

# Some Key Figures

Author: Stephanie Enemark<senemark@middlebury.edu>

Discover some of the key figures in Maghrebi Cinema

[Merrzak Allouache](#) - [Ismaël Ferroukhi](#) [Nabyl Ayouch](#) - [Moufida Tlatli](#) - [Jillali Ferhati](#) - [Nadir Moknache](#)

## Cinema Key Figures

**Merrzak Allouache** is one of the most prolific directors of Algerian origin in Europe. He has also achieved success as a producer and screenwriter. Born in October, 1944 in the Algerian capital city, he studied cinema at l'Institut National du Cinema d'Alger, where he made his first film, *Croisement* in 1964. He then did internships at the Institut des Hautes Études Cinématographiques and the Office de radiodiffusion télévisuelle française before making his first feature film, *Omar Gatlato*, in 1976. The film tells the story of a group of young Algerians working in the Algerian bureaucracy.

*Bab El-Oued City*, released in 1994 during the height of the violence that rocked Algeria for nearly a decade, gives an inside glance at the rise of Islamic radicalism in the medina of Algiers and its appeal for the population there. Two years later he made *Salut Cousin!*, a comedy about a young Algerian named Alilo (Gad El Melah) who goes to Paris to pick up a shipment of contraband clothes to take back to Algeria. Unfortunately, he loses the address where he is supposed to make the pickup, so he stays with his cousin Mok (Mess Hatatou), an aspiring rapper (whose lyrics are the tales of La Fontaine) in the immigrant neighborhoods of Paris. Allouache surprised many with his 2003 film, *Chouchou*, a young North African immigrant who comes to Paris clandestinely to look for his nephew. He stays with a couple of priests and finds work in a psychiatrist's office before he finds his nephew singing in drag at a cabaret called L'Apocalypse. Before long, Chouchou is working at the bar in drag, as well. She soon also falls in love with a foppish Frenchman in this enormously successful comedy. (Official web site- <http://www.warnerbros.fr/movies/chouchou/>)

His most recent film stars the Algerian singer Faudel, Samy Naceri and Julie Gayet in *Bab El Web*. Released in 2004, the film is the story of two brothers with very different personalities who live in Bab El Oued. Kamel, a shy and quiet young man, spends his days in the cybercafé chatting with Laurence, a young French woman who eventually decides to visit Kamel in Algiers. Filmography-<http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0021577/>

**Ismaël Ferroukhi** is a screenwriter and director who won the Best First Film award at the Venice film festival in 2004 for *Le Grand Voyage*, the story of Oda (Nicolas Cazalé), the young son of an Algerian immigrant in France, who is obliged to drive his father (Mohamed Majd) on the

pilgrimage to Mecca. Their trip through Italy, Serbia, Turkey, Syria and Jordan to Saudi Arabia is fraught with tension as the each from different worlds and speaking different languages, struggle to come to terms with one another. As the web page for the American distributor of the film points out, the genesis of the film was in the author's memories of this father. "I have had this project in mind for a dozen years...It turns out that when I was a kid my father would take this voyage in a car and this crazy trip made me fantasize. I said to myself that one day I would have to tell the story of this crazy adventure" (http://www.filmmovement.com/forms/FilmDetails.aspx?listing=past&ProductID=0605&canadian=&Trailer=\_\_\_\_\_). He was born in Kentira, just north of the Moroccan capitol, Rabat and, most recently, was screenwriter for *L'Avion (The Airplane)* (http://www.lavion-lefilm.com/site.htm), a film release in France during the summer of 2005.

**Nabyl Ayouch** was born in Paris in 1969. He is one of Morocco's younger generation of film makers born after independence. After theater studies in France, he worked in advertising for a while before directing a very successful series entitled *Lalla Fatima* for Moroccan TV. Between 1992 and 2002 Nabyl Ayouch directed more than six works between short and feature length films among which we can name *Les Pierres bleues du desert* (1992), *Vendeur de Silence* (1994) and the full length feature films *Mektoub* (1997), *Ali Zaoua* (1999) and *Une Minute de Silence de Moins* (2002). Internationally, Nabyl Ayouch is perhaps best known for his film *Ali Zaoua* which won an impressive number of awards including at Ouagadougou Panafrican Film and Television Festival (2001), Montréal World Film Festival (2000), Mannheim-Heidelberg International Filmfestival (2000), and Stockholm Film Festival (2000) to mention just a few. Nabyl Ayouch's *Ali Zaoua* was submitted by Morocco for consideration for Oscar of Best Foreign Language Film. In Morocco, "*Mektoub*" is viewed as the first national action/adventure film to get a positive response from a domestic audience that tends to be favor European and American films when it comes to popular entertainment.

