Maroc, ARCH 0301/2, Liste des 84 détenus politiques de la prison de Meknès arrêtés au Maroc en Mai-Juin-Juillet 1977, n. p.

60 After his release and his relocation in Paris, Ahmed Othmani continued, alongside Simone, his engagement in human rights. At the end of the Eighties, he was amongst the founders, in London, of the ONG Penal Reform International, supporting the abolition of death penalty. With Sophie Bessis, he published *Sortir de la prison Un combat pour réformer les systèmes carcéraux dans le monde* (it. tr. 2004). He died from a car accident in December 2004 in Rabat while attending the conference *Civil Society as a means to activate reform in the Arab World*.

militants remained in prison into the early nineties, as was the case of Abraham Serfaty.

Although female activists were arrested and prosecuted, they generally received shorter sentences than their male counterparts. Nonetheless, early release often brought new challenges, such as reintegration into societies in which opposition groups had been dismantled and suffered widespread stigmatization. In Tunisia, former political militants were barred from public employment. The Ministry of Education dismissed Zeineb Cherni and her husband from their posts as philosophy teachers. As she vividly recalls, this period –the six years from 1974 to 1980– was harder to endure than the prison sentence itself, due to the struggle to sustain her family.⁶¹ Only after protests and union mobilizations were former prisoners eventually reinstated.⁶² Similarly, in Morocco, political prisoners suffered great difficulties in resuming their studies and reintegrating into society after their release. By the early eighties, King Hassan II had freed most female political prisoners, with the notable exceptions of Ila al-amam member Fatima Oukacha and 23 Mars militant Fatna El Bouih, who both served five-year sentences.⁶³

23 Mars militant Latifa Jbabdi was released in 1980 due to the severe health conditions caused by a collective hunger strike in Meknès prison. During her imprisonment, she developed the idea of creating a movement specifically dedicated to women's rights, which had been overshadowed by the New Left. Her initiative marked a transition from a purely political militancy to a commitment to civil society centered on gender issues. In 1983, she founded «8 Mars», the first feminist magazine in Morocco, which sparked a debate on the necessity of reforming the status of women both culturally and legally. A women's movement emerged around the magazine that aspired to be «democratic, unitary and mass-based».⁶⁴ This process culminated in 1987 with the establishment of the Union de l'action féminine. Chaired by Jbabdi, the Union de l'action féminine launched a major campaign in the early nineties, collecting one million signatures to reform the Mudawwana (Code of personal status). The campaign effectively initiated the process

61 Interview with Zeineb Cherni, Tunis, 26 February 2025.

62 Cherni, *Wa li-Antighun' ab 'ad 'adida*, p. 103.

63 Interview with Fatna El Bouih, Casablanca, 19 March 2022.

64 Latifa Jbabdi, *Min ajl haraka nisa'yya jamahiriyya* [For a mass women's movement], «Anwal» 10th November 1983, p. 14.

of legal reform.⁶⁵ Among many other former New Left women, in 1988, Jbabdi also became a founding member of the Organisation marocaine des droits humain, in which a Commission femmes was soon established.⁶⁶

In Tunisia, former Perspectives militants, such as Amel Ben Aba and Zeineb Cherni contributed to the emergence of an autonomous feminist movement starting in the late seventies. This included the creation of the Club d'étude pour la condition féminine, better known as Club des femmes or Club Tahar Haddad, named after the pioneer thinker of Tunisian feminism.⁶⁷ As Neila Jrad recalls, the club represented a break both from Bourguiba's liberal, state-sponsored feminism, and from the limitations of the Left's vision of women's emancipation.⁶⁸ Like the Union de l'action féminine, the Club des femmes generated tension with the New Left's successor organizations, from which many of its members had come, asserting its will to transcend partisan boundaries and to claim the centrality of women's issues.⁶⁹ Nonetheless, debates within the club led to the founding of «Nisa'», Tunisia's first feminist magazine. Published monthly in both Arabic and French, «Nisa'» addressed women's working conditions, social issues, and everyday gender discrimination from both a national and transnational perspective, while emphasizing autonomy from other movements and continuity with earlier women's associations.⁷⁰ From the pages of «Nisa'», Zeineb Cherni recognized the Club des femmes' pioneering role in sparking the debate on Tunisian women's issues.⁷¹ Recently, she

