

# 5 Uses and Abuses of Gender and Nationality

## Torture and the French-Algerian War

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Ultimately, it was an unquestioning faith in the higher destiny of the French civilising mission, founded paradoxically on the universal Rights of Man of 1789, that provided the justification and dynamic for state violence against “others,” colonised peoples who were perceived to be at a primitive stage of historical evolution or racially inferior.

—Neil MacMaster (2004)  
‘Torture: from Algiers to Abu Ghraib,’ p. 5

The infant revolution was already burdened with the perverted tendencies of all the others. Aided and abetted by intellectuals with clean hands and “white” complexes.

—Gisèle Halimi (1990) *Milk for the Orange Tree*, p. 301

In laying bare corporeal resistance strategies and bodies, wartime torture uncovers complicated power relationships, often structured around stereotypical ideas about gender, sexuality, race, and nationality. At times, the body of the tortured is constructed as hypersexual or perversely sexual (which itself becomes a convenient justification for more torture, or torture in the first place), and at others the body becomes a passive site onto which the torturer may project anxieties about their own gender or sexuality. Intersecting with constructions (or deconstructions) of both masculinity and femininity may be a shoring-up of nationality and culture, particularly during “civilizing missions” that position the other as inferior. Taking the 1960 legal case of Djamila Boupacha, a young Algerian woman who was brutally raped and tortured by the French military during the French-Algerian War (1954–1962), as my point of departure, this chapter investigates how gender, sexuality, and nationality figure in this physically and psychologically damaging act and in its subsequent representations. Although torture had been commonplace during this long war of decolonization, Boupacha’s case is unique in the attention it received, particularly from public intellectuals in France, prompting accusations such as that of Gisèle Halimi (1990), who stated that the interventions may have been less

than pure. For some political activists and scholars, Boupacha's story has functioned as proof of the existence of torture during the war, whereas for others it has been taken up as a convenient opportunity to oppose governmental policies, if only then to reaffirm French nationality. Still others have made her into a symbol of the dangers of colonialism and unchecked militancy, and a select few have used the story in an attempt to give her a public voice. Here, I use Boupacha's case to show how gender and sexuality figure in the torture scene, taken up by all sides to project an image of her that helped bolster national identities and fulfill political goals.

Building on the notion that Muslim women's bodies have been co-opted by all factions of the war to serve particular purposes, I look at feminist philosopher Simone de Beauvoir's publicizing work on the case, focusing on her rhetoric of sexual purity and collective responsibility. I argue that narratives such as that of Boupacha have aided in the construction of a cohesive French nationality based on civility and human rights precisely because these were representations and accounts of Algerian women tortured by French men. Through this lens, I consider the complicated invocation of national pride and shame when discussing torture, asking what role such affects may play in the hands of those privileged enough to have a public voice. I also have a stake in uncovering critical parallels between this case and the US occupation of Iraq, particularly the highly publicized systematic abuse of Iraqi detainees at Abu Ghraib prison. Although the historical and political contexts are undoubtedly different (albeit with some similarities), the 2004 torture scandal again demonstrates how normative gendering and invoking of shame play a role in the reinforcement of national identity and further exposes the legacies of colonization that, as other chapters in this collection similarly show, continue to mold gender, race, nationality, class, and sexuality in global politics and cultural representations. The following questions will guide my analysis, even as they continue to elude clear answers. What do wartime representations of torture reveal about gender and sexuality? How do race and nationality intersect with gender in the accompanying rhetoric? And, more generally, how do we theorize the continued deployment of women as tools of war in both decolonial and neo-colonial conflicts?

### **DJAMILA BOUPACHA, TORTURE, AND THE FRENCH-ALGERIAN WAR**

As art historian Tom McDonough (2005: 79) writes of late 1950s France, 'The Algerian War was, in a sense, everywhere and nowhere, present daily in Parisians' newspapers as bulletins from the Evian conference and stories of nighttime bombings against supporters of independence, but largely absent from their everyday lives.' Whereas many civilians turned a blind eye to the abuses done in the name of France, a number of intellectuals

experienced the war as a profound personal and philosophical watershed. In the wake of three international conflicts—World War I, World War II, and Indochina—French intellectuals and nonintellectuals alike were struggling to understand what went “wrong” in Algeria. Assumptions about French universality were turned upside down as France’s status as upholder of human rights appeared disputable, a fact that seemed to compel intellectuals to reevaluate understandings of, and engagements with, difference and otherness.

