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Writing Trauma: Assia Djebar's *Le Blanc de l'Algérie* and "L'Attentat "

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The Algerian people have been engulfed in a massive, collective trauma since the days of the 1831 French conquest of Algiers masterfully fictionalized in Assia Djebar's *L'Amour, la Fantasia*, through the Algerian war of liberation in the 1950s and 1960s, and the 1990s brutal massacres. While the responses of colonized societies including Algeria to colonialism have "occupied a continuum from absolute complicity to violent rebellion, all of which can be seen to be post-colonial," independence from French colonial rule has not given the Algerian people much respite from violence (Ashcroft 26). To the contrary, in the 1990s, Algeria found itself mired in a civil war like situation. During that decade, between an estimated 80,000 to 120,000 of Algeria's 28 million citizens were killed by fundamentalist and anonymous armed groups, and at least 18,000 people disappeared (Bedjaoui 15). Among the victims were numerous writers; the murderers singled out those who spoke, those who said I, those who spoke out in defense of democracy. Their mission, as the narrator in *Le Blanc de L'Algérie* puts it was to, "kill the one who is on the path: the path of many languages, many lifestyles, the one who stays on the fringe, who walks, unconcerned about himself or each day invents his own truth" (200). This text —an homage to of three intellectuals: the psychiatrist Mahfoud Boucebci, the sociologist M'Hamed Boukhobza and the playwright Abdelkader Alloula—serves as a commemoration and an inscription of an imaginary dialogue with the dead. Importantly, it seeks to establish historic truth, and it is a curative form of writing as it is aimed acknowledging and facing trauma, as putting a sequence of traumatic events into words can be as the first step in coming to terms with them.[1] Post-terrorism Algeria is like a

[1] As indicated by its title, the project can be seen as a fictionalization of mourning for Algerian writers who were murdered including Mouloud Feraoun, Tahar Djaout, Youcef Sebti and Jean Sénac, but also those

blank page: the deaths of the murder victims are unexplained and unaccounted for, much like the color white which can take over space, thoroughly obliterating people, objects and the world around us, as in a snow storm. While in Muslim culture, the color white represents the color of mourning, it can also stand for forgetting and obliteration. The color of trauma, it symbolizes the calm that comes after the storm—peace, infinite white—the blankness and silence that follow violence and/or death.

According to Benita Parry, it is "now impossible to overlook a strong impulse in the contemporary postcolonial discussion to find a middle ground between the terms 'domination' and 'oppression', to define colonial relationships as generically ambivalent, and to represent colonial locations as always and necessarily the site of dialogue" (90). Trauma, given its relation to an abysmal wound, can be seen as a breakdown in dialogue on all levels. Djebar's *Blanc*, I would argue, represents an attempt to reestablish dialogue and to address the problems faced by a postcolonial society. In order to fictionalize these three senseless murders, the author engages in an imaginary dialogue with the dead, recalling moments spent together and recreating the victims' final hours. As Djebar said in an interview, dialoguing with the dead in French allowed her to come to terms with their untimely death: "I tried to make them come to life. I said to myself that there had already been a long tradition of dialoguing with the dead [. . .] Thus, I wanted to write this dialogue with the dead as though they were there... (Russo 235). In *Blanc*, post-mortem writing is crucially marked by the *non dit* which mark traumatic blanks, or a "pulsion towards silence", which paradoxically does not exist in itself given that it is also a speech act, that of saying nothing. Silence is " . . . still to speak. Silence is impossible. That is why we desire it" (Blanchot 11). Hence, the style of writing is fragmentary, incoherent, and amnesic; and yet it is filled with words as it gives body to the collective trauma of an entire society terrified by an unspeakable amount of violence. It is through the process of fictionalization of real life dialogues that post mortem becomes possible

who were not murdered, including Albert Camus, Mouloud Mammeri, Kateb Yacine, Jean Amrouche, Malek Haddad, and Frantz Fanon.