65 *Un million de signatures pour changer la Moudawana*, «Maroc Répression. Bulletin de l'association de soutien aux comités de lutte contre la répression au Maroc», March 1996, n. 132, p. 7.

66 Biondi, *Gli anni di piombo in Marocco*, cap. 5.

67 On Tahar Haddad, see: Nouredine Sraieb, *Islam, réformisme et condition féminine en Tunisie: Tahar Haddad (1898-1935)*, «Clio. Femmes, Genre, Histoire», 1999, n. 9, pp. 75-92.

68 Neila Jrad, *Mémoire de l'oubli: réflexion critique sur les expériences féministes des années quatre-vingt*, Tunis, Cérès Éditions, 1996, pp. 21-35. On the Tunisian feminist movement and state-sponsored feminism, see: Amy Aisen Kallander, *Tunisia's Modern Woman. Nation-Building and State Feminism in the Global 1960s*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2021.

69 Amel Ben Aba, *Clôre pour éclore à l'aube du féminisme tunisien*, in *Tunisienne en devenir – vol. 2*, Tunis, Cérès publications, 1992, pp. 67-101.

70 Neila Jrad, *Naissance d'une réflexion autonome*, «Nisa'», April 1985, n. 1, pp. 29-30; Marzouki Ilhem, 1936: *la première association tunisienne de femmes*, «Nisa'», May 1985 n. 2, p. 15; Ilhem Marzouki, 1944, *à l'heure de la coexistence des organisations féminines*, «Nisa'», August 1985, n. 3, p. 14.

71 Zeineb Cherni, *L'hérésie de Tahar Haddad. Clamer la liberté en termes traditionnels*,

has also recalled how crucial the magazine was to overcome the marginalization she had experienced after prison.⁷²

In March 1985, a Commission femmes was established by the Ligue tunisienne des droits de l'homme –an organization that was already deeply involved in defending political prisoners' rights⁷³ –to promote the labour, social, and civil rights of women.⁷⁴ It launched a national petition to raise awareness on the condition of women and organized a series of seminars to mark International Women's Day throughout the second half of the eighties.⁷⁵ By the end of the decade, new feminist organizations had secured legal recognition, including the *Association des femmes tunisiennes pour la recherche sur le développement*, which focused on research, advocacy, training, and awareness-raising for gender equality. As a university philosophy professor, Zeineb Cherni contributed with publications on the status of Tunisian women.⁷⁶ Moreover, Cherni was also a founding member and executive committee member of the *Association tunisienne des femmes démocrates*, established in 1989. As she affirmed, the subordination experienced in own family, as well as in social and political life, motivated her deep engagement in the collective debate on women's liberation. She believed that the feminist search for autonomy and political independence from other organizations echoed the empowerment she had experienced in the seventies, when the New Left itself had broken away from the parties of the historical Left.⁷⁷

«Nisa'», November 1985, n. 4, p. VII.

⁷² Interview with Zeineb Cherni, Tunis, 26 February 2025.

⁷³ Bibliothèque de documentation internationale contemporaine de Nanterre, Fonds Othmani, ARCH 0105/26, *Quelque informations sur l'enquête de la Ligue tunisienne des droits de l'homme dans les prisons tunisiennes sur les conditions de détention en général et en particulier les cas des prisonniers politiques*, Tunis, 31 October 1977.

⁷⁴ Bibliothèque de documentation internationale contemporaine de Nanterre, Fonds Othmani, ARCH 0105/26, *Commission droits de femmes de la Ligue tunisienne pour la défense des droits de l'homme*, n. d.

