Art beyond Borders

Published by Central European University Press

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A Dying Colonialism, a Dying Orientalism: Algeria, 1952

Each person knows that governments have done precisely all they can to organize amnesia. Amnesia about the reality of the colonial system, the struggles and sacrifices made by an entire people who rose up to break their chains. Amnesia and silence around an atrocious war into which tens of thousands of young Frenchman were drawn against their will.
—Henri Alleg, 2009

In December 2009, the Nelson Mandela library in the communist municipality of Vitry-sur-Seine outside Paris held a modest exhibition: *Two Painters in Algeria on the Verge of Insurrection, 1951–1952: Mireille Miailhe/Boris Taslitzky*. The catalog preface by Alleg added prestige: in 1958, as a communist militant and director of the daily newspaper *Alger républicain*, Alleg

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became world news after his account of torture in *La Question.* Taslitzky died at the age of ninety-four in 2005; Mialhe in 2010. Alleg is thus one of the “last survivors” whose engagement with the struggles of colonial peoples adds to the exceptional narrative of Communism’s relationship with France. The painful narrative of decolonization cannot be told here. However, the definition of conquered territories as “greater France,” *la plus grande France,* adds another dimension to the notion of “art beyond borders in communist Europe.” The trip to Algeria by Taslitzky and Mialhe offers us a *punktum*—an eloquent moment which deconstructs the colonial narrative.

The story of socialist realism in France is becoming more familiar. The strategic nature of decision making for the French Communist Party (PCF), beholden at this time to the Comintern and a nationwide electorate in France, must be emphasized. A campaign such as the *Algérie 1952* show involved the Communist Parties of both France and Algeria (the PCA). It was part of a global network of cultural operations that spread via press coverage and filmed reportage, involving the intellectual prestige of artists such as Pablo Picasso and the poets Louis Aragon and Pablo Neruda. The efficiency of painting exhibitions—so cheap to produce—should be underlined, particularly in a context where personal domestic television was as rare in Mediterranean countries as it was in Eastern Europe.

In Paris, the exhibition at the Galerie Weil in January 1953 demonstrates that the attention of the PCF was turning from Indochina to Algeria. This followed the arguable failure of Picasso’s painting *Massacre in Korea* at the May Salon of 1951, but the scandalous success of the Autumn Salon, where five paintings lambasting French policy in Indochina were taken off the walls by the police—with substantial press reaction. *Algérie 1952* also repeated the successful strategy of a show aimed at the workforce and staged at the heart of Paris’s bourgeois art world, prior to a tour of Eastern European satellite countries. Politically, it was designed to intervene in the national debate on Algeria during the brief period when the PCF’s domination of the anticolonial argu-

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ment had become a powerful recruiting machine (initially hostile, even Jean-Paul Sartre now adopted the party; he would be faithful until the Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1956). However, two months after the exhibition ended, Stalin’s unanticipated death in March 1953 left the PCF in political disarray. Subsequently embarrassed by the scandal around Picasso’s obituary portrait of Stalin, the party’s attention was diverted from Algeria. By the Autumn Salon of 1953, socialist realist history paintings on a grand scale would be publically disavowed. Henceforth a strategy of ostensible de-Stalinization would emphasize the politique de la grandeur française: a patriotic rhetoric of “French grandeur” that sat uncomfortably with the previous anticolonialist stance.4

Algérie 1952 occasioned the last grand history paintings in the French orientalist tradition. Here, Miailhe’s status is crucial (Plate 32.1). She is surely France’s greatest female socialist realist painter. Yet the anathema associated with the term réalisme socialiste became all too clear, when after the richest of personal encounters, her distress lead to the withdrawal of both my article and her drawings from a major Parisian retrospective exhibition on Algeria in 1992.5 Anissa Bouayed, organizer of the Vitry-sur-Seine show of 2009, also took care to establish a distance: “Formally, we are also far from socialist realism, for there is no presupposed or restricting framework here,” she declared. The drawings and small oil sketches displayed were essentially preparatory studies in the Beaux-Arts tradition. Significantly, the huge canvases shown at the Galerie Weil exhibition in 1953 were not indicated in the 2009 catalog. The paintings’ romantic lineage argues, in France at least, for a redefinition of socialist realism involving subject matter and time frame (including questions around realism and anachronism) rather than “style” itself and, as I conclude, the European language of painting itself was problematic in a colonial context.6

“On the very sites where Chassériau, Delacroix, Eugène Fromentin and Constantin Guys were intoxicated with the miracle of the Orient, its fanta-


5 See Laurent Gervereau et al., eds., La France en guerre d’Algérie (Paris: BDIC, 1993). “Femmes d’Algérie, femmes françaises, autour de Mireille Miailhe” (suppressed), should have complemented Christian Derouet’s text on Taslitzky (which occasioned the artist’s donation to the Centre Pompidou).