through usage of the French language. [2] The narrator creates a dialogue that goes beyond any actual dialogue between a man and a woman, a gendered dialogue, which is always encumbered and necessarily limited due to the cultural exigencies of sexual and linguistic propriety which marks the complex nature of relations between men and women in Algeria. *Blanc* can thus be seen as an attempt to converse fully with fellow male writers since this is not possible in real life: “A woman and a man in Algeria, both writers moreover, what do they say to each other? They should have so much to say to each other, and, precisely for that reason, they say nothing!” (*Blanc* 140). It is only once death has abolished distance and feelings of propriety, that speech breaks free, and that a full dialogue between opposite sexes becomes a possibility, this time in the local idiom, the Arabic with its flattened dentals. And yet, this is an imagined dialogue, a dialogue with ghosts if not a monologue within the author who effortlessly resurrects her peers, filling the unalterable white of their presence. It appears that immediacy in terms of absolute presence is only possible retrospectively through the writing process itself. Asked about the use of writing, Marguerite Duras once said that writing is “a way of keeping still and speaking at the same time,” which makes it very close to the rhythm of speech (*No more* 22). In *Blanc*, the female narrator hints that the contradictory nature and complexity of writing as a way of expressing, proclaiming loudly yet saying nothing and being still is not dissimilar from the complexities of speech in present day Algeria, especially with regards to communication between opposite sexes, which remains hampered by restrictions of propriety, tradition, and taboos.

While in real life, communication between writers from opposite sexes is doomed to failure, the writing process itself can, however, create a *semblance* of successful communication, mutual respect, understanding and solidarity between men and women, men and women novelists. Paradoxically, writing is both peaceful and violent as it aims

[2] While the French language in *Blanc* is seen as an acceptable means of communication between herself and her male peers, in actual life, usage of the French language proves dissatisfactory, fake, and pompous, as the narrator ponders: “So, dear friends, before, did we find it so difficult to have an open dialogue? Our French was on parade, a ceremonial uniform…” (20). It is only once death has abolished distance and feelings of prudishness, that a genuine dialogue can come into being in dialectical Arabic.

at both overcoming and embracing the color white, by occupying the space of epistemic violence, and replacing the color red, the color of blood and violence, as well as black, the color of anger. Writing is inherently violent: ". . . writing is per se already (it is still) violence: the rupture there is in each fragment, the break, the splitting, the tearing of the shred—acute singularity, steely point. And yet this combat is, for patience, debate (Blanchot 46). In this context, the narrator evokes the death of female writers, including Anna Gréki, Taos Amrouche and the journalist Josie Fanon: "I have assembled these three silhouettes today because I miss these women: alas, what a women's literature we would have brought into the world, from the braziers filled with embers and ashes, and the patios packed with whining children!… (*Blanc* 177). Again, the resurrection of these novelists remains a hypothetical endeavor, a construct of the mind. Instead of a female group of writers writing in solidarity, writing as a celebration of life and the living, writing has become a solitary and anguished enterprise filled with metaphors of anger, fire, and death. Epistemic violence is at the heart of Anna Gréki's poems published in 1963 in *Algérie, capitale Algers* with its powerful metaphors of bodily mutilation, colors and motions symbolizing violence. [3] And yet, graphic violence is quasi absent from *Blanc*, which contains only few, matter-of-fact accounts of violence, in particular graphic yet cursory descriptions of the victims' bodies. For instance, the sociologist's corpse is described as follows: "The body like that, guts ripped out, chest open, then finished off from behind, with a blow to the back of the neck!" (*Blanc* 60). Similarly, Alloula's

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[3] In a poem entitled "The Reason for anger" (Les raisons de la colère), Gréki literally "writes" violence:

> *Like a naked bird and the color jumps*
> *At my throat anger ocean color*
> *Blood anger turned the color of high tide*
> *Like a whip lashing the eyes black anger*
> *Cuts off my breath, cuts off my*
> *Arms and legs. Knives of fire. Stones cast*
> *At my body. Anger beats upon my wounds*. (167-8)

violent death is summed up in a few words, uttered in the passive voice: […] three bullets were fired, two of them hit him in the head" (*Blanc* 75). Similarly, Tahar Djaout's murder is briefly related: "One day in May at dawn, Tahar Djaout would be killed pointblank by bullets" (188). Though murder silences the voice, it cannot silence the desire to write. Quite the opposite. Death can spur or reinforce a desire to do write. Asked what she wants to do when she grows up, Djaout's daughter Kenza replies: "I want to write! Write, like my father!" (193).

