

critical discussion of these problems, see Margaret A. Simons (1983). Passages from the Simons article are included without quotation marks or citation in the introduction to the most recent edition of *The Second Sex* (Bair 1989, xxii).

3. In fact Linda Singer has argued, in a ground-breaking 1985 article that Beauvoir's "gynocentric" feminism is an "unacknowledged source" of the postmodern discourse "of 'difference' of deconstruction." According to Singer, by "taking the insights of existentialism seriously with respect to its denial of a supervening perspective and its affirmation of the situational character of discourse, Beauvoir begins the project of writing the other side, of giving voice to the discourse of otherness" (Singer 1990, 324-25).

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14

Beauvoir and the Algerian War: Toward a Postcolonial Ethics

Julien Murphy

Simone de Beauvoir's coauthored book on decolonization in Algeria remains relatively obscure. The 1962 *Djamila Boupacha: The Story of the Torture of a Young Algerian Girl which Shocked Liberal French Opinion* (Halimi and Beauvoir 1962), finds its importance in calling attention to Beauvoir's writings about the Algerian war (1954-62). The war marked a political turning point for her. I argue here that the Algerian war made Beauvoir an engaged intellectual and the book marks this transformation in the canon of her work. Its insertion in a Beauvoir bibliography presents interesting questions concerning her involvement, her relationship to French colonialism, and her activism in behalf of a twenty-one-year-old woman, Djamila Boupacha. By coauthoring the book with Boupacha's defense attorney, Gisèle Halimi, and participating in numer-

ous activities on Boupacha's behalf, Beauvoir used Boupacha's situation to bring to international attention the plight of Algerian rebels and the atrocities of France. She wrote a famous essay for *Le Monde* on Boupacha's case, organized and headed a political action committee in her defense, and decided that a book should be written about her. By linking her fate with that of Boupacha, who became famous from the book, Beauvoir took up the liberation struggles of her time in ways that challenged her own philosophy of freedom.

Beauvoir's support for the decolonization of Algeria was consistent with her views of freedom in *The Ethics of Ambiguity* (Beauvoir 1980), published before the war. Of all of the existentialists, she alone had written an ethics by 1954. After her *Ethics*, her radical politics of liberation continued to evolve as illustrated by the choices she made in support of Algeria and the meanings they held for her. A close examination of her thoughts on Algeria in her autobiographical writings and essays reveals a new context for understanding her notion of freedom and aids an important re-reading of Beauvoir's middle period (1954–63). Moreover, the radical freedom found in these writings provides a powerful tool for analyzing postcolonial societies. I shall argue here three points. First, the war was catalytic for Beauvoir's political consciousness, much as World War II was for her lifetime companion, Jean-Paul Sartre. This is not to suggest that Algeria marked Beauvoir's first political act: she had already published a political novel, *The Mandarins*, which won the Prix Goncourt Award, and she was a founder of a major political journal, *Les Temps Modernes*. Rather, Algeria provoked Beauvoir's first acts of political advocacy against colonialism.

Second, the theme of decolonization in Algeria is often missing from scholarly accounts on Beauvoir, and its absence alters how her work is read and understood. Beauvoir's position on Algeria is eclipsed in writings about French intellectuals and decolonization as well. This is unfortunate because Algeria served as a key moment in Beauvoir's political formation, one that would extend her political insights to postcolonial politics. But her writings on Algeria are significant for another reason as well. When seen in the context of her *Ethics*, they present a radical analysis of her war activities and suggest a postcolonial ethics. In particular, a critical reading shows the practical ethics by which she lived and responded to the Algerian war, an ethics not vulnerable to common criticisms of philosophical humanism.

Third, I argue that there is a radical notion of freedom implicit in

Beauvoir's Algerian writings and that it is more nuanced than the discussions in her *Ethics*. While her concept of freedom has often been interpreted strictly within either left Hegelianism or Sartrean existentialism, it affords much broader and more radical interpretations. It is quite interesting to interpret it in light of feminist ethical theories that stress the interrelatedness of human beings and postmodern theories, Derridian deconstruction in particular. One can find a deconstruction of identities within Beauvoir's writings from this period, afforded by her gender, class, and race analyses. The sense of freedom that emerges after such interpretations offers a view of freedom more problematic and better able to address the complexities of postcolonialism.

Historically, the Algerian war marked the end of imperial France (Lipietz 1991), the last major act of French decolonization, and the collapse of the French left.¹ This last event, which will be explained later, resulted in French intellectuals such as Beauvoir struggling to find if not a political foothold, at least political allies. The war began as an anticolonial uprising and was never a declared war, but it ended French colonialism, which had been deeply rooted in Algeria by the time of Beauvoir's birth in 1908. Some writings, including some on Beauvoir, persist in referring to it as the "Algerian conflict," the "Algerian crisis," or the "colonial problem" (Smith 1978, 9), even though Beauvoir clearly regarded it as a war. French colonization had begun in Algeria as early as 1830, with the Algerians putting up armed resistance until 1871. After that, French colonization in Algeria displaced the Arabic language and many Muslim traditions with French institutions, and many Europeans settled there.

Algeria's rebellion against French colonialism in 1954, more than a century after the initial French conquest, began by rebels waging violent attacks on European colonists and posed no small threat to France's stability as a major power. With its vast land, a population of nine million, primarily Muslims, but also Berbers, Jews, and one million European settlers, its strategic military locations, trading capacity, industry, and the recent discovery of oil, Algeria was integral to the French empire, or so the French government believed. Among the causes of the initial Algerian uprisings in 1954 were difficult economic conditions, a surge of Algerian nationalism, and a growing disparity of wealth between the European colonists or French nationals born in Algeria (called *pid nairs*) and African Algerians. The Algerian war, which would last until the signing of the Evian Treaty in 1962, produced profound effects in

France. France was still suffering from the Nazi occupation and its more recent loss of control over Indochina as a result of the colonial uprising there (1946–54).

Algeria would be Beauvoir's first and most explicit battle for French decolonization, one that would make her painfully aware of the ambiguities of her own position within the colonial structure in ways not experienced in her travels to Algeria before the war to vacation with Sartre and to lecture on existentialism. She had experienced the Occupation a decade earlier and had been deeply affected by it. Like France in World War II, Algeria was an occupied country. However, this time France was the racist occupier, and it took seven years of war to finally end French colonialism.² Beauvoir claimed that living in France in the 1950s when it was strongly opposed to ending colonialism was a worse sort of occupation. "Yes, I was living in an occupied city," she wrote during that time, "and I loathed the occupiers even more fiercely than I had those others in the forties, because of all the ties that bound me to them" (Beauvoir 1965, 384–85). Decolonization in Algeria coincided with an important moment in Beauvoir's life. Her work had achieved a sort of maturity and she was approaching age fifty. She had published numerous books, including *Le Deuxième Sexe*, which made her a somewhat controversial figure in France, and translations of her books gave her prominence abroad. For her, the age of fifty represented the beginning of, if not old age, its discrete preface. She was keenly aware of the steady lapse of her youth and the privileges it had brought her, and she was taking a longer view of history and her place in it. The 1950s were a critical period for her. Her autobiography of the period indicates an implicit radical perspective on decolonization.

Beauvoir's Politics on Algeria

"[L]iving through the Algerian war was like experiencing a personal tragedy," Beauvoir wrote in *Force of Circumstance*, her autobiography covering the 1950s (Beauvoir 1965, 652). Tragedy suggests a personal relationship to war so painfully profound that it enabled her to see herself quite differently than before. Living through tragedy altered her identity. It also had a moral dimension; certain constructions of goodness and evil were challenged or inverted. Part of the personal tragedy of the

Algerian war for Beauvoir was that she so vehemently disagreed with France's part in it. Until the war, being a French citizen was unproblematic for her. This is not to suggest she completely approved of or agreed with government policies, but that she could reconcile her criticisms with her position as a citizen. Beauvoir was horrified by France's persistence in keeping Algeria French. French officials often argued during the war that France was the friend of the Arabs, and that they would fare better by continuing to be part of the empire. She did not agree. She consistently believed in a free Algeria and never regretted decolonization even when she realized years later that the new government was not the socialist one she envisioned.

Like many people of conscience living in a country waging war, Beauvoir struggled in the mid-1950s to find the best political analysis of the rapidly unfolding events. This was no easy task because the French Left did not present a coherent stand against French colonialism when the war began in 1954. The French Communist party (PCF) had not supported the precursor to the war, the 1945 Sétif riots for independence. Thousands of Muslims were massacred by French troops in the riots. Moreover, the PCF voted in favor of the referendum on special powers in 1956, which transferred additional power to de Gaulle and greatly accelerated the war. Over time, the PCF became supportive of Algerian independence, but not without significant internal opposition. There was some concern that support of the Muslim rebels would alienate the party from the French people. Also, for some, French sovereignty in Algeria was far preferable than allowing America to exercise control there. Nonetheless, communist support for the Front de Libération Nationale (FLN) increased. The French socialists, on the other hand, took a middle position on Algeria, one which favored French control but allowed for some measure of Algerian self-governance. This was opposed by the FLN.