Such reflection was central to the philosophical project of Simone de Beauvoir, whose existential ethics and adherence to theories of collective responsibility compelled her to fight for universal freedom for the self and for the other. Although she had earlier maintained a distance from the messy world of politics and war, she describes France’s controversial actions in Indochina and Algeria as fully awakening her political consciousness, sparking a commitment to anticolonial struggle. She saw the Algerian fight for independence as bound up with contemporary French leftist ideologies, yet recognized the paradoxical relationship at the heart of one conflict in which the French were occupied and another in which they were the occupier. While France was attempting to shed any traces of fascism from the previous war, the military was forcefully oppressing its North African *départements*. Further emphasizing the historical irony that the French government would mirror the behavior of its own recent oppressors, Beauvoir (1964: 146) lamented: ‘Yes, I was living in an occupied city, and I loathed the occupiers even more fiercely than I had those in the 40s, because of all the ties that bound me to them.’

Indeed, in its paradoxical absence and presence, the war provoked an individual and collective crisis—French national identity, purportedly a beacon of culture and civility, was suddenly placed in question as a domestic and international public learned of the military’s violent tactics. Four years into the eight-year conflict and following the collapse of France’s Fourth Republic in 1958, newly instated President Charles de Gaulle pledged to end the already ubiquitous practice of torture. Slowly but surely, stories began to emerge that proved his pledge to be in vain, as the French military continued to employ unwarranted violence in the face of growing calls for Algerian independence. One case that clearly proved the existing deployment of torture was that of Djamila Boupacha. French journalist and fellow torture victim Henri Alleg wrote: ‘Djamila Boupacha is proof personified that torture has not been brought to an end by the Gaullist régime, that torture can only end with the end of the colonial war whose poisonous fruit it is’ (cited in Beauvoir and Halimi 1962: 207). Boupacha’s case garnered significant attention after Beauvoir became involved in the campaign to defend her against false accusations that carried the death penalty. Many critics have diminished Beauvoir’s commitment to the anticolonial movement by assuming her involvement was merely self-serving.<sup>1</sup> She has, for example, been criticized for demonstrating a lack of emotion (a charge that

itself can be read as gendered) and for engaging in intellectual solipsism (an accusation generally attributed to Frantz Fanon but taken up by others as well).<sup>2</sup> Although I keep in mind the very clear practical and theoretical problems that Beauvoir's actions provoked, I believe that dismissing her as purely opportunistic misses the mark, falling short of an opportunity to examine the increasingly equivocal relationship between intellectualism, activism, and national identity at this historical moment and beyond. It is crucial to note how the figure of Djamila Boupacha became a tool in the war of decolonization, her physical body a prime site of contention and exchange, particularly through Beauvoir's use of her story and participation as a white French woman in the Algerian independence movement.

Boupacha's involvement in the war began when she learned that Algerian girls would be prevented from earning certificates from the University of Algiers. In her words, 'I made up my mind to fight for my country's independence . . . because our cause is just . . . we shall achieve it' (cited in Beauvoir and Halimi 1962: 52–53). She decided to join the Front de Libération Nationale (FLN), the Algerian socialist party and face of the national liberation struggle, and to help the cause she stole medical supplies from a hospital in which she worked and hid FLN members in her home. On 10 February 1960, fifty troops raided the house that Boupacha shared with her parents, and she was taken into custody, along with her brother-in-law and her father. Eventually, after being held for a period without charges, Boupacha was falsely accused of having planted a bomb five months earlier (which, incidentally, was defused before it could explode).

After being brought to Hussein Dey prison, Boupacha was given what was called the *second degré*. In the text of her civil indictment, Boupacha summarizes the treatment:

I found out what this implied—firstly, torture by electricity. (Since the electrodes would not stay in place when affixed to my nipples, one of my torturers fastened them on with Scotch tape.) I received similar electrical burns on my legs, face, anus, and vagina. This electrical torture was interspersed with cigarette burns, blows, and the 'bath treatment': I was trussed up and hung over a bath on a stick, and submerged till I nearly choked. (Cited in Beauvoir and Halimi 1962: 218)