⁷⁵ *Ibidem*, 'Arida muqtaraha min lajnat al-mar'a [Petition proposed by the Women's Commission], n. d.

⁷⁶ Zeineb Cherni, *Quétude et déperdition ou l'étrange statut dualiste de la femme en Tunisie*, in *Tunisiennes en devenir*, pp. 23-66.

⁷⁷ Interview with Zeineb Cherni, Tunis, 26 February 2025.

4. The Making of Women's Memory

From a long-term perspective, while marking a shift from political struggle, the engagement of former militants in civic society and their activism for human and gender rights significantly facilitated the later process of confronting past political violence. The tragic events of the sixties and seventies and the repression of the New Left only resurfaced years later, when former militants began to publicly address the traumatic memory of past abuses, once the political conditions allowed it. As mentioned, the persecution of New Left militants in Morocco lasted longer. Their public rehabilitation began in the late nineties, facilitated by the death of King Hassan II and the accession of Mohammed VI to the throne. Consequently, the two-thousands have produced a “memory boom” with dozens of accounts of the repression during the Years of Lead.⁷⁸

In this context, El Bouih and other former New Left militants attended a writing workshop designed to elicit collective memories of the Years of Lead. The renowned intellectual Fatima Mernissi organized the event, entitled *Libérer la mémoire détenue*. Although not directly involved in the repression herself, Mernissi played a crucial role in restoring the memory of the Years of Lead. As El Bouih emphasized regarding Mernissi's role in recovering memory: «Fatima ne se contentait pas de nous inviter à écrire. Elle nous poussait à revenir sur notre vécu, à assumer nos luttes et à sortir de notre silence».⁷⁹ This experience led to several collaborative editorial projects. Fatna El Bouih and her husband, Youssef Maddad, edited *La mémoire fragmentée*, while *Femmes-prison. Parcours croisés* edited by former 23 militant Nouredine al-Saoudi, followed, including many women's testimonies on the solidarity networks developed in the Years of Lead.⁸⁰ In the pamphlet entitled *Enfantement dans la douleur* Fatna El Bouih reflected for the first time on her civil commitment to restoring the memory of the Years of Lead.⁸¹ Furthermore, Fatima Mernissi encouraged her to review the notes she had written during

78 Khalid Zekri, *Écrire le carcéral au Maroc: histoire, mémoire et écriture de soi*, «Les Cahiers de l'Orient», 102, 2011, n. 2, pp. 59-79.

79 Fatna El Bouih, *Raccommoder le passé, tisser l'avenir* in *Toutes peines confondues. De la disparition forcée à l'engagement citoyen, parcours d'une ex-détenue politique marocaine*, Donnemarie-Dontilly, Éditions Ixe, 2025, p. 126.

80 Nouredine Saoudi (coor.), *Femmes-prison: parcours croisés*, Rabat, Marsam, 2005.

81 Private Archive Fatna El Bouih, *Enfantement dans la douleur*, n. p. 2000.

her imprisonment. As a result, in 2001 El Bouih published *Hadith al-ʿatama* [Tale from the darkness]. Retracing her experience from her imprisonment to her release, the memoir details abuses and torture, as well as the emergence of a shared sisterhood and the struggle in prison to have their status as political prisoners recognized. The first edition of the book also incorporated the voices of other prisoners from the Meknès group, including Latifa Jbabdi and Widad Baouab, providing a collective dimension of suffering and solidarity.⁸²

In this period, Fatna El Bouih and Latifa Jbabdi participated in the creation of al-Muntada min ajl al-haqiqa wa-l-insaf (Forum pour la vérité et la justice). This new association demanded the recognition of the past violations and truth about the unidentified victims of the Years of Lead calling for the opening of a transitional justice inquiry. Therefore, through publications, public interventions as well as associationism, Fatna El Bouih became one of the most vocal former militants engaged in memory activism.⁸³ Through her activism, and despite the challenges of confronting such a painful past, Fatna El Bouih sought to reframe the historically censored narratives of political violence, urging the state to publicly acknowledge its past crimes.