6 Contemporary realisms from Balthus and Jean Hélion to Bernard Buffet or the political expressionism of Bernard Lorjou form part of this context.
sias and its exotic dancers, two great artists of our times, discovering the un-fathomable misery of a people, celebrate its hopes and battles” wrote the communist art critic Jean Rollin in 1953. The depiction of the Orient was as old as colonialism itself: military and topographical imperatives preceded “orientalism” proper. The picturesque tradition subsequently extended from exotic landscapes to the realm of the sexualized feminine—where the academic nude, as odalisque or almée (singer, dancer, poetess) was reframed within the imagined excess of the harem—the dream that was the “Other” of colonial reality. Algérie 1952 is a détournement of that tradition, a demonstration of its misrepresentations: via explicit reference to Delacroix it brought political “reality” onto the dream-territory of the painted surface. Life under colonial rule demonstrated a symbolic violence embodied in language, while its picturing demonstrated a systemic violence: the “often catastrophic consequences” of the smooth functioning of the system, according to Slavoj Žižek’s analysis. This violence, symbolic and systemic, preceded the eruption of what the administration first named “civil disobedience,” followed by guerilla tactics and the one-on-one conflict of rape or torture in the situation of the “war with no name”: the guerre sans nom.

Among communist intellectuals and artists, Boris Taslitzky wielded great moral authority, due to his 1930s experience within the AEER (Association of Revolutionary Writers and Artists), his closeness to Louis Aragon, and his status as a resistant and déporté. He had made drawings at the heart of political action from 1934 onward, through the Popular Front era and his internment in several French prison camps. His Buchenwald concentration camp drawings, translated into large Salon scale paintings, were at the root of the polemic “Picasso or Taslitzky?,” which triggered a debate about art and style within the Communist Party in November 1946, before any postwar social-

Mireille Glodek was born in Paris, like Taslitzky, from a Jewish émigré family; she was ten years his junior. Glodek’s father went back to Russia to witness the 1917 revolution, but returned to France and became a Zionist. Mané-Katz, the Paris School painter, offered Miailhe crucial encouragement and she briefly attended classes at the École des Beaux-Arts (as Taslitzky had done). The war forced her to flee to the south, where in Banyuls-sur-Mer, the model Dina Vierny introduced her to the Catalan sculptor Aristide Maillol. In 1942 she joined the Resistance in Toulouse, meeting Jean Miailhe, her future husband. The scenes of revenge and denunciation she witnessed informed her painting from 1945 to 1946. Her fascination with the tribunal—a subject that would reappear in Algeria—was transformed by Honoré Daumier’s bitter satire, reinforced by his 1945 Musée Galliera retrospective in Paris, organized by the resistant Front National des Arts. The dark silhouettes of toulousaines seeking retribution in the courts (superimposed upon the memory of Caravaggio’s mournful courtesans) were exhibited to great acclaim as The Widows at the “under-30s” Salon in 1946.11

In April 1947, Taslitzky asked her to exhibit with him.12 In 1949 he reviewed her solo show noting “a human content turned to a ferocious critique of the world in which she lives . . . talent and a conscience.”13 A member of the Communist Party for over three years, Miailhe’s work became increasingly militant. In spring 1950, she joined the team that transformed the Gresillons market at Genevilliers into a setting for the Twelfth Congress of the PCF. Here, Taslitzky’s huge backdrop of a gesturing Stalin demonstrated Party orthodoxy, while leader Maurice Thorez advocated socialist realism linked to national themes. His speeches spurred the production of paintings, touring exhibitions, films, and novels, marking the high point of the movement.14 Ironically, 

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13 Boris Taslitzky, “Un contenu humain orienté sur une critique féroce du monde dans lequel elle vit. . . . talent et conscience,” France d’Abord (December 1949) on Miailhe’s show, Galerie du Bac, 19 November to 23 December 1949.
14 Le don des militants (Montreuil: Musée d’histoire vivante, 2009) demonstrated the fiftieth birthday cult of personality around Thorez (imitating Stalin). See also Annette Wieviorka, Maurice et Jeannette, Biographie du couple Thorez (Paris: Fayard, 2010), 437–35.
most took place in his absence: gravely ill, he left France for the USSR in November 1950.