The search for an existential politic can be seen in the war writings of Albert Camus, a former Algerian colonist criticized by Beauvoir for his refusal to support Algerian independence; Franz Fanon, the African psychiatrist and FLN theorist she greatly admired; Jean Genet, the playwright who signed, with Sartre, a manifesto in 1956 in support of Moroccan and Algerian independence and wrote *The Screen*, a play about the Algerian war;³ Francis and Colette Jeanson, who wrote *Outlaw Algeria* in support of the FLN; and, of course, Sartre.

Sartre and Beauvoir saw themselves as leftist partisans and supporters

of the FLN. They shared many political views and activities during the Algerian war, while also pursuing separate activities and causes. Both Beauvoir and Sartre favored social democracy for Algeria. Both strongly opposed the special powers referendum, because it took political power away from French citizens, and both thereafter distanced themselves from the French Communist party. In Beauvoir's final interviews with Sartre, many years later, Sartre claimed: "The [Communist] party did envisage the independence of Algeria but only as one possibility among others, whereas we agreed with the FLN in calling for that independence in the immediate future" (Beauvoir 1984, 367). Later Sartre worked with the party to oppose the OAS (the *Organisation armée secrète* formed in 1961 by French extremists), but saw this coalition as ineffective. Beauvoir described their politics as sympathetic to Marxism while remaining apart from both the French communists and socialists. Nearly twenty years later she wrote,

On the one side, there were the people who felt close to Marxism, even if they had never belonged to the Communist Party—like Sartre and me and Merleau-Ponty at a certain moment. On the other side, there were people who absolutely rejected it, like Camus and Aron. . . . [We] remained, let's say, fellow-travelers of the Communists. Yet somehow or other, they never stopped insulting us; it was a hard road. What separated us definitely from [the Communists] was the Algerian War. We were very much involved, were what one would call now Leftist partisans of Algerian independence. But the Communists, like the Socialists, had voted to give the government full powers. I was horrified, deeply, by everything I knew about the way in which the French were conducting that War, the torture. . . . It was a very violent, an excruciating experience. (David 1979, 266–67)

The Algerian war was a major focal point for Sartre's political engagement. As Roland Dumas notes in an interview: "The Spanish Civil War passed Sartre by, as did the Popular Front. The Resistance? Yes, but so little. . . . He missed all the important political events of his time except the Algerian war, which was, in a way, the meeting of a great cause and a great personality" (Cohen-Solal 1987, 441). His political activities in behalf of the FLN, like those of Beauvoir, were

largely those of a famous French intellectual. He spoke out against the war, lent his endorsement to important books (his prefaces to Henri Alleg's *La Question* [1958], which documented war crimes, and Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* [1967]), he contributed to Jeanson's underground paper, *Vérités pour*, and gave depositions at the trials of FLN supporters Georges Arnaud and the abbé Davezies. During this time he finished the *Critique of Dialectical Reasoning*; met Arlette Elkaim, an Algerian Jew, and his adopted daughter; and established an international reputation as an anticolonialist. "I've always looked upon colonialism as an action of pure theft," he told Beauvoir, "the brutal conquest of a country and the absolutely intolerable exploitation of one country by another; I thought that all the colonial states would have to get rid of their colonies sooner or later" (Beauvoir 1984, 367).

While Beauvoir never wrote a treatise on colonialism, traces of her views can be found in her war writings and activism. Beauvoir, along with other French intellectuals, struggled with the ambiguities of various political positions on the Algerian war. She acknowledged her humanistic upbringing and its influence on her in her writings: "they should have trained me from childhood to be an S.S.," she wrote in an autobiographical volume, "instead of giving me a Christian, democratic humanist conscience: a conscience" (Beauvoir 1965, 369). Nonetheless, her position was set in sharp contrast to Camus's, who, she felt, was on the side of the *pied noirs*, as evidenced, in part, by his comment to the audience on the occasion of his Nobel Prize: "I love Justice: but I will fight for my mother before Justice" (Beauvoir 1965, 383).⁴ She criticized him for not speaking out against the war, for not questioning his own relationship to colonialism deeply enough. He came to represent an unavory form of humanism: "The fraud lay in the fact that he posed at the same time as a man above the battle, thus providing a warning for those who wanted to reconcile this war and its methods with bourgeois humanism" (Beauvoir 1965, 383).

Camus, Merleau-Ponty, and Fanon died before the war's end, leaving Sartre and Beauvoir all the more central to the French existentialist movement. Beauvoir participated in many activities opposing colonialism, including speaking out publicly against the war. For instance, in 1961 she traveled to Brussels at the invitation of left-wing Belgian socialists and gave a pro-Algerian speech entitled "The Intellectual and the Government" to a large student audience, some of whom were well-known war supporters, while others were secretly assisting Algerians

across the border. She took to the streets for antiwar protests, and she and Sartre were threatened with imprisonment for signing the *Déclaration sur le droit à l'insoumission dans la guerre d'Algérie*, commonly known as Manifesto 121 in 1960, which opposed compulsory military service in Algeria. Sartre called a press conference in Beauvoir's apartment a month later to object to the arrests of some signers. A more moderate appeal, "For a Negotiated Peace in Algeria," was signed by Roland Barthes, Merleau-Ponty, and others. Beauvoir was involved in the court proceedings against Algerian independence fighters and wrote and organized against the war, serving as a character witness for Jacqueline Guerroudj, her former Rouen student who had become a teacher in Algeria involved with the ALN (National Liberation Army). Beauvoir's efforts, joined with those of others on the left, saved Guerroudj from the death penalty. By 1960, the government changed the penal code such that the death penalty could be applied to anyone collaborating with or even in contact with rebel leaders.

Though a leftist partisan, Beauvoir felt that what was required in the case of Algeria was to "fight from the outside," rather than within the narrow confines of party-politics. This was also her suggestion for combating the oppression of women. Comparing Algerian liberation with women's liberation, she wrote, "Just take Algeria—it was betrayed by the Socialists just as much as by the Communists. We had to fight against the Algerian war from the outside, from the sidelines, from underground. And similarly women will probably also have to fight from the outside, in the areas where they really want fundamental change" (Schwarzer 1984, 101–2). Refusing nationalism, communism, or middle-class solidarity, the outside became her best political location during the war. She resisted the usual political categories, as much as possible, and struggled to fashion her own ground for political positioning. The politics of the outside or sidelines was contrasted with underground activity, which she greatly admired but felt incapable of. "If one wanted to remain faithful to one's anti-colonialist convictions and free oneself of all complicity with this war," she wrote, "then underground action remained the only possible course. I admired those who took part in such action. But to do so demanded total commitment, and it would have been cheating to pretend that I was capable of such a thing. I am not a woman of action; my reason for living is writing" (Beauvoir 1965, 461).

The roles of women in the Algerian war were the focal point of

Beauvoir's own involvement. Many were in the underground. Rebels such as Djamilia Bouhired, Hassiba Ben Bouali, Zhora Drif, Elyette Loup, and Nassima Hablal, were nearly equal partners with men in the FLN, smuggling weapons, throwing grenades, and enduring torture upon capture (Gordon 1968). Their activities, along with their disparate treatment by the French authorities (women were routinely raped by paratroopers and soldiers), deeply affected their supporters, and Beauvoir in particular. Beauvoir's most explicit political action during the Algerian war was taking up the case of Djamilia Boupacha in 1960.

A careful analysis of Beauvoir's activities in the Boupacha case (1960–62) reveals a profoundly radical approach to the war and to colonialism. For the last two years of the war, Beauvoir interceded in numerous ways on behalf of Djamilia Boupacha, a young Algerian Muslim, accused of planting a bomb, which was defused before it was to explode, at a café near the University of Algiers in 1959. Boupacha had joined the FLN after she learned that all the Muslim girls would be debarred from taking their certificates. Outraged by the racism against Muslims and cut off from her career possibilities, she began working for the FLN. She used the undercover name of Khelida and stole medical supplies from a hospital where she worked, collected intelligence, and hid FLN members in her home. French security forces raided her house one night looking for two prominent rebels. They harassed, attacked, and arrested her along with her seventy-one-year-old father. Boupacha and her father were imprisoned on charges of collaborating with the FLN. She was tortured by electrodes and with cigarettes, beaten, raped with a bottle by French officials, and fell unconscious while imprisoned in a prison in El Bair, where Henri Alleg had been interrogated and tortured, and the French university student Maurice Audin had been strangled. She later was moved to a prison in Hussein Dey and finally brought to Paris for trial. Boupacha had confessed to the charges under torture. Beauvoir got involved in Boupacha's case at the invitation of her lawyer, Gisèle Halimi, Tunisian by birth and a defender of several members of the FLN. Halimi needed help getting an investigation into Boupacha's torture and in pursuing charges against General Ailleret, the military commander in Algiers, and Pierre Messmer, minister of war, for her wrongful detention and torture. Given the serious nature of her charges, Boupacha would easily have been executed, despite the lack of evidence against her, had it not been for the efforts of Halimi and Beauvoir. Their efforts not only educated French citizens but also slowed

down the proceedings so that they lasted until the peace treaty was signed, ending Boupacha's trial.

