

RE-VISIONS OF VIOLENCE: TABOO AND TRANSFORMATION  
IN THE PAINTINGS OF CONTEMPORARY FRENCH-ALGERIAN ARTIST  
DALILA DALLÉAS BOUZAR

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## **PLEDGE**

*This thesis represents my own work in accordance with University regulations.*

**X    Charlotte Grove Reynders**

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## INTRODUCTION

*"La violence du temps déchire l'âme. Par la déchirure entre l'éternité."  
(The violence of time tears the soul apart. Through the opening, eternity enters).<sup>1</sup>*

- Simone Weil, *Cahiers*

On the homepage of contemporary artist Dalila Dalléas Bouzar's personal blog, she proclaims the overarching motive of her creative practice: "My ambition, to free myself from history."<sup>2</sup> Through this statement, she expresses an individualist attitude, laying bare her desire to escape the confines of her past, both personal and cultural. Born in Oran to Algerian parents in 1974, Bouzar moved to Paris with her father, a construction worker, when she was only two years old, and she spent the rest of her young life in France.<sup>3</sup> As an Algerian woman who grew up in the *métropole*, she occupies a twilight world that brims with her two homelands' collective memories of colonial violence and cross-cultural encounter.

When placing Bouzar's self-proclaimed desire to escape history in conversation with her oeuvre and with her scholarly reception to date, key points of contradiction emerge. First, Bouzar's stated desire to escape history appears paradoxical in light of the prevalence of historical content throughout her body of work. For instance, over the past two decades, she has created multiple large-format paintings inspired directly by landmarks of the Western art historical canon ranging from French representations of nude bathers to Eugène Delacroix's *Femmes d'Alger dans leur Appartement* (1834). Moreover, a significant portion of her oeuvre reimagines the formal content of archival

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<sup>1</sup> My translation.

<sup>2</sup> Dalila Dalléas Bouzar, *Dalila Dalléas Bouzar – My Ambition, To Free Myself from History* (blog), accessed January 29, 2019, <http://daliladalleas.com/blog/>.

<sup>3</sup> Dalila Dalléas Bouzar, "About," *Dalila Dalléas Bouzar*, accessed May 5, 2018, <http://daliladalleas.com/>; Simon Njami, ed., *La Cité dans le Jour Bleu : Réenchantements* (Bielefeld : Kerber Verlag, 2016), 293.

photographs from the Algerian War of Independence (1954-1962) and the Algerian Civil War (1991-2002), transforming documentary material into evocative drawings and paintings. Even through her choice to confine her methods to figurative modes of representation, she inscribes herself within an established history of visual expression. On the whole, her references to art historical tradition and contemporary Algerian history raise questions about the nature and scope of her stated “ambition” and call for a more in-depth examination of the artist’s relationship to history.

Second, while Bouzar’s statement exudes self-reliance, her reception to date suggests that scholars – excluding those who have collaborated with Bouzar on monographic catalogues of her work – tend to group her with other artists on the grounds of her Algerian background. One key example of this phenomenon is an article by art historian Érika Nimis that appears in *Archive (Re)mix: Vues d’Afrique*, a collection of essays on contemporary African artists’ innovative engagement with archival material. On the one hand, Nimis attends to the distinctive characteristics of Bouzar’s technique, describing the “quasi-abstraction” of the drawings in her series *Algérie année 0 ou quand commence la mémoire* (2011-2012). She is particularly interested in the ways in which Bouzar reimagines archival imagery outside the confines of official Algerian history. On the other hand, Nimis groups Bouzar with three other female Algerian artists – Rachida Azdaou, Amina Menia, and Zineb Sedira – and describes these women as an artistic family or “famille artistique.”<sup>4</sup> In her view, Bouzar’s drawings of archival photographs from the Algerian War of Independence and the Algerian Civil War share similarities

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<sup>4</sup> Érika Nimis, « Passeuses d’Histoires : des Archives ‘Miniscules’ pour Dire les Silence de l’Histoire Algérienne, » in *Archive (Re)mix : Vues d’Afrique*, edited by Maëline le Lay, Dominique Malaquais and Nadine Siegert (Rennes : Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2015), 40.