During 1951, meticulous planning involved contact between the PCF and its Algerian counterpart to organize itineraries and the 400,000 francs budget for travel, subsistence, and materials. The Algerian Communist Party expressly requested a female complement to Taslitzky to venture where men were forbidden. Miailhe and Taslitzky were in Algiers by January 1952; the trip was semi-clandestine. He traveled eastward from Algiers to Oran, Beni-Saf, Ain-Témouchant, Sidi-bel-Abbès, Tlemcen, then far across to the west: to Constantine, down to Biskra, Djema Setif, and back to Algiers. Miailhe covered Algiers itself. Accompanied, as she recalled, by a Jewish *pied noir* (an Algerian-born guide of settler origin), she visited the streets of the Casbah, the slums, the port where the dockers loaded up at dawn, and various families in both the Arab and European communities.

Traveling to Blida in February, she managed to attend the trial of the “56 de Blida”—fifty-six nationalists, of the clandestine OS (Special Organization)—by befriending women in the defendants’ families. Like the nineteenth-century painter Henriette Brown, or later, Lucie Ranvier-Chartier, Elisabeth Faure, or Jeanne Thil, she was highly conscious of the tensions between reportage and her artistic heritage. Yet whereas the object of a nineteenth-century female orientalist was to penetrate the harem in native dress, Miailhe, veiled and in the djellaba, sketchbook hidden in its folds, was smuggled into the courtroom to depict the confrontation between defendants and gendarmes. “I make my drawings discreetly. French lawyers are there to defend the accused.” In *Tribunal*, the viewer takes up the position of these female spectators: a confrontation of the sexes is implicit.

In Cherchell, Miailhe was taken by her guide Mustapha to his home. She witnessed the life of an extended Muslim family, small-time cultivators, who themselves employed agricultural workers, including children. The women in the family were illiterate; the boys attended the École Communale; the

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second son, a nationalist, was the treasurer of the National Liberation Front (FLN), which was at the time breaking away from the PCA. She was then invited to join the touring electoral campaign of communist deputy Pierre Fayet, with Mustapha and a chauffeur. They visited Boghail, Djelfa, Laghouat, and Bou-Saada, where, appalled at the sight of starving children, Miailhe took photographs, not as an aide-mémoire for her painting, but as irrefutable evidence: “the same misery everywhere” she recalled. Returning to Algiers she linked up again with Alger Républicain and Henri Alleg (who had welcomed her), before flying back to France. “I arrived morally shattered and out of things—certain that grave events were in preparation.”

The arduous task of working small sketches into finished paintings began: Miailhe’s largest canvas, Young Agricultural Workers in the Area around Algiers, would be 3 x 2 meters in scale.

In June 1952, the communist illustrated magazine Regards published a special number on North Africa. The editorial declared: “The conquest of Algeria was one of the most cynical cases of organized pillage of the last century. . . The conquest and the repression of rebellion were accompanied by terrible massacres. . . The spectacle of the misery of the North African people is one of the most poignant in the world.” The artists’ photographs and drawings were used to illustrate the article “Guided by a Blind Boy,” by Resistance heroine and journalist Madeleine Riffaud (sent out on a reportage by the CGT trades’ union federation). A book, Deux peintres et un poète retour d’Algérie, with Jacques Dubois’s poem appeared in July. Here, Taslitzky’s sketches of striking dockers, militants, children of the shantytown bidonvilles appeared first. In 2009, the characters still spoke vividly to Alleg: Hadj Omar, a communist veteran of the 1919 Black Sea mutiny; Kalif Chabana, a peasant who lost a limb in the appalling Sétif massacres on 8 May 1945 (France’s liberation day); Tahar Ghomri, a communist peasant from Tlemcen who would later die in the maquis.
Miallhe’s work followed. In the crude, rushed printing job, her notes were left visible. Goya joined Daumier in her sketches: the long crayoned titles such as *Cité Mahédinne in Algiers: Seven Drinking Fountains for 30,000 People* acknowledged the tradition of Goya’s *Disasters of War*. In *The Administration Has Just Passed By*, a homeless woman crouches among boulders, sheltered by the planks of her demolished shack; she draws her meager garments around her. *Her Neighbor: It’s Here She’ll Give Birth in a Few Days’ Time* recaptures a snatch of conversation between Mialhle, her female guide, and the woman whose interior they enter. Jagged black contours conveyed anger: 88% of *Children without a School*. Drawings dramatized with fluid wash were more typically “orientalist”: the squatting woman in *Woman and Child*, or the cluster of figures in *Pause at Noon, It’s the Colon Who Sells the Bread*, recalling similar figures in watercolor by Delacroix or Gerôme. The rough sketch of the *Child with Trachoma* conveys the anxiety of Mialhle’s own professional gaze: the boy’s right eye, upturned, remains opaque. The inevitable relationship between pathos and voyeurism, blindness and insight, is here at its most problematic.