In taking up Boupacha's case, Beauvoir believed that she could best expose the common criminal practices of French officials through an individual situation. Once exposed, the French people could no longer hide behind their innocence in support of French Algeria. The hard part was exposing the truth. Beauvoir believed that people had gotten used to the war atrocities and that the cover-up of explicit evidence was quite thorough. Boupacha's case was able to dislodge many readers from their complacency and present them with evidence. Hence, Beauvoir wrote, "The exceptional thing about the Boupacha case is not the nature of the facts involved, but their publication" (Halimi and Beauvoir 1962, 10). Beauvoir saw her role as rallying public opinion. She eagerly responded to Halimi's request that she write something demanding an investigation into Boupacha's treatment, immediately writing a highly controversial essay which was published in *Le Monde* in June 1960, entitled, "In Defense of Djamila Boupacha." According to Halimi, Boupacha managed to obtain a copy of the newspaper in prison. Upon reading the essay she exclaimed, "What an article! My, what an article! Every member of the movement should have someone like that behind them" (Halimi and Beauvoir 1962, 73). The attorney general claimed that the essay annoyed the army. The essay was considered so anti-French and dangerous, the government ordered the seizure of all copies in Algiers, bringing even more international attention to Boupacha. The essay was also placed in Boupacha's dossier and condemned for its "scandalous attitude and conduct" at the first hearing on the case (Halimi and Beauvoir 1962, 85). By contrast, François Mauriac had written an article in *Express* at Halimi's request a few weeks earlier, which she described as "deceptively mild" with "calculated ambiguity." Mauriac's political tone was one of bitter irony, unlike Beauvoir's moral outrage.⁵ The seizure of *Le Monde* provoked an international response in support of Boupacha. Halimi reported letters from Italy, England, Russia, Costa Rica, Egypt, Israel, and elsewhere. Many drew comparisons with Nazi Germany and its silencing of the press and use of torture.

Beauvoir also quickly formed a political action committee, *Comité pour Djamila Boupacha*, in France, chaired it herself, and held its first press conference the same month. The committee petitioned for the adjournment of Boupacha's trial, protection for her family and friends, and justice for her torturers. The philosophers Gabriel Marcel and

Maurice Merleau-Ponty joined with many notable writers to compose a membership of hundreds. The committee sent the president of the republic telegrams demanding a delay for the trial so inquiries could be made. Beauvoir and others met with key government officials, such as M. Michelet, the minister of justice, and M. Patin, the president of the Committee of Public Safety, whom she accused of promilitarism and racism.

The importance of Boupacha's case involved more than the use of torture by a government that had signed at least four documents prohibiting it. More important, Boupacha's case documented the use of rape by the military. Rape, a form of war torture applied primarily to women, whether vaginal or anal, with a bottle, a gun, or a grenade, had long-lasting negative implications. Beauvoir and Halimi understood not only how Boupacha's case reflected the larger ills of French colonial policy, but equally important, how Boupacha's rape affected her status as a woman eligible for marriage within her culture. As Boupacha put it, "Do you think any man would want me after I've been ruined by that bottle? Our customs are very different from yours. A young bride must be a virgin" (Halimi and Beauvoir 1962, 75). In her tradition, the bloody bridal garment is shown to other men on the wedding night by the groom.

Beauvoir and Halimi had to educate the men of France about the significance of rape. After Beauvoir argued with M. Patin about Boupacha's mistreatment, he responded: "I was rather afraid they'd sat her on a bottle, the way they used to do in Indochina with the Viets. . . . That means the intestines are perforated and the victim dies. But that's not what happened" (Beauvoir 1965, 504). It was as if he believed that Boupacha's rape was a relatively "normal" occurrence and patronized Beauvoir for taking up her cause. The behavior of French officials he dismissed. What baffled Beauvoir most was the casual attitude that French officials had about the widespread use of torture. Shortly after the meeting, Boupacha was offered the chance to plead mental incompetence and refused.

To further rally public opinion on the war, the Boupacha committee passed a proposal by Beauvoir that a book or pamphlet be produced describing Boupacha's case. Halimi explained that the book was to be "a weapon in the immediate struggle, and instrument for disseminating the truth as widely as possible, and also constitute a pledge for the future" (Halimi and Beauvoir 1962, 170). While she wrote most of it, she asked

Beauvoir to coauthor it. *Djamila Boupacha: The Story of the Torture of a Young Algerian Girl which Shocked Liberal French Opinion*, appeared in France shortly before the war's end. It was also translated into English and published in London and New York shortly thereafter. The book documented the preparation for and proceedings of the Boupacha trial and includes not only Beauvoir's introduction and her *Le Monde* essay, but accounts of Beauvoir's activities with the Boupacha committee. On the book's cover was Picasso's sketch of Boupacha, signed 21 August 1961, which appeared in several magazines. It also included testimonies by Madame Maurice Audin, Henri Alleg, Andre Philip, Jules Roy, Françoise Sagan, and others. Halimi's careful account of the trial, along with Beauvoir's contributions, shocked French and international readers. In particular, the fact that the French army, despite de Gaulle's denouncement of torture, routinely used torture in Algeria came as a surprise. As Beauvoir put it in her introduction, "For reasons affecting its own interests, and nobody else's, the Army is determined to keep Algeria a slave-state—even though the Algerian people would rather die to the last man than give up their hope of independence" (Halimi and Beauvoir 1962, 20). Beauvoir pleaded with her readers "to refuse to countenance the war" rather than align with "our contemporary butchers." She compared the French atrocities to the Warsaw ghetto and Boupacha to Anne Frank. She cited a million victims of "racial extermination" in internment camps in Algeria. She noted the murders, lynchings, manhunts in Oran and elsewhere and considered Algeria "the second Haiti," condemning not simply the abuses or excesses of the army but the whole system that sanctioned them. She morally challenged her readers to "refuse to countenance a war that dares not speak its true name," and called upon them to "raise heaven and earth to give this gesture of yours effective force" (Halimi and Beauvoir 1962, 21).

Djamila Boupacha would be Beauvoir's only coauthored book, and, as Carol Ascher has pointed out, "one of her first political activities with another woman" (Ascher 1981, 40). It was actually an alliance among three women: Beauvoir, Halimi, and Boupacha, even though Beauvoir never met Boupacha.⁶ All three were middle-class and French-educated, but of different religious backgrounds, Christian, Jewish, and Muslim, respectively. Halimi had come to Paris at the age of eighteen for university education and Boupacha had a similar desire after her imprisonment. Beauvoir and Halimi had somewhat different goals. Halimi

wanted to free an FLN member from unfair charges. Beauvoir wanted this, but also wanted a moral awakening for France. She used Boupacha's case to enlighten the citizens of France about the war crimes committed in their name with hopes that public outcry would stop the war. The book was among very few accounts of the torture of Algerian women.⁷ She claimed to have joined Halimi in coauthorship to share the political fallout from the government and from terrorist extremists. After all, many intellectuals in France were the targets for bomb attacks and she expected that the book might provoke additional violence. Contemplating this, and the threat on her life that happened after the book appeared, she wrote, "I had finally accepted co-authorship with Gisele Halimi in order to share the responsibility" (Beauvoir 1965, 614). There was no small amount of violence happening in Paris connected to the war. The OAS bombed Sartre's flat twice. Just two years earlier, the French police seized a book by seven Algerian men describing their torture while being held by police in Paris and smashed the printing plates (Silvers 1960).⁸ A French journalist published with some difficulty another book that gives an account of his torture by French paratroops in Algeria.⁹ On the very day in February that Beauvoir and Halimi's book appeared in Paris, her concierge received a phone call threatening Beauvoir's life. Halimi received numerous threats linked directly to the trial. She was even forced into hiding at one point and imprisoned in Algiers on false charges at another time. In addition to terrorism, she risked imprisonment for her anti-French views.

