

Simone de Beauvoir on Violence and Politics

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Simone de Beauvoir addresses several explicit instances of the political use of violence. She discusses the violence of occupation (*The Blood of Others*, *The Mandarins*, "An Eye for an Eye," *Force of Circumstance*); the violence of colonization ("In Defense of Djamilia Boupacha" and *Force of Circumstance*); and the ethical responsibility of individuals considering the political use of violence to counter occupation and systemic oppression (*The Blood of Others* and *The Ethics of Ambiguity*). In each case, she argues that the instrumental use of violence to achieve political goals – by states, groups, and individual actors, legitimately or not – is an affront to the human condition of ambiguity. Yet, while she claims that the use of violence denies ambiguity by freezing both violator (tyrant/subject) and violated (thing/object) into ossified positions, Beauvoir still does not take a wholly pacifist stand. She says in *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, for example, that violence can still sometimes be ethically defended in movements for liberation (EA 97), and in "An Eye for An Eye," she justifies the execution of a Nazi criminal by the French state.

Beauvoir says less about the international organization of power through violence, such as how states organize to deploy violence by building arsenals of weapons, by investing in technology to initiate and perpetuate the destruction of communities and individuals, and by training armies of individuals in the use of such weapons and methods of mass destruction. When she does speak of the concentration of weapons and armies by states attempting to assure domination or assure a certain outcome, she emphasizes the paradoxes haunting any struggle for sovereignty and the inability to predict or control actions set in motion: "The more widespread their mastery of the world, the more they find themselves crushed by uncontrollable forces; though they are masters of the atomic bomb, yet it is created only to destroy them" (EA 9). In all of her writings, she argues that whenever violence is deployed, the outcomes are always unpredictable, except that every action contains an "element of failure": "no action can be generated for man without it immediately being generated against men" (EA 99).

Often, theories of violence, such as those found in the Hegelian, Kantian, and Utilitarian traditions, discuss the uses and abuses of violence primarily as an instrument. They attempt to theorize ways to counter or control its unethical use and deleterious effects. To Beauvoir's mind, however, not only must we acknowledge the unpredictability and uncontrollability of violent actions and counter-actions, we must also recognize that violence is a fluid and affective force, as present in our everyday lives as in what we would identify as an explicitly political sphere. She acknowledges that violence is present not only on the national and international scene, but also in the natural world, language, sexuality, and all interpersonal relationships. So, rather than simply deploring or condemning violence, Beauvoir demonstrates that we have to understand that violence delineates and is manifest in all our relationships and representations. Linguistic violence, for example, will never be completely eliminated.

Beauvoir shows that violence is embedded in our bodies and muscles, in language, speech, and writing, in intimate and distant relationships, and in processes and forces in nature. Violence is, for her, an immanent potential within our human and earth-bound predicament: we are always exposed to each other, connected as much by potential cruelty as by generosity or kindness. She argues, however, that although violence seems intractable, we must seek to minimize its pernicious contributions to political and structural oppression.

Within Beauvoir's theory of violence, we see that ontological conditions are themselves political. What we say is true or natural, Beauvoir shows to be a result of a political struggle over interpretation. Nature's cruelty, our servitude to the reproduction of the species, the fact of finitude and mortality, the precariousness and fragility of life and the vicissitudes of chance – none of these portend any "natural" justification for structural and political conditions of inequality or oppression. Human relationships of oppression situate us as systematically and unequally exposed to violent injury and premature death, and as unequally able to nourish a creative and flourishing life. These inequalities are never justified by ontology, for ontology itself is for Beauvoir a result of political practices.

Beauvoir's work helps us see, and then to reimagine, forms and practices of violence that are taken for granted as inherent, unchanging, ontological, or necessary. She notices, for example, how violence is gendered in "everyday" forms of sexism, as well as in physical acts of violence against women and other oppressed and politically vulnerable subjects. She condemns the political use of natural conditions to justify relationships of oppression such as in Nazi ideology, colonial claims to superiority, or capitalist boasts of the "survival of the fittest." It is in noticing and theorizing these intersections – among instrumental, ontological, structural, and affective workings of violence – that we can see the contours and implications of Beauvoir's political theory of violence articulated most strongly.