Violence is at work within the writing process itself for it becomes a necessity on the part of a writer who escaped such a tragic fate. Writing serves as a commemoration of the lives and works of intellectuals, who continue to live as long as they are being written about. Even several years following their deaths, the narrator remains haunted by her friends' presence. To her, they remain alive as their shadows and ghostly presence continue to haunt her. For a writer such as the late Abdelkader Alloula, the narrator obstinately insists, there is no death. The victim becomes a hero, immortalized by both his death and his work. A premature death merely interrupts a life's work that continues to live on in people's collective memory, and that is relayed by the narrator-turned-scribe.

In a chapter titled "La mort inachevée", the narrator wonders whether death is unfinished on account of its violent nature, because it occurred unexpectedly. Life suddenly wiped out leaves the survivants in denial and in a state of incomprehensibility, and with feelings of survivors' guilt. A life ended abruptly, through murder or illness is difficult to accept, as it forces survivors to confront trauma in the shape of their own mortality. As the narrator leaves the building after visiting her friend Malek Haddad on his deathbed, she is met by bright sunshine, realizing in a flash that she is destined to live and live this day to the fullest, as she recalls: "To tell the truth I have to say that it was the sun—so bright, so vertiginous—that assailed me with a kind of violence. The truth was that in extraordinarily egoistic way my heart was beating with the acute understanding that I, in that instant standing up and not lying down, reader that day to wander around the town, and not nailed to a hospital bed, I was going to live. I was alive, I wasn't going to die, at least not that day; not perhaps the following day, nor the day after that!…

(*Blanc* 136). Her exclamation conveys a sense of elation and acute happiness, and joy of living that comes with the realization that every minute in life is precious and must be savored accordingly, and that life experienced in the intensity of its instantaneousness.

In *Blanc*, the narrator's sense of selfhood is anchored in memory, the recollection of a traumatic killings, and writing but also in the realization that life is a gift and deserves to be lived to its fullest. Writing is the work of a voice-scribe, the transcription of a solitary voice in search of other voices, dead or alive: " […] let the word find a rhythm for itself within the self, a cavalcade, a murmur, listen to that voice, that strange voice for the self alone, from where does it rise, whose voice is it in truth?" (131). It is not the writer who speaks, as Blanchot puts it in *The Writing of the Disaster*, "It is not you who will speak; let the disaster speak in you, even if it be by your forgetfulness or silence" (4). Thus, the origin of artistic creation and of writing in particular remains mysterious, an omission that –eerily—recalls the rekindling of violence and the anonymity of the murderers. As the narrator wonders, "how did in Algiers—no longer the white but the black city—how did the transition of yesterday's executioners to those of today come about? (*Blanc* 185). Writing has come under threat of extinction in a country where "writers flicker out, like lamps: often enough surrounded by honors", in the prime of their success (131). Writing aims at bringing back the voices of loved ones, by capturing their voice and tone, often failing to do so, as it fails to account for the roots of violence. In 1990s Algeria, the identity of the perpetrators of the massacres is unclear. In Djebar's fiction, the murderers are portrayed as faceless, cloaked only in youth and blood. During that decade Algeria became a country where young killers appeared out of nowhere, a country where blood splashed abundantly, to the point where it replaced *insouciance* and laughter. While Blanc can be read as an implicit acknowledgement of the impossibility of depicting collective trauma through language in a logical and organized manner, this is is precisely what Djebar does in her collection of short stories entitled *Oran, Langue morte*.

Oran, Langue morte is divided into two parts. The first part, "Algeria, between Desire and Death", features four short stories and one fairy tale. The second part,

"Between France and Algeria", comprises one narration (*récit*), one short story and a postscript, entitled "Blood does not dry up in Language". Nearly all of the texts refer to Algeria's recent history, in particular the Algerian War of liberation (1954-62) — euphemistically alluded to as "les événements"—and post-colonial Algeria. The book reflects the history shared by Algeria and France, a history marked by 132 years of colonial rule, a long and grueling war of liberation, independence from colonial rule, and, finally, the deadly cycle of senseless post-independence violence.[4] The texts in *Oran, langue morte* function like a palimpsest: they ponder the consequences of a long, conflict-ridden relationship between Algeria and France on a personal and poetic level, and show how colonial and post-colonial violence continues to affect people in both Algeria and France, Algerians, *pied noirs* and Algerians in exile.