In March 1962, the Evian agreement was signed granting amnesty to all political prisoners and to all accused French officials. Boupacha, who had been brought to France for trial, was freed in April. For several days, she stayed with Halimi, hoping to remain in France to study, but, according to Halimi, the FLN kidnapped her and returned her to Algeria, where she later married.¹⁰ Beauvoir continued to be involved in writing about the war. It was a major theme of her third volume of autobiography, *Force of Circumstance* (*La force des choses*), which was published in France in 1963. The book charts her increasing commitment to the Muslim rebels as well as the toll of the war on her spirits. At one point, near the war's end, she recounts listening to a radio report on Algerian deaths and prison camps, "Again I loathed it all—this country, myself, the whole world" (Beauvoir 1965, 599). No political event thereafter would match the significance of the Algerian war.

Beauvoir and Her Critics

The Algerian war was a major theme of *Force of Circumstance*, but reviewers routinely skipped over it.¹¹ Beauvoir herself noted much later that she had written about Algeria with "a heart ablaze with anger," and had "breathed out this anger" in the book, only to find that "[b]y October 1963 the tortures and the massacres were already ancient history that worried nobody" (Beauvoir 1974, 125). Numerous references to the Algerian war can be found in her next volume of autobiography, *All Said and Done* (1974) and in later interviews, including her last interviews with Sartre. In one interview, Beauvoir said that the Algerian war marked an important moment in the development of her life (Wenzel 1986, 25). A final indication of her commitment to Algeria, as noted by her sister, H el ene, was found in the presence of many Algerian women, along with other African women, at her funeral in 1986 (Forster and Sutton 1989, 14). Yet, the significance of the Algerian war for Beauvoir is often erased or diminished in the scholarly literature on Beauvoir. There is no single work devoted to this topic. Even when the topic is Beauvoir's politics, mention of Algeria can be missing.¹²

If Algeria is mentioned at all in Beauvoir scholarship, its mention is brief (Ascher 1981; Appignanesi 1988; Bieber 1979; Biagini 1982; Brosman 1991; Cottrell 1975; Crosland 1992; D'Eaubonne 1986; Evans 1985; Keefe 1983; Okely 1986; Winegarten 1988) and often critical. For example, Anne Whitmarsh claims that the exposure of torture in the Djamila Boupacha case was Beauvoir's most important activity in the Algerian crisis. However, she also claims that the revelations of torture were not instrumental in ending the war (Whitmarsh 1981, 122, 198 n. 6). Clearly, a case can be made to the contrary. To assume otherwise is to believe that public opinion, which involved soldiers deserting the cause for reasons of conscience, had no effect on de Gaulle. This also leaves unexplained why copies of Beauvoir's *Le Monde* essay would be seized in Algiers. Public opinion is always a weapon of war in one way or another and frequently is an important factor in bringing war to an end.

Among those commentators who do discuss the influence of Algeria on Beauvoir, Terry Keefe sees part 2 of *Force of Circumstance* as "entirely dominated by the Algerian War. . . . [H]er handling of it is obviously much more calculated to make a political point . . . than to describe a particular phase of her life." He describes her as having an unanalyzed

and nearly pathological obsession "with the idea of being a party to the atrocities committed on the French side" (Keefe 1983, 38–39). Judith Okely attributes Beauvoir's "need to make sense of her life in terms of external political events," not as an achievement of political engagement, but rather as "a compensation perhaps for past naivet e and privileged isolation"; and she claims that Beauvoir's "apparent egocentricism" gets in the way of a "deeper examination of the self" (Okely 1986, 121). Margaret Crosland diminishes Beauvoir's political views by attributing them to meaningless emotional outbreaks. She claims that Beauvoir's "increased political awareness was now focused on the situation in Algeria which upset her so deeply that whole sections of the relevant memoirs . . . become one long moan" (Crosland 1992, 388).

Most critics writing book-length studies of Beauvoir omit reference to her coauthored book on Boupacha. Her political essays from *Les Temps Modernes* remain untranslated. Her role in politics has also been overlooked in scholarship on the French left. It is common to find that the plight of women, including Algerian women, is treated as insignificant. For too many critics, her romantic attachments take precedence over her political beliefs. It is not unusual to find a longer and more detailed discussion of Beauvoir's romantic involvement with the American writer, Nelson Algren, than of her politics on the Algerian war. The displacement of Beauvoir's political involvement in the Algerian war, a decade following the publication of *The Second Sex*, presents a diminished view of her work. One biographer attributes Beauvoir's Algerian activities solely to her relationship with Sartre, claiming that during this time, she "had spent most of her life within various groups formed by men around Sartre's political concerns," and "was spending most of her life in the turbulent 1960s following Sartre everywhere" (Bair 1986, 159, 156). This implies that Beauvoir's involvement was incidental and fails to grant Beauvoir her own political commitments. Beauvoir's pro-Algerian politics should not be dismissed or seen as parasitic upon Sartre's, simply because Sartre was involved as well. Beauvoir and Sartre shared some but not all of their political activities. Beauvoir's advocacy for women rebels, for instance, was a part of her political independence from Sartre and wholly her own. At the same time, her friendship with Sartre, which she greatly valued, should not be ignored. Clearly, their intellectual and political conversations sustained both of them, and as two critics suggest, Sartre gained much from Beauvoir's work (Fullbrook and Fullbrook 1994). It would be hard to argue that Sartre was the

political center of their relationship and Beauvoir was merely swept along in his political activity, particularly since even a Sartrean biographer, Annie Cohen-Solal, wonders how much Sartre acted on his own or was swept up in the acts of others. Cohen-Solal attributes Sartre's Algerian activities to his pledge of total support to Jeanson and his political group. She reminds us that although he "lent his name" to Manifesto 121, his letter in behalf of Jeanson's group was actually written by someone else in his name. "So was Sartre really active," she asks, "or simply consenting, managed (and well-managed) by the members of his group and other French intellectuals" (Cohen-Solal 1987, 430)? She concludes that he was a "screen," and, quoting Jean Pouillon, a "national treasure," to be used against de Gaulle by his political friends at strategic moments. This might explain Sartre's tardiness in supporting Algerian independence, which has been noted by one critic who reminds us that there were very few articles on the war in *Les Temps Modernes* until 1957 (Schalk 1991, 101).

In decolonization scholarship, if Beauvoir is mentioned, the mention is similarly brief and critical. David L. Schalk notes Beauvoir's support for Algerian independence and Manifesto 121, in his comparative study of the role of intellectuals in the Algerian and Vietnam wars; but he fails to mention any of her activities in behalf of Djamilia Boupacha (Schalk 1991). Rita Maran, who extensively uses the Boupacha case, names Beauvoir among those who failed to expose the ideology behind government sanctioned torture as integral to the "civilizing mission" of French colonialism (Maran 1989, 189). Yet, Beauvoir's outrage and activism against the use of torture to maintain colonialism in Algeria is quite apparent. There is no evidence for Maran's assumption that Beauvoir ignored the dimensions of colonialism in the Algerian war. In Paul Sorum's study, he suggests that "Simone de Beauvoir underwent an emotional and political evolution not unlike [Maurice] Maschino's" (Sorum 1977, 158). Maschino, who wrote for *Les Temps Modernes*, fled to Tunisia to avoid his recruitment to Algeria and struggled with his own French patriotism. While this is a potentially interesting comparison, it does not explain why Sorum spends only a paragraph on Beauvoir, mentioning her again only briefly as a signer of two manifestos (Sorum 1977, 174, 179), or why, in his discussion of torture, there is no mention of Djamilia Boupacha. Beauvoir is absent also from other works on French intellectuals (Debray 1981; Judt 1986; Ross 1991) even though it

has been noted that she would end her later years with greater influence on French intellectual thought than Sartre (Reader 1987, 73).¹³ Her greater influence is attributed to the importance of *The Second Sex* for the feminist movement and the displacement of Sartrean philosophy in later years by French structuralism. Because critics have diminished if not erased the theme of Algeria in Beauvoir's middle-period writings and activism, no analysis has been done about its significance.

Since I will claim that the Boupacha case amounted to radical activity for Beauvoir, it is helpful to address criticism that Beauvoir was a bourgeois French writer absorbed by her romantic relationships and only minimally involved in the Algerian war. This criticism is partially implied in the lack of attention to Beauvoir's writings on Algeria. Even if one attended to this aspect of her life, it could be argued that she dashed off the *Le Monde* essay in a few days, merely lent her name to the Boupacha book, and was primarily a figurehead for the Boupacha committee. The criticism may be common in America because Algeria is barely mentioned in American scholarship on Beauvoir and because American critics and biographers too often portray Beauvoir as an apolitical and primarily literary figure. A recent example of this can be found in the editing of and book reviews for the recent American edition of her *Letters to Sartre*.¹⁴

Beauvoir's response to the war was not a typical bourgeois response but a radical one. She risked her reputation on the Boupacha book. It could have cost her readers and discredited her in France. It was not a simple decision, and it certainly wasn't a naive one. Beauvoir may have been unprepared for the backlash from *The Second Sex*, but she knew the topic of Algeria was controversial. As a threat to bourgeois politics, she risked much: imprisonment for signing Manifesto 121, the threat on her life for coauthoring the Boupacha book, inner torment that she likened to that of an exile. Her *Le Monde* essay was so controversial that not only were copies seized in Algeria, as mentioned earlier, but the day after, *Le Monde* published a short front-page announcement attributing the government-ordered seizure of the paper solely to Beauvoir's Boupacha essay. Such censorship and attention were quite extraordinary. The author of *The Second Sex* taking on the case of a woman rebel, an African woman rebel, was too much for the French establishment. An analysis of her activities is suggestive for understanding her view of the political and moral content of subjectivity.