In this chapter, I focus on specific instances in Beauvoir's *oeuvre* where her unique contribution to the study of violence and politics is demonstrated most aptly. I offer brief interpretations of three key passages/essays: the "Biological Data" section of *The Second Sex* (1949); "An Eye for An Eye" (1946), her essay on the 1945 trial of Robert Brasillach, who was executed for treason by the French state for publishing a column identifying Jews in hiding during German Occupation; and finally, "In Defense of Djamilia Boupacha" (1960), where she discusses the case of an Algerian female militant

captured, raped, and tortured by French police. Studying these pieces together, we see Beauvoir theorizing the politics of violence in its various manifestations – ontological, instrumental, structural, and affective – and on multiple levels – personal and (seemingly) distant. Each of the ways Beauvoir theorizes violence has political meanings and implications that I discuss here.

Linking Beauvoir's reflections on ontological, instrumental, structural, and affective aspects of interpersonal and global violence, I argue that Beauvoir offers us a distinctive political theory of violence. She recognizes both its contingent and organized manifestations, and she faces up to our failure to predict the irruption and outcome of violent actions. Beauvoir does not preclude the possibility of an ethical use of violence for political ends, but she urges us to take collective responsibility for our world by struggling against personal, structural, national, and international violence. While Beauvoir insists that we avow ontological realities such as plural non-sovereignty, body as flesh and bodily difference, and the unpredictability of action, she also shows that ontology is itself always political in that it is the accumulated result of political struggles over how we see and interpret our world. The fact that violence, as much as generosity and friendship, connects us to each other, deepens our responsibility to engage in efforts to create more equitable political conditions for life's flourishing and the affirmation of freedom for all.

1. Violence as Nature and Construct

When, in *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir turns to "biological data" to ponder the origin of sexual difference, she demonstrates that linguistic violence is always present in the political interpretation of biological "facts" – in the marking and categorizing of two sexes and their capabilities and potential. The deadly violence that ensues within, upon, and through reproductive practices does not necessarily give rise to judgments concerning the perpetual existence (or not) of violence, does not reveal the secrets that could "explain" sexual difference, and does not and should not direct or dictate social organization or political meaning. Beauvoir's analysis draws our attention to physical violence as a fluid and affective force in nature, as well as to how violence operates in and through language and representation, again as a fluid and affective force, to identify and fix how we "see" nature. Violence is thus theorized as *both* nature and construct: violence in natural processes, violence as the brutal forces of time and space, and the violence manifest in the continual sacrifice of individuals to species perpetuation are all facts of existence. What is most damaging are the political meanings, and here Beauvoir is most attentive to gendered meanings, that circulate and are said to be justified by nature.

In the social contract theory tradition, for example, theorists "return" to the idea of nature, or to a construct of the state of nature, in order to legitimate their specific version of the social contract and to discern the origins of current political and social practices. Whether and where these thinkers identify the existence and manifestation of violence in the state of nature legitimates a state that will control people's violent proclivities (Hobbes, Locke) or bring out their better nature (Rousseau). Thus violence itself is theorized as pre-political in that we seek to escape conditions of "natural" violence via political solutions. Beauvoir challenges this practice of legitimating social organization through a return to an imagined natural state, particularly when it

authorizes exclusion and inequality. Moreover, she alerts us to the intersection of violence and politics by insisting that "all authority is violence" and "no one governs innocently" (EA 108). She also urges us to think more skeptically as well as more creatively about how the construction of an imagined state of nature authorizes political constructs.

Asserting that "humanity is constantly in the making" (TSS 44/LDS I:70) Beauvoir reminds us that we are a "becoming," that "*possibilities* have to be defined" rather than being reduced to the past or to the present (TSS 45/LDS I:72). She invests in the future anterior, a future that has yet to take place, to argue that the world *could* look otherwise. She says that what our capacities *might* be will "manifest themselves clearly only when they have been realized;" "when one considers a being who is transcendence and surpassing, it is never possible to close the books" (TSS 46/LDS I:72).

We are thus rightly cautioned by Beauvoir to foreswear making judgments that look to nature or ontology to confirm a "*natural* hierarchy of values" or that engage in "psychophysiological parallelism" (TSS 45/LDS I:71-2). Studies that "confuse a vague naturalism with an even vaguer ethic or aesthetic are pure verbiage" (TSS 45/LDS I:72). So, when we see violence in nature, we must tread carefully in reaching conclusions about what such violence means for human relationships, and our human relationship to the facticity and materiality of the world.

