

Preface

The immediate provocation for writing this book came from my sense of horror at the recent war against civilians in Algeria, and at how women have been affected by what some have referred to as a particularly “virile war.”¹ Systematic collective rape, kidnapping, and murder of women are common in all wars, of course; the current war in Algeria is no exception. Such incidents are rarely reported, however, or given adequate attention in the media, either within Algeria or outside. The work of a few feminist reporters—notably Salima Tlemçani, Salima Ghezali, and Ghania Mouffok in Algeria—has been exceptional in this regard.² What is also striking in Algeria is the way in which feminists, and others who correctly or incorrectly have been viewed as “westernized,” have been singled out for persecution in the war against civilians that has been waged since 1992. In the 1960s and even into the 1970s, Algeria set itself up as the avant-garde third-world nation that had effectively rid itself of the imperial machine and was working on an Islamic socialist model to build the state in a manner that would value the work done by men and women alike during the war of independence. It was only in the early 1980s that women’s access to public space began to be severely curtailed, with the institution of the 1984 Family Code, which clearly made women legally into citizens of a different class who would have to seek permission from men in the family to do things previously considered to be part of everyday life. The Family Code was significantly amended, but not abrogated, by President Abdelaziz Bouteflika in February 2005.

My commitment to a transnational—or perhaps more appropriately, a new internationalist—feminism demanded that I consider what had gone so wrong in Algeria, and also what structures of violence have shaped women’s lives in the colonial and postcolonial period in Algeria. Focusing on both the colonial relationship between France and Algeria

and the neocolonial situation of Algeria in the era of globalization, my research on Algeria has encountered ethical and scholarly problems arising from the corrupt colonial history of protofeminism in cross-border analyses. But a commitment to the idea that justice cannot be sought unless done so on an international scale caused me to start writing about Algeria in spite of claims of limitations that could (with some justification) be leveled against me from a nativist angle. My focus on Algeria derived from an interest in a kind of feminism that could reach across borders—indeed, from a feminism that would not deserve that name unless it had some global reach.

In recent years, much research has been conducted on colonialism and how its historical narrative has to be revised in the light of postcolonial societies. Competing historical accounts suggest alternative positions on women in nationalist histories. *Algeria Cuts* assesses the ways in which figures of woman have critically cut into the construction of these nationalist stories of the past, thus demonstrating, in the interstices, an engendering of the pursuit of justice, both material and imagined. By analyzing how national cohesion is simultaneously sustained and broken down through conceiving a shared history, an inassimilable ethical remainder can be perceived. The concept of “shared history” involves more than the power of institutional molding of groups. It also involves psychical investment in the idea of ethical responsibility to the group. *Algeria Cuts* provides a way of understanding how the shift away from group identification toward critical identification paradoxically engenders the pursuit of justice. The critical apparatus I have employed involves resistance to the idea that identity is formed through empathetic relation to others within a group, particularly when empathy involves projective identification. The book instead looks to and develops the idea of *critical identification* and the *refusal of identification*. I argue that it is this breakdown of assimilative identification that provides a critical agency in pursuit of justice.

Each of the chapters considers, through different media, what it means to write as a response to injustice performed on others and in the interest of achieving justice for others. Each also addresses forms of responsibility appropriate to feminism as it acts across borders to try to listen to the damage done by persons, events, or manifestations at and beyond those borders. The philosophical, literary, fine art, filmic, legal, and policy examples that make up the book provoke questions about represen-

tational politics and about the forms of women's political reasoning that cause damage to the masculinist frames currently dominating world politics. More pointedly, it considers how the figure of woman cuts into the masculinist frame of the Franco-Algerian relationship and manifests itself in the works discussed.

Algeria Cuts represents an interest in three periods of Algerian history: the period of French colonialism (1830–1962), the Algerian Revolutionary War of Independence (1954–1962) and the intriguing role women played in it, and contemporary Algeria and the feminist issues that have arisen there, where feminists, once strong and respected figures, have recently been singled out for persecution by both religious fundamentalists and the state (1962 to the present). The manner in which the imagined construct of the nation and the figure of woman that emerges alongside it has material consequences is a core concept of the book.

Given the cultural forms employed to elaborate the argument of this book, I propose a model of national history as developed through culture. Rather than construct a national history out of cultural enunciation, or indeed reduce culture to politics, economics, and history, my aim is to understand cultural artifacts as an “acting out” of national identities in their complex relationship to context.³ My concern is to elaborate how individuated histories are imagined in the force field of the nation and in the context of colonial conceptions of the past through cultural artifacts. It is also to understand how the national force field creates supplements and how those supplements manifest themselves, and damage, or *cut through*, the frame.