An Ethics of Intersubjectivity

Beauvoir's involvement in the Algerian war is interesting not only in light of her earlier work, but also, because so few women intellectuals from that period are on record with their responses to the historical conditions of their time. For philosophers interested in ethics, especially those who have read or taught her *Ethics of Ambiguity* and *The Second Sex*, this study provides another opportunity, namely to put together Beauvoir's war writings and activities with her developing notion of freedom and responsibility.

An analysis of the ethical basis for her anticolonial activism reveals a notion of collective responsibility developed beyond earlier writings. In her *Ethics*, the ambiguity of life situations and interconnectedness of human beings are central notions but do not foreshadow Beauvoir's political challenges to the government a decade later. Nonetheless, she does address colonial violence by questioning the assumption that human beings are in competitive relationships with each other so that some can win only if others lose. As Beauvoir explained there, colonialism perpetuated an insidious form of violence: "And even outside of periods of crisis when blood flows, the permanent possibility of violence can constitute between nations and classes a state of veiled warfare in which individuals are sacrificed in a permanent way" (Beauvoir 1980, 99).

Although the *Ethics* and *The Second Sex* are philosophical accounts of how subjectivities experience freedom and oppression, Beauvoir's view of freedom has long been misunderstood. It is often placed squarely within Sartrean philosophy and is rarely read from within a colonial context. There have been recent debates by critics over whether Beauvoir's view of freedom is compatible with or oppositional to Sartrean philosophy. Much of Beauvoir's *Ethics* agrees with ideas in Sartre's *Being and Nothingness*, more so than Sartre's posthumously published *Cahiers pour une morale*. Both rejected the notions of absolute value schemes and believed that human beings are the creators of values and of history; both emphasized individual freedom as fundamental to human beings and contextual in nature. However, Beauvoir presents a more concrete view of freedom than Sartre's. She understood the severe political and social limitations on individual freedom. Consider Sartre's being-for-itself in *Being and Nothingness* and Beauvoir's female subject in *The Second Sex*. The female subject, although oppressed, is situated within

myth, science, history, politics, and religion. Through these constructions, women either work out limited freedoms or have them snatched away. Moreover, subjectivity is fundamentally intersubjective for Beauvoir, whereas, while Sartre grants the necessity of being-with-others, he constructs subjectivity in solipsistic ways: Being is in relation to Nothingness, subjectivity is Being with Nothingness at its core. This difference is also expressed in their autobiographies. A comparison of any of Beauvoir's autobiographies with Sartre's *The Words* (which he wrote at the end of the Algerian war), contrasts a subjectivity thrown into a world of political events, friendships, personal thoughts, and profound connections to others, with a subjectivity that is preoccupied with itself, insulated from other people.

The significance of this difference on subjectivity cannot be underestimated, particularly in light of contemporary feminism. Some critics read Beauvoir's language of freedom through Hegelian dialectics and Sartrean ontology (Butler 1990, 10), while others emphasize the differences between Sartre's and Beauvoir's conceptions of subjectivity and freedom (Kruks 1992, 92–97; Singer 1993, 133–43), with claims that Beauvoir's view of freedom has a better grasp of being in oppressive situations, and our connections with others. Such controversy over Beauvoir's notion of freedom shows that much is at stake in critical readings of the *Ethics* and *The Second Sex*. In these discussions, Beauvoir and her critics struggle for new ground. What is the content of moral and political subjectivity? How can responsibility be defined from the outside? Her writings on ethical responsibility in her Algerian essays must be added to these discussions. For in her writings on the Boupacha case, subjectivity is placed within an intersubjective framework and has a moral basis. The ethical path requires political action because human freedom is made possible by a commitment to others. "And it is true that each is bound to all; but that is precisely the ambiguity of his condition: in his surpassing toward others, each one exists absolutely as for himself; each is interested in the liberation of all, but as a separate existence engaged in his own projects" (Beauvoir 1980, 112). Perhaps there is no clearer example of how we are bound to others than what she says about the Boupacha case. There she affirms the collective by affirming the individual. Djamilia Boupacha is important because every rebel is important.

In Beauvoir's *Le Monde* essay, she argued that the French people were complicit in the tortures committed by their government irrespective of their individual beliefs, morals, and political activities: "For whether we

choose our rulers willingly, or submit to them against our natural inclination, we remain their accomplices whether we like it or not. When the government of a country allows crimes to be committed in its name, every citizen thereby becomes a member of a collectively criminal nation. Can we allow our country to be so described? The Djamila Boupacha affair is the concern of every person in France" (Halimi and Beauvoir 1962, 197).

The relationship between the individual and the social collective has moral implications. Her own ethics recognized her intimate bonds to others. She rejected a framework predicated on the insulation of subjectivities from each other, and instead critically analyzed her relationship to Algerians, imagining how Algerians must have perceived her. Taking up the point of view of others, particularly of Algerian rebels, provided her with a critical perspective. Sartre had argued that the gaze of others objectified us and limited our possibilities.¹⁵ For Beauvoir, the gaze afforded moral possibilities and gave moral content to subjectivity. She might have imagined her individuality would spare her collective responsibility, but instead she was outraged that people were being tortured, raped, and killed for no justifiable reason and felt responsible. She wrote, "I needed my self-esteem to go on living, and I was seeing myself through the eyes of women who had been raped twenty times, of men with broken bones, of crazed children: A French woman" (Beauvoir 1965, 369).¹⁶ Some have questioned the authenticity of this shift in perspective.

Fanon, for one, claimed that French intellectuals were more concerned with their reputation than with the victims of their crimes: "The gravity of the tortures, the horror of the rape of little Algerian girls, are perceived because their existence threatens a certain idea of a French honor. . . . Such shutting out of the Algerian, such ignoring of the tortured man or of the massacred family, constitute a wholly original phenomenon. It belongs to that form of egocentric, sociocentric thinking which has become the characteristic of the French" (Fanon 1967, 71). He never criticized Beauvoir for this, though others might have, particularly those who have not read her autobiographical writings. In these personal writings, there is not the distant perspective described by Fanon. Even the genre in which Beauvoir wrote about Algeria set her apart from male philosophers and protected her from this criticism. Unlike Fanon and other male intellectuals who wrote treatises on colonialism in Algeria (Sartre 1991), Beauvoir's war writings are journal-

ism and autobiography. She abandoned the detached style of the treatise genre to speak directly to newspaper readers or intimately to readers of her life. The direct style hints at the deeply personal way she experienced the war. "I felt the war inside me again," she wrote, "all wars, all the things that divide us, that tear the world apart" (Beauvoir 1965, 359).

She recognized the temptation to be so overwhelmed by the war that one might shut it out. However, she broke through the emotional numbness, writing in *Le Monde*, "The most scandalous aspect of any scandal is that one gets used to it. Yet it seems impossible that public opinion should remain indifferent to the present tragic ordeal of a twenty-two-year-old girl called Djamila Boupacha" (Halimi and Beauvoir 1962, 194). It seemed impossible because Beauvoir's moral arguments made it impossible. And again in her introduction to the Boupacha book, after listing many of the horrors in the media, she asks, "Can we still be moved by the sufferings of one young girl?" (Halimi and Beauvoir 1962, 91). That the response to her essay was a resounding yes, indicates her ability to reconnect the reader with the collective, a collective that included rebels as well as patriots. While Beauvoir was a friend of Fanon, what she criticized him for years later were not his remarks on the inauthenticity of French intellectuals but rather his mistaken optimism on the liberation of Algerian women: "And then the thing that really revolts me in Algeria, [after independence] as in all the Muslim countries, is the condition of women. I can't accept the way they oppress their women, veil them, impose forced marriages on them. Fanon thought they would become emancipated after the Algerian war. On the contrary, they have been crushed" (Moorehead 1974, 32). (Or as an Algerian feminist noted, "the [Algerian] war that had just concluded between people was being reborn with the couple.")¹⁷

Instead of Fanon, it was Halimi, who regarded Beauvoir as emotionally constrained, "I expected a sister-in-arms, I discovered more and more an entomologist" (Halimi 1990, 294). Halimi criticized Beauvoir's relationship to Boupacha as abstract. Beauvoir had never met Boupacha though she had countless opportunities. Halimi remarks in her autobiography, "For her, Djamila was one victim among thousands, a useful 'case' in the battle against torture and the war. . . . For her, was not understanding the nature of the battle more important than the person at stake?" (Halimi 1990, 301). By contrast, Halimi was quite emotionally involved in Boupacha's case, working daily with her in prison, writing letters to her when she was out of the country, sheltering her from the OAS after

she was released from prison. But what Halimi missed is the emotional perspective Beauvoir had for her ethics. She felt injustice deeply; the relationship between the French and the rebels was criminal and felt with great emotion. The compromise was an ethical one and felt at an emotional level. Strong emotive language is used in her descriptions: she felt the war inside her, war was a personal tragedy, the white heat of middle-class complicity enraged her. Her activism and beliefs on the Boupacha case, Algerian liberation, and France's use of torture were felt in her body: "It was not of my own free will, nor with any lightness of heart, that I allowed the war in Algeria to invade my thoughts, my sleep, my every mood" (Beauvoir 1965, 365).