A lithograph of “*Algeria Will Be Free*: The Arrival of the 56 Patriots at the Blida Tribunal” was sold at the Fête de l’Humanité of 1952. *Deux peintres et un poète* was signed by Taslitzky at the National Writers’ book sale at Paris’s famed Vel d’Hiv, in October. Mialhle’s *Group of Young Arabs in Rags* was accepted for the Tuileries Salon but officially removed before the opening. The huge *Young Agricultural Workers in the Area around Algiers* was refused at the Autumn Salon—but illustrated in the journal *La Patrie* with due outrage and publicity.20 Provocation in painting was linked to publicity-generating events. *Algérie 1952* would repeat for Algeria what the Autumn Salon scandal of 1951 had attempted for Indochina, when the police removed seven canvases, including Taslitzky’s *Port de Bouc* (Tate Modern), from the walls prior to the official presidential visit to the Salon. The date—6 November 1951—was chosen to found the association to defend and commemorate Maréchal Pétain, France’s head of state under German occupation.21 These

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coinciding events perfectly exemplified the communists’ claim of “two Franc-
es,” one capitalist, bourgeois, collaborationist, extending to the military and
the police force, one proletarian, patriotic, representing national values, justi-
fying the PCF confrontation with the government. Bourgeois art in the “im-
perialist” camp (read abstraction?) was likewise differentiated from socialist
realism and its great history painting tradition. As Taslitzky said, “the fact
that two cultures confront each other in each nation does not mean there are
two national traditions.”

In January 1953, the exhibition of forty paintings and sixty drawings fi-
nally opened in the elegant Galerie André Weil, Avenue Matignon. The post-
er and invitations for Algérie 1952 were designed by Miallhe. André Fou-
geron’s Mining Country series, shown at the Bernheim-Jeunes in January 1951
set the precedent: a respected and bourgeois gallery was given over to a par-
ty painter for the exhibition of a series of critical, politically legible paintings
and drawings; the opening attended by the Communist Party political and
artistic élite, a campaign was orchestrated in the communist press, a working-
class public was bussed in from the communist red belt around Paris, finally
(after a regional showing) the works left for a tour of in Eastern Europe and
were acquired by institutions in Soviet satellite countries. Two Cercle d’Art
publications were produced for Fougeron: a cheap book and a luxury folder
of color plates, as would be the case for Algérie 1952.

Advance press appeared in the authoritative communist daily, L’Humanité.
Etienne Fajon, member of the PCF Politbureau, eulogized Mialhle’s Young
Agricultural Workers; the visitors’ book included Picasso’s signature and
touching tributes from Algerian workers and students. The right-wing Al-
gerian press immediately denounced “Algeria sullied by communist paint-
ing, . . . [as] a flagrant deformation of the truth.” Government action ensued.
A press release declared: “By decree of the Minister of the Interior, the po-
lice service proceeded to remove the mast supporting the Algérie 1952 exhibi-

23 André Fougeron corroborated the suggestion that “Algérie ’51” was created as a riposte to “Les Pays de
Mines,” and that the alternation of exhibitions by Fougeron and Taslitzky constituted a PCF bipartite
24 B, “L’Algérie éclaboussée par la peinture communiste” and “Une déformation flagrante de la vérité,” Jour-
nal d’Algé, 1 and 3 January 1953.
tion poster at 1:30 p.m. today.”

