

TUNISIAN WOMEN WRITING IN FRENCH: A SELECTIVE BIBLIOGRAPHY

The following bibliography represents a list of works researched and collected primarily in Tunisia on three occasions, from 1993-1996, funded in part by travel grants from Lake Forest College and the American Institute of Maghrebi Studies for research on Tunisian women's literature and the Tunisian women's movement. Some of these works are not available outside of Tunisia or North Africa, and some are out of print. It remains a challenge for researchers outside of Tunisia to obtain current resources and information relative to the development of literature in French in Tunisia, as well as information on the women's movement there. There are of course, women writing in Arabic in Tunisia, which do not figure in this bibliography, except in translation. Unfortunately for researchers with limited knowledge of Arabic, these works are rarely translated into French. There are a significant number of short stories published by Tunisian women in periodicals, which are difficult to locate, only some of which are referenced here. Only a small number of women writers have devoted themselves to the novel genre, or have been successful in publishing a collection of poems or stories in French or Arabic perhaps due to a lack of publishers, and a lack of time to devote to this endeavor. See Jean Fontaine, *Ecrivaines tunisiennes* for the most informative overview of this area.

Tunisian Women Writers

I. Literature (Fiction)

Behi, Jelila. *Chapelet d'ombres*. Tunis: L'Or du Temps, 1993.

This novel describes the life of a mother, Amina, from her childhood to her second pregnancy, through the visual record of the photo album. A third person narration underlines the distance between the reader and the main character, whose memories lack the depth of mature reflection. Brought to the present at the end of the novel, Amina's desire to give meaning to her life through her children's future remembering retains an emotional flatness characteristic of this novel: "La vie qui s'annonçait s'impatientait, les douleurs se rapprochaient. Amina jeta un regard sur son fils endormi. Elle espérait avoir réussi à ancrer un premier maillon de cette chaîne de souvenirs qui avec les années deviendrait bien longue. Demain peut-être, son fils ordonnerait ses chagrins en récits et se verrait ainsi doté d'une mémoire en même temps que d'une petite soeur!" (223)

Béji, Hélé (1948 -). *L'oeil du jour*. Contemporains en poche. Tunis: Cérés Productions, 1993.

Béji, currently residing in France, has published both fiction and non-fiction (see below). This novel, which takes place entirely within the memory of the narrator, juxtaposes two generations, one the traditional and mystical world of the grandparents, the other a westernized, modern perspective embodied by a narrator who seeks to reconcile this heritage with current modes of thought. Béji's style is full of detail in an attempt to recreate inner and external realities. Her language, replete with description in the first person, represents a search for the self and a desire to recapture a past way of life and thought that is dying out. The following excerpt demonstrates the symbolic weight of each element remembered: "--Où est mon beurre? dit ma grand-mère avec un persiflage d'actrice qui feint de se fâcher, levant sa canne comme pour battre un personnage imaginaire. Et par ce geste distinctif, unique, la canne prépare un éblouissement pour d'autres objets, des petites choses de la réalité sur lesquelles on s'appuie et qui se dérobent pourtant, simples et complexes, infinies et opaques..." (21).

----- *Itinéraire de Paris à Tunis. Satire*. Paris: Noël Blandin, 1992.

Proustian in style, this poetic narrative could be considered an essay of sorts. It is a meandering of thoughts, for example, on anticipation of the reading experience: "Moment qui précède la caresse de l'esprit sur la chose, rêve de l'intelligence à cette minute où l'enveloppement de ses milliers de

petits yeux noirs vous regarde, hasard poétique de la connaissance, page encore floue mais fulgurante, dont on se saisit avec la discrétion d'un souffle." (77)

Bel Haj Yahia, Emna (1936 -). *Chronique frontalière*, 1991, Droits réservés; excerpt in Al Madariss, *Littératures francophones du monde arabe*. Paris: Editions Nathan, 1994: 150.

In its examination of societal questions, such as the wearing of the veil, this novel approaches the essay genre, while remaining the story of two types of women caught between tradition and modernity, told in the third person. One scene, recounted from the perspective of a twelve year old girl, observes her mother without veil affronting her grandfather's disapproval: "Comme un vent de sable brûlant, une douleur schizoïde entra par la grande porte toujours ouverte et emporta Zeïneb dans deux blessures contradictoires. Lequel des deux visages l'a le plus ébranlée? Lequel du bégaiement de sa mère rougissante, ou de la blême colère de son grand-père l'a soumise à plus rude épreuve?" (150).