As a member of a collectively criminal nation, Beauvoir made little moral separation between herself and the acts of her government and refused to separate her politics from the political economy she participated in. She did not fashion for herself the blameless position of a political dissident. "I'm French," she wrote. "The words scalded my throat like an admission of hideous deformity. For millions of men and women, old men and children, I was just one of the people who were torturing them, burning them, machine-gunning them, slashing their throats, starving them; I deserved their hatred because I could still sleep, write, enjoy a walk or a book" (Beauvoir 1965, 384). Any formal differences between herself and supporters of the war were surpassed by material conditions they shared. In the daily lives of Algerians, she was indistinguishable from French patriots. To be middle-class and French was to be a "profiteer," as she called herself, of educational and class opportunities. This is how she saw herself. "I exploit no one directly; but the people who buy my books are all beneficiaries of an economy founded upon exploitation" (Beauvoir 1965, 652). Her fame and privilege was part of French colonial power. Although at times she saw herself as an "enemy of the middle classes" she also was part of them and shared in their deeds. That is why she claimed that "the horror my class inspires in me has been brought to white heat by the Algerian war" (Beauvoir 1965, 649).

Not only is the dissident who acts not spared from collective responsibility, the bystander who fails to act is also responsible. This is why she argues in her *Le Monde* essay that her readers must act, mindful that even then one is not free from blame. Refusing responsibility for a government acting contrary to her wishes could only be an abstract refusal, a sort of good faith perhaps, in the erroneous belief that beliefs

alone determine responsibilities. To see herself as complicit and a dissident, while paradoxical, points to the complexity of her situation; namely, that she was an opponent of Algerian liberation and a beneficiary of French colonialism. Hence, the tragic nature of the war: "I am an accomplice of the privileged classes and compromised by this connection; that is the reason why living through the Algerian war was like experiencing a personal tragedy" (Beauvoir 1965, 652).

Her political response to Boupacha completely altered her relationship to middle-class culture and she rejected the promise that class privilege was morally defensible. She admitted that, "Bourgeois culture is a promise: it is the promise of a world that makes sense; a world whose good things may be enjoyed with a clear conscience. . . . It was by no means easy to tear myself away from such splendid expectations" (Beauvoir 1974, 126). Instead, her realization that a clear conscience was truly not possible transformed her relationship to herself and her past. She wrote, "As far as I am concerned, my aging became apparent to me between 1958 and 1962. I was sickened by the crimes that were being committed in the name of France; I turned nostalgically back to my past, and I realized that there were many planes upon which I had to say good-bye to it forever" (Beauvoir 1974, 126).¹⁸ Beauvoir critically examined her past by writing two books of autobiography during the Algerian war, *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter*, a book which Boupacha read while imprisoned in Algeria, and *Prime of Life*. Such a radical examination of her life was required by her political development.

Representing Boupacha

I have discussed the moral basis for intersubjectivity in Beauvoir's ethics, particularly her writings on the war and hinted at ways in which the moral and political content of subjectivities is constituted through our bonds to others. Some of these bonds are shared identities, such as cultural, racial, class, or gender identities. These form the possibility of a collective, while other identities individuate us. How identities are transgressed, supplanted, or asserted is a matter too complex for this study. However, the Boupacha case and its representations, afford us the opportunity to examine how a few identities were represented and deconstructed by the Algerian war, for the war was as much a battle over

material conditions such as territory and rulership, as it was over collective identities.

The politics of representation can be analyzed on two levels. Halimi was Boupacha's legal representative in court for her charges of terrorism and her countercharges against her torturers. As her attorney, Halimi described Boupacha's ordeal within the context of the French penal code, particularly the sections prohibiting torture. Boupacha's public statements were generally in court and shaped by that discourse. These statements were transcribed by a court reporter leaving out important details: for instance, although she confessed to the charges while imprisoned, her confession was extracted by torture. The court's transcript can be read as an admission of guilt were it not for Boupacha's request, at the end of her statement, for a medical examination to verify her rape and torture.

The second level of representation is literary. Beauvoir represented Boupacha's case in the court of public opinion, writing in *Le Monde* and coauthoring a book-length account with Halimi. These representations are all we have of Boupacha, since she has not published any account of her own. Unlike Halimi and Beauvoir, she did not publish an autobiography, though she did write letters to Halimi from prison and wrote a prison diary. Although the literary representations were designed to affect Boupacha's legal case, they are part of a less restrictive discourse. Instead of appealing to penal law exclusively, these representations appeal to moral claims, emotions, politics, and the assumed psychological disposition of the reader. Beauvoir assembles these elements of Boupacha's situation for the reader so that the reader can best perceive it. She did not perceive herself as interpreting Boupacha's situation, "I limited myself, more or less, to transcribing Djamila's own account of the affair [told to Beauvoir by Halimi]" (Beauvoir 1965, 500).

If there is any discourse that is prevalent in the book as well as the essay, it is the discourse of virginity. Doctors, government officials, a psychologist, witnesses, and others address the question of whether Boupacha's virginity was lost or preserved while imprisoned. The gynecological report submitted at the trial documented the perforation of the hymen, suggesting Boupacha's claim of rape was true. Beauvoir noted that *Le Monde* attempted to censor the word "vagina" from her account of Boupacha's rape. An editor from the newspaper asked that "vagina" be changed to 'womb'. Beauvoir refused because "vagina" was the word Boupacha had used; however, in a later reference describing the rape, "vagina" was

changed to "belly." The editor also asked that Beauvoir paraphrase "Djamila was a virgin." Again she refused and the sentence was printed in parentheses (Beauvoir 1965, 501). When the editor remarked that high sources suspected Boupacha's guilt, Beauvoir shot back, "I don't see that that's any justification for sticking a coke bottle into her" (Beauvoir 1965, 501). Virginity is a cultural concept as discussed earlier. One wonders whether Boupacha's claim of rape would have been discussed were she not a virgin. Some suggested she was not. One Algerian journalist wrote in *Echo d'Alger*: "Do not these documents [suggesting that Boupacha hid FLN members in her bedroom] suggest that Djamila Boupacha that supposedly straitlaced and orthodox Muslim girl, really used her bedroom to entertain men in? If that be so, what are we to make of her complaint against the troops whom she alleges to have outraged her" (Halimi and Beauvoir 1962, 88)?

A secondary discourse in the book is the discourse of the body, in particular, the discourse of torture. How could Halimi prove that Boupacha was tortured if there were no witnesses, only accomplices? One newspaper account suggests the complexity of this problem when the government denies it. *Le Monde* claimed that medical examiners considered Boupacha to be in pain but did not address the cause of her physical ailments ("New Charge" 1960, 5). Not only were Boupacha's torturers never held responsible, but even her requests for photographs to confirm their identities were denied. The most compelling proof of her torture was the testimony by fellow women prisoners in Algiers who had also been tortured, in particular, Zineb Laroussi. Laroussi had shared a prison cell with Boupacha and seen her beaten body after torture sessions but the police had threatened her into silence. Fortunately, despite risks to her life, Laroussi supported Boupacha's account when confronted with her in court.