with the videos, photographs, paintings, and installation projects of other female Algerian artists in that they facilitate the transmission of memories to a present-day viewership. Although Nimis alludes to Bouzar in her article, her analysis prioritizes a broader examination of the role of archival material in the work of contemporary women artists from Algeria, highlighting only a narrow subsection of Bouzar's oeuvre to achieve that end. Along similar lines, cultural historian Fanny Gillet references Bouzar in an essay on the role of photographs from the Algerian Civil War in French and Algerian art from 1992 to 2012. Linking archive-inspired artistic production to processes of memory formation and memorialization, Gillet uses Bouzar's drawing of former Algerian president Mohamed Boudiaf, who was assassinated in 1992, to exemplify the broader creative phenomenon of reimagining the Algerian archive.<sup>5</sup> These examples suggest that the literature to date on Bouzar generally associates her work with Algerian artists' contemporary practices of "re-mixing" or reworking historical material. What remains to be explored is the relationships that Bouzar's engagement with art historical tradition and the archive bear to one another and to her oeuvre as a whole.

While grouping Bouzar with contemporary Algerian artists illuminates key aspects of her creative practice, it is important to note that her work only partially intersects broader trends in the contemporary Algerian arts scene. Curator and critic Nadira Laggoune-Aklouche discusses such trends at length in *Algeria: More or Less*, a catalogue of contemporary Algerian artwork commissioned by collector Luciano Benetton. According to Laggoune-Aklouche, the Algerian Civil War of the 1990s

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<sup>5</sup> Fanny Gillet, "The Persistence of the Image, the Lacunae of History: The Archive and Contemporary Art in Algeria (1992-2012)," translated by Patrick Crowley, in *Algeria: Nation, Culture, and Transnationalism 1988-2015* by Patrick Crowley (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press and the Society for Francophone Postcolonial Studies, 2017), 155-156.

“destroyed the art world, forcing it to be structured within a panorama of death that crippled creation for 15 years.”<sup>6</sup> As a result, contemporary artists from Algeria have had to reinvent the cultural landscape of their home country and have done so by developing alternative exhibition spaces, forming socially engaged artist collectives, and embracing “the culture of the screen, the web, multimedia, photography and the moving image.”<sup>7</sup> In addition to identifying trends in Algerian artists’ modes of expression, Laggoune-Aklouche highlights the role of established artists such as multimedia artist Zineb Sedira in facilitating residencies and networking opportunities.<sup>8</sup> To some extent, Bouzar has participated in these cultural rebuilding efforts. For instance, in 2004, she conducted a six-month residency in Oran sponsored by the French Cultural Center in Algiers during which she collaborated with a feminist non-governmental organization to facilitate painting workshops for women.<sup>9</sup> However, her artistic formation has generally taken place outside the geographic and discursive bounds of the contemporary Algerian art scene.

In fact, Bouzar’s background can best be described as multidisciplinary and international. As an undergraduate, she studied biology at Université Pierre et Marie Curie in Paris, and she earned her degree in 1997. However, she soon realized just how starkly her vision of the world clashed with her chosen course of study. To this day, she characterizes biology as a “violent” field that, paradoxically, relies upon death to study life.<sup>10</sup> From 1998 to 2003, she studied *arts plastiques* at the École Nationale Supérieure

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<sup>6</sup> Nadira Laggoune-Aklouche, “Algeria and Contemporary Art,” in *Algeria: More or Less - Contemporary Artists from Algeria*, ed. Emanuele Benedetti (Villorba: Fabbrica, 2015), 22.

<sup>7</sup> Laggoune-Aklouche, “Algeria and Contemporary Art,” 22.

<sup>8</sup> Laggoune-Aklouche, “Algeria and Contemporary Art,” 23.

<sup>9</sup> Dalila Dalléas Bouzar, Interview by Charlotte G. Reynders, October 28, 2018; Dalila Dalléas Bouzar, “Vita,” accessed May 5, 2018, <http://daliladalleas.com/>.