Ben Redjeb, Mclika Golcem. *Graines d'espérance*. Tunis: s.éd.1970. Cited in Fontaine, *Ecrivaines tunisiennes*: 48.

Chaïbi, Aïcha. *Rached*. Tunis: MTE, 1975.

This is a realistic novel that describes an "arriviste" and his ascension to power which corrupts him; his marriage to a foreigner is a failure and he is refused the hand of a local's daughter. Cited in Fontaine, *Ecrivaines tunisiennes*: 40-41.

Chitoui, Khadija (1944 -). "Al-Chahhat Suhayb," short story translated by Maurice Borrmans into French, *IBLA*, no. XXVIII/111 (1965/3): 311-319. Cited in Fontaine, *Ecrivaines tunisiennes*: 12.

This is the story of a poor man who has to beg to make ends meet, and his orphan wife.

El Goulli, Sophie. *Signes (poèmes)*. Tunis: STD, 1973. Cited in Fontaine, *Ecrivaines tunisiennes*: 47.

This poet's thematics center around silence, the dream, the dance and song of freedom, the long road through past history to the restorative sea (Fontaine, 71). The identification between woman and sea is evident in this collection: "le coeur aveuglé d'azur/ j'ai rêvé de caresse marine dans le miroir opaque des pluies noires de l'hiver/ ô mer/ toute errance à toi me ramène/ juste le temps de me faire offrande/ juste le temps de m'éblouir à tes danses de sirènes/ juste de temps d'accorder mon sang au récitatif de tes vagues/ juste le temps de n'être que matière ouverte/ je plonge" (8).

----- *Vertige solaire (poèmes)*. Tunis: s.éd., 1975. Cited in Fontaine, *Ecrivaines tunisiennes*: 71.

----- *Nos rêves. (poèmes)*. Tunis: Union Internationale des Banques, 1981. Cited in Fontaine, *Ecrivaines tunisiennes*: 71.

Guellouz, Souad. *Les Jardins du nord*, 1982, Droits réservés; excerpt in Al Madariss, *Littératures francophones du monde arabe*. Paris: Editions Nathan, 1994: 151.

In this autobiographical novel, Guellouz describes a family circle in which characters, such as the grandfather, are admired or express warmth. In the following excerpt, the grandfather reads from the Coran: "Il lisait lentement, gravement, pieusement. Alors, toute la poésie et, avec elle, toute la paix du monde pénétraient dans les coeurs. C'était la douceur et la joie, l'harmonie avec l'univers, la raison de vivre sur terre, la splendeur intérieure."

----- *La Vie simple*. Tunis: MTE, 1975 (novel). Further information not available.

Hafsia, Jalila (1929 -). *Cendres à l'aube*. Tunis: MTE, 1975.

This realistic novel is a rejection of traditional customs: "N'ai-je pas le droit d'exister pour moi seul?" (69). It is cited in Fontaine, *Ecrivaines tunisiennes*: 15.

Hedri, Souad. *Vie et agonie*. Tunis: Bouslama, 1978.

This novel is dismissed as a literary work by Fontaine in *Ecrivaines tunisiennes* (41) because of the abundance of mistakes in French that are not limited to typographical errors.

Jlassi, Zohra. Short story translated by Fontaine, no title given, *IBLA*, 1972: 156-162. Cited in Fontaine, *Ecrivaines tunisiennes*: 80.

Nouri, Beya (1944 -), "S'il n'y a pas eu le couffin," short story translated into French by Maurice Boormans, *IBLA*, XXVIII/111 (1965/3): 291-310.

This story is that of a girl kept at home by traditional parents who falls in love during a chance encounter, and marries a man chosen by her parents who turns out to be her beloved.

Saïd, Amina. *Paysages, nuit friable (poèmes)*. Paris: Inéditions Barbare, 1980.
Cited in Fontaine, *Ecrivaines tunisiennes*: 68.

----- *Métamorphose de l'île et de la vague (poèmes)*. Paris: Arcantère, 1985. Excerpts cited in Fontaine, *Ecrivaines tunisiennes*: 68-70.

This second collection of poetry is descriptive of personal experience: "le jour commence pour moi/ il faut alors respirer/ se délivrer des oeillères de la nuit/ de l'ombre qui me regarde/ sous le chapelet vibrant des soleils passagers" (73).

II. Political and Historical Essays and Critical Works (Non-fiction)

Béji, Hélé. *L'Art contre la culture. Nûba*. Collection Intersignes/Essai. Paris: Intersignes, and Tunis: PICTURA ImPress, 1994.