In representing Boupacha, Beauvoir and Halimi needed ways to render a Muslim woman visible to a French culture. French representations of Algerian Muslims had been undergoing transformation even before the war. One writer describes "a closing down of indigenous society [from 1900 to 1954 in Algeria], more and more dispossessed of its vital space and its tribal structures. The orientalizing look—first with its military interpreters and then with its photographers and filmmakers—turns in circles around this closed society stressing its 'feminine mystery' even more in order thus to hide the hostility of an entire Algerian community in danger" (Djebar 1992, 146). By the time Beauvoir took up Boupacha's case, "the feminine mystery" was juxtaposed with the unveiling and

militarization of some women rebels who smuggled bombs and who "took those bombs out as if they were taking out their own breasts, and those grenades exploded against them, right against them. Some of them came back later with their sex electrocuted, flayed through torture" (Djebar 1992, 150). Beauvoir and Halimi had the difficult task of describing the rape and torture of many of these rebels, for whom Boupacha became the spokesperson. Moreover, since Boupacha's rape was central to her case, they needed to write about it in ways that did not further objectify Boupacha, or provide a new instance of racist pornography. This was an impossible project and no doubt some read their work in this way. Even so, among the difficult tasks necessary to spare Boupacha her life, was the representation of her subjectivity in ways that avoided her assimilation or her erasure. In their accounts, they stressed the moral prohibition against torture and the dignity of war prisoners, attacked misogynist attitudes toward rape, and challenged notions of French officials that vilified Boupacha. All this was accomplished in part by stressing the middle-class status of Boupacha and her youth. Hence, the subtext of Beauvoir's writings played upon class solidarity and paternalism (the sufferings of a young girl), to attack racist imperialism and misogyny. Her class identity no doubt made her more acceptable to French citizens than if she was poor and uneducated. Similarly, much is made of her youth. Beauvoir herself asks in her essay: "Can we still be moved by the suffering of a young girl?" Part of Boupacha's youth is attributed to being unmarried. In addition, Boupacha appears as an attractive person in photos and in Picasso's sketch. Would it have been different if she were unattractive or an older woman or married? Would a sketch be used? Would her rape have been even more dismissed?

The destabilizing moments of Boupacha's subjectivity represented by Beauvoir had much to do with being caught in the crossfire of culture wars. Boupacha was African, Muslim, an FLN member, an Algerian nationalist, a threat to France. She was represented as an Algerian Muslim girl, a militant young Algerian nationalist (Halimi and Beauvoir 1962, 24), the imprisoned hand-grenade terrorist or the bomb-dropper (Halimi and Beauvoir 1962, 84), the Algerian torture victim (Bair 1990, 487), and a courier for the FLN. By the time of her release from prison, demilitarized representations were used. For instance, one British paper entitled the article on her release: "'Torture' Case Girl Freed" and then referred to her in the beginning of the article as "a young Muslim typist" ("'Torture' Case" 1962, 1). In order to render a representation of

Boupacha that did not further her victimization, Beauvoir understood her situation in light of anti-Muslim racism. By the time her thoughts were drawn to the Algerian war, she had visited America, felt her whiteness in Harlem, and seen American apartheid, which she spoke out against in *America Day by Day*. She was appalled by the widespread chauvinism and the depth of racism in France, manifested in the docility of the young men sent off to fight in Algeria and widespread police brutality toward North Africans in France. Many of the more than two hundred thousand Muslim Algerians in France suffered increased hostility (Hollifield 1991). She wrote, "The lives of Moslems were of no less importance in my eyes than those of my fellow countrymen" (Beauvoir 1965, 460). As the African-American philosopher, Angela Davis, noted from her travels in Paris during the war, "While the Algerians were fighting the French army in their mountains and in the Europeanized cities of Algiers and Oran, paramilitary terrorist groups were falling indiscriminately upon men and women in the colonialist capital [Paris] because they were, or looked like, Algerians" (Davis 1974, 122). French patriots desired to maintain psychological and material dominance over the Arabs, including those living in Paris.

Beauvoir understood how racism operated against Muslims in Algeria even before the war. In her *Ethics* she explained, "All oppressive regimes become stronger through the degradation of the oppressed. In Algeria I have seen any number of colonists appease their conscience by the contempt in which they held the Arabs who were crushed with misery: the more miserable the latter were, the more contemptible they seemed, so much so that there was never any room for remorse" (Beauvoir 1980, 101). During the war, she sharply attacked the racism of French patriots who gave "not a thought to what it was going to cost, convinced that 'the loss of Algeria' would make them poorer, their mouths full of slogans and clichés—French Empire, French departments, abandonment, selling out, grandeur, honor, dignity—the entire population of the country—workers and employers, farmers and professional people, civilians and soldiers—were caught up in a great tide of chauvinism and racism" (Beauvoir 1965, 339). At the same time, they were impervious to responsibility ("no one in France raised so much as an eyebrow" [Beauvoir 1965, 339]), and as long as the press remained uncritical, "the people of France were prepared to accept this war with a light heart" (Beauvoir 1965, 366). She also understood how material conditions were used as the occasion for new racist practices: "It was only when the *piéd*

noirs rushed into France competing with the French for work and housing that they finally became unpopular; just in time to replace the old one, we watched the rise of a new sort of racism between members of the same race, as if we always needed the Other to hate, in order to be assured of our own innocence" (Beauvoir 1965, 623). Beauvoir needed to ensure that Boupacha was not the hated Other in order to advocate effectively in her behalf. Yet, Boupacha's situation placed her in this role. Were it not for Beauvoir's strong moral language, her use of class solidarity and paternalism, and her avoidance of many aspects of Boupacha's Muslim identity, she may have been unsuccessful.

As Beauvoir and Halimi constructed representations of Boupacha's identity in their writings, they were also aware of how their own identities were undone by the war. It is no surprise that a new philosophy, deconstruction, would emerge from France after the war. Deconstruction, which can easily be applied to Beauvoir's own analysis of her situation during and after the Algerian war, was founded by a former Algerian Jew, Jacques Derrida. The parallels between the theories of deconstruction and the general claims of decolonization are usually not discussed. Yet, they are quite apparent. Deconstruction prepares us to think beyond traditional notions of freedom to a more ambiguous concept of liberation. Such a concept is compatible with Beauvoir's descriptions of subjectivity.

For Beauvoir, like Derrida, notions of identity have much to do with ambiguity and are never resolvable by theoretical categories. In an essay on European cultural identity, Derrida describes himself as an "over-aculturated, over-colonized European hybrid," "someone who, as early as grade school in French Algeria, must have tried to capitalize, and capitalize upon, the old age of Europe, while at the same time keeping a little of the indifferent and impassive youth of the other shore. Keeping, in truth, all the marks of an ingenuity still incapable of this other old age from which French culture had, from very early on, separated him" (Derrida 1992, 7). There is no innocent offering up of a new identity or complete cancellation of an old one. That is why, in the same essay, he calls himself a European intellectual, but not wholly a European.¹⁹ The Boupacha case and the Algerian war disrupted Beauvoir's identity in profound ways. "My own situation with regard to my country, to the world, to myself, was completely altered by it all" (Beauvoir 1965, 365). Halimi too: "Born into a society [German-occupied Tunisia] that had neither French nor Arabic culture, I had inherited nothing but contra-

dictory traditions. A great many superstitions, both religious and folkloric, taboos handed down from the Diaspora or from pre-colonial times. No written works. The only Language we spoke was Tunisian Arabic, an impure dialect in which words of Italian origin mixed freely with Maltese and Hebrew" (Halimi 1990, 152-53).

In some postcolonial writings, for instance, those of the Algerian writer Marie Cardinal, the difficulty of cultural identity is most apparent. Cardinal describes herself as a French Arab. Her family left Algeria for France before the war, and she writes about living in a France set on destroying her Algerian homeland. The war caused the onset of madness for her: "It seems to me that the Thing took root in me permanently when I understood that we were to assassinate Algeria. For Algeria was my real mother. I carried her inside me the way a child carries the blood of his parents in his veins" (Cardinal 1983, 87-88; Angelfors 1989; Durham 1992). Assia Djebar, an Algerian Muslim, emerged as a young writer during the war. Educated in the French system while under colonial rule, she writes her novels in French. Since the war, she has been critical of the Algerian government and its policy of Arabization, which proclaimed Arabic as the official language and she has commented on the complexities of her identity in postcolonial Algeria: "Who was I? A Berber? An Arab? I was Francophone in my writing, but who or what was I in my life? There was a zone of silence inhabited by words of love I pronounced only in Arabic and kept safe in my memory" (Djebar 1992, 184). Another writer, H el ene Cixous, is a German Jew born in Oran who grew up in the midst of racism and colonialism. "People said, 'the French,' and I never thought I was French. . . . I felt that I was neither from France nor from Algeria. And in fact, I was from neither. . . . I had the 'luck' to take my first steps in the blazing hotbed between two holocausts, in the midst, in the very bosom of racism, to be three years old in 1940, to be Jewish, one part of me in the concentration camps, one part of me in the 'colonies.'" Writing, especially autobiographical writing, is a method of recovery. In Cixous's words, "I lost Oran. Then I recovered it, white, gold, and dust for eternity in my memory and I never went back. In order to keep it. It became my writing" (Cixous 1991, xix, 17, xx).²⁰ Algeria is also recovered and is a dominant theme not only in Beauvoir's autobiography, as mentioned previously, but Halimi's autobiography as well.