We can, according to Beauvoir, nevertheless see the force of violence in nature, even at the very bottom of the species ladder. For example, at lower levels of development, living organisms are mostly slaves to maintenance of the species, dying immediately after coitus, or after fertilization. Death comes rapidly after the "next generation's future has been assured" (TSS 32/LDS I:52) and it happens mechanically. Violence is ever present, but never employed by conscious agents. As we move up the species ladder, more ugly events ensue with increasing resistance by individuals against the species, but no conscious agent or actor, other than the force of species preservation, can be held responsible. But we can see in Beauvoir's language that even she is lured by the temptation to assign volition. She says, for example, that after the queen termite lays her last eggs and becomes sterile, she is "pitilessly massacred." In bee and ant matriarchies "males are intruders that are massacred each season." Male ants are "killed" or they "starve to death" after being refused entry to female encampments. The fertilized female ant has no better fate, having to "dig herself into the earth alone" and "die from exhaustion," or if she manages to make a new colony, she is "imprisoned for twelve years laying eggs ceaselessly" (all quotes from TSS 32/LDS I:52). The female spider "devours" the male after coupling. The praying mantis "assassinates" her spouse. The male "attacks, palpates, seizes her and imposes coitus on her." Sometimes "he has to fight off other males" (all quotes from TSS 33/LDS I:53). The drone bee "that catches the queen in her wedding flight crashes to the ground eviscerated" (TSS 33/LDS I:52). When in heat, fish and cetaceans "isolate themselves and become aggressive toward other males" (TSS 37/LDS I:59).

Even though Beauvoir herself employs language that makes it seem as if agents are consciously enacting violence, she explicitly cautions against interpreting too quickly or broadly from these observations other than to realize that "in nature nothing is ever completely clear" (TSS 38/LDS I:60). To see "in these facts the harbinger of the 'battle of the sexes' that sets individuals as such against each other

is just rambling" (TSS 33/LDS I:53). She insists that assigning *human* meaning to the facts of nature reveals the most egregious anthropomorphizing. Although she says it is seems true that the male of several species "imposes himself on [the female]," and that "it is he who *takes* her" and "she is *taken*," "the male does not *do* violence to the species, because the species can only perpetuate itself by renewal; it would perish if ova and sperm did not meet" (TSS 35/LDS I:57; my emphasis). The *processes themselves* are affective and active, propelling and impacting other processes and energy flows.

To Beauvoir's mind, to read *human* desire and consciousness into processes of complex and multi-directional biological relationships illuminates not the "battle of the sexes," but rather the opposite: the political and social violence that results when nature is said to legitimate constructed familial and social arrangements. For example, because the male is *seen to be* more violent and aggressive in nature, human boys are schooled in the lessons of violence and girls are not. But there is plenty of counter-evidence that challenges the certainty of male violence. Certainly, feminine and masculine activities in nature do not simply or cleanly map on to the opposition of "passivity and activity" (TSS 38/LDS I:60). Nevertheless, social situations often assume these oppositions:

Much of masculine behavior arises in a setting of potential violence: on every street corner skirmishes are waiting to happen: in most cases they are aborted: but it is enough for the man to feel in his fists his will for self-affirmation for him to feel confirmed in his sovereignty. (TSS 343/LDS II:83)

In contrast, "these conquering actions are not permitted to the girl, and violence in particular is not permitted to her:" girls "are banned from exploring, daring, pushing back the limits of the possible" (TSS 343/LDS II:82). Beauvoir reminds us that to argue that nature justifies sexual hierarchy is total nonsense: males and females are not even "always sharply distinguished" and the division into sexes is often "absolutely contingent" (TSS 38/LDS I:60). "Biological data take on [only] those values the existent confers on them" (TSS 47/LDS I:75).

So, what can we conclude about the presence of violence in nature? Beauvoir says that "in truth these facts cannot be denied: but they do not carry their meaning in themselves" (TSS 46/LDS I:73). For different types in nature, the "active operations" (*not* passive female and active male, but two active operations) of "maintenance and creation" realize the "synthesis of becoming" differently (TSS 38/LDS I:61). How we respond to and act within the constraints of biology – in this case the violence that arises from our being enslaved to reproduction in different ways for the male and the female – becomes a political struggle. We can confirm or deny ambiguity and potential freedom, but we cannot eliminate the fact that violence exists in nature and perpetuates itself in the reproduction of all species. The meaning that biological data is given, the very partition of beings into two distinct types – male and female, in hierarchical arrangement – is itself an act of linguistic violence that has physical manifestations.

