Moufida Fedhila , "Creating is Resisting", Paris, 2013

Michèle Cohen Hadria interviews Moufida Fedhila

Michèle Cohen Hadria: It seems to me that everything we are experiencing is no more than one of the consequences of the end of the Cold War through the globalisation and deregulations resulting from that. Basically, globalisation for me is a story of power. There's nothing egalitarian about it, and it's been preceded by other globalisations throughout history, such as those of empires (Greek, Byzantine, Roman, Persian, Islamic, Ottoman, then European colonial expansion, and today by what we call the West). Has this total, worldwide upheaval prompted you to think about the problems raised by the walls they're building in the world to confront the flow of migration?

Moufida Fedhila: To be honest, I haven't asked myself that many questions about history. What interests me first and foremost is what we're experiencing here and now. What's central for me is the body, and its displacement in a geopolitical context. In the years since 2000, speaking about illegal immigrants has taken on incredible dimensions. I had the impression that the economic powers weren't at all bothered about it before that. As long as the economy was working, it didn't really matter if those populations were moving from one place to another in search of a job, or if, because the climate had changed, natural catastrophes had impelled some of them to find somewhere else to live. As for me, the question I ask myself is how does this body live? How does it move from one place to another confronted with these new political and geopolitical codes? All these parameters have an influence on this notion of the body.

Michèle Cohen Hadria: You mean the body that moves through spaces that are no longer where it was born?

Moufida Fedhila: That body is confronted with a boundary. What event imposes a boundary on me in relation to my body? The body is already a boundary in itself. Geographically, geopolitically, you can't move around like that. But there's also everything that goes on in that body, what it thinks, what it feels. Where do you place the boundary? With *My Island*, my work takes on a more explicit dimension with reference to geopolitical matters. In view of globalisation the question is to know where individuals are placed. I was interested by what Paul Virilio's wrote about speed and disappearance, which was ahead of its time. For that's what we're again finding today, his ideas have become very topical. In what way do we live in this world where globalisation and capitalism are presented to us as "open systems", giving access to greater wealth, at a personal level too? In fact it's the very opposite, that world only encloses us. I wanted to highlight that paradox in benefits. For, on the contrary, little islands are created where individuals are contained. In the past, the Communist system didn't work. Now it's the capitalist system, and it isn't working either. Where can we find an alternative? Perhaps in participative politics? I've asked myself these questions, going beyond the interests of a single country, like Tunisia. Today you can no longer confine yourself to a single territory. Everything's connected.

Michèle Cohen Hadria: You often refer to a 'space with no boundary'... Is that a form of utopia with you?

Moufida Fedhila: I don't know if it's a utopia... The thing that can be said about it comes to me from quantum physics and the "string theory" that I'd talked to you about. It's something that resonates with me, thinking that things don't simply stop there...

Michèle Cohen Hadria: At their visible boundary?

Moufida Fedhila: Yes, I think that's there's a different way of thinking: Are there several worlds or just one?

Michèle Cohen Hadria: You're keen to decompartmentalize space in your works. By creating a wall at the Noloco gallery in Padua, you referred to other walls that have been built in the world, in Palestine, Mexico, Africa... But a wall in Padua, in Europe itself, that seems almost incredible...

Moufida Fedhila: Not many people know about it.

Michèle Cohen Hadria: In this work you take a dialectical approach to boundaries. But for you a wall generate a different space from that of separation, it also affects behaviour, customs...

Moufida Fedhila: Walls separate and connect. It seems hard to imagine, but they create new life around them. It's very complicated...Like in the town of Tijuana where life is being organized around the wall built between Mexico and the United States.

Michèle Cohen Hadria: Did the blue light on the wall built in the gallery have any special meaning?...

Moufida Fedhila: I wanted to create a science-fiction aspect. Bring alive something that's not completely reality, make visitors experience a different sensation, make them wander between the real and the unreal...

Michèle Cohen Hadria: How was the work received in Padua?

Moufida Fedhila: The inhabitants had great difficulty in coming to terms with what was going on. When I planned to go and ask the migrants questions, they were afraid on my behalf. In fact, they didn't know what to do with the place; it was such a painful wound. When I approached it, I saw a checkpoint and the police patrolling, not allowing anyone to go in. Even the people who lived on the other side of the wall asked me to leave. For them, I shouldn't be there. The only person willing to tell me more was an imam, responsible for a mosque located inside that ostracised place. I felt he needed to talk to me about that situation of being shut in.
Their migrants were playing table football or improvising a market among themselves, a small world was being created inside those walls.