25 In Algiers, 2,500 dockers acknowledged the show’s success as “a work of truth and fraternity.” The tribute was followed up by other dockers unions.

26 The PCF, with its “two France” ideology, subscribed to a typically Manichaean Cold War vision—duplicated in the press. To Etienne Fajon’s: “Here is Mireille Miailhe’s Women’s Portrait, their blind eyes empty with trachoma, like so many others in Algeria,” the Echo d’Alger (a staunch defender of “French Algeria”) proposed an alternative: Ophtalmological Consultation in the Bled. “We know (and the people know far better than we do) a whole cohort of doctors and medical auxiliaries who have devoted their lives to the struggle against trachoma.”

27 The celebrated deportee and anthropologist Germaine Tillion traveled once more to Algeria from December 1954 to March 1955. She offered a dispassionate, demographic analysis of the clash between “nonadapted” and “industrialized” peoples, pitting “‘Everything-that-France-has-done-in-Algeria’ (hospitals, roads, port constructions, big towns, a little industry a quarter of the necessary schools) against ‘Everything-that-France-has-not-done-in-Algeria’ (three quarters of the necessary schools, other industries, a plan for agriculture with agrarian reform and the necessary experts).”

28 Moreover, Miailhe’s uncaring Colon, master of the Young Agricultural Workers, and her Daumieresque, toad-like gendarmes in Permanent Conspiracy, raise the problem of stereotypes which Franz Fanon was to expose in 1959. His book L’An V de la révolution algérienne, with its deliberate reference to the French revolutionary calendar and the Terror, appeared as A Dying Colonialism in 1965. He describes, for example, lesser colons, farmers or managers who were so often on the side of the revolutionaries.

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25 “Par décision du Ministère de l’Intérieur, les services de police ont procédé, à 13h30 aujourd’hui, à l’enlèvement du mât supportant l’affiche de l’exposition ‘Algérie ’52,’” (Decree, 5 January 1953).

26 Compare the congratulatory letter sent by the Bone dockers’ syndicate to the artists at the Galerie André Weil, 16 January 1953.

27 “Voici le Portrait de Femmes de Mireille Miailhe, avec ses yeux d’aveugle vidé par le trachome, comme tant d’autres en Algérie,” Etienne Fajon, L’Humanité, 30 December 1952, and “La Consultation ophtalmologique dans le bled. Nous connaissons (et le peuple le connaît encore mieux que nous) toute une phalange de médecins et d’auxiliaires médicaux qui ont voué leur existence à la lutte contre le trachome,” B. "L’Algérie éclaboussée," Journal d’Alger, 1 January 1953.


phasis on the family and parent–child relationships in the work of both artists was poignantly undercut by Fanon’s analysis of family tensions and disintegration during the war period.\textsuperscript{30} And the shantytown/rural emphasis of \textit{Algérie 1952} was as selective as its emphasis on the exploited and oppressed, French, Spanish and \textit{arabo-berbères}: it was far from fully representative of the \textit{nation en formation}\textsuperscript{31}.

Fanon’s opening chapter, “Algeria Unveiled,” offers the richest retrospective critique of \textit{Algérie 1952}. Socialist realism was defined by Taslitzky in 1952 as a two-way revelation: subject matter into art, art into the visual world of the proletariat: “The working class . . . has torn off the veil which separated the world of the arts from its own concerns.”\textsuperscript{32} The play of revelation and refusal, of sight and blindness was repeated across the range of works exhibited in \textit{Algérie 1952}: the artist “guided by the blind,” the depiction of trachoma, the women peering through their veils at militant meetings. Most striking, surely, was the symbolic unveiling in Taslitzky’s \textit{Women of Oran} (a long panorama of 2.45 x 0.45 meters; Plate 32.2). He explained:

striking dockers found themselves in difficulty confronting the police who were savagely attacking them. Alerted, the women came out, went down to the port to help them, and in the midst of violent combat, before an Orient amazed, veils were removed from their customarily hidden faces. . . . It was women’s passion, marking an important step toward their liberation, both national and social, a plunge into the future.\textsuperscript{33}

The color, the gesticulating women with swirling draperies—above all the central figure with raised arms, aiming a huge curbstone at an armed \textit{gendarme}—recall Delacroix’s \textit{Fanatics of Tangiers} (1837). The trope of the wom-