At the same time, from the two-thousands, Simone Lellouche-Othmani came to be recognized as a transnational symbol of the memory of the repression against the Tunisian New Left. On April 3, 2007, the Citoyennes des deux rives Association organized an event in Paris entitled *Simone Lellouche-Othmani, une tunisienne, citoyenne de deux rives* to celebrate her legacy in the struggle for human rights in Tunisia. The event featured moments of reflection and remembrance by friends and activists, honoring Simone as the «memoire vivante de la Tunisie».⁸⁴ Among them, there were representatives of various social movements close to Simone, including former Moroccan political prisoner Driss El Yazami, then Secretary-General of the

82 Fatna El Bouih, *Hadith al-ʿatama*.

83 Yifat Gutman, Jenny Wüstenberg (eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Memory Activism*, London, Routledge, 2023, p. 5.

84 Bibliothèque de documentation internationale contemporaine de Nanterre, Fonds Othmani, ARCH 0105/64, *Conversation avec Simone - Simone Lellouche-Othmani, une tunisienne, citoyenne de deux rives*, «Mémoire & Horizon - Special number», April 2007, p. 12.

International Federation for Human Rights, and Amel Ben Aba, former Perspectivist and co-founder of the Club des femmes. The publication that followed included contributions by Khadija Cherif, President of the Association Tunisienne des Femmes Démocrates, Neila Jrad, Secretary-General of the Association des Femmes Tunisiennes pour la Recherche sur le Développement, and of Zeineb Cherni, who highlighted Simone's enduring role in justice and memory work even in her later years:

Au moment où sa mémoire flanchait et que tout déparait après la disparition de son compagnon, elle continuait à se faire mémoire de tous, elle ressemblait les textes écrits, trouvés disparus et réapparus, en faisait traduire d'autres en français pour les diffuser et continuer à sourire et à réfléchir dignement et librement, incarnant toujours l'espérance d'une devenir meilleur.⁸⁵

Significantly, Simone Lellouche-Othmani's political memory was revived through the transfer of her and Ahmed Othmani's archives, organized in 64 boxes, to the Bibliothèque de documentation internationale contemporaine in Nanterre. The public opening of the collection in 2012, a valuable source for studying the history of political and social movements in Tunisia and beyond, was marked by a conference on the archives of human rights activist networks in the Maghreb.⁸⁶

By contrast, in Tunisia, women's memories emerged much later than those of their male counterparts and, so far, exclusively in collective form.⁸⁷ The stories of female activists in the radical left only appeared after 2011 in post-revolutionary Tunisia. Although a 2008 seminar entitled *al-Dhakira al-wataniyya wa-l-tarikh al-zaman al-hadir* (National memory and the history of the present time) and organized by the Temimi Foundation significantly revived the experiences of New Left militants,⁸⁸ it was largely the overthrow of Ben Ali's regime that created new spaces of freedom, enabling the

⁸⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 36.

⁸⁶ Bibliothèque de documentation internationale contemporaine de Nanterre, Journée d'étude Le Fonds Othmani Archives des réseaux militants des droits de l'homme au Maghreb, des années soixante aux révolutions arabes, Vendredi 22 juin 2012, Université Paris Nanterre.

⁸⁷ The first and most famous prison memoir by a Perspectivist is *Cristal* by Gilbert Naccache, published in 1982 in Paris by Éditions Salammbô. Alcaraz, *Écrire la prison*, pp. 144-146.

⁸⁸ Jebari, 'Illegitimate Children', p. 101.

public memorialization of the Tunisian New Left.