<sup>10</sup> Dalila Dalléas Bouzar, Interview by Charlotte G. Reynders, October 28, 2018.

des Beaux-Arts in Paris and has since exhibited her work (which consists primarily of drawings and paintings) in galleries, art fairs, and exhibitions in cities around the world, including Paris, Berlin, Casablanca, Abidjan, London, and Oran.<sup>11</sup> Between 2010 and 2014, she lived in Berlin and, in 2013, was selected for the Goldrausch project, a prestigious professional training program for women artists. While she currently works in Bordeaux as a member of an artist collective called grOEpi, she regularly returns to North Africa. (Her work is frequently displayed and sold by the Galerie Cécile Fakhoury in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, and she has participated in the most recent installments of the Dakar Biennale in Senegal). In light of the breadth of her experiences, it would appear that emphasizing her reimagination of the Algerian archive risks confining readings of her oeuvre to one of many potentially useful thematic frameworks.

If Bouzar does intersect with trends in contemporary Algerian art, then she does so primarily through her active disruption of “taboos” – a term that is central both to Bouzar’s understanding of her own practice and to my analysis of her work. In the words of Laggoune-Aklouche, many Algerian artists today use recent events in history as “inspiration,” diverging from “those who, to an always increasing extent, tend to make it an official taboo.”<sup>12</sup> While Laggoune-Aklouche uses the term “taboo” to refer to the repression of memories, especially of the violent conflicts that erupted between the Algerian government and emerging Islamist insurgent groups throughout the 1990s, Bouzar uses it to capture the forbidden status of figurative painting in the context of her training at the École des Beaux-Arts.<sup>13</sup> In the words of the artist, “[p]ainting, a supreme

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<sup>11</sup> Dalila Dalléas Bouzar, “Vita,” accessed May 5, 2018, <http://daliladalleas.com/>.

<sup>12</sup> Laggoune-Aklouche, “Algeria and Contemporary Art,” 23.

<sup>13</sup> Dalila Dalléas Bouzar, Interview by Charlotte G. Reynders, October 28, 2018.

and sacred art to my eyes, has particularly always been taboo to me.”<sup>14</sup> Although Bouzar confirmed in person that she associates the term exclusively with her decision to practice figurative painting, I understand the concept of “taboo” more broadly as a useful lens through which to examine the relationship of Bouzar’s historical references to her oeuvre as a whole and her desire to “free [her]self from history.”

In an effort to extend upon current readings of Bouzar’s work, I use the concept of taboo as a thematic framework through which to assess the relationship between her chosen technique and subject matter. To do so, I adopt a broad-based definition of the term that can be applied in a variety of contexts, ranging from art practice to official history. To sketch this broad-based definition, I will turn to a seminal text on the subject, Sigmund Freud’s *Totem and Taboo*. However, before proceeding, I should note that Freud’s combined anthropological and psychoanalytic approach –which involves the establishment of unfounded parallels between psychological neurosis and the belief systems of indigenous peoples – is irrelevant to the present study. Instead, I am interested specifically in his introductory remarks on the term “taboo” and its significance. According to Freud, the word “taboo” is Polynesian in origin and has two strands of meaning: “To us it means, on the one hand, ‘sacred’, ‘consecrated’, and on the other ‘uncanny’, ‘dangerous’, ‘forbidden’, ‘unclean’.”<sup>15</sup> “Thus,” he claims, “‘taboo’ has about it a sense of something unapproachable, and it is principally expressed in prohibitions and

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<sup>14</sup> Dalila Dalléas Bouzar, Interview by Charlotte G. Reynders, October 28, 2018; Dalila Dalléas Bouzar, “Taboo,” accessed May 5, 2018, <http://daliladalleas.com/>.

