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Guest-Editor Note

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The present collection of essays on Algeria was conceived in 1998, after watching a program on *W* (alias *WTN*) in which Rachida spoke movingly about her family, most of whom were killed by the Islamicists and/or State police. Apart from extending a critical view of the unrest that is ripping post-independent Algeria apart to an English-reading public, *Algeriad's* principal objective was to reflect on what Wole Soyinka aptly called the "other open sore" of Africa. By no means all the issues are confronted and/or dealt with here, though the questions of colonialism, Islamism, terrorism are covered. Equally, the range of critical method, while not exhaustive, seeks to encompass politics, social criticism, critical method, deconstructive analysis, autobiography, and language.

It is envisaged that the collection, given its multi-dimensional objective in poem, painting, and narrative, will extend our knowledge of the Algerian crisis and introduce to both

Mustapha Marrouchi, who lives in Toronto, is the author of

Signifying with a Vengeance.

*His **Presence of Mind** is due in 2003.*

the general reader and student of culture a plurality of views of the current situation in that country and the world.

This special issue *Algeriad* is about the rise of Islamism, that complex and dangerous process by means of which many people lost their innocent lives. Both narrative and poem explore and ultimately, I hope, deconstruct the binary notion of Islamism/terrorism, as they operate in a society still searching for a way out of the impasse.

The collection examines the process by which, through shifts in positions, any given person can be de-authorized, eliminated, rendered *invisible*, and perceived as inconsequential, while others are valorized. The contributors, a team of writers, philosophers, feminists, poets, and painters, from different cultural, social, and ethnic backgrounds and positions, have had a difficult task in defining what constitutes the process of “crisis” from the varied individual and collective points of view, and then writing in a manner which might suggest issues that stand beyond the specific ones addressed here. That they have done so is a tribute above all to their ability to care *for* and *about* Algeria.

The approaches taken by these essays range from the social to the seductive, from the theoretical to the personal. In reading and re-reading them, I find myself witnessing a process of discovery. It is as though the civil war in Algeria was being converted into new concepts of the Self, of pain, of meaning, of validity, of life and death. The essays are densely interrelated. No introduction, short or long, can deal with the issues they raise. I wish, therefore, to let the reader discover for himself or herself the wide canvas these writers and artists paint. One thing is certain: the reader is made to rub his or her face in the dirt. And if writing cannot create for the writer a paradise or hell, it certainly makes survival possible. Writing is for these contributors a personal and public commitment and testimony to ethical and literary values.

I am first and foremost grateful to Kostas Myrsiades for giving me the opportunity to undertake this complex and important task, and who kindly accepted my idea about editing a special issue of *College Literature*. Izmer Ahmad who, after reading the manuscript, fathered a painting which he aptly called “Garden” for the cover. (Ironically, under French occupation, there was in Algiers, which was known at the time as “le petit Paris,” a public park called “Le jardin d’essai: une espèce d’évasion avant d’arriver à la plage”). Ahmad worked long and hard to translate the content of *Algeriad* into visual terms. Dramatic in scale, the painting makes the idea of *Algeriad* seem foreign, rendering it beautiful yet malevolent. Through the juxtaposition of opposites such as beauty and horror, Ahmad aims to engage the viewer and/or reader in conflicting emotions and revulsion, fear, and fascination. In doing so, he creates what Edward Said has aptly called the “logic of the irrec-

oncible.” Or, to put it otherwise, the image of a man pouring petals of roses out of a bucket flows from Ahmad’s imagination with its unfolding bound to his brush where both painting and writing are twin products of the same memory. It is the completed image, however, that reawakens the memory of the reader. Otherwise, why would a painting’s title, the only liaison between words and visual form, come to mind long after the artist put the finishing touches to a painting? At best the title is a bridge that allows the viewer/reader to *negotiate* an entry into the language of a painted image; it attempts no more than to sum up or evoke certain associations with memory, be they personal or collective.

To Izmer, I say thank you. Wayne Tompkins and Aida Khouildi undertook the laborious task of translating, reading, and proofreading the manuscript in its entirety, and Sherbanu Mamujee, the equally intensive job of word processing a bulky, disorderly muddle into a semblance of form. They all worked extraordinarily hard to see the project to completion. It is difficult to imagine its success without their skill and dedication. Always patiently and humorously, they guided me as we went through hundreds of pages of often overwritten and inchoate prose.

I would also like to acknowledge as well the assistance of Abdelkader Djmaï, Hassen Bouabdellah, Emmanuelle Persson (*Europe Images International*), Yves Jeanneau, and Catherine Ventenat (*Les Films d’Ici*), Eric Prenowitz, Lynne Willcock (*WTN*). To them I am genuinely indebted. Last, but above all, my thanks and gratitude go to the authors for their generosity—not just in giving permission to print their works, but for the generosity of spirit which prompted them to write on the subject in the first place.

I have a special intellectual and personal indebtedness to Fran Devlin, who gave of herself with remarkable generosity in translating, reading, and proofreading the manuscript in its entirety and for removing almost everything onerous from a copyediting process that was nothing if not exacting. I am at once pleased to recall illuminating conversations with her on the crisis of Algeria. Her perspicacity and tenacity played a sustaining role in this project. I hope that the written word and distilled record of my gratitude will prove enjoyable to her kindness to me.

Carolyn Bryson bore with me throughout the four years of work on this issue. Her humor, unconditional support, and strength made the whole thing easier to live through, for me, and I am profoundly grateful. Further she has the love and respect she deserves from a humble servant.