\textsuperscript{30} Fanon, \textit{L’an V de la révolution}, Chapter 3 on the Algerian family.
\textsuperscript{32} “La classe ouvrière . . . a déchiré le voile qui séparait le monde des arts de ses propres préoccupations,” Taslitzky, “L’Art et les traditions nationales,” 72.
\textsuperscript{33} “Les Docks en grève, se trouvaient en difficulté face à une police qui les assaillaient sauvagement. Alar- mées, les femmes sortirent et descendirent sur la porte pour leur porter secours et, au cours d’un combat violent, devant l’Orient stupéfait, les voiles s’effarèrent des visages que la couurme avait cachés. . . . C’est la passion des femmes, marquant un pas important vers leur libération, à la fois nationale et sociale, fonçant vers l’avenir.” Boris Taslitzky, \textit{Algérie 52} (Paris: Editions Cercle d’Art, 1953).
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...en warrior recalls to Jean Jacques François Lebarbier’s Jeanne Hachette at the Siege of Beauvais in 1472 (1784), a source for Delacroix’s Liberty on the Barricades, which Taslitzky knew so well.34

In Fanon’s analysis the veils symbolize a whole tissue of meanings. Prime among them is that of refusal: “This woman who sees without being seen frustrates the colonizer. There is no reciprocity. She does not yield herself, does not give herself, does not offer herself.” Rape is the equivalent of the tearing of the veil. And removing the veil (for Taslitzky a “step toward liberation”) was also a step toward breaking up Algerian society: Fanon described significant colonial investment in this project. Only after 1955 did the coop-tion of female terrorists involve a revision of attitudes toward the veil on the Algerian side, and this, precisely, in a context where “Not one of them failed to realize that any Algerian woman arrested would be tortured to death.” Unveiled, the militant “Algerian woman . . . in conflict with her own body . . . is a link, sometimes an essential one, in the revolutionary machine.” Thus Mireille Miallhe, Parisian artist and militant, disguised in Arab women’s clothing, learning the customs of Arab/Berber peoples in Algeria had a dialectical Other: the female Algerian militant and bomber: “that young girl, unveiled only yesterday, who walks with sure steps down the streets of the European city teeming with policemen, parachutists, militiamen.”35

Critics of both sexes were anxious to differentiate Mialhle’s drawing as sensual and “female” in contrast to Taslitzky’s “precision and hardness of an act of accusation.”36 Writing on Mialhle for the Algérie 1952 luxury print album, Taslitzky fluctuates between the exhortations of a professorial elder and the anxiety of a transferred “self-criticism” (using the required communist rhetoric).37 The differentiated critical response to Mialhle’s work veils a dis-
turbing perception of her closeness to her subject, an intimation that she implicitly perceived what Fanon defined as the hidden matriarchy of Algerian society: “Behind the visible, manifest patriarchy, the more significant existence of a basic matriarchy was affirmed.”38 Julia Kristeva has defined “the terror of power and the power of terrorism” as a breaking out of a female, cyclic, monumental time. The sensual orientalist dreamworld implied the female time of tradition and repetition; the military vision, a male time of battle, terror, rape, and torture.39

Torture, practiced in France by the Nazis, appropriated as a tool in Algeria, was theorized as a reascent, twentieth-century phenomenon in French civil society before 1950; it is at the core of most analyses of the Algerian war.40 That this debate should explode over the case of a woman is no surprise: the cause of Djamila Boupacha, the FLN militant accused of placing bombs in Algiers, would involve Simone de Beauvoir, the Tunisian lawyer Gisèle Halimi, Germaine Tillion, and communist glitterati including Picasso. In The Second Sex, de Beauvoir had declared that to talk of the Other was to set up a Manichaeans structure (“Poser l’Autre, c’est définir un manichéisme”). Now, she concluded: “What is exceptional in the Boupacha affair is not the facts, but their unveiling.”41

Algérie 1952 was premonitory. “For once color, the picturesque and orientalism in painting do not mask the pain of Algeria, and the reasons to fight. For once, painters have set up an unforgiving indictment of the colonial regime,” the PCA (Algerian Communist Party) proclaimed in 1953.42 Yet, color, the picturesque, the very tropes of orientalism are coded in the feminine.