Michèle Cohen Hadria: Was it a kind of camp? ...

Moufida Fedhila: It's a derelict block of flats where illegal immigrants are subsisting on the other side of an adjoining wall 84 metres long and 3 metres high, which created a dead end for the block of flats. A non-place, I'd say, using the terminology of the anthropologist Marc Augé in "Non-lieux: Introduction à une anthropologie de la surmodernité", expressing the feeling of 'a space that cannot be defined either in terms of identity, or as relational'. What emerges from the short film The Noise of Silence is a traumatised landscape, a life left hanging. A camp! Yes, the camp that for Giorgio Agamben becomes the extreme paradigm of our modern world.

Michèle Cohen Hadria: What was that wall protecting the residents from?

Moufida Fedhila: It was supposed to be "temporary" to stop trafficking by people selling on drugs and put an end to recurrent outbreaks of violence. It quickly became emblematic: it was compared to the Berlin Wall. Ultimately it achieved nothing: the migrants scaled it just the same. That district is mainly inhabited by migrants. The checkpoint and the police have ended up stigmatising them. In A Wall for Everyone I in my turn built a wall cutting the gallery in two, to test out the body of the visitor, the space in itself, through that wall that isolated his or her body from the rest of the room, and the reality of the wall in Padua. While my breezeblock wall was ephemeral, the one in Padua is real, lasting, and unbearable.

Michèle Cohen Hadria: How did they react to the metamorphosis of the gallery?

Moufida Fedhila: A lot of people knew that gallery well and went there often. Suddenly, it was a place cut in two. I wanted to see the body moving around in that transformed space. It was also a form of mockery to say: 'I can do what I like with this space'... It was absurd, because when I removed that wall the space would go back to being what it was. So I thought up an essential, minimalist piece, but one that confronts the body.

Michèle Cohen Hadria: My Island shows a kind of drift of the continents where every country seems to close in on itself in a loop...

Moufida Fedhila: Almost like plates.

Michèle Cohen Hadria: Is it a political and migratory map? ...

Moufida Fedhila: I was inspired by the work of the American architect, designer, inventor and futurist, Buckminster Fuller, who was one of the first to disseminate a systemic vision of the world. He was interested in ecology and communication. He designed very interesting projects. He was respected in his field for his avant-garde views.

Michèle Cohen Hadria: The other day we talked about the relativity of the horizon line which is only a concept, for as you move forward that line shifts... There isn't really a horizon. Where your work involving maps and cardinal points is concerned, are you playing with that same relativity? ...

Moufida Fedhila: Absolutely. I've done research into cartography. For Jean-Claude

Groshens, 'Cartography lives off that kind of ambiguity which places it at the meeting point of exact science and art'. The geographer-cartographer, through satellite imagery and projections systems, "invents" a visual representation of that basic geographical information. He works out the architecture, prepares his map as a painter does his canvas before applying the shapes and colours on to it. The reading of such map-making never shows exactly where a territory starts and finishes. And when you go to the spot, you understand that no absolute frontier exists. In my series of drawings called *Dessine-Moi le Monde de mémoire*, I invited passers-by, people from different countries, to draw the outlines of the world, and confront the vulnerability of memory, with a right to make mistakes. Tossed between these constructions and ruins alongside one another, the drawing indicates a habitable place. Thus the public became absorbed in a complicated exercise: drawing the map of the world from memory. Between extreme simplification of the continents, symbolisation of the world, and an account of the details and outlines, you culminate in an accumulation of visions, memories and conceptions that are always different.

Michèle Cohen Hadria: A conceptual boundary...

Moufida Fedhila: Conceptual, but as you approach reality, you notice a country's whole organization... it's more palpable in the countries of the South: Libya stops here, Tunisia begins there... Little by little you become aware of a police presence. Everything's controlled. And even if a frontier may seem conceptual to us, it isn't for a state. There's a grid.