This poetic essay is an exploration of the dynamics of art in a cultural context, and pleads for a revival of the recognition of beauty in the everyday: "Il ne suffit pas d'interpréter cela comme une réhabilitation de ce qu'on appelle art populaire, mais plutôt de rendre à la vie populaire l'instinct du beau qu'elle croyait avoir perdu, de lui tendre un miroir intérieur où tout ce qui était déjà là, mais brouillé, absent des consciences émerge à la conscience avec la véhémence de ce qui reste obscurément enfoui sous les artifices de la culture, en rompt joyeusement le triste fatras." (36)

----- *Le Désenchantement national: Essai sur la décolonisation*. Cahiers Libres. Paris: Librairie François Maspero, 1982.

This critic, also a writer of fiction (see above) has written a forceful and daring essay about the decolonisation of Tunisia, bringing to the forefront the current political system entrenched in a nationalist politics which dominates and oppresses. Béji defines the internal problems of her country not in terms of external forces, but rather the internal forces of oppression which have caused an intellectual and political stifling of voices. Both the concepts of identity and nationalism for her, have been squelched to serve the needs of the current party in power: "A la destruction coloniale succède le gonflement national, une effervescence saturée." (133)

Belhaj Yahia, Emna, et al. *Nissa (revue)*. Tunis, avril 1985 - mars 1987 (8 issues).

This important bilingual forum for Tunisian feminists, primarily those associated with the Club Tahar Haddad, covered a wide range of topics, political, societal, historical, personal, literary, etc. The beginning and development of this magazine, along with its editors and writers, are well described in Evelyne Accad's novel, *Blessures des mots: Journal de Tunisie* (see below).

Ben Saïd Cherni, Zeïnab, and Amel Ben Aba, Souad Triki, Hayet Gribâa, Rachida Ennaïfer. Preface Fatima Mernissi. 2. *La Moitié entière: Tunisiennes en devenir*. AFTURD, Ouvrage collectif. Collection Enjeux. Tunis: Cérès Productions, 1992.

The essays in this two volume collection are the result of a writing workshop in Tunisia under the guidance of Fatima Mernissi. Two main themes emerge, that of the history of feminism in Tunisia, and that of women's experience and the imbalance of power (see volume 2 below, Binous et al.).

Bessis, Sophie, and Souhayr Belhassen. *Femmes du Maghreb: l'enjeu*. Tunis: Cérès Productions, and Editions J.-C. Lattès, 1992.

Bessis and Belhassen examine the last thirty years of changing mentalities regarding women in the Maghreb. They confront the difficult aspect of a rise in Islamic fundamentalism and analyze societal contradictions for women that have arisen since colonial independence: "C'est également au nom du respect de l'islam que la Tunisie, tout en ratifiant en 1985 la Convention de Copenhague sur l'élimination de toutes formes de discrimination à l'égard des femmes, y apporte des réserves qui la vident pratiquement de sa substance." (103)

----- *Bourguiba*. Tome 1, tome 2, Jeune Afrique Livres, 1988.

Bessis, Sophie. *L'arme alimentaire*. Paris: Librairie François Maspero, 1979.

----- *La dernière frontière*. Paris: J.-C. Lattès. 1983.

----- *La faim dans le monde*. Paris: La Découverte, 1991.

Binous, Jamila, and Fathia Harzallah, Samira Hamzaoui, Habiba Ben Romdhane, Dorra Mahfoudh Draoui, Léa-Véra Tahar Baklouti. Preface Fatima Mernissi. 1. *Comment les femmes vivent: Tunisiennes en devenir*. AFTURD (Association des Femmes Tunisiennes pour la Recherche et le Développement), Ouvrage collectif. Collection Enjeux. Tunis: Cérès Productions, 1992.

The highly varied and enlightening essays in this two volume collection are the result of a writing workshop in Tunisia under the guidance of Fatima Mernissi. See above, Ben Saïd Cherni, et al.

Bouraoui, Soukaina, preface. *Création Liberté Femmes en Méditerranée. Actes du colloque de Tabarka 1992*. El Manar II: CREDIF/ L'Or du Temps, 1993. With articles by Sophie Ferchiou, Faïka Bejaoui, Salma Hamza, Nejla Bouden-Romdhane, Raja Fendi-Aouali, Inchirah Hababou-Allagui, Marguerite Jerbi, Sivia Fajarnes-Fuster, Faïza Azzouz, Hélène Pednault, Lina Mangiacapre, Maria Angela Roque, Anissa Banzakour-Chami, Emna Ben-Miled and Sophie Bessis.