<sup>15</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, trans. James Strachey (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1950), 18.

restrictions.”<sup>16</sup> Drawing upon Freud’s definition, I understand “taboo” as the collective suppression of particular phenomena from the realm of public discourse and experience.<sup>17</sup>

Having mapped a broader definition of the term and its connotations, I will now sketch in broad strokes its relevance to the chapters that follow. In Chapter 1, I examine the ways in which Bouzar challenges the taboo of figurative painting, focusing in particular upon her reinterpretations of Eugène Delacroix’s *Femmes d’Alger dans leur Appartement* (1834). Then, in Chapter 2, I explore her creative process of combating official taboos surrounding the violent legacies of the Algerian War of Independence and the Algerian Civil War, using her series *Princesse* (2015-2016) and *Algérie année 0* as case studies. Lastly, in my third chapter, I examine her self-portraiture series titled *Taboo* (2013), as well as some of her recent interactive painting performances, to develop a theoretical framework for her approach to identity formation. Through my analyses of these examples – which, I should note, is structured more thematically than chronologically – I aim to demonstrate that Bouzar liberates herself (and, ultimately, her viewers) from the passive internalization of hegemonic norms and taboos, advocating instead the active construction of knowledge systems. While I spoke with the artist in person and had the opportunity to ask her directly about her life and work, I have aimed to extend my reading of her oeuvre beyond the scope of her claims. This project represents my efforts to find a middle ground – to position her point of view in constellation with existing literature, historical context, and my own interpretations.

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<sup>16</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, 18.

<sup>17</sup> Freud notes that such “prohibitions” are seldom formally declared and often have ambiguous root causes (see Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, 18). However, I adopt a slightly more general definition that accommodates both direct and implicit or indirect acts of suppression.

## CHAPTER 1 – WOMEN OF ALGIERS REIMAGINED

*What floats between these Algerian women and ourselves, then, is the forbidden. Neutral, anonymous, omnipresent.*

- Assia Djebar, *Women of Algiers in their Apartment*

Last fall, from September 17th through January 6th, the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York presented a retrospective on Eugène Delacroix (1798-1863) – the first of its kind since 1963, when the Louvre launched an exhibition to honor the one-hundredth anniversary of the artist’s death.<sup>18</sup> Placing sketchbooks, journal excerpts, and drawings in constellation with Delacroix’s large-format paintings, the recent exhibition at the Met spotlighted the multidimensionality not only of the artist’s creative process but also of his thematic preoccupations.<sup>19</sup> Among the most notable fixtures of the exhibition was Delacroix’s 1834 oil painting titled *Femmes d’Alger dans leur Appartement* (or, *Women of Algiers in their Apartment*), which curators centered on a Prussian blue wall in close proximity to a low leather bench, inviting prolonged aesthetic engagement (Fig. 1). Regarded by generations of scholars as a pivotal landmark in the history of French painting, the harem scene has long served as a point of reference for inquiries into the fraught French-Algerian past.<sup>20</sup> Like many artists and authors before her, Bouzar has quoted the painting in her work, mobilizing its expressive content to explore her identity as an Algerian woman and inscribe herself within the European art historical continuum.

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<sup>18</sup> Eugène Delacroix, Sébastien Allard, Côme Fabre, Dominique de Font-Réaulx, Michele Hannoosh, Mehdi Korchane, and Asher Ethan Miller, *Delacroix* (New York, NY: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2018), vii.

<sup>19</sup> Ewa Lajer-Burcharth, “Through the Past, Darkly,” *Artforum* 57, no. 3 (2018), accessed January 29, 2019, <https://www.artforum.com/print/201809/ewa-lajer-burcharth-on-the-art-of-eug-232-ne-delacroix-77267>, paragraph 13.

<sup>20</sup> In fact, art historian and curator Maurice Sérullaz has referred to *Femmes d’Alger* as the “summit of the art of Delacroix”, confirming its centrality to the history of French painting (see Maurice Sérullaz and Eugène Delacroix, *Delacroix* [Paris: Fernand Nathan, 1981], 112).



In this chapter, I focus on Bouzar's series of paintings titled *Les Femmes d'Alger*, which she completed between 2003 and 2018 (Figs. 2-7). Inspired directly by Delacroix's 1834 composition of the same title, these works provide a compelling lens through which to parse the nature and implications of Bouzar's creative practice as a painter. As I will argue, these innovative compositions convey both her admiration for the European figurative painting tradition and her commitment to de-canonizing that tradition.<sup>21</sup> Extending upon Delacroix's Orientalist vision rather than rejecting it outright, Bouzar adopts elements of his approach and distills his work into its most fundamental thematic and formal schemata, constructing for herself an armature from which to develop her own aesthetic project.