Michèle Cohen Hadria: Your installation of Tunisian flags expresses an analogous national, linguistic, social norm. Wasn't it risky to exhibit it in the climate of the revolution? You've decomposed the graphics of the flags, cut out their centres as if to empty them of their emblems, the Crescent and the Star, which you've placed on the ground.

Moufida Fedhila: The flag is present in any revolution; it's the symbol of your country. In Tunisia, the further on the events moved, the more people were attached to that emblem, without necessarily knowing its history. Doing historical research, I realised that not many people knew the meaning of that emblem. The red of the Tunisian flag symbolises the blood of the martyrs. But which martyrs? Most Tunisians think that the martyrs in question are the ones who freed Tunisia from the French Protectorate. That's wrong. It symbolises the blood of the Ottomans fighting to conquer Tunisia when it fell into the hands of the Spanish. Basically the Tunisian flag is an exact repeat of the Ottoman one, but reversed. The Turkish and Tunisian flags are in fact very alike; they have the same star, the same crescent. What differentiates them is the white circle the crescent and star are placed on in the Tunisian flag. The Beys who governed Tunisia agreed to allow France to introduce its protectorate because the country was going through an economic crisis.

Michèle Cohen Hadria: Why have the crescent and star emblems been placed lying flat under the aligned flags?

Moufida Fedhila: To deal with the fetishist aspect of any flag, but also in relation to the state of Tunisian society after the revolution. That flag had been omnipresent since the revolution of 14 January 2011. Since then it has invaded the street,

symbolising the questioning of power. It's become a fetish in the collective imagination, crystallising the hopes and issues of stake of a nation to be rebuilt. The question of identity didn't arise before. But little by little we became aware of a new feeling emerging in relation to religion. And I wanted to consider this question of identity as a problem area, and say that in the end we only hide behind these symbols. For what does all that really represent? Do human beings need these symbols to express themselves? As I see it, not necessarily. And I wanted that flag to be stripped bare. Nothing to be left of it. The question was: If I remove these two symbols of religion from the flag, what actually is left of Tunisian identity?

Michèle Cohen Hadria: Yes, there's this vacuum, but what's to be done with it... nothing?

Moufida Fedhila: But in fact, nothing is something, isn't it? By removing the symbols, what was there left? A circle. A vacuum. And what is a vacuum? For me, it's the field of possibilities. That can't be "nothing". Let's try and imagine nothingness, are we even capable of imagining it? So many things really pass through us. Silence, even. In 1948, John Cage visited the soundproofed room at Harvard University. Cage expected to "hear" silence when he went in, but as he wrote later: 'I heard two sounds. And I was so surprised that I went to the engineer in charge … and said, There's something wrong, there're two sounds in that room, and he said describe them, and I did, one was high and one was low, and he said, the high one was my nervous system … and the low one was my blood circulating.' For me an empty circle is more eloquent than any attempt to attach words to things. In any case, how do you define a thing?... The circle offers an opening that will perhaps close up at a given moment.

Michèle Cohen Hadria: Is that perception of possibilities linked to cycles of history?

Moufida Fedhila: It's perhaps my optimistic way of looking at history... But I think that what is happening in Arab countries will not be rebuilt in a few years. Recurrent problems still link identity to religion, it's very striking. What interests me is asking other underlying questions relating to Arab thought and its incapacity for self-criticism in interminable religious quarrels. A critical reading of religious texts and their history is called for. How could this mean "transgressing", "overstepping" and "displacing"? If I ask that question via a simple fabric, this symbol of the flag, it's in order to go beyond that and posit a dialectic of history: What is it that causes civilisations to be constructed in this way or that? Does it happen based on something? Or on... nothing?...

Michèle Cohen Hadria: The nothing can also be the Revolution. An empty square. Or the chaos that may arise... Again every possibility. In Tunisia, radical Islamists have put a brake on hopes. We haven't embarked idealistically on a revolution where "everything's fine". You've rightly spoken in your writings about apprenticeship and a crisis situation. It's an in-between Tunisia. That fluctuating aspect, those governmental procrastinations, its leniency towards the Salafists, even if they cause concern, indicate that rare moment when a people is in search of itself...