At one point during her incarceration, her brother-in-law and her father, both visibly tortured, were presented to her. Not only did this allow her to see the further pain that may be inflicted on her own body were she not to cooperate, but it also served to break the men, as the sight of her destroyed body could function as psychological torture. The French military effectively positioned these men as powerless to save her, highlighting the power maintained by the colonial forces that held this woman's life in their hands. After thirty-three days of torture, Boupacha "confessed" to having planted the bomb. A psychiatrist stated that she was not responsible for her criminal

actions, and she was offered a plea bargain. Instead of accepting the offer, however, she retracted her earlier confession and, in a shocking move, pursued her own case against her torturers. Her brother contacted Gisèle Halimi, known for human rights work, and Halimi immediately began a case against General Ailleret, the commander-in-chief in Algeria, and Pierre Messmer, Minister of Armies, for wrongful detention and torture in violation of Article 344 of the Penal Code. Halimi approached Beauvoir in hopes that she would lend her support to the case. Together, they decided that Beauvoir would write an incendiary editorial piece for *Le Monde* with the goal being ‘to overcome the most scandalous aspect of the whole scandalous affair—the fact that people had gotten used to it’ (Beauvoir and Halimi 1962: 63).

On 3 June 1960, the day Beauvoir’s editorial was published, there was uproar. The French military in Algeria immediately confiscated the newspaper issue in hopes of preventing a crisis in popular opinion. Soon after, Beauvoir and Halimi established the Djamilia Boupacha Committee to garner the public’s support. Their first task was to have the case moved to France, away from corruption in the Algerian court system. Before going to trial in 1962, Halimi and Beauvoir together published a chronicle of the case up until Boupacha’s hearing in a book entitled *Djamilia Boupacha*. Their text includes a series of *témoignages* from contemporary intellectuals and activists, along with a portrait of Boupacha sketched by Picasso. The international press eventually took up the story, and demonstrations in support of Boupacha were staged in Paris, Tokyo, and Washington.

## BOUPACHA’S BODY: A RHETORIC OF VIRGINITY

In the introduction to *Djamilia Boupacha*, Beauvoir makes clear both the element of sexual torture central to Boupacha’s case and the ubiquity of such practices: ‘An Algerian girl of twenty-three, an FLN liaison agent, illegally imprisoned by French military forces, who subjected her to torture and deflowered her with a bottle: it is a common enough story’ (Beauvoir and Halimi 1962: 12–13). Despite the unexceptional nature of the treatment, the *supplice de la bouteille* (torture by bottle) became one of the central points of debate and fascination during the trial. In her study of torture during the war, sociologist Marnia Lazreg (2008: 160) points to the central role of sexuality: ‘When a woman was taken prisoner, the sexual nature of torture was a matter of fact. It was borne by her gendered body. . . . Her body, perceived as that of the generic female, was imbued with sexual desire.’ Although I would caution against the reduction of the inherent power structure to ‘sexual desire’ and would argue that a male prisoner’s body is equally gendered (and sexualized), it is important to recognize the roles that gender and sexuality play in Boupacha’s torture. Whereas the kind of torture Boupacha experienced was, indeed, rather common,

her story becomes unique in its detailed exposure of the abuse inflicted on Algerian women (and undoubtedly men, as well). Boupacha endured torture of all kinds, sexual torture being one form, but most accounts of her story privilege this aspect of her abuse over all others. For example, in the limited number of scholarly accounts of the case, the most cited detail remains her rape—not “ordinary rape,” but rape with a bottle—underscoring the sexual aspect of her abuse and enabling thirty-three days of torture to be condensed into this act, which, as we will see, allowed for problematic assertions that she was not even tortured at all.

Key to the gendered and sexualized dimensions of the abuse, Boupacha’s virginity became central to the case. Beauvoir’s choice to include the fact that Boupacha was a virgin in her editorial provoked a heated debate with the director of *Le Monde*, who, as Beauvoir herself recalls, ‘found it shocking . . . that I had written: “Djamila was a virgin”; would I not paraphrase this somehow? I wouldn’t. They printed these four words in parenthesis’ (Beauvoir 1964: 501).<sup>3</sup> Indeed, Beauvoir and Halimi were strategic about their deployment of this trope, for Beauvoir’s adamant inclusion of this detail positioned Boupacha as “innocent,” hence sympathetic, to the French public. As some have also pointed out, the self-exposure of her rape also carries particular weight given her status as a Muslim woman. Halimi summarizes:

To questions about the meaning and value of virginity, Djamila gave absolute and uncompromising answers: virginity for her was a totemic symbol, with positively magical significance. Any girl who besmirched herself by having relations with a man before her marriage was dishonoured and accursed. . . . No Moslem of good family would ever marry a girl who had been previously deflowered. (Beauvoir and Halimi 1962: 126–27)

Much like Jasbir Puar (2007: 100) writes of torture as ‘robbing the feminine of its symbolic and reproductive centrality to national-normative sexualities,’ by having her virginity taken from her (if it is even appropriate to interpret her rape in this way), Boupacha also risked losing access to a whole set of cultural privileges, including marriage and respect.