This collection of the Acts of the Colloquium in Tabarka (1992) provides a wide variety of analyses of the current situation of women, primarily in Tunisia, but also in other Mediterranean countries, with regard to the concepts of freedom, power, creation, solidarity, resemblance, nature and culture, sexual life, religion, patrimony, architecture, engineering, rights and legislation for women.

-----, directeur du projet. *Femmes de Tunisie: Situation et perspectives*. El Manar II: CREDIF (Centre de recherche, de documentation et d'information sur la femme, République Tunisienne, Ministère de la Femme et de la Famille), 1994.

This report is comprised of statistical studies with commentary on the questions of demographics, education, sanitation, economic integration, standard of living and participation in public, political and societal life for women in Tunisia, to determine current needs. It was prepared for the international women's conference in Beijing.

Chabbi-Labidi, Lilia. *Histoire d'une parole féminine*. s. éd., 1982.

This psychoanalytical analysis posits that the simple act of self-expression is the most important step for women to take. As cited in Fontaine, *Ecrivaines tunisiennes*: 55.

---- *Les origines des mouvements féministes en Tunisie*. s. éd., 1987.

As cited in Fontaine, *Ecrivaines tunisiennes*: 55.

Chater, Souad. *Les Emancipées du Harem. Regard sur la femme tunisienne*. Tunis: Editions La Presse, 1992.

Chater, recognizing the privileged status of Tunisia in the Arab world with regard to women's rights, asks the important question: "Le Code du Statut Personnel et la législation afférente au statut de la femme ont-ils pu concrétiser, dans les faits, le nouvel ordre familial et social qu'ils ont institué?" (9-10) In response, this volume includes excerpts from interviews with 55 Tunisian women conducted between 1985 and 1991 on various aspects of women's life in Tunisia.

----*La Femme tunisienne: citoyenne ou sujet...?* Tunis: MTE, 1978.

Chérif-Chammari, Alya. *Guide des droits des femmes: Le Mariage*. Tunis: Les Editions de la Méditerranée, 1995.

This guide provides explanations of Tunisian laws and current applications regarding engagement, the marriage contract, ceremony, the propriety of assets, etc.

Cherni, Zeineb. "La pensée de l'amour: Essai sur la littérature féminine tunisienne." *IBLA*, 152 (1983): 279-297. Also in *Europe*, 702 (oct. 1987): 32-41 (unrevised version). As cited in Fontaine, *Ecrivaines tunisiennes*: 54.

Ghanmi, Azza. *Le mouvement féministe tunisien. Témoignage sur l'autonomie et la pluralité du mouvement des femmes (1979-1989)*. Collection féminisme. Tunis: Chama, 1993.

This author and participant in the Tunisian women's movement, recounts the history of five important elements in the movement during the 1980's: the Club Tahar Haddad, la Commission Syndicale, the group Femmes Démocrates, the magazine *Nissa*, and l'Association des Femmes Démocrates. The common elements of group autonomy and a plurality of voices gives thematic focus to the essay.

Hafsia, Jalila. *Visages et rencontres*. Tunis: A compte d'auteur, 1981. (interviews with primarily French celebrities of the arts and letters). See Hafsia, fiction (above).

---- *La plume en liberté*. Tunis: A compte d'auteur, 1983. Cited in Fontaine, *Ecrivaines tunisiennes*: 87.

The first half is a collection of 43 short texts published in *La Presse*, and which draw their unity from the role of the Médina, as the author walks the reader through the historic past of Tunis and its inhabitants. The second half includes commentary on Palestine and the Arab Muslim world.

Hafsia, Nazli. *La prostitution: un des coûts du développement d'un pays sous-développé*. Tours: Doctorat de 3e cycle, juin 1972. Cited in Fontaine, *Ecrivaines tunisiennes*: 49.

Lakchal-Ayyat, Naziha. *La femme tunisienne et sa place dans le droit positif*. Tunis: Dar al-Amal, 1978. Cited in Fontaine, *Ecrivaines tunisiennes*, 38.

Mahfoudh-Draoui, Dorra. *Paysannes de Marnissa. Le difficile accès à la modernité*. Tunis: Chama, 1993. This study was originally published under the title, *Femmes rurales de Marnissa*. Tunis: PNUD, 1990.

This study of the social and economic role of women in rural areas of Tunisia includes statistics and interviews with three families.