38 “Derrière le patriarchat visible, manifeste, on affirme l’existence, plus capitale d’un matriarcat de base.” Fanon, L’an V de la révolution, 16.
41 Kristin Ross’s Fast Cars, Clean Bodies: Decolonisation and the Reordering of French Culture (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996) is the most striking account in English.

“Pour une fois, les couleurs, le pittoresque et l’orientalisme ne masquent pas dans la peinture la douleur de l’Algérie et les raisons de lutter...” For one time, colors have dressed an irreproachable accusation against the colonial regime.” Letter to Boris Tszlitzky and Mircelle Mialhe, sent by the secretariat of the Algerian Communist Party, L’Humanité, 15 January 1953.
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Miailhe’s involvement with the female bodies and spaces she drew, Taslitzky’s transference of the revolutionary ideal to women in *Women of Oran*—with the “unnatural” trope of the woman warrior—anticipated an imminent rupture, a tear of the veil. An anxiety around femininity destabilized the communist rhetoric of militancy. And, inevitably, the artists’ structural position could override the signs of solidarity: “Everywhere fear in their eyes and their gestures . . . simply because the stranger who paints them is like those who have hurt them in his clothes and language.” As Delacroix himself quickly understood, realism transgressed the Islamic prohibition against graven images.

Thus the regime of representation—whether romantic or “socialist” realism—was the regime of the conqueror: a situation played out in the USSR itself as socialist realism was imposed upon Islamic peoples. It was a regime deployed by the USSR as propaganda in its satellite nations, who were themselves familiar with the French Beaux-Arts tradition; who could read the pictures within the “correct” Manichaean framework—as socialist realism was conceived to be read. *Algérie 1952* was sent to tour Eastern Europe: Miailhe’s *Young Agricultural Workers* and Taslitzky’s *Père algérien* were donated to the Museum of Fine Arts in Bucharest, on the first stop of the Eastern European tour. She traveled to the official opening there, Taslitzky to Budapest, both to the inauguration in Prague.

France’s *mission civilisatrice* was referred to with scorn in the context of *Algérie 1952*: the works showed “all that serves to belie those ready-made phrases about the ‘civilizing mission.’” The rights of man enshrined by the French Revolution and its aftermath, the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century intellectual heritage, were part of France’s “educational” mission. Yet, as Rita Maran has declared:

43 “Partout l’effroi dans leurs yeux et dans leurs gestes . . . tout simplement parce que l’inconnu qui les peint ressemble par son costume et son langage aux gens qui leur ont fait mal.” Étienne Fajon in *L’Humanité*, 30 December 1952.

44 See André Joubin, ed., *Correspondance générale d’Éugène Delacroix* (Paris: Plon, 1935), vol. 1, 175 and 184 (letters of 8 February and 1 April 1832), “Leurs préjugés sont très grands contre le bel art de la peinture . . . l’habit et la figure de chrétien sont en antipathie à ces gens-ci, au point qu’il faut toujours être escorté de soldats.”


46 “Quelques aspects d’une exposition. Algérie 52,” corrected page proofs, no source. Taslitzky archives.
Object of the “civilizing mission,” the colonized was never yet a subject with full rights; structurally, the colonized was never fully “man.” . . . The colonized could not reach adulthood under colonialism, despite the fact that to make him into “man” was a key legitimating doctrine of colonialism.47

The Algerian war, an apotheosis of tripartite tensions, civil, religious, and political, would witness France’s violation of its declaration of human rights of 1789, specific articles of the Charter of the United Nations (1945), the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the United Nations in 1948, and the Geneva Convention of 1949. With Algérie 1952, a dying—if paroxysmal—orientalism coincided with France’s dying colonialism. The war would shortly explode as we know it, with its violence, its repressed psychoses, its retrospective melancholy, its tragic reenactments.48

48 Taslitzky’s Women of Oran was exhibited with works by Mireille Miallh in Les Artistes internationaux et la Révolution d’Algérie for the opening of the Musée National d’Art Moderne et Contemporain, Algiers, in spring 2008. Mireille Miallh was present. Thanks to the late Mireille Miallh and Boris Taslitzky, to Evéline Taslitzky, Florence Miallh and Isabelle Rollin-Royer, to Anissa Bouyaed for her exhibitions and to Adrien Sina who accompanied me to Vitry and took photographs on 16 September 2009. I would be grateful for help from colleagues in tracing large-scale paintings from Algérie 1952.