Leading up to the trial, in fact, the most important debate involved not Boupacha’s guilt or innocence but her status as a virgin. Medical professionals poked and prodded her body in hopes of proving or debunking her assertion of sexual abuse and prior virginity, thereby enacting more violence unto her. Even though a team of doctors decided that Boupacha may have indeed suffered from ‘traumatic defloration’ (Beauvoir and Halimi 1962: 139), definitive proof of the manner in which this occurred remained inconclusive. Notably, however, in the psychiatric portion of her examination, Dr. Hélène Michel-Wolfron responded without hesitation that she had ‘a mentality corresponding with that of a virgin’: ‘Her awkwardness

in personal relationships, her innocence, her atavistic pride and religious convictions—all these prompted reactions characteristic of a virgin’ (cited in Beauvoir and Halimi 1962: 127). What exactly might constitute the mentality of a virgin, or what the “characteristics of a virgin” might be, remains unclear. Perhaps more problematic is another observation (and one on which Dr. Michel-Wolfron undoubtedly based her assessment of sexual abuse and prior virginity): Boupacha was incapable of lying. Halimi summarizes Dr. Michel-Wolfron’s opinion: ‘What struck her most was Djamilia’s genuineness, her absolute sincerity. “I don’t think she knows how to tell a lie”’ (Beauvoir and Halimi 1962: 123–24). Although such statements certainly played a role in her defense, presenting Boupacha as unable to lie places her in another category of human being. In assigning this incapability to Boupacha, she was infantilized and framed as not yet developed, perhaps even too simpleminded to tell mistruths.

In examining Boupacha’s legal case and its surrounding rhetoric, it becomes clear that her sexuality had been figured not only as a tool for the defense, but also as a weapon for the prosecution. Contrasted to Dr. Michel-Wolfron’s belief that Boupacha was ‘a most remarkable girl—extraordinary innocence and honesty’ are statements made by Maurice Patin, president of the Committee of Public Safety in Algeria: ‘You claim that she was a virgin. But, we have photos of her, taken in her bedroom: she’s between two FLN soldiers with guns in hand, and she’s holding a machine gun’ (cited in Beauvoir 1964: 504). Patin’s assumption that militancy (or even anti-colonial resistance) and virginity are mutually exclusive is strategic, albeit problematic, as is the underlying notion that female sexuality is inherently dangerous and to be controlled. In his reluctance to give weight to Boupacha’s case and her assertion of prior virginity, he also states, ‘Your Djamilia Boupacha, she’s really not a pleasant character, not a nice girl at all. . . . Girl thinks she’s Joan of Arc. . . . She wants *independence* for Algeria!’ (cited in Beauvoir and Halimi 1962: 99). Patin’s logic seems to be that Boupacha wants freedom so she must not be ‘a nice girl.’ And the further corollary: she must not be a virgin, for only nice girls are virgins.

Perhaps even more egregiously sexist were statements Patin made questioning the validity of Boupacha’s claim of having been tortured at all. After realizing that she was raped vaginally and not anally, he stated: ‘I feared at first that she might have been violated *per anum*, as was done on occasion with the Viets in Indo-China: such treatment results in perforation of the intestines, and is fatal. But this, this was something quite different’ (cited in Beauvoir and Halimi 1962: 9). Through further statements such as ‘We’re not concerned with *real* torture’ (cited in Beauvoir and Halimi 1962: 97), the assumption is that being raped anally is inherently more serious than being raped vaginally. In Patin’s view, being forced to sit on a bottle (a form of anal rape) constitutes ‘real torture,’ whereas having a bottle inserted into one’s vagina does not. In her extensive study of torture during the French-Algerian War, Rita Maran (1989: 163–64) comments on this scene: ‘As

an adherent of French traditions of the “rights of man,” Patin appears to have made a distinction between “rights of man” and “rights of woman,” despite the fact that the constitution then in force had juridically erased that distinction.’ In questioning if female bodies could even be tortured if not raped anally (a form of rape and torture that of course both men and women could be subjected to), Patin effectively points to the gendered dimensions of the torture scene, uncovering, as Maran signals, a murky debate around gender and human rights beneath the surface.