**Moufida Tlatli** is the widely acclaimed director from Tunisia, known for her two films *Silences of the Palace* (1994) and *The Season of Men* (2000). Trained at the Paris based Institut des Hautes Etudes de Cinematographie in the 1960s, Tlatli's career as a director was preceded by a two-decade long career as the most accomplished and sought after film editor in the world of Arab-filmmaking. This experience brings to her films an unusual depth of sensitivity and gracefulness to women's issues unparalleled in regional as well as international filmmaking. Her films both center on issues of gender roles, female sexuality, and the struggle between tradition and modernity that are implicit in both as they are articulated in modern Tunisian society. There is also a generational angle of Tlatli's films when taken together: *Silences of the Palace* examines the struggle for independence and self assertion the generation of women who came of age concomitantly with national liberation in the late 1950s. She explores the dynamics of women's subjugation through protagonists who are domestic servants to the Beys in the final days of the French Protectorate. In *the Season of Men*, Tlatli explores the subjugation of female sexuality in contemporary Tunisia through the stories of women from the island of Djerba estranged from their husbands who live in the capital to sell their wears the majority of the year. She further examines the effects of this culturally imposed form of physical exile on the following generation of the protagonist's daughters, one of whom is incapable of consummating her marriage, the other of whom carries on a secret relationship with her music teacher, a married man. Currently, Tlatli is working on a new film, "the last of the trilogy," she says, further exploring these issues as they are defined by family dynamics and the 'rule of silence' in contemporary Tunisian society.

**Jillali Ferhati** (often spelled Jilali as well) is probably one of the most prolific and influential Moroccan film makers. He is one of the first voices of a Moroccan cinema that sought to create its own space of expression that embraces reality and seeks to contribute to the universal through that delving into which is specific and local. This constituted a break from earlier trends that sought inspiration in Middle Eastern cinema, Egyptian cinema specifically.

Originally from the area near Khemisset, a small town about 50 miles east of the capital Rabat, he currently lives and works in Tangier. Ferhati studied both in Morocco and France where his interest in the visual arts started, first in theater then in cinema.

In 1982 he launched a film production company called Heracles. Ferhati has directed more than nine separate works between short films and feature length films. Among his short films we could mention *Carom* (1973), *Bonjour Madame* (1974) and *Le Mouchoir bleu* (1995). His movie titles include: *Breche dans le mur* (1977), the critically acclaimed *Poupées de Roesaux* (1981), *La Plage des enfants perdus* (1991), *Chevaux de fortune* (1995), *Tresses* (1999) and finally *Memoire en detention* in 2004 and which tackles the until now taboo topic of secret detention centers, torture, forced disappearances and a whole slew of human rights abuses that marked what Moroccans call the years of lead and which stretch from the early sixties of the late eighties under the reign of Hassan II.

*Memory in Detention* (2004) will be shown at Wellesley College on Monday November 7th immediately following its US premiere in New York City on Sunday November 6th.

**Nadir Mokneche** is a provocative filmmaker whose films deal frankly with subjects centered around gender and sexuality in Algerian society. His first major release, *Le Harem De Mme Osmane* (2000). In the movie, Madame Osmane who was involved in the War of Liberation in Algeria. Her husband, also a militant during the war, is now living in France with another woman and Madame Osmane is left in charge of her apartment where she seeks to control the lives of the tenants. The film is set in 1992 against the rise of militant Islam in Algeria. Indeed, it was shot in Morocco precisely because of the level of violence that shook Algerian society throughout most of the 1990s. Yet in spite of the looming danger, the film is lighthearted and funny at times.

Madame Osmane is played by Spanish actress Carmen Maura who is best known for her roles in Almodovar. The daughter of Madame Osmane is played Linda Slimani, and her eccentric maid by Biyouna, a singer who has a leading role in Mokneche's second film, *Viva Laldjerie*.

Mokneche has said that the city of Algiers can be seen as a character in his films and his second film is also set there after the violence in Algeria had tapered off considerably. Once again it

follows the lives of three women living in an apartment building in Algiers where they have taken refuge from the violence that swarms around them. Biyouna plays Papicha, a former cabaret dancer who is the mother of Goucem, played by Loubna Azabal. Goucem lives with her mother (the 90s were marked by terrible housing shortages in Algeria) but insists on living a lifestyle that actively defies the rigid morality of Algerian society. Goucem is involved in an affair with a married man and her most loyal friend is a prostitute, Fifi, who operates under the protection of a security officer of the State. Goucem's father was killed in the civil war, and Biyouna still lives in fear, suspicious of everyone around her, especially men. Lisa Nesselson of *Variety* has accurately described the film as "a fine portrait of women exiled in their own country."

Mokneche grew up in Algiers before studying in France and at the New School for Social Research in New York.

A clip from *Viva l'Algérie* can be found here:  
[http://arabworld.nitle.org/audiovisual.php?module\\_id=5&selected\\_feed=295](http://arabworld.nitle.org/audiovisual.php?module_id=5&selected_feed=295)