Marzouki, Ilhem. *Le Mouvement des femmes en Tunisie au XXe siècle. Féminisme et politique*. Collection Enjeux. Tunis: Cérès Productions, 1993.

Sociologist Marzouki, founder of the Club d'Etudes de la Condition des Femmes (Club Tahar Haddad) in 1978 in Tunis, delivers a socio-political history of the evolution of the women's movement in Tunisia, with particular emphasis on l'U.N.F.T. (l'Union Nationale des Femmes de Tunisie)

Pruvost, Lucie. *La prostitution des mineures en Tunisie*. Tunis: DES de Sciences Criminelles, 1973. Cited in Fontaine, *Ecrivaines tunisiennes*: 49.

Selected Secondary Sources (Information about Women Writing in Tunisia)

Accad, Evelyne. *Blessures des mots: Journal de Tunisie*. Collection prémices. Paris: INDIGO & côté-femmes éditions, 1993. Also in translation by Cynthia Hahn. *Wounding Words: A Woman's Journal in Tunisia*. Oxford: Heinemann Press, 1996.

This novel was drawn from the author's experiences in Tunisia during the mid-1980's, when the woman's magazine *Nissa*, was begun. Many of the women involved in the Club Tahar Haddad, a forum for feminist voices are depicted, along with the description of an important colloquium in Tunis, "What Feminism for the Maghreb?" The author's layering of voices, from poetic segments, to descriptive narrative, to dialogue, to interpretive introspective commentary on the events recounted, provides a multi-faceted look at this time period, considered by many to be the height of the movement.

Fontaine, Jean. *Ecrivaines tunisiennes*. Tunis: Le Gai Savoir, 1990.

The singularly most prolific literary historian in the area of women writing in Tunisia is Jean Fontaine. Librarian at the Institut des Belles Lettres Arabes in Tunis, he is chief editor of the journal *IBLA*.

The chapters of this work have been published separately as articles in *Les Cahiers de Tunisie*. -Chapter 1: "Situation de la femme écrivain en Tunisie: 1956-1970" was published in Vol. XX, no. 79-80, 1972: 285-307. It was later published in *Vingt ans de la littérature tunisienne* (see below): 89-129. This work is out of print.

-Chapter 2: "La littérature féminine tunisienne, marque-t-elle un renouveau? 1971-1980" was published in Vol. XXIX, no. 115-116: 269-285. It was republished in *Aspects de la littérature tunisienne* (see below): 103-110, 163-165. This is a hard to find work.

-Chapter 3: "Le déclin de la littérature féministe en Tunisie: 1981-1987" was published in Vol. XXXV, no. 141-142, 1987 (no page nos. given).

In addition to the analytical and insightful commentary Fontaine provides, he also includes some

translations of poems by authors who publish in Arabic, such as those of Halima Attia, Zoubeïda Bechir, Leila Mami, Fadhila Chabbi, and Najet Adouani. This is a very useful reference tool for an overview of twentieth century Tunisian women writers.

----- *Regards sur la littérature tunisienne*. Tunis: Cérés Productions, 1991. In this volume, Fontaine here only reviews works originally written in Arabic. However, translations of several poems (into French) by Fadhila Chabbi (1946 -) are provided (pp. 93-99). Also, see Chapter 3: "Ecriture féminine tunisienne et résistance," 39-52, for a description of works by Tunisian women writing in Arabic.

----- *La Littérature tunisienne contemporaine*. Paris: CNRS, Cahiers du CRESM, 1990.

----- *Etudes de la littérature tunisienne 1984-1987*. Tunis: Nawras, 1989.

----- *Histoire de la littérature tunisienne par les textes. Tome 1. Des Origines à la fin du XIIIe siècle*. Bardo: Turki, 1988.

----- *Aspects de la littérature tunisienne 1976-1983*. Tunis: Rasm, 1985.

----- *Vingt ans de la littérature tunisienne 1956-1975*. Tunis: Maison Tunisienne de l'Édition, 1977.

El Khayat, Ghita. *Le Maghreb des femmes. Les femmes dans l'U.M.A.* Casablanca: Editions EDDIF, 1992.

See the chapter on Tunisia (222-233) in the context of l'U.M.A. (l'Union du Maghreb Arabe).

Zamiti-Horchani, Malika. "Les Tunisiennes, leurs droits et l'idée qu'on s'en fait," *Femmes de la Méditerranée, Peuples Méditerranéens*, no. 22-23, janvier-juin 1983: 181-192.

This author discusses the discrepancies between the law as it stands for women in Tunisia and what has been commonly practiced.

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