Beauvoir's acknowledgement of conditions of violence in the reproduction of the species signals her unwillingness to simply reject or condemn violence outright. Instead, she points out that violence is a force that is harnessed when we identify or even challenge its existence, such as when authors turn to biological data to justify the "battle of the sexes," the confinement of women to the home, women's maternal

instincts, the rapacious and aggressive "nature" of men, or as we see in sections 2 and 3 of this chapter, the superiority of one race or civilization over another. Beauvoir's theorization of violence as a politicized ontology, as well her attention to how violence is intrinsically at work in the partitioning of the world by language and representation, makes her even more attentive to the many manifestations and kinds of violence we find in more extreme, more physical, and more obviously political circumstances.

I now turn to one of those circumstances in which she is willing to justify state violence to demonstrate our collective commitment to condemning oppression, in this case conditions that make genocide possible. Under these conditions, individual agency and structural context combine to create a particularly deadly situation for certain individuals said to be "naturally" inferior. In her essay "An Eye for an Eye," Beauvoir justifies the violence of the French state in the execution of Robert Brasillach, but not for the reasons offered by the state. In her essay, the violence of language, of structural oppression, and of the political marking of certain bodies to further oppression are what justify the state's decision to execute Brasillach. Beauvoir contests the state's reason for execution (treason) and argues instead that Brasillach's crime is the denial of ambiguity, a denial that demeans the conditions that make it possible for Jews to exercise public freedom.

2. "An Eye for an Eye"

In "An Eye for an Eye," first published in 1946 in *Les temps modernes*, the journal she and Jean-Paul Sartre founded in 1945, Beauvoir reported on the trial of Robert Brasillach, which she attended in January 1945. Brasillach was a journalist, an elite alumnus of the *École Normale Supérieure*, and a recognized intellectual and fervent anti-Semite who, in addition to serving as editor of the fascist paper *Je suis partout* from 1935 to 1943 (during which time he condemned individual Jews by pointing them out to state officials), also published highly regarded fiction, literary criticism, plays, and poetry. Brasillach was accused of treason by the French government, found guilty, and executed.

Beauvoir explicitly refused to sign a petition submitted by French intellectuals urging a pardon for Brasillach. Her refusal to sign the petition for clemency (though forty-nine of her compatriot intellectuals, Camus among them, did so) registered her judgment that Brasillach should be executed. However, she wrote her essay to clarify that he should not be executed for the reason given by the French court, which was that Brasillach had committed treason. Instead, for Beauvoir, his crime consisted of a particularly egregious form of violence. Regarding people as body-objects and denying their subjectivity and future, he had reduced human beings to things.

According to Beauvoir, the French state's narrative of Brasillach as collaborator and traitor obscured both his violence against individual Jewish victims and the larger structural violence in which his acts played out. In contrast, Beauvoir sought in her essay to foreground both the suffering of the victims and the violence of the denial of their conditions of freedom. She did so by illuminating Brasillach's acts of violence against particular named Jews. Brasillach had "claimed the right 'to point out those

who betray us' and had used it freely; under his editorship, the staff of *Je suis partout* denounced people, specified victims, and urged the Vichy Government to enforce the wearing of the yellow star in the Free Zone" (FC 28).

Beauvoir argued that the French state *must* execute Brasillach in spite of the fact that all forms of punishment, including both individual vengeance and abstract justice, fail to restore the reciprocity originally violated by the crime. What is special about these circumstances in Beauvoir's eyes, so special that the instrumental violence of the state can be justified? Brasillach's actions denied already vulnerable individuals and groups of people any possibility of affirming their own relationship to the world, thus denying their freedom. When groups of people, through a variety of forms of violence including both mechanisms and institutional processes (substantive economic inequality, racial and sexual discrimination, blocked access to citizenship, and so forth), are systematically rendered body-objects, they are open to dehumanization, their bodies are especially vulnerable, and the possibility of fostering collective freedom is denied. These political conditions serve to enhance Brasillach's responsibility in Beauvoir's eyes: there is no compensation "for the abomination he causes to erupt on the earth" (*Eye* 257).