### **Re-painting the Past**

A critical first step in assessing the significance of Bouzar's active quotation of Delacroix in her work will be to outline her broader relationship to the world of French painting. Throughout the entirety of Bouzar's life in France, the arts were central to her development and self-concept. As a young child, she found joy in sketching copies of cartoons, and later, at age fourteen, she experienced a veritable "coup de coeur" when she first encountered a book on Caravaggio.<sup>22</sup> Drawn to the raw vitality of his work, she

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<sup>21</sup> Here, I borrow the concept of de-canonization from Alain Ricard and Ulf Vierke, co-authors of the preface to *Archive (Re)mix*. In their discussion of reinterpretations of archival material in contemporary African art, they state the following: "Thus, we redistribute spaces and postures: we conceive different classifications, we question well-established positions. In the process, we de-canonise the corpus" (see *Archive (Re)mix : Vues d'Afrique*, edited by Maëline le Lay, Dominique Malaquais and Nadine Siegert [Rennes : Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2015], 12).

<sup>22</sup> Dalila Dalléas Bouzar, Interview by Charlotte G. Reynders, October 28, 2018.

began to cultivate an interest in the history of European painting and regularly sought out opportunities to visit the Louvre and the Musée d'Orsay.<sup>23</sup> While Bouzar's fascination with the methods of the European masters might at first imply a certain degree of alignment with French academic expectations, Bouzar's professors at the École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux Arts claimed that figurative painting, which she had always viewed as a "supreme and sacred art", was "dead." In Bouzar's words, it had become a "taboo."<sup>24</sup> Advisors encouraged her to adopt an abstract expressionist style, but she found it unnatural to paint without first creating preparatory drawings, which she had always viewed as her "foundation."<sup>25</sup>

Art historian and graphic designer Jean-François Desserre explores the problematics of contemporary figurative painting in his text titled *L'Image Peinte: Enjeux et Perspectives de la Peinture Figurative des Années 1990 à Nos Jours*.<sup>26</sup> Through his study, he poses the question, "Que reste-il à peindre?" (What is there left to paint?), highlighting the extent to which photography and digital media have transformed the relationship between image and reality.<sup>27</sup> As philosopher Michel Guérin describes in

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Although Delacroix and Bouzar were born centuries apart, interesting parallels exist between their respective artistic trajectories. For instance, some of the earliest Delacroix drawings featured in the Met exhibition were copies of English caricatures by James Gillray that Delacroix had produced in his early twenties. Moreover, as Sébastien Allard and Côme Fabre note in the accompanying exhibition catalogue, Delacroix "belonged to the first generation of artists able to train with relative freedom at the museum – that is to say, the Louvre" (see Sébastien Allard, et al., *Delacroix*, 11). While Bouzar looked to Caravaggio as a source of inspiration, Delacroix idolized Rubens and regularly incorporated elements of his style and subject matter into his own compositions (see Sébastien Allard, et al., *Delacroix*, 97).

<sup>23</sup> Dalila Dalléas Bouzar, Interview by Charlotte G. Reynders, October 28, 2018.

<sup>24</sup> Dalila Dalléas Bouzar, "Vita," <http://www.daliladalleas.com/> (accessed May 5, 2018); Dalila Dalléas Bouzar, Interview by Charlotte G. Reynders, October 28, 2018.

<sup>25</sup> Dalila Dalléas Bouzar, Interview by Charlotte G. Reynders, October 28, 2018.

<sup>26</sup> Jean-François Desserre, *L'Image Peinte: Enjeux et Perspectives de la Peinture Figurative des Années 1990 à Nos Jours* (Paris : L'Harmattan, 2016).

<sup>27</sup> Desserre, *L'Image Peinte: Enjeux et Perspectives de la Peinture Figurative des Années 1990 à Nos Jours*, 11.