In April 2013, a group of former Perspectivists established the association *Perspectives Amel Ettounsi - Mémoire et horizons* in Tunis.⁸⁹ The association aimed to preserve the movement's memory through seminars, publications, and, more recently, the digitalization of private archival collections.⁹⁰ Notably, one of its first initiatives was a seminar marking the movement's fiftieth anniversary, *Perspectives: hier et aujourd'hui*, which was held on December 18-20, 2013 at the Tunisian National Library in collaboration with the National Archives Centre and the Higher Institute for the History of the National Movement. As former Perspectivist Mohamed Cherif Ferjani recalled, the event represented «le meilleur hommage qu'on puisse rendre aux sacrifices de plusieurs 'génération' de militants».⁹¹ The scientific coordinator of the event, Zeineb Cherni, later served as president of the association (2015-16). She placed the recovery and promotion of the memory of seventies militancy at the heart of her work, stressing that «le travail de la mémoire est une marche au sein de la temporalité active où s'agglutine le temps rassemblant le passé, le présent et l'avenir».⁹²

In October 2018, activist Zeineb Farhat started a writing workshop to give voice to left-wing women activists. Iraqi writer and activist Haifa Zangana, herself a survivor of torture in Iraq for her political activism, led the sessions in the safe environment of El Teatro in Tunis.⁹³ Thus, both Zangana and Mernissi served as activators of gendered memory in the Tunisian and Moroccan cases. In collaboration with the Association Zanooby, the workshop sought to elicit memories of women's militancy and repression, and

89 *Qui sommes nous* <<http://perspectives50.tn/qui-sommes-nous/>> (07/25)

90 Association Perspectives Amel Ettounsi Mémoire et Horizons, *Le mouvement Perspectives Amel-Ettounsi. Son histoire et ses ramifications*. Sfax, CAEU Med Ali Editions, 2016; Les archives de M. Hassan Ouerdani <<http://perspectives50.tn/les-archives-de-m-hassan-ouerdani/>> (11/25); Les archives de M. Hechmi Ben Frej <<http://perspectives50.tn/les-archives-de-m-hechmi-ben-frej/>> (11/25); Les archives de M. Jean Paul Charbert <<http://perspectives50.tn/les-archives-de-m-jean-paul-charbert/>> (07/25).

91 Mohamed Cherif Ferjani, *Prison et liberté. Parcours d'un opposant de gauche dans la Tunisie indépendante*, Tunis, Nirvana, 2019³, p. 17.

92 Zeineb Ben Said Cherni, *Introduction. Le mot de l'Association Perspective: hier et aujourd'hui*, in *Le mouvement Perspectives/El Amel Ettounsi. Son histoire et ses ramifications. Actes du colloque international qui célèbre le cinquantième de Perspectives*, CAEAU Med Ali Editions, 2016, p. 10.

93 Zeineb Farhat, *Ihtiraman li-l-dhakira. Al-jama'yya al-nisa'yya* [In respect for memory. The women's collective], in Zangana, *Banat al-siyasa*, p. 9.

included former militants Amel Ben Aba, Dalila Mahfuz, Sassia Rouissi, Aisha Ben Mansour, Zeineb Farhat, and Zeineb Cherni. As Aisha Ben Mansour recalled:

«L'objectif étant de libérer une parole de femmes militantes qui ont vécu la répression, la torture, la détention, les exactions de toutes sortes sous le régime d'après l'indépendance. Femmes de gauche à la recherche d'une liberté confisquée».⁹⁴

As Amel Ben Aba remembers, the process of publicly shedding light on the wounds of the past, even after many years, was a source of anxiety and pain.⁹⁵ Yet, whereas writing in prison had been imposed as a form of 'torture',⁹⁶ intended to extract testimony against their alleged political crimes, the act of writing more than forty years later became a powerful means of reclaiming personal and historical integrity. In 2020, the collective work *Bnat essayassa* [*Banat al-siyasa*, Daughters of politics] published the workshop's testimonies. The book offers an unprecedented reflection on the process of coping with traumatic memories, or the «wounded memory» as former women militants often call it.⁹⁷ Zeineb Cherni insisted that political violence against women had been silenced for far too long.⁹⁸ In her testimony, she discussed the process of «activating the memory of body violations»,⁹⁹ believing that overcoming the erasure of bodily pain was essential to fully understanding the past and transmitting it to future generations. The publication received significant attention both in Tunisia and abroad, with numerous book presentations and translation projects that revived an interest in the biographies of radical political women.¹⁰⁰