## SHAME, NATIONALITY, AND COLLECTIVE RESPONSIBILITY

Beauvoir writes in her memoirs that her participation in Boupacha’s case coincided with a personal crisis of sorts, a crisis that stemmed from her philosophical beliefs about collective responsibility and her own misgivings about her status as citizen of a colonizing nation. She writes of the existential feelings this provoked in her:

This hypocrisy, this indifference, this country, my own self, were no longer bearable to me. All those people in the streets, in open agreement or battered into a stupid submission—they were all murderers, guilty. Myself as well. ‘I’m French’. . . . 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. The only moments of which I was not ashamed were those in which I couldn’t do any of those things. (1964: 384)

This idea of being seen by others is central to Beauvoir’s notion of the ambiguity of human existence and to her philosophical project as a whole. In seeing herself being seen, Beauvoir places herself at a distance that then allows for both self-critique and critique of her fellow French citizens. But from this self-evaluation emerges a sense of shame, a point emphasized by Annabelle Golay (2007: 418, my translation): ‘Shame of the self, shame of others, shame of French colonialism, shame of being French, shame of her bourgeois origins, her privileges, her complicity in the war. Speaking her shame, writing her shame, constituted for Beauvoir the point of departure for an ethics of solidarity and relationship to the other.’ For Beauvoir, being seen as a French woman (i.e., a colonizer), and therefore reprehensible, evoked in her such shame and culpability, which then provoked collective responsibility, a motivating force for her involvement in the Algerian cause and one she hoped would carry over to her fellow French citizens. In maintaining an existential ethics predicated on a responsibility to others, Beauvoir was also invested in showing how freedom—in this case, freedom of the average French citizen—was



necessarily bound up with freedom of the other—freedom of Algerians. Indeed, Beauvoir took up Boupacha's case to put this philosophy into practice, as seen in the carefully chosen words of her *Le Monde* editorial: '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 Djamilia Boupacha affair is the concern of every person in France' (Beauvoir and Halimi 1962: 223). Rita Maran (1989: 167) writes of Beauvoir's rhetoric: 'in a moment of urgency, she relied on the most direct appeal, one that required no explanation. . . . She called up benevolent aspects of France's civilizing mission as expressed in national pride.' In addition to forcing ordinary French citizens to look at the effects of their own complicity and lack of action by underscoring collective responsibility, Beauvoir also appeals to cultural pride and decency by drawing on the nation's long history of human rights that was being threatened.

French journalist Henri Alleg, who underwent one month of torture at the hands of the French military for supporting Algerian independence, was engaged in a similar protective task, beginning *La Question*, his account of being tortured, with the following epigraph: 'In attacking the corrupt French, it is France that I defend' (2006: 33), and concluding it with: 'All this I have had to say for those Frenchmen who will read me. I want them to know that Algerians do not confuse their torturers with the great people of France, from whom they have learnt so much and whose friendship is so dear to them. But they must know what is done IN THEIR NAME' (96). Although key aspects of Alleg's and Boupacha's cases were dramatically different (it is worth noting, they went to trial two days apart), his personal account may serve as a useful point of comparison in looking at how exposing torture activated a nationalistic response. Alleg's use of phrases such as 'the great people of France' and his choice to capitalize 'IN THEIR NAME' highlights the importance that patriotism occupied in debates over torture (and also echoes Beauvoir's above use of 'in its name' in her direct appeal to the French). Similarly, his epigraph clearly captures how critiques of French actions paradoxically became defenses of French culture.

Despite such interventions, contemporaries of Beauvoir and Alleg signaled the ambiguous status of French intellectuals in the Algerian cause, questioning if they were in fact more concerned with protecting their nation's reputation than bringing about justice for the victims of said crimes. Fanon (1967: 71), for example, wrote that 'the gravity of the tortures, the horror of the rape of little Algerian girls, are perceived because their existence threatens a certain idea of French honor. . . . It belongs to that form of egocentric, sociocentric thinking which has become the characteristic of the French.' It is not in the scope of this chapter to debate the rightfulness or wrongfulness of Beauvoir's involvement; it is nevertheless important to recognize the ways in which the accompanying rhetoric of both sexuality and nationality objectified Boupacha.