Moufida Fedhila: And I placed that black box beside the flags with *'Material of Self*

Destruction' printed on it. Still in the same spirit of mockery... As if to say: there, you've got the wherewithal and now you can destroy yourself with it too. That Tunisian identity which closes in on itself is recurrent, it links up with what's happening in France, in the North, where we've witnessed a withdrawal and a tension about identity which have given votes to Le Pen. But these outbreaks of intransigence occur in all societies. We feel today how much it is present everywhere. We come back to this paradox: observing how we open up, or close in on ourselves. We want to assert our identity. How can we assert our difference? By distinctive signs that make us stand out. And generally it's religious affiliation that expresses it. It's like a pressure cooker that can explode at any time. I'm observing what's going on inside, that imminent explosion relating to Arab identity. But we also have to know whether identity is confined to religiosity. It would be possible to get attached to lots of other elements. I produced that work in 2011. And I note in 2013 that things have changed in Tunisia. When we spoke before you mentioned the return to Sharia law in Libya. For around sixty years there had been no equivalent in the Arab Muslim world of Tunisian legislation relating to women's rights. With the coming to power of the Islamists, those rights are being ridiculed. They claim they're replacing female equality with woman's "complementarity" to man. I felt a world collapsing like a sandcastle when I heard that. Instead of fighting for rights that were missing from the Code of Personal Status, we'll have to try and preserve what's left. As a woman and an artist, I feel in the line of fire, and all the more because of what happened at the Abdellia Palace. I felt the full weight of it, through the Fatwa issued by the Imam of Zitouna, calling for my death. But what really interests me isn't this story of religion, but asking questions and acting in such a way that some other person can tackle different sets of problems of her own accord... without necessary finding any answers, what's more.

Michèle Cohen Hadria: Fatima Mernissi, a Moroccan sociologist, has written about a woman's status in the Maghreb. She focused one study on territoriality, the gender-based division of Arab Muslim space, in the traditional sense.

Moufida Fedhila: But in Tunisia, in spite of the gains in social rights, if the cultural dimension – in the wide sense – doesn't follow, it won't work. Even if Bourguiba brought in women's rights in 1956, it still doesn't prevent girls from still getting married very young, wearing the veil and today sporting the niqab – something foreign to Tunisian society – and not having the right to express themselves. Therefore there's still a huge job to be done internally.

Michèle Cohen Hadria: In the three months that followed Tunisian Independence, Bourguiba introduced the Code of Personal Status, but after a few years, he had to make concessions to the conservatives. You can't impose modernity with no transition. A woman friend who was talking to me about Atatürk told me that, like Bourguiba, Atatürk had paradoxically brought in an "authoritarian Modernism" which didn't allow for that sedimentation of mental attitudes, customs, practices. It's true that no-one casts doubt on women's emancipation, but at the same time we have to wonder if it hasn't all come about too suddenly.

Moufida Fedhila: That problem of transgression is a crucial question in art. You're speaking about that problem at the level of social and political development, but in relation to art, how do we manage transgression? Are we going to "go for it", telling ourselves that the works will shock, or progress slowly to allow for a learning phase.

It's a real question for art! A girl from the MLF (Mouvement de Libération de la Femme – Women's Liberation Movement) recently posed naked. Of course, it wasn't art, but activism. But let's merely imagine a work of art, along those lines... This problem arose at the Tunis Art Spring. And yet there were no shocking works. That raises the question of the way in which we construct our work. Is it a question of complying with a standard?... Do you have to say to yourself, 'My work won't rub anyone up the wrong way?' I don't believe that's the role of art. Art has to "transgress". Even more so in this kind of society that shuts free and retrograde thought away in order to introduce religious politics.

Michèle Cohen Hadria: Let's move on to your performances that you staged in Tunis. You took three weeks to analyse the street. What method did you adopt in that upsurge of activity that followed the downfall of the regime?

Moufida Fedhila: I made it a rule to be in the street every day. There was always something happening in Tunis. The city was cordoned off. People assembled to make demands, to demonstrate... For the first time I saw Salafists praying in the streets. There was also the Labour Day holiday. And I was saying to myself, 'How can I make art exist in the midst of these social or religious demands?' Art had to be able to find its place there. In Tunis, creative work was only exhibited in galleries. And all these passers-by in the street weren't necessarily going to see exhibitions in a gallery. In Tunisia art is intended for an elite. I wanted to raise the question of the place of art in the public space of a society in transition, in connection with the political context. Just then we were experiencing stalemate. Tunisians believed that the Revolution, the arrival of a government, would solve their problems. Instead of that we witnessed interminable rows about the Constitution, the number of the seats in the Assembly, and so on. The main concern of these self-styled representatives of the people wasn't finding solutions, whereas things were urgent. I thought to myself that there must be a character similar to these heads of state that claim to save the country, and it could only be Superman! (Laughter). Superman has unlimited power, he can solve "everything"! He has something of the "Dear Lord" about him...

