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Khalida Messaoudi, Elisabeth Schemla
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Khalida Messaoudi, Elisabeth Schemla : Unbowed: An Algerian Woman Confronts Islamic Fundamentalism (Critical Authors Issues) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Unbowed: An Algerian Woman Confronts Islamic Fundamentalism (Critical Authors Issues):

8 of 9 people found the following review helpful. Unbowed: An Algerian Woman Confronts Islamic FundamentalismBy Daniel Pipes, Middle East Forum, PhiladelphiaBorn in 1958, a red-headed, highly-educated and fiercely secular Berber, Messaoudi has established herself as one of Algeria's bravest and most articulate speakers of truth. In a series of interviews with a French journalist, capably translated into English, she presents a pungent, invaluable first-hand exposé of the Islamist challenge in her country. Its every-day texture imbues her account with a feel for living in an Islamist tyranny-such as the incident of a primary school teacher who requests students to bring in corks for a practical experiment. When the children oblige, it turns out there is no experiment-only a trap; the teacher asked for the corks to find out whose families drink wine, then he launched into a violent diatribe against their miscreant parents for not living by Islamic law. A freethinker from an early age (as a teenager, she decided against prostrating herself during prayers, instead adopting a yoga-style position), Messaoudi does not mince words. She despairs about the descent of Algeria into what she calls "fundamentalist barbarism" and argues that the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS), Algeria's main Islamist organization, has "absolutely all the classic ingredients of totalitarian populist movements." Contrary to most Western analysts of Islam, she discerns an "Islamist International" along the

lines of the Communist International. In a particularly powerful analogy, she states "The veil is our yellow star" (even if she does stretch the analogy too far in arguing that the FIS obsession with women is "exactly like" Hitler's obsession with Jews). Were the Islamists to take power, she fears they would "clear the country of all the people who really bother them," which she assumes will be a very large group indeed. Like many Algerians, Messaoudi blames the Islamist rise in large part on the purposeful scheming of the dictatorship that ruled the country from independence in 1962 until the crisis in 1992. She argues that many of its steps, from introducing the Arabic language in schools to not cracking down on FIS, eased the Islamists' path. Messaoudi has her foibles, to be sure, sympathizing with Saddam Husayn and asserting that Washington was "completely responsible" for Scuds falling on Tel Aviv. But she emerges from these pages as a highly attractive intellectual, a heroine made necessary by the horrors of her country's recent history.

Middle East Quarterly, June 1999

16 of 16 people found the following review helpful. A Riveting Account of the Oppression of Women in Algeria. By Bridgette Belasli. Written as a dialogue between journalist Elisabeth Schemla and feminist leader Khalida Messaoudi, this book details the heartbreak and the triumphs of being female in a country that has bowed down to the pressures of Islamic Fundamentalism. Messaoudi discusses her life in an intelligent, honest, and passionate manner as she details what it was like to grow up Algerian and female. She also explains the many players and political groups who have tried to control the direction of Algeria over the last thirty years. Most importantly, she brings to life the terrible reality of life in Algeria, where women have been betrayed and stripped of their rights as people by the government under the Family Code and then enslaved, terrorized, and murdered by the misogynistic enemies of that same government. Messaoudi also discusses the ongoing tension between the Berber culture and the Arab culture of Algeria and its effect on the problems there. This is the first book I have read, in English, that gives such a clear accounting of the political climate of Algeria and of the lives of women there.

7 of 7 people found the following review helpful. An angry patriot talks. By Customer. This book consists of a series of conversations between the journalist Elisabeth Schemla and the Algerian feminist Khalida Messaoudi. The conversations are organized into chapters according to topic. It is most interesting for the general reader when Messaoudi is describing her childhood and education. Later chapters focusing on her political struggles require the reader to have extensive background knowledge of modern Algerian politics in order to make sense of them. The repeated use of abbreviations in the book tends to be rather annoying for readers who aren't familiar with Algerian politics. They are explained in a glossary at the end. If you want an insider's view of Algerian politics of 1980s and 1990s, you must read this book. If you are simply looking for tales of an ordinary woman's life (or even an extraordinary woman's life) in Algeria, you'll need to look elsewhere.

In 1993, a handwritten envelope arrived in Khalida Messaoudi's mailbox. In it was an official communique announcing that she had been condemned to death by the Islamic Salvation Front. This letter came after a series of threats and an attempt on her life in retaliation for her role as a leader of the feminist and democratic movements in Algeria and a fierce opponent of Islamic fundamentalism. Messaoudi did not flee from this threat by seeking refuge outside her country. Instead, she went into hiding within Algeria, where she continues her fight for emancipation and independence from religious extremism. Her battle continues today with the same goal—to restore in Algeria what she describes as "the basics of dignity"—a woman's right to pursue her studies, practice a profession, make a living, marry and divorce freely, and walk the streets without a veil. Readers of *Unbowed* will have the unique opportunity to sit in on a series of intensely personal conversations between Messaoudi and renowned journalist Elisabeth Schemla. In their discussions, Messaoudi gives a first-hand perspective of the situation in her homeland. She remembers the Algeria of her youth, recounts the changes that have gradually consumed her country, and laments the horrifying realities that face Algerian women today. She also tells her own story of terror, despair, hope, and determination.

From *Publishers Weekly*

One of the most courageous, vigilant and eloquent women's rights activists in Algeria, Messaoudi has lived under a fatwa, or death sentence issued by Islamic fundamentalists, since 1993. She has rather miraculously survived several assassination attempts and in 1997, was elected to the National Assembly. In 1995, the former math teacher was interviewed extensively by French journalist Schemla, and those conversations are compiled here in question-and-answer form. They comprise a lucid and riveting account of the recent violent upheaval in Algeria. Messaoudi supports constitutional democracy in a country currently torn by a totalitarian military regime (the National Liberation Front) on the one hand, and, on the other, a fundamentalist organization (the Islamic Salvation Front) that has killed tens of thousands of Algerians in an attempt to overthrow the government. Messaoudi proves an intelligent, candid and good-humored speaker, noting briskly that Islamic extremists view women as "evil," relying on skewed readings of the Koran. She points out that the systematic rape and murder of women who, like Messaoudi, live alone, wear makeup, and/or appear in public without a veil, are, in some way, the logical fallout of The Family Code passed by the supposedly secular FLN government in 1980. These laws state, among other things, that women are not legally considered adults, and cannot choose or divorce their husbands. Implicit throughout this important, illuminating book are the dangers of politically empowered religious extremism to the lives of real people. Copyright 1998 Reed Business Information, Inc. "Compelling and thought-provoking."—*International Journal of Middle East*

Studies "A lucid and riveting account of the recent violent upheaval in Algeria. . . . Implicit throughout this important, illuminating book are the dangers of politically empowered religious extremism to the lives of real people."—Publishers Weekly "Messaoudi has established herself as one of Algeria's' bravest and most articulate speakers of truth. . . . She presents a pungent, invaluable first-hand exposé of the Islamist challenge in her country. Its everyday texture imbues her account with a feel for living in an Islamist tyranny. . . . She emerges from these pages as a highly attractive intellectual, a heroine made necessary by the horrors of her country's recent history."—Middle East Quarterly
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