The short story "L'Attentat" in *Oran, Langue morte* echoes the project started in *Blanc*. In a nutshell, it is a *mise en abîme*, a concise, fictionalized, reporter-style like illustration of the more poetic *Blanc*. Written in Paris in October 1996, the text's dateline suggests that Algeria had become a life-threatening place for writers and intellectuals, many of whom left the country in the 1990s. "L'Attentat" documents the circumstances and the aftermath surrounding the murder of Mourad, a French teacher in Algeria, who in the face of constant, serious death threats, goes into hiding for a year where he turns into a freelance journalist, writing weekly articles using a pseudonym. Mourad is married to Naïma, a teacher of Arabic. While this is an Algerian and not a mixed French/Algerian couple, their professions make them potential targets for terrorism.[5] In addition, Mourad is a teacher and school inspector of French at a time when the use of French is

[4] For an analysis of thematic violence in *Oran, langue morte*, see Marie-Claire Chatelard's article entitled "L'Algérie entre la violence et la parole. Réflexions sur *Oran, langue morte* d'Assia Djebar," and for an analysis of the themes of women and space, in particular, see Mina Aït'Mbark's article "Voix féminines multiples dans *Oran, langue morte*: Représentation d'une (re)conquête de l'espace par les femmes."

[5] On August 6 1994, for instance, the *Groupe islamique armé* (GIA) threatened to destroy all schools and universities and prohibited teaching in Algeria.

discouraged in a society freed from colonial rule and eager to establish Arabic as the only official language. As a result, Mourad and Naïma are viewed as highly subversive elements in a society terrorized by radical, Islamist groups such as the *Groupe islamique armé* (GIA), the *Armée Islamique du Salut* (AIS) and the outlawed *Front Islamique du Salut* (FIS).

The couple has a teenage son who had been suffering from scoliosis but is recovering from successful surgery and able to walk on crutches for the first time in his life. Scoliosis can be seen as a metaphor for the country, which is still mired in violence but slowly starting to perceive a hope for change and a less violent society. Mourad and Naïma are overjoyed that their son is on the mend from his debilitating illness, and Mourad decides to move back in with his family, again signaling hope that things will change for the better. He does not yet resume teaching on a regular basis, but stays mostly indoors and continues writing articles for several local newspapers on a weekly basis. The text conveys an acute sense of urgency. Life must get better, the violence must be stopped, and journalists must continue to write even in the face of death. Thus, Mourad wakes up his wife in the middle of the night, urging her to read the article, he will deposit at his daily early in the morning.

In the text, Mourad refuses to give in to trauma, *angst*, and intellectual paralysis instead expressing an activist urgency to act. In his long, polemic, politically and emotionally charged analyses which are pieces of textual violence, Mourad criticizes the Algerian government and speaks out against fanaticism and governmental inertia in the face of daily massacres on the streets of Algiers and Oran, and throughout the country. While Mourad lives in hiding, he proudly signs his articles with his name, thus exposing himself to the possibility of being found out and murdered. He proudly insists on the necessity of speaking out: “But someone must say things out loud and clearly, very loudly! This time it is I, Naïma, don’t be mad at me, later on it will be someone else and, then someone else again!” (146). Clearly, Mourad’s writing goes against the grain. Accusatory and violent in nature, he argues *against* what he considers to be amiss in the post-colonial Algerian society he lives in. In his long, polemic, vehement analyses of

society, he writes *against* those in power, against the religious fanatics, against silence and inertia. In his opinion pieces, Mourad tries to explain why his country has fallen into such a desolate state. He mentions the assassination of the newly elected president, Mohammed Boudia who was assassinated in Anaba on June 29, 1992, a murder, which gave rise to a cycle of violence. However, the text is elliptic, and does not reveal in detail what type of political program or agenda Mourad advocates to counter what he considers to be amiss. These blanks can be read as traumatic blanks or refusals to fully analyze the situation.[6]

After living in hiding for more than a year, Mourad only lives two weeks in which he can enjoy the newly found peace and tranquility of family life, the narrator Naïma tells us. One morning, as the couple gets in their car to deliver an article, Mourad meets his death. At an intersection, he stops and gets out of the car to buy a copy of the daily newspaper when two young men appear out of nowhere. One of them shoots Mourad who falls to the ground dead, a newspaper in one hand and clutching the envelope containing his article in the other hand. Violence is thus directed at both a human being as well as at the written word, which is massacred as well.