Michèle Cohen Hadria: How did people react to the symbolic ballot box you offered them?

Moufida Fedhila: Voting was something quite new for Tunisians. When I brought the ballot box on to Avenue Habib Bourguiba, they looked at it oddly and didn't know what to do: 'What do we do? Do we vote? Or don't we?' That performance filmed by the Al Tunisia channel created a sort of agora. Everyone clustered round and asked questions: 'what is it? A political party?' 'A demonstration to call for something?' Other people understood that it was an artistic act. But the majority of people didn't know what a performance was... it was the first time they'd seen one... Some people tried to put a stop to it. I'd brought along a text to explain the work. I was aware that what I wanted to do was new, and I wanted to give as much information as possible so that people could get into it. It was necessary to prepare the ground so that people would ask questions. Despite the introductory text, some people came to see me at the end and said: 'I didn't understand, if it's a party, can we have our membership card?'... But on the whole it passed off very well, as you saw in the video, one person didn't know what to think, but towards the end she decided to vote. That's what interested me. How we transform our behaviour, we become politically

aware, and we understand how to become the originators of our acts. Ben Ali had instilled this feeling of having no existence as citizens in Tunisians. My mother or I could have a member's card for his party without asking for it, and other people could go and vote in our names and give him our votes! My work latched on to that relationship of a citizen who decides wholeheartedly on his or her political choices. Through the gesture of voting, I wanted to restore that right, and "heal" those fractures as if we were licking our wounds...

Michèle Cohen Hadria: Did the fact that the performance started at the National Theatre of Tunis have a symbolic value?

Moufida Fedhila: Yes, because during the events that's where everyone met up. Starting from a cultural location – the theatre –, which also has a relationship with the political field, had this meaning. The street connects with people, and they don't all have access to art. At the theatre you have to pay for a ticket, you can't always afford to... For some people going to the theatre is not a necessity. But I wanted to raise the question of the necessity for art in society: It isn't only politicians who decide on our lives. Developing thinking, the way of conceiving the world that happens through art. If art remains in its ivory tower, it won't be understood.

Michèle Cohen Hadria: Was Avenue Habib Bourguiba a symbol too?

Moufida Fedhila: It also related to the events that had brought the people of Tunis out to argue and debate. For my second performance on the main square, behind the Casbah, it was very difficult to get permission because of the Ministries around it, I was only given it the evening before, whereas I'd spent a year preparing my performance! For me it was a revenge, for it's also a symbolic location of power. That's where the government's decisions are taken. And there I was offering a freer space to creative work. It's true that I invited the people to write the... Super-Constitution there (laughter).

Michèle Cohen Hadria: Were these elements from popular cultures, football, a Superman outfit, aiming at improved accessibility for the public?

Moufida Fedhila: Those forms suit me for their impact. It doesn't much matter what you think of what's around the sport, for me football represented life. I derived inspiration from the Monty Pythons and their humour. That magnificent sketch where Karl Marx arrives and gets worked up over a match with the philosophers from ancient Greece... and then, that sport does represent something, there's a ball and a goal... That would require a lot of explanation... During the 1998 World Cup, Ignacio Ramonet in an article entitled 'Planète football' in Le Monde Diplomatique dealt with this universal relationship to football... 'Football is the number one international sport. But it is indisputably more than a sport. Otherwise it would not arouse such a storm of contrasting feelings. 'A total social fact', the great essayist Norbert Elias called it. We could also state that it constitutes a metaphor for the human condition. For, according to the anthropologist Christian Bromberger, it shows up 'the uncertainty of people's individual status.

Michèle Cohen Hadria: Young people were actively involved, even girls in veils, everyone was conscious of the fact that it was interesting. I sensed a great yearning in

those Tunisian young people.