The war had deconstructed not only cultural identities but gender roles, particularly for Algerian women. The abrupt expulsion of women

from the veil to the military forged together the roles of men and women in Algerian society. At the same time, the rape and torture of many Algerian women rebels deeply affected the society and was the "cause of painful upheaval, experienced as trauma by the whole of the Algerian collective" (Djebar 1992, 150). Djebar describes the effects of these changes, the repression by men and women of the terror experienced in solidarity during the war, and the renewed emphasis on traditional gender roles following the war:

The public condemnation of it [rape and torture] through newspapers and legal intervention certainly contributed to the spread of scandalous repercussions: the words that named it became, where rape was concerned, an explicit and unanimous condemnation. A barrier of words came down in transgression, a veil was shredded in front of a threatened reality. . . . What words had uncovered in time of war is now being concealed again underneath a thick covering of taboo subjects, and in that way, the meaning of a revelation is reversed. . . . As if the fathers, brothers, or cousins were saying: "We have paid plenty for that unveiling of words!" Undoubtedly forgetting that the women have inscribed that statement into their martyred flesh, a statement that is, however, penalized by a silence that extends all around. (Djebar 1992, 150–151)

The deconstruction of cultural identities by war not only disrupts our subjectivity but presents us with moral and political challenges. Beauvoir's ethics, in particular, her responses to the Algerian war, indicate possibilities for reconstruction through recognizing our bonds to others. At the same time, it raises questions about history and how we see our own histories. Beauvoir, who turned fifty during the war, saw her own lifeline in terms of historical, not biological moments. When asked, years later, if there were not well-marked stages in women's lives distinct from men's, she replied, "No, I don't think so. I don't think it's due to sex, it's due obviously to politics, events; there were events, I don't know, the Resistance, Liberation, the war in Algeria . . . these are the things that marked eras, at least for me, in any event, and for Sartre as well, and for many of my friends. That's what marked the big epochs in our lives, it's the historical events, the historical involvements one has in these larger events. It's much more important than any other kind of

difference" (Wenzel 1986, 25). Part of her radical perspective is her belief that historical events of our time are rites of passage for us.

This essay has taken an unconventional path. An often overlooked book about the rape and torture of a young rebel in Algeria has led to a discussion of subjectivity within a colonial context, in a little-taught ethical treatise and in often overlooked war writings of Simone de Beauvoir. Beauvoir was one of the few women existential philosophers of France. She was the same woman who wrote *The Second Sex*, a book that has had the effect in many countries of decolonizing a nation's women, a book rarely read against its colonial background. While Beauvoir carefully represented Djamila Boupacha in ways that reflected the end of colonialism in Algeria, her own identity was deconstructed by the historical forces around her and her radical relationship to others. An insider in French culture (one of its world-famous authors), she became a political outsider during the Algerian war. A moral voice for France during decolonization, a censored voice at one point, she never denied her bonds to France. A sharp critic of Western bourgeois culture and its colonial past, she did not wholly reject it but acknowledged that French culture had sustained her. In her last autobiographical volume she remarked, "I do not believe in the universal and everlasting value of Western culture, but it has been my food and I love it still. I should not like it to vanish entirely but to be handed on to the rising generation—most of it, at any rate" (Beauvoir 1974, 219).

Notes

1. Raymond F. Betts wrote, "By the time of Algerian independence, the colonies in West and Equatorial Africa had become nations. There is thus something of an overarching irony in the historical realization that modern French colonial history begins and ends with Algeria; begins and ends with military encounter there" (Betts 1991, 113).

2. This is not to suggest that France was completely well-meaning during World War II. Recent evidence notes that France has taken little responsibility for the deportation of 13,000 both naturalized and foreign French Jews in 1942, and that these activities were not ordered by the German occupiers, but rather freely taken up by the Vichy regime. Mitterand has recently refused to acknowledge this despite a petition signed by Jacques Derrida, Louis Malle, Nathalie Sarraute, Pierre Boulez, and others; see Greeman (1993), 43–45.

3. Edmund White cites correspondence from Genet to Roger Blin, director of *The Screen*, in which Genet claimed that the play was "nothing but a long meditation on the Algerian war." White also cites evidence that explains Genet desired to sign Manifesto 121 but was so viciously attacked in the press as a "thief," a "paederest," and a "police informer," after signing the earlier manifesto, that he supported Manifesto 121 by withholding his signature (White 1993, 491, 411).

4. For a reading of Camus within a colonial context, see Said (1993), 169–85.
5. Mauriac wrote: "A girl called Djanifa Boupacha has lodged an official complaint with the examining magistrate in an Algiers court. Dare I waste this column's space on an account of her deposition? Why bother to publish stuff about people having their ribs kicked in, or being electrocuted, or undergoing what they call the bath-torture? We've heard it all so often before, and there's no need to believe what we hear. The plaintiff in this case wants to call a gynaecologist as an expert witness. I hope no reader expects me to say why" (Halimi 1962, 63).
6. Beauvoir's relationship with Halimi continued after Algerian independence. She wrote an introduction to Halimi's 1973 book on the abortion case of Marie-Claire Chevalier in Bobigny and also founded Choisir, an advocacy group for reproductive rights with Halimi, Jean Rostand, and Delphine Seyrig in 1971; see Halimi (1973).
7. Another book, *Pour Djanila Bouhired*, had been published in France in 1957 by two communist supporters of the FLN; see Arnaud (1957).
8. *La Gangrène*, the original version of this account by seven Algerians living in France of their arrests and tortures, had been published in 1959 by Editions de Minuit in Paris.
9. The torture of a French journalist and editor of the *Alger Républicain* by the French Paratroops was published with an introduction by Jean Paul Sartre; see Alleg (1958).
10. Halimi describes Boupacha living in hiding so as to remain in France, but tricked by an appointment set up for her with the Comité Intermouvement Au près des Evacués, at which she was captured and forced back to Algeria. Halimi saw Boupacha in Algeria a few months later and learned that she held a job at the Ministry of Employment and was married (Halimi 1990, 300).
11. Brigid Brophy wrote, "In it, intellectual analysis and atmosphere are alike suffocated," and "Mlle. de Beauvoir's moral sensibility—simply, perhaps, her imagination—does not impress me as very acute" (Brophy 1965, 1). Olga Carlisle wrote, "Mme. de Beauvoir is highly eloquent in her indignation at the war conducted in Algeria by the French government" (Carlisle 1965, 3). See also Algren (1965), 135.
12. As in Bair (1986).
13. Reader writes, "De Beauvoir may have begun the seventies by being attacked in a feminist journal (*L'An zéro*) for her 'fixation' on Sartre, but she ended the decade (and not for reasons of age or health alone) more in tune with, and influential upon, contemporary French intellectual developments than the man whose 'disciple' she was so often called."
14. An exception is an essay by Hazel Barnes (1991).
15. For a feminist critique of Sartre's gaze, see Murphy (1989).
16. Hélène Cixous takes a similar view of the gaze when she writes: "But in the Society of Crime in which we are citizens of liberty, we do not look each other in the eye—have you noticed!—we avoid looking each other in the eye so that we avoid the risk of seeing ourselves as we are, and being perhaps ashamed or hesitant, or tempted by truth or friendship, in which case our construction would be shaken and deconstructed and that would be the end of our security and our success" (1993, 219).
17. Clarisse Zimra quotes this last line from Djébar's *Les allouettes naïves*, in the afterword to *Women of Algiers* (Djébar 1992, 190).
18. Beauvoir also mentions feeling old age in her fifties in an interview years later: "It was the time of the Algerian war. I was overwhelmed by the course of events. I thought I was getting old and that the political future was overcast at one and the same time. That all led to the sad and disillusioned ending to *Force of Circumstance*" (Schwarzer 1984, 83).
19. Another postmodern philosopher, Jean-François Lyotard, has similarly argued that identities are largely historical and reflect a range of social and material practices. Lyotard held a teaching position in Constantine from 1950 to 1952 and became active in Algerian politics, writing several articles about the war. In early writings published shortly after

Algerian independence, he was critical of the ways in which French colonialism had attempted to prevent an Algerian identity and pessimistic about the FLN's ability to provide alternatives to colonial structures (Abbeele 1991). He observed gripping problems of starvation, unemployment, the corruption of state officials, the war-damaged social and administrative services, and the lack of a coherent ideology to build a new Algeria, concluding, "Nobody, no political group, no social class succeeded in creating a new image of Algeria which Algerians could want as much as they had wanted independence" (Lyotard 1963, 21).

20. For a discussion of the effects of decolonization on Algerian and European Jews, see Friedman (1988).

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