The situation in which Brasillach's violence played out, in which oppression was so prevalent, thus served to magnify, rather than mitigate, his responsibility. While Brasillach's anti-Semitism was despicable and his refusal of freedom was clearly an ethical violation, it only became possible for his anti-Semitic actions to result in the deaths of particular Jews within political conditions whereby Jews were already isolated and targeted. By identifying the location of Jews in this particular political environment he made it possible for them to be rounded up by authorities, deported, and killed. Brasillach's instrumental acts of violence (the writing and publication of essays) multiplied the violence already existing as structural relations of oppression under conditions of Nazi Occupation, itself a violent system of inequality propped up by arguments rooted in false claims about nature. Acting as an ultimate sovereign within these systems of violence made Brasillach, in Beauvoir's judgment, guilty of heinous crimes.

As tyrant, as pure transcendence, as ultimate sovereign, Brasillach sought to control and manipulate events and people, thinking he alone could determine the outcome of the future and impose his meaning, in this case Nazi meaning, on the world. Beauvoir stresses repeatedly that freedom aims at "an open future," and that only "the freedom of other men can extend [the ends toward which we project our freedom] beyond our life" (*EA* 71). As she puts it, "every man needs the freedom of other men" since only "the freedom of others keeps each one of us from hardening in the absurdity of facticity" (*EA* 71). Brasillach denied his own ambiguity by acting as pure transcendence; he denied the ambiguity of his victims by treating them merely as things, or as body-objects with no legitimate access to the future; he denied the ambiguity in nature by claiming and fixing a hierarchy of bodies; and he denied the ambiguity in acting by assuming that Nazi control over the future was certain.

In her willingness to judge Brasillach as guilty of committing an egregious crime against ambiguity and to argue in favor of his execution, Beauvoir again affirms her stance that violence can never be extracted from the human condition or from politics. She also accedes that in this case violence should be employed instrumentally, even though such an act itself violates ambiguity. Brasillach must be executed, Beauvoir

argues, in order to affirm revenge, enact solidarity, and show our commitment to a different future. Affirming that it is with Brasillach's victims, dead or alive, that she feels solidarity, Beauvoir writes: "they [Brasillach and others at *Je suis partout*] had demanded the death of Feldman, Cavallès, Politzer, Bourla, the deportation of Yvonne Picard, Pèron, Kaan, Desnos ... if I lifted a finger to help Brasillach [by signing the petition for writers asking for clemency for the defendant], then it would have been their right to spit in my face" (FC 28-9).

Beauvoir argues that we are responsible to ourselves and to others to expand the scope of freedom for all by collectively altering the political conditions in which our acts (unpredictably) play out. She sees individuals and collectivities exercising a dangerous and radical freedom to act, and thus create the world, outside of any moral standards. Without nature, law, or history as a guide, we are radically free, but also supremely responsible. Thus, we have a daunting responsibility to, and for, the lives and freedom of others. When confronting others, we should not seek to control them; nor should we see our own freedom as a zero-sum game in competition with the freedom of others. Instead, the meaningful exercise of our own freedom depends on acting to make possible the kind of political conditions that lessen or eliminate violence, including the structural violence of oppression.

Thus, when Beauvoir posits ambiguity as constitutive of the human condition, she complicates the conditions under which we identify violence by making it clear that violence is inextricable from the context in which it occurs, and is linked to our collective responsibility to enhance conditions of freedom. Theorizing violence in this way, Beauvoir asks us to think not only about the ethical realm of the responsibility of individuals but also more explicitly about the political conditions in which people act and in which ontological, structural, and instrumental acts of violence play out and affect the world and others in ways that can never be predicted or controlled.

I turn now to a final case to illustrate Beauvoir's political theory of violence, one in which she was a key player. We see that here she enacts her own strong sense of individual responsibility for furthering the cause of freedom on behalf of oppressed others by taking on the case of Djamila Boupacha. Beauvoir's reading of, and personal intervention in, this situation demonstrates the several and interrelated ways she understands violence in politics.

3. The Case of Djamila Boupacha

In June 1960, Beauvoir published a short editorial in *Le Monde* called "In Defense of Djamila Boupacha" and then expanded on this piece to include it as the preface to a book by Gisèle Halimi recounting Boupacha's ordeal. Boupacha, a female Algerian militant accused of planting a bomb to register protest against French colonization, was tortured and raped by French officials in an effort to extract a confession. Although there was extensive evidence in France of the use of torture as a systematic practice in colonial Algeria, as well as the increasing militancy and resistance of the Algerian population, the French chose to ignore their complicity in the organized violence of colonization. Beauvoir, who at this time was quite well known and well regarded in French intellectual circles, put these issues center stage in her public intervention into Boupacha's case.