Moufida Fedhila: It took me some time to digest that performance because I'd derived a lot of energy from it. I didn't think that it would become so huge in the imagination of those youngsters. But there were people of all ages there. And so much energy! They'd run towards us: 'Wait for us! We want to have our capes!' As for me, by pushing them that far I'd achieved my aim. That 'I'm taking part!' showed they had a tremendous imagination. There's another element too, Tunisian humour. These are things you notice in the caricatures that circulate on Facebook, a tragic element treated in a tragi-comic way. I think it's their way of transcending a difficult political time.

Michèle Cohen Hadria: Super Tunisian was the first performance in Tunisian public space. But some people cordoned you off and prevented you from carrying on...

Moufida Fedhila: In the first performance we'd been attacked on the avenue by the civilian police. But in the performance on Government Square, those intrusions intended to break us up became part of the act. I'd written a text in Arabic and English to explain it. I'd recruited two actors who would appear towards the end. They had two boards, one blue, one red. On the blue one Gilles Deleuze's maxim: 'Créer c'est résister' – Creating is resisting. On the red one the motto of the Brazilian Football Club, Corinthians: 'Win or lose, but always as a democracy'. For a long time Brazil was under a dictatorship. At that period the movement was led by Socrates; shortly before the elections, the players wrote messages on their shirts urging citizens to vote, and had dared to raise a placard carrying the word 'Democracia'. I found that out afterwards. I asked my two actors to intimidate other people. Why? There are recurrent things in Tunisian society. Some people exert all sorts of coercions, censorship. Whether in the case of an individual, the police, someone holding power of some sort, they burst in and restrict other people: 'What are you doing here? Clear off! You've got no right to demonstrate on the street!' It was a new phenomenon for the citizen to be censored by someone else... What interested me was to show that in the euphoria of the revolution when everyone was feeling that they could at last decide, write things freely, censorship could arise again. I wanted to recreate that moment, make them aware of that danger. Other people reacted differently towards the two actors. They got angry, wanted to attack them. We came to calm things down and explain to them that it was part of the performance. The real was getting mixed up with the fictional. The most interesting thing was to let them experience that moment where you pass from freedom to censorship.

Michèle Cohen Hadria: You write 'the democratic illusion tends to destroy the political illusion and to destroy itself'. But what can we do without that democratic illusion? We're practically obliged to nurture that aspiration, even if it's often contradicted by political scandals... as in France.

Moufida Fedhila: That's the whole problem with democracy. What is democracy in our modern or ultra-modern world? ... It's more palpable in Tunisia or in Egypt where we see that in the name of democracy we're giving Islamist parties the right to exist. Otherwise we'd have been accused of dictatorship. What have they done with that right to take part in elections? They're shutting us in, confiscating our rights. One

example: we still don't have a Constitution, whereas it was planned in, and they should have stood down a year later. Well, they didn't leave. We're still waiting for elections, and we've had nothing. We're being led off course.
These problems are arising more or less everywhere. In Tunisia, it's more flagrant than in the western world... With regard to the ideal of democracy the question is: 'How can we do as little damage as possible?' We should think about it. The Ancient Greeks define the concept by theorizing about it in specific terms. Yet again, we come back to utopia. The thing that may work is perhaps trying to get close to utopia. Of course it can't be achieved. But democracy can't be achieved either, in my opinion. We just have an idea of it, we get as close to it as possible in spite of the intrusion of other interests and issues...

Michèle Cohen Hadria: In your second performance, the notion of citizen participation became clearer.