I have studied a variety of cultural artifacts to demonstrate the three phases of this complex relationship between France and Algeria. For the first phase, which spans the early years of French colonial rule, I include Delacroix's *Femmes d'Alger dans leur appartement* (1834 and 1849) and early French colonial documents on assimilation. The second phase of colonial history I address is the 1930s to the 1960s, that is, from modernism to the early years of Algerian independence, when Algeria attempted to conceive itself as an entity separate from France, and France struggled with separation. The artifacts from this period include surrealist and neorealist work ranging from Breton's *Manifeste des 121* (1960), which protested the treatment of Algerians by the French during the war, and the *First Surrealist Manifesto* (1924), both of which blur the distinction between

cultural artifacts and *realpolitik*. Also included are analyses of the paintings of Baya and Picasso's *Femmes d'Alger dans leur appartement*, and narratives of torture by Algerian women, including legal testimony, mock trials, and Pontecorvo's film *The Battle of Algiers*, which, in keeping with a neorealist style, presents us with a fictionalized documentary. For the third and final phase, the period following independence, in which the nation-states were separate yet struggled with the politics of separation and the deferred effects of hybridity, I consider the books and films of well-known Algerian Francophone writer, filmmaker, and historian Assia Djebar and other contemporary films on and from Algeria, and mock and real trials. Interspersed throughout the book is a reading of the current work of "French" or "Franco-Maghrebi" scholars working through their *nostalgérie* while Algeria has been split apart in civil war.

The book is divided into three sections. "Theorizing Justice" dwells on the ways in which a theoretical notion of justice emerges in the Franco-Maghrebi context. This includes chapters on Derridean notions of justice, and on mock and real trials in Algeria. The second section, "Melancholic Reminders," explores the legacy of Pontecorvo's *Battle of Algiers* and Delacroix's *Women of Algiers in Their Apartment* to reveal how the figure of woman challenges notions of representational politics and restitution. The final section, "Algeria Beyond Itself," is organized around the paintings of Baya and the writings of Assia Djebar in a comparative frame that questions comparison by thinking through mutual constitution. These two final chapters of the book take the questions raised by the figure of woman in the Franco-Algerian context beyond that site of mutual constitution and conflict in order to parochialize surrealism and modernism respectively, but also to provide a means of understanding modernist ideas of the international from the global periphery, as a cut into its dominant framework. The final section questions the space of the nation as an exclusively determining framework.

Algeria Cuts conceives of the relationship between individualized imagining and group formation in terms of history and memory, and in terms of conceptions of the past that seek to understand how the passing of a historical moment, framed as it is through global and local politics and economics, is introduced into the cultural imagination of the citizens or subjects of an artificial group such as the nation-state. One way of imagining the relationship to the past, the function of which is to

sustain a cohesive group into the future, has been through the concepts of mourning and melancholia. I argue that early models of the French nation-state required that the national subject be in a mournful relationship to the history of the state. In such a relationship, a series of events are worked through and remembered as forgotten, as Ernest Renan would formulate it, and successfully introjected into the national self. These *cuts* through Algerian history on my part focus on the inassimilable, the barely incorporated, and the melancholic traces that in turn cause damage to the force field of mournful national history that fails to introject them. In my readings, a focus on the figure of woman allows for a different political reason to emerge, one that cuts through the force fields that allow for injustice, looks to the future, and allows for the emergence and pursuit of justice. The conceptual weight of the *cut*, *couper*, or *coupure* is primarily Anglophone and Francophone in this project. Given the politics of language in Algeria, I hope the book will be cut through with the Arabic قطع or قص, or the Tamazight *anezsum* or *gzem*, or with the appropriate words in Kabyle, Chaoui, Chenoua, Hassaniya, or other languages whenever necessary.

With this focus on justice, Algeria ultimately becomes more and perhaps less than its history because it ultimately cannot be seen in this book only as an ontology. Algeria becomes the occasion for thinking about different forms of knowledge production, and my intellectual investment in Algeria also becomes philosophical. How metropolitan *epistemes* were written out of their relationship to colonies emerges as one of the foci of the project, particularly how conceptions of alterity (in abstract as well as in political categorizations of the foreign and the female) were theorized coterminous with, but in silence about, coloniality. Questioning the frames within which philosophical questions were posed clarifies the implications of understanding some “French theories” as *Franco-Maghrebi* theories shaped through the complicated history of decolonization from France faced by the countries of the Maghreb region. To some extent, this questioning foregrounded the shortcomings of accounts that neglected the context, pretext, subtext, and discipline of colonialism and decolonization in recent intellectual developments. But what also emerged was the necessity of a theory of the inadequacy of causality, biography, and foundationalism as ways of accounting for the production of certain forms of knowledge. The introduction and first chapter of the book lay out, and

subsequent chapters expand on, how deconstructive reading techniques produced through the years of Algerian decolonization are particularly pertinent in the work of pursuing justice internationally, and are accountable to the history of decolonization, its psychical as well as its historical impact, and its reshaping of the world's subjects.