94 Aisha Ben Mansour, *Écrire 'Bnet essayassa'*, in Laroussi Amri (coord.), *Oppressions, marge et cultures alternatives*, Tunis, Association Perspectives, 2023, p. 51.

95 Haifa Zangana, *Limadha naktubu al-an?* [Why do we write now?], in Zangana, *Banat al-siyasa*, p. 16.

96 Ben Aba, *Tajriba haya*, p. 43.

97 Zangana, *Limadha naktubu al-an?*, p. 34.

98 Interview with Zeineb Cherni, Tunis, 26 February 2025.

99 Cherni, *Wa li-'Antighun'*, p. 98.

100 *Parution de la version française de 'Bnet essayassa' sous le titre 'Détenues politiques, récits de militantes Perspectives El Amel Ettounsi, les années 1970': en hommage à Zeyneb Farhat* <<https://lapresse.tn/2021/08/13/parution-de-la-version-francaise-de-bnet-essayassa-sous-le-titre-detenu-es-politiques-recits-de-militantes-perspectives-el-amel-ettounsi-les-annees-1970-en-hommage-a/>> (07/25) *Tunisie. Quand les anciennes prisonnières politiques se souviennent* <<https://orientxxi.info/lu-vu-entendu/tunisie-quand-les-anciennes-prisonnieres-politiques-se-souviennent,4578>> <https://>

5. Concluding Remarks: *Transitional Justice and the Ongoing Work of Memory Transmission*

In both Tunisia and Morocco, a gendered memory of the New Left has emerged quite recently, highlighting striking parallels between women's engagement in political militancy, shared experiences of State repression, and collective forms of memory transmission in the two countries. This trajectory reveals the enduring legacy of women's struggles as well as the feminist roots of women's re-engagement for memory activism. Indeed, their memories have been not only individual or biographical but also deeply collective, demanding society's recognition of past political repression and action to ensure that it never happen again. In this sense, former militants have contributed to what can be described as a "culture of memory" that sustains and reactivates remembrance across generations and beyond borders. With the support of transnational networks of solidarity, these experiences demonstrate the importance of memory activism in strengthening democracy culture in such (post-)authoritarian contexts.

Transitional justice efforts in both countries, namely Morocco's Equity and Reconciliation Commission in 2004–2005 and Tunisia's Truth and Dignity Commission in 2016, only partially incorporated a gendered perspective¹⁰¹. In Morocco, Latifa Jbabdi, the sole female member of the Equity and Reconciliation Commission, worked to ensure the integration of a gender perspective in the Commission, enabling the voices of some women to be heard in the public audiences and introducing a 15% increase in financial compensation for the women who were victims of violence during the Years of Lead.¹⁰² Tunisia's transitional process largely prioritized reconciliation with Islamist victims, leaving radical leftist histories –especially those of women– underrepresented. Only Gilbert Naccache, one of the founders of the Perspectives movement, was invited to testify at the public hearings. His sole presence reflected

lapresse.tn/2021/08/13/parution-de-la-version-francaise-de-bnet-essyassa-sous-le-titre-detenu-es-politiques-recits-de-militantes-perspectives-el-amel-ettoussi-les-annes-1970-en-hommage-a/> (07/25).

101 Éric Gobe (coord.), *Justice et réconciliation dans le Maghreb post-révoltes arabes*, Tunis, IRMC – Karthala, 2019.