As Beauvoir recounts in her autobiography (*Force of Circumstance, Part II: 1952–1962*), the war in Algeria took up a growing place in her consciousness and her politics from 1957 onward. *Les temps modernes* published exposés by French soldiers as early as 1957, and continued publishing several articles and editorials denouncing torture conducted by the French in Algeria and denouncing colonialism *tout court* (FC 89). In *Force of Circumstance*, which she was writing in 1960 and published in 1963, she recalls the period of 1957 as the time she realized the great and growing extent of violence that manifested in the relationship between colonizers and colonized. As a structural relationship, colonialism is itself violent. Instrumentally, the French occupiers exercised violence on the bodies of the Algerians. Through discourse and claims to “scientific” and “natural” proof, the French justified their colonial superiority, imposed their cultural and religious values, and made the colony in their own image. Moreover, French in the homeland were in a violent relationship with the Algerians through specific acts of complicity – looking away, continuing with everyday life in apathy, and disavowing their role in maintaining and perpetuating violence as well as acts of torture.

Beauvoir theorizes these complex conditions of violence, and also offers many specific examples of French complicity: the *pied noirs* “lynched anyone they could get their hands on;” the “press had become a lie factory;” the “vast majority of the French people” “failed to realize the depth of their racist attitude” (FC 87–8). As she recalls, “in 1957, the broken bones, the burns on the faces, on the genitals, the torn out nails, the impalements, the cries of pain, the convulsions, they reached me, all right” (FC 89). As Beauvoir describes it, France’s role in Algeria was structurally, institutionally, and personally deeply violent, and for pointing this out, Beauvoir was labeled as “anti-French” (FC 90).

In 1960, when Gisèle Halimi (Boupacha’s lawyer) contacted Beauvoir to call her attention to the specific case of Djamila Boupacha, Beauvoir seized the opportunity to make her own intervention. While she does not directly justify the counter-violence of the FLN (*Front de Libération Nationale*), in her writing on the case, Beauvoir takes the agency and revolutionary activity of an individual female militant, Djamila Boupacha, seriously in its own right. Beauvoir makes it obvious that the French exercised a specifically gendered instrumental form of violence on Boupacha – forcing a bottle into her vagina – and that her rape and torture was not an isolated case. Beauvoir does not provide the context as to why or how Boupacha became a member of the resistance, but she does repeatedly highlight Boupacha’s agency in her self-assertion of her right to personhood, dignity, and freedom. Most important, Beauvoir demonstrates how Boupacha moves beyond the violence of her own induced shame to political agency in expressing her violation and demanding it be redressed. As Beauvoir puts it, in spite of being left in a state of “abject traumatic shock after the savage treatment she had received,” Boupacha possessed the courage it took to make a clear demand: “I have been tortured. I insist on a medical examination” (DB 12).

As Beauvoir recounts it, Boupacha’s resolve initiated a series of events. She persevered with her case in spite of intense harassment and the duplicity of medical examiners and psychiatrists who sought to discredit the evidence of rape and torture (another form of violence against Boupacha) and refused to work with police authorities who offered to drop charges against her in exchange for the withdrawal of her accusations.

Despite these obstacles, Boupacha's case was brought to the attention of the French public with the help of Beauvoir, a special committee organized on Boupacha's behalf, and her own attorney. Aided by Boupacha's determination and resolve, the case wove its way through a state bureaucracy exercising its own kind of bureaucratic violence in its determination to cover up evidence, lie about every level of involvement, and protect all representatives and agents of the colonial apparatus. In 1962, upon Algeria's independence and under the conditions of the Évian Accords, all charges against militants were dropped and the Boupacha case was ended without her torturers ever facing justice.

What is remarkable about her analysis, in addition to emphasizing Boupacha's tenacity and agency, is Beauvoir's insistence that moral indignation is not an appropriate response to the vast bureaucracy that condones and hides torture. As Beauvoir puts it, "in a war of this sort morality as such has no place" (*Djamila Boupacha* 1962, 19). Revulsion against this form of suffering does nothing; it lacks "concrete reality unless it takes the form of political action" (DB 20). In her final paragraphs she condemns the "willing and facile grief" of the French over "past horrors" such as "the death of Anne Frank" (DB 20). Instead, she calls on the French to not "content [them]selves with a mere token of horrified sympathy" (DB 21) and thereby align themselves with "our contemporary butchers rather than their victims" (DB 20). Echoing Césaire's argument in *Discourse on Colonialism*, Beauvoir sees contemporary colonial violence as much the same in both practice and motivation as that practiced by the Nazis. Likewise, she concludes that just as sorrow and moral indignation failed to defeat fascism, collective political action, probably including acts of violence, will be necessary to counter the violence of colonization and occupation.