In this vein, it is worth noting how the story ends. Boupacha's legal case concluded in March 1962 (four months prior to Algerian independence) when de Gaulle granted a blanket amnesty to French military personnel, forever preventing prosecution of crimes committed during the war. What often escapes analyses of Boupacha's case is that just after being released, she was kidnapped by the FLN and brought back to Algeria, further serving as a pawn in the "masculine" fight for political control. In her memoir, Halimi (1990: 300) writes: 'Kidnapped, kept by the "brothers" of the Federation under lock and key in a council flat in the Paris suburbs. Then put on a plane, well guarded. Destination: Algiers. For the FLN, mission accomplished.' When Halimi relayed this news to Beauvoir, she received a surprising response: 'You have been unwise, Gisèle, I had no right, we French had no right, to intervene on behalf of an independent Algerian woman' (cited in Halimi 1990: 300). Whereas Beauvoir was willing and eager to critique French treatment of Boupacha, she did not see it as the place of 'we French' to intervene in FLN matters. As Sonia Kruks (2005: 193) states, 'Beauvoir would not speak out for Boupacha against the FLN. She would speak out for another against her own government, but not against a Third World independence movement that she supported.' Beauvoir's stance fuels the critique that she was more concerned with the larger cause (ending torture and granting Algeria independence) than she was with Boupacha's personal situation, furthering the idea that the case served the purpose of critiquing French culture, if only to then seek redemption. In representing these larger issues (which was not something Boupacha chose), we may actually view this strategy as having 'appropriated the people of Algeria insofar as it deflected attention away from them and back to the needs of France' (Kruks 2005: 194). Algerian female bodies were sites onto which anxieties over French national identity were being worked out at this decolonial moment, and critiquing the FLN could serve no such function.

### WHY ARE THE TORTURED WOMEN? OR, WHERE ARE THE TORTURED MEN?

Although Djamila Boupacha's trial proved to be somewhat of a political watershed, there were other cases of torture that received public attention during the French-Algerian War. The case of Djamila Bouhired, who was caught carrying communication between FLN militants, also attracted a considerable amount of press coverage. Like Boupacha, after days of torture and sexual abuse, she signed a confession (which she later denied) and was condemned to death. Two French lawyers, Jacques Vergès and Georges Arnaud, took up her case and published a manuscript entitled *Pour Djamila Bouhired* (1957) in hopes of drawing public attention to her case (just as Beauvoir and Halimi would years later).<sup>4</sup> In addition to Boupacha's and

Bouhired's cases, other newspaper accounts of anonymous tortured women were circulating. Now that French-Algerian War archives are being relaxed and taboos surrounding the war are slowly being lifted, more and more individuals are speaking out about abuse suffered at the hands of French soldiers. For example, in June 2000 *Le Monde* published on its front page the account of Louissette Ighilahriz, a young Algerian woman who was also tortured during the war. Her story effectively pinpoints the different factions at play in the postcolonial landscape, as many (including some of her alleged torturers) would step in to state their case, often in the name of protecting France. It is, perhaps, not a coincidence that it was the story of a tortured Algerian woman that finally provoked intellectuals to publicly respond to France's common practice of torture during the war, nor is it haphazard that the story of another Algerian woman reignited the debate four decades later. However, given the fact that there were just as many men tortured as women (if not more), why have accounts of women tortured attracted such attention? What is at stake in circulating representations of tortured women at this colonial moment and beyond? And how does talking about the horrors of one's own "people" torturing actually shift the conversation away from the victim and larger systemic violence to some sort of national preservation?

Before returning to these questions, I think it is worth veering slightly to briefly review one case of a tortured man—Henri Alleg—that did receive tremendous attention, perhaps because he was a French man. Through his graphic account of the torture he endured at the hands of the French military, he is often credited with exposing the truth of interrogatory practices. (He also wrote that the torture he was forced to undergo was not as bad as that inflicted on Algerian prisoners.) Alleg's case exposes another set of gender-based dynamics and, in particular, highlights the ways in which masculinity plays a role in the torture scene. Whereas the intention of torture is often, as Marnia Lazreg (2008: 255) writes, 'to rebuild the native "suspect" or combatant from the ground up in a psychological action based on sex, masculinity and femininity,' there are also heavy stakes for the torturer, who is often equally demonstrating a level of masculinity through such violence. In his introduction to Alleg's memoir, Jean-Paul Sartre writes: 'the torturer pits himself against the tortured for his "manhood" and the duel is fought as if it were not possible for both sides to belong to the human race' (Alleg 2006: 30). Ross Chambers also gestures toward the ways in which the torture calls up traditional notions of manliness:

Alleg's testimony . . . demonstrates the archaic dimension of the appalling experience he underwent, and underscores its significance as an up-to-date version of an age-old, hyper-masculine ordeal of pain. . . . His narrative explores the practice of modern torture as an unholy alliance of industrial rationality and ancient trial by ordeal, a man-to-man encounter mediated by pain. (2008: 209)

Whereas the gender of the actors involved is certainly a key component in the scene that both Sartre and Chambers describe, curious is the absence of any implied hierarchy—or “right” to dominate—whence torture such as that of Boupacha originates. In their descriptions, torture becomes almost an affair of honor, a battle between equals, thereby erasing the racial, ethnic, and sexual component that is so central to the torture cases I have cited above.

Returning to my earlier examples, it bears repeating that the French colonial project was reliant on the use of Algerian women in particular ways. Similar to Gayatri Spivak’s well-known formulation, it was under the guise of saving Algerian women (from Algerian men) that the French army and government were able to gain support for certain policies (similar to a recent rhetoric of “women’s emancipation” heard in the US government making its case for the invasion of both Iraq and Afghanistan). Furthermore, whereas drawing attention to cases of tortured Algerian women had the initial effect of creating a public outcry over French policies and even causing some to question France’s status as “civilized,” it had another effect, too. By reading between the lines of Beauvoir’s writing, these narratives may have actually allowed for maintaining a sense of national superiority over this colonized group *because* these publicized torture victims were *female* bodies, that is, to borrow from Adriana Cavarero (cited in Oliver 2007: 130–31), ‘bare’ or ‘real’ bodies who would be excluded from the political realm (in contrast to ‘abstract’ male bodies, which are seen as properly political bodies). In this way, the decision to circulate stories and images of ‘real’ tortured bodies (i.e., female bodies) can be simultaneously interpreted as an implicit privileging of masculinity, or, at the very least, an assumption that stories of tortured men would have no effect on the winning of the war, for ‘abstract’ bodies cannot really be tortured.

## EPILOGUE: IRAQ

In investigating what sorts of narratives of torture were circulating during the French-Algerian War, the war in Iraq may serve as a worthy comparison. Despite their significant historical, geographical, and political differences, some scholars have begun to signal the commonalities between the two conflicts. Neil MacMaster (2004: 5) summarizes one such similarity: ‘almost every feature of the US response to the [9/11] crisis had been prefigured in French counter-insurgency strategy during the Algerian war, a body of doctrine that had had a major influence on US “low intensity” warfare during the four decades after 1961.’ Indeed, I believe that examining the parallels and divergences in representations of torture at these two moments may yield productive discussions about gendering—that is, how torture always already draws upon a matrix of power relations between “men” and “women” built around ‘the oppressive binary scripts of masculine and

feminine' (Puar 2007: 100)—and racialization based on ignorant ideas of Muslim ideologies deeply engrained in the Western imaginary, all of which are consistently drawn on to justify oppressive treatment.

The abuse of Iraqi detainees by American soldiers at Abu Ghraib may, at first glance, pose a contrary example to my above emphasis on accounts of tortured Algerian women, for the scandalous photos that were leaked notably lacked representations of women—Iraqi women, that is. As anyone familiar with the photos knows, women were glaringly present; they were, however, serving as torturers, a fact that may explain, in part, the public fascination with the images, as they played with traditional notions of how “women” act and what they are capable (or incapable) of. What remains the same in both contexts, however, is that women were used as weapons of war, their bodies serving very calculated purposes, regardless of whether they were in the role of torturer or victim. Algerian women as weapons of war has been discussed at length, and, in the case of the American women at Abu Ghraib, we need only turn to any account of the scandal to see how the trope of humiliating Muslim men through feigned sex acts or forced nudity ordered by (or in the presence of) women was a strategic tool concocted by higher-ups. Women were used as tools to “break” these men. Of course, Iraqi women were also targeted, and according to the US military’s Taguba Report (Office of the Secretary of Defense and Joint Staff 2004), at least one woman was raped at Abu Ghraib, a figure we know must be higher, and others were forced to strip. Despite the fact that photos of these acts most certainly exist, American news outlets, perhaps from government pressure or restriction, chose not to release images of tortured Iraqi women.