Rosalind Krauss addresses similar themes in her introduction to *Art Since 1900*. Associating the postmodern art scene with the concepts of "simulacra" and the "spectacle," she notes that contemporary artists face the challenge of producing images in a global context in which reality is largely experienced via

the preface to the text, widespread modes of visual representation have not simply *captured* but have also *constituted* our lived experience since the late-twentieth century, calling into question the status of the figurative painter as an originator of images.<sup>28</sup>

While Desserre sees promise in figurative painting as a genre and carefully maps the ways in which artists, since the early 1990s, have used figuration to develop a particular vision of man's relation to the world, he acknowledges that many have characterized the genre as unfeasible – even “dead” – in a contemporary context.<sup>29</sup> Bouzar's instructors at the École des Beaux-Arts shared this perspective, emphasizing to her the “taboo” status of figurative oil painting. Nevertheless, Bouzar gravitated towards this particular mode of representation and its expressive potential.<sup>30</sup> By resolving to prioritize drawing and figurative painting, Bouzar has made a conscious decision to transcend taboo, breathing life and originality into a creative practice that others once characterized as anachronistic and obsolete.

What remains to be articulated is what precisely Bouzar accomplishes by challenging the “taboo” surrounding figurative oil painting. At first, it might appear that her choice of medium serves a critical function, allowing her to comment directly upon the historical status of easel painting as a means of expressing colonial relations of domination, particularly in an Algerian context. For instance, in *Les Artistes de l'Algérie: Dictionnaire des Peintres, Sculpteurs, Graveurs, 1830-1962*, Algerian-born art historian

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mass media. (See Rosalind Krauss, “Poststructuralism and Deconstruction,” in *Art Since 1900: Modernism, Antimodernism, Postmodernism* by Hal Foster, Rosalind Kraus, Yve-Alain Bois, and Benjamin H.D. Buchloh [New York: Thames & Hudson, 2004], 47-48).

<sup>28</sup> Desserre, *L'Image Peinte: Enjeux et Perspectives de la Peinture Figurative des Années 1990 à Nos Jours*, 11.

<sup>29</sup> Desserre, *L'Image Peinte: Enjeux et Perspectives de la Peinture Figurative des Années 1990 à Nos Jours*, 190.

<sup>30</sup> Dalila Dalléas Bouzar, Interview by Charlotte G. Reynders, October 28, 2018.

Élisabeth Cazenave refers to “la conquête picturale de l’Algérie” (the pictorial conquest of Algeria), noting that the year 1830 marked not only the arrival of French armed forces on the Algerian coast at Sidi Fredj but also the beginning of an era in which pictorial depictions of colonial subjugation pervaded the cultural landscape of France and French-occupied Algeria.<sup>31</sup> Throughout the 1830s, French artists such as Horace Vernet (1789-1863) rendered scenes from contemporary battles, as well as portraits of key military figures, constructing pictures that mythologized the violence of colonial expansion in Algeria.<sup>32</sup>

While military paintings glorified colonial invasion, fantastical landscapes and portraits contributed to a regime of representation that strengthened the colonial apparatus by perpetuating exoticist visions of the Maghreb. Such visions corresponded to the rise of Orientalism, which Cazenave defines as “un rêve d’évasion d’une Europe obsédée par la lumière, les couleurs et les chimères de l’Orient [...]”<sup>33</sup> Infused with escapist sensibility, Orientalist pictures prioritized fantasy over the concrete realities of landscape, lived experience, and colonial domination. In Linda Nochlin’s seminal essay titled “The Imaginary Orient,” she claims that depictions of the Middle East in nineteenth-century French painting tend to omit critical historical information and, as a result, inhibit cross-cultural understanding. For instance, she notes that Orientalist French paintings rarely allude to the “Western colonial or touristic presence” and tend to favor

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<sup>31</sup> Elisabeth Cazenave, *Les Artistes de L’Algérie : Dictionnaire des Peintres, Sculpteurs, Graveurs, 1830-1962* (Paris: Bernard Giovanangeli Éditeur, 2001), 16; James McDougall, *A History of Algeria* (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 49.

<sup>32</sup> Cazenave, *Les Artistes de L’Algérie : Dictionnaire des Peintres, Sculpteurs, Graveurs, 1830-1962*, 17 ; 20-21.

<sup>33</sup> Cazenave, *Les Artistes de L’Algérie