Naïma who had stayed in the car waiting for her husband to return from the kiosk is lucky to escape unscathed as the second gunman, a fifteen or sixteen-year-old teenager, points his gun at her face. Luckily, it misfires. Naïma's high-pitched scream pierces the air when she sees her husband crouched on the street, his body lifeless. She finds herself quickly surrounded by neighbors who pull her away from the corpse. Relatives flock in,

[6] Readers can assume that Mourad criticizes the government's lack of political reform and its inability to contain terrorism and to even try to protect its citizens from the mass murders carried out at random at the hands of religious fanatics. Under the leadership of Liamine Zéroual, members of the former *Front Islamique du Salut* (FIS), including party leaders Abassi Madani and Ali Benhadj who had been condemned to twelve years in prison by the military tribunal of Blida in July of 1992, were placed under house arrest in September of 1994, a decision which Mourad may condemn in his articles. He might also speak out against reforms undertaken by the government such as the new school system, which privileges the teaching of classical Arabic over French instead advocating a democratic society and a modern school system marked by tolerance, cultural and linguistic and cultural plurality. On December 17, 1996, the government's *Conseil national de la transition* (CNT) unanimously adopts a law generalizing the Arab language. See Bernard Philippe and Nathaniel Herzberg for a chronological synopsis of political events in 1990s Algeria.

making sure she is not alone for weeks to come. Meanwhile, Naïma receives frequent visits from colleagues of her husband's, as well as visits from other women whose husbands were victims of terrorism. Female solidarity as a source of comfort and solace helps to come to terms with senseless acts of violence. Eventually the limbo stops and life goes on, even though death keeps lurking just around the corner. Forty days after the death of her husband, Naïma goes back to work, teaching Arab language and literature. One day, she hands back a test on which one of her teenage students accuses her of miscalculating, claiming he has eighteen and half points out of twenty and not eighteen. When she retorts, "eighteen, you have eighteen points and that is not enough for you?" in dialectical Arabic, only pronouncing the number eighteen in French, he aggressively shoots back, in Arabic, challenging her: "Do we have a French teacher or an Arabic teacher?" (*Oran* 158). Shocked by this verbal violence uttered by a fifteen-year old—a teenager the same age as the one who shot Mourad—she relives the traumatic murder scene in a flashback and comes to realize that the killer might very well have been one of her own students. Close to a nervous breakdown, she talks to her students about her husband's death, explaining that he was one of the best French teachers in the country and asking the young boy why he objects to the French language being spoken in class.[7] Interestingly, her students agree to discuss their sense of collective trauma: for the first time, they break their stubborn silence and start opening up about the daily violence, explaining that school used to be a haven but has now turned into a potential death trap as they are afraid to enter the building for fear of being gunned down by fundamentalists. The episode suggests that it is up to Naïma to take up Mourad's credo of educating and

[7] The theme of linguistic ambiguity which is repressed by the collective psyche of the Algerian people, also surfaces in *Le Blanc de l'Algérie* where physical violence is also reflected in a linguistic breakdown, both of which are linked with identitary ambiguity. For instance, the narrator ponders that languages and dialects no longer peacefully coexist as they did during the novelist Taos Amrouche's childhood, marked by the coexistence of the Italian, Sicilien, Tunisian dialectical Arabic, French and the Kabylian Berber languages. Rather, they have been transformed into antagonistic sites of violence that imperil an individual's sense of selfhood. For instance, the narrator recalls a scene in which the psychiatrist Mahfoud treats a patient for depression. The patient only spoke in classical Arabic, refusing to speak in either French, berber or dialectical Arabic. Unable to overcome his own linguistic complexities, Mahfoud advises him to be "Algerian only" and comes to the realization that he does not know what it means to be "Algerian only" (*Blanc* 33).

opening up a dialogue with the younger generation in order to pave the way for future peace and tolerance. If Mourad felt it was his civic responsibility to speak out against violence, Naïma now feels compelled to believe that it is her responsibility to breach the silence surrounding victims of violence. As a schoolteacher, Naïma must strive to establish a dialogue with her students. It is her responsibility to analyze the sociological and political situation and to explain the roots of violence to her students so that it can be eradicated some time in the future: as a teacher it is her responsibility to face, give voice and deal with trauma, be it personal or collective.