Returning to Iraq, operating alongside matrices of gender relations and the co-opting of female bodies is, like in Algeria, an invocation of national shame. To cite one example among many, on 7 May 2004, after the Abu Ghraib photos were exposed, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld stated:

I feel terrible about what happened to these Iraqi detainees. They are human beings. They were in US custody. Our country had an obligation to treat them right. We didn’t do that. That was wrong. To those Iraqis who were mistreated by members of US armed forces, I offer my deepest apology. It was un-American. And it was inconsistent with the values of our nation. (Rumsfeld 2004)

Rumsfeld here distances himself and the American people as a whole from the random acts of “a few bad apples.” Indeed, such a statement could have been uttered by French officials during the earlier conflict. Puar (2007: 113) comments: ‘the violence of the United States is an exceptional event, antithetical to Americanness, and thus by extension, US subjects emerge as morally, culturally, and politically exceptional through the production of the victims as repressed, barbaric, closed, uncouth.’ We need only think back to Alleg’s ‘IN OUR NAME’ or Beauvoir’s ‘Can we allow our country

to be so described?’ to see the ways in which publicized torture allows for attempts at recuperating nationality. While alluding to shame (just as Beauvoir did), guilt is avoided through a distancing from the violence.

And here gender plays a key role. Indeed, we might ask why photos of Iraqi women were not published by the American media. What is at stake in circulating stories of tortured Algerian women during the French-Algerian War but prohibiting dissemination of images of tortured Iraqi women? In Algeria, a distancing from torture could be achieved through intellectuals “saving” Algerian women (albeit from their fellow citizens), a semblance of French honor being maintained through critique, even while being rendered symbolically impotent in losing their most valuable former colony. And in Iraq, this was accomplished through a scapegoating of those highly exceptional women who tortured—exceptional because they were defying “femininity.” In both cases, the torturer’s culture remains relatively unscathed.

Torture during the war in Iraq, which may on the surface look quite different than it did in the French-Algerian War, is equally notable in the deployment of gender, sexuality, and nationality, as is the collective work performed around shame and nationalism to bolster a national identity constructed as superior to “barbaric” bodies (even though the savagery is instead located in those doing the torturing). I have attempted to flesh out how gender, sexuality, race, and nationality intersect in both isolated incidents of torture and systemic (and often sanctioned) practices of such violence. Tortured Algerian female bodies (as well as torturing American female bodies) became prime sites for the projection of individual and collective anxieties around female sexuality and imperial power; at the same time, these stories paradoxically served to preserve notions of identity built on self-critique and civility. Boupacha’s story, taken together with other representations of torture, uncovers the complicated ways in which women became convenient tools to redeem a certain honor; meanwhile the state is given a free pass to pursue (neo) colonialist projects. Further, by framing these acts as exceptional, they are revelatory of the ways in which stories of female bodies are used to maintain, sustain, and privilege normative nationality, masculinity, and, as Halimi alludes to in the opening epigraph, whiteness.

## NOTES

1. For a summary of these charges and a well laid-out defense of Beauvoir’s work, see Mary Caputi (2006).
2. Writing decades later, Boupacha’s lawyer Gisèle Halimi commented on Beauvoir’s level of detachment, positioning her own level of involvement against that of Beauvoir: ‘I discovered her rejection of any emotional approach to the problem. For her, Djamila was one victim among thousands, a useful “case” in the battle against torture and the war. I on the other hand, wished to restore a little humanity to the ravages of politics, making the public see Djamila as I had seen her in prison’ (1990: 297).
3. Beauvoir (Beauvoir and Halimi 1962: 195) wrote: ‘A witness whose name and whereabouts are known actually saw her at Hussein Dey, bleeding and

unconscious, being dragged along by her gaolers. (She was a virgin.) The seemingly unrelated surrounding text and the addition of parentheses inadvertently (or not) seems to draw attention to this detail that *Le Monde* wanted to suppress.

4. Bouhired remained in prison during the war and later married Vergès, who would express his admiration for her by explicitly contrasting her to Boupacha: 'she was in fact a revolutionary and was not claiming to be innocent, unlike Djamila Boupacha' (cited in Le Sueur 2005: 363).

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