102 Interview with Latifa Jbabdi, Rabat, 23 March 2022.

the marginalization, in the Commission, of a broader narrative on the repression of the New Left.¹⁰³

In recent years, facing national institutions that have failed to fully integrate the memory of the New Left, acts of memory have been pursued by former militants in both countries. In Morocco, official gatherings of former activists in Rabat commemorated the victims and activism of the Years of Lead with the encounters organized, for example, on February 18 and May 20, 2022¹⁰⁴ that were prominently attended by several former female militants. In Tunisia, the meeting held on March 7-9, 2022 by *Perspectives* Amel Ettounsi - Mémoire et Horizons focused on the alternative culture of the seventies. This was followed by a seminar held at the Tunisian Academy of Sciences, Letters and Arts Beit al-Hikma in Tunis on June 17, 2025, dedicated to the New Left's militant biographies, including that of Zaineb Cherni.¹⁰⁵ Such public encounters have reaffirmed the significance of women's political engagement and lives, demonstrating how, despite frequent institutional reluctances, memory activism contributes to the incorporation of their testimonies into national historical narratives.

Abstract: L'articolo esplora la trasmissione della memoria di genere delle ex militanti della Nuova Sinistra tunisina e marocchina. In entrambi i paesi del Maghreb, l'ascesa della Nuova Sinistra fu legata allo "momentum" globale della fine degli anni Sessanta che ha generato alternative di cambiamento radicale. Sotto i regimi del presidente Bourguiba e di re Hassan II, i movimenti della Nuova Sinistra hanno subito una forte repressione, che ha portato infine al loro collasso. Con l'obiettivo di contribuire alla riscoperta delle traiettorie di attivismo delle donne della Nuova Sinistra, questo articolo analizza l'articolazione del movimento in Tunisia e Marocco, la repressione ai loro danni e il loro successivo impegno in favore dei diritti umani e di genere. L'articolo si concentra in particolare sul più recente processo di memorializzazione della militanza femminile e della violenza subita, esaminando gli atti del ricordo del loro attivismo passato. Basandosi su documentazione di archivio, testimonianze, interviste e sulla stampa d'epoca, l'articolo contribuisce alla riconcettualizzazione dell'impegno politico delle donne nel XX secolo mettendo in luce le forme contemporanee di "attivismo della memoria" nella regione del Maghreb.

103 Gilbert Naccache, *la mémoire de Cristal* <<https://www.justiceinfo.net/fr/46398-gilbert-naccache-memoire-cristal.html>> (07/25).

104 *Dikhra al-wafa' Mu'taqaluma, al-mukhtatifuna, wa-l-manfiyyuna al-sabiquna yaltaquna li-takrim rifaq iftaqadnahum* [The memory of loyalty: former prisoners, disappeared, and exiles reunite to honor their deceased companions], Rabat, Imprimerie Rabat Net, 2022.

105 Amri, *Oppressions*.

This article explores the transmission of memory by female militants from the Tunisian and Moroccan New Left. In both Maghreb countries, the rise of the New Left was linked to the global momentum of the late sixties that generated new radical political alternatives. Under the regimes of President Bourguiba and King Hassan II, the New Left movements faced intense repression that would ultimately lead to their collapse. Seeking to contribute to the rediscovery of women's participation in the leftist social movements, this article analyzes the organization of the Tunisian and Moroccan New Lefts, the repression of women, and their civic re-engagement in human and gender rights. The contribution then focuses on the most recent process of memorialization, concerning the past militancy of women and the violence they endured, examining public and intimate memories related to their activism in the Tunisian and Moroccan New Left. Drawing on archival materials, testimonies, interviews, and press sources, this article contributes to a reconceptualization of women's political engagement in the twentieth century, highlighting contemporary forms of gendered "memory activism" in the Maghreb.

Keywords: storia delle donne; memoria di genere; Nuova Sinistra; Tunisia; Marocco; women's History; gendered memory; New Left; Tunisia; Morocco.

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