The postscript of *Oran, Langue morte*, entitled "Blood does not dry up in Language," suggests that writing cannot unmake the past, nor can it restore the dead to life. However, the written word is important and the dead can speak, as shown by the posthumous publication of Mourad's article, which is faithfully delivered to press by his wife. What it can and must do, however, is give voice to trauma, put it in rational, explainable terms, rather than ignore it. Mourad's determination to accept death if it allows him to express his opinions freely, reflect this realization. Thus, he is determined to critically analyze the reasons of violence: "I hold the article in my hand, in its envelope. It has not yet been delivered to the newspaper; it will be; absolutely. It will be published. Everybody will read Mourad tomorrow; tomorrow, even if he will be buried" (150). Though Mourad is gunned down as suggested by his very name, which seems a deliberate choice of name as it hints that he will die in the future, considering the phonemic similarity between Mourad [murad] and mourra [mura], meaning "will die" and the letter d perhaps standing for demain [tomorrow], his words survive since his article does go to press. As Mireille Calle-Gruber points out, "Oran rhymes with death [mort] … Oran is the name of death: death is named Oran" (157). Clearly, Mourad has a sense of foreboding of his own imminent death; his sense of urgency to get the article safely delivered to the editor suggests that he is in fact, very much aware that his writing might be his death sentence. While his wife is trying to persuade him not to sign his articles or at least to write from the relative security of a hideout in the countryside, he vehemently objects to running away even at the cost of his life: "Let it be! Do you not

understand: I will live, I will die here, at home, in my country! (*Oran* 143). Naïma, however, is less brave than her husband as she finally decides to take her son and leave the country for two years, to go as far away as possible to bypass the void left by Mourad's death.

Mourad's death underlines that writing and its concomitant assertion of authorship is a subversive and dangerous act. An affirmative act and an act of resistance, writing eventually becomes both an expression and an elixir of life a reflex of survival. As long as Mourad can write, he is still alive. Tragically, writing in the sense of expressing one's true feelings and opinions and making them known to the public ultimately kills.[8] Clearly, death and writing are inextricably linked in a society that forbids freedom of expression, and writing as an affirmation of freedom is lethal.[9]

In conclusion, it is interesting to note that "L'Attentat" does not solely portray acts of violence that are directed primarily against women—as is the case in most of Djebar's other texts which depict women's struggle to assert themselves as individuals in a patriarchal society. Rather, it shows that atrocities are directed against Algerian society as a whole, uniting ordinary people in their efforts to live "normal" lives despite rampant inflation, economic hardship, political instability, and terrorism.[10] Mourad's death is by no means a single occurrence but stands for thousands of other brutal murders committed by terrorists, underlining that personal and collective history and trauma are inextricably linked. Thus, both *Le Blanc de l'Algérie* and the short stories in *Oran, Langue morte* document post-colonial violence and the rise of Islamist fundamentalism in 1990s

[8] On December 3, 1994, Saïd Mekbel, editor of the daily *Le Matin*, is assassinated in Algiers.

[9] On November 19, 1994, the government censures the private press, including Arab language daily *El Khabar* and French language daily *El Watan*.

[10] Djebar analyzes violence in *L'Amour la fantasia* (1985) which describes the conquest of Algiers and the subjugation of the Algerian population by the French colonizer and in *Ombre sultane* (1987) under the guise of corporal punishment as on of the two main female characters, Hajila is beaten by her husband, for venturing outside the apartment without his permission. The theme of domestic violence also appears in *Vaste est la prison* (1995) where the narrator, Isma, is beaten by her husband after confessing her infatuation for a younger, single man.

Algeria. As Djebar notes in her collection of essays *Ces Voix qui m'assiègent*, both works are documentary in nature and both deal with death (237). I would argue that they are both therapeutic projects: chronicles of both collective and individual trauma. Fictionalizing trauma, writing about killing and death allowed the author to come to terms with the untimely death of thousands of her Algerian nationals and peers, some of whom were close friends of hers.[11]

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[11] *Oran, langue morte* is the book I'm most personally attached to, because all seven of its novellas are documentary . . . Nearly all the facts related in the novellas are true. I wrote them immediately after having heard them orally in the street, during chance meetings, after short teaching stints . . . all or nearly all of them are about the violence of the 1990s. They originated as first-hand retellings, then from chance encounters during my stay in Paris in summer 1996. (Humphries 15)

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