Moufida Fedhila: It was after that second performance that I received death threats. Yet it was in a gallery, not in public space. The idea was that Super Tunisian was deemed to follow the development of Tunisian society. But at that point we were experiencing a stagnation of hopes. There was incredible depression. And I wanted Super-Tunisian to appear as an anti-hero, as a fallen clown... I made out that he needed the strength of the people who would intervene in that performance *Super-Tunisian est dans le pétrin, il fait appel au hasard /Super Tunisian's in a fix, he's calling on chance.* Everything started with a throw of the dice. On its sides, each dice had numbers corresponding to events Tunisia had experienced. The number 20 (from 20 March, Independence Day), 23 (from 23 October, election day), 7 (from 7 November, Ben Ali's coup d'état), 14 (from 14 January 2011 and the uprising). I added the number 1 and a zero. The 1 for the decision-maker, the zero for all possibilities. The visitor entered a square drawn on the floor called the 'Free Speech Zone'. Only one or two were allowed there at a time. The others waited outside
the perimeter. The visitor threw the dice. And based on that he would formulate a thought, even a single word... to help Super-Tunisian at this difficult time... It's odd, some people got two consecutive 7s, and if they did they felt bad about it. If 7 is a lucky number for others, for Tunisians it is the number of misfortune, or the day of the coup d'état that sparked 23 years of dictatorship. Then I let them try again so that different numbers would prompt new ideas in their minds... But it all also spoke of our relationship to history: How do we rebuild ourselves today in view of that past? On all the placards there were messages about art, current events, criticisms directed at the Minister of the Interior, things that were sometimes very personal. Some people wrote a sentence, others a single letter, 'Time for love, time against obscurantism', 'Long live Tunisia', 'The ball is in my court'. A message in Arabic to the Salafists: 'You don't scare me' or 'Fe'dina' which means 'We've had enough', or 'I'm a free woman'; or 'A dog barks on a plane'... an artist wrote that. 'M'ala ghas'ra' which means stalemate, in relation to politics. Children did drawings too. There were a lot of people there that day. I sensed that thirst to participate in them...

Michèle Cohen Hadria: In your photograph portraits of Tunisians, people are wearing Super-Tunisian's cape, even this little grandmother with henna-dyed hair …

Moufida Fedhila: Yes, I wanted to discover a baker, a butcher, a schoolboy; the keeper of a mosque in Mahdia in their everyday lives...

Michèle Cohen Hadria: And the title, Fuck Democracy, Miracle Too? ...

Moufida Fedhila: Every democracy is almost something of a miracle, it's so difficult to achieve!

Michèle Cohen Hadria: Politics is really only a starting point in your work. Heading towards what?

Moufida Fedhila: I draw inspiration from it; because politics is recurrent, it's our everyday fare. But what interest me is individuals. Their way of...

Michèle Cohen Hadria: Resisting?

Moufida Fedhila: But also of living in the world poetically, as Hölderlin put it. For Heidegger: 'It is a question of fighting against ourselves, tearing ourselves away from everyday concerns, and in a leap transporting ourselves into the sphere of the poetry, which is not a simple means of expression, but the way by which the original powers of Being […] can reach us.' I also see in individuals a sort of passage taking place. The way in which they experience those moments... Beyond reality, for me it's about observing that sort of alchemy in them.

Michèle Cohen Hadria: Nowadays there is talk of a "pro-globalist ethic". So there is some hope. Between Egyptians, Tunisians and other Arab countries, communication circuits are possible.

Moufida Fedhila: You're drawing attention to an important point. In France, the Internet, social networks, Facebook, don't have the same importance as in Arab countries. That raises the problem of connections and of what is done in art. At present debates are starting in the cultural institutions, including one organized by Roberto Cimetta at the French Institute in Beirut. That meeting in Beirut which I took part in brought together fifty-five artists, cultural operatives, journalists, representatives of institutes, experts and members of the board of the FRC, members of the Istikshaf platform, from twenty-one countries. We considered the question of creating an art network and mobility for artists in those countries. Creating artistic exchanges in spite of the closures imposed through visas between Arab countries, the North/ South divide, so that art might become a force that counts. A cultural revolution is in progress through digitilization; what forces should be deployed so that art contributes to it, or even constitutes an axis for freeing those imposed boundaries? It isn't only politics that can make things evolve. How, through art, can we make people think, reflect about situations, and prompt participation through other expedients? Invent a creative force, bridges that didn't exist between artists from Bahrain, Jordan or Africa, through a stronger network. For what's attacked first in dictatorships is art, artists, intellectuals. How do we approach societies from the right side, to help them to develop differently. The more we multiply these exchanges, meetings, experiences, performances, the more that strength will become real. Those societies so much lack that strength of art. We're at the start of a political revolution, but what about the Cultural Revolution? A revolution in thinking is crucial; it's from it that everything starts.

Michèle Cohen Hadria: Tunisian artists have been directly attacked. There were major violations of works during the annual Tunis Spring session… How are these so violent iconoclastic forces to be confronted?

Moufida Fedhila: Never stop. It's the only way, I think. Still create, go on creating. And exist. Resist.