4. Conclusions

Thinking about these three pieces together, we can conclude that Beauvoir contributes a political theory of violence that recognizes the antinomy of all action. This theory laments but acknowledges our inability to eliminate some forms of violence from our existence, as linguistic violence is always present in representation, in our relationships, and even in nature as an affective and fluid force. She also outlines a theory of judgment wherein even physical violence might be justified in the struggle against conditions of oppression. Although Beauvoir insists that the violation of ambiguity is an ethical affront, to think violence politically demands that we struggle to act, as individuals and collectives, to affirm ambiguity but recognize that we are bound to fail repeatedly. We must act, but we will not know and cannot determine the outcome in the present, and failure to achieve our goals is always likely. Ironically, this unpredictability and uncertainty in politics makes us more, rather than less, responsible for trying to affirm ambiguity, struggle against oppression, and minimize the tragic effects of violence.

As we have seen, Beauvoir refuses easy answers on the question of violence in politics. Beauvoir emphasizes the contingency and intractability of certain forms of violence as well as the open-ended becoming of processes in nature. At the same time, she reveals the violence enacted by fixing and determining these relationships and the role of these discourses in structuring hierarchical political arrangements that

themselves can lead to physical forms of violence. Her writing in *The Second Sex* on biological data supports subsequent chapters wherein she presents the lived experience of women and the everyday violence that women and other oppressed subjects must confront as themselves the consequence of structural conditions that situate women as the "other" and legitimate this ordering with reference to the discourses of biology, history, psychoanalysis, literature, and myth. The legitimating violence of these discourses serves as foundation for the (seemingly) mundane and ongoing violence of oppression, which, as Beauvoir attests, is not authorized by scientific data. The biological data, as she presents it to us, offers a picture of change, variation, open-endedness, contingency, and un-decidability. The data does not show the male as active and the female as passive, or the male and female in hierarchical relationship to each other.

Any guidance for making judgments concerning violence that Beauvoir offers confirms her stance against oppression. Oppression is that which denies collective and individual freedom in the cutting off of possibility for the future. The key word here is *possibility*, since as Beauvoir envisions it, the future is never certain or guaranteed. No relations in the past or present predict this future, as unpredictability, antinomy of action, and open-endedness all are central concepts in her writings. Yet, what Beauvoir does offer as ground is that the future must be open to each individual and to all of us collectively. Since freedom for Beauvoir is always to be experienced collectively (freedom has no meaning when we are alone) and we can only secure freedom for ourselves by enabling freedom for others, the future is something we create together. It is to be produced and not assumed. The grave crime committed by Brasillach, and for which Beauvoir argued that he should be executed by the state, was his assumption of sovereignty over the future, his assumption that it would be in the image of the Nazi party, which led him to determine the future for all by marking it on the bodies of vulnerable others.

In her writing on the Boupacha incident, she likewise argues that the violence of colonization can be judged by its determination of the future for some and against others. In this case too, the violence manifested itself on the very bodies of the colonized, and particularly on the raped and tortured body of Djamila Boupacha. Bringing the bodies of oppressed victims into view, as Beauvoir does in both the Brasillach and the Boupacha incidents, is a strategy that demonstrates ontological, instrumental, and structural violence as fluid and affective, all at once. We see the violence in how bodies are politically determined within struggles over intelligibility and naming; we see the instrumental use of violence by individuals, groups, or the state on the bodies of the oppressed; and we see that the implications of this violence are enhanced by the structural conditions in which this violence takes place. Such structural conditions are themselves based on the violence of marking some bodies as superior, and deeming some relationships, cultural practices, or ideologies as more advanced, better, or privileged. It is in response to such conditions and such events that Beauvoir is willing to legitimate the use the violence, in the case of Brasillach by the state, and implicitly, in the case of Boupacha, by the FLN.

In all, Beauvoir offers us a political theory of violence that invests in a future that moves beyond but is not predicted by the present. For Beauvoir, this is a future that we can only produce collectively. Politically, the effort must be directed to affirm ambiguity and freedom as against conditions of inequality and oppression, and to minimize the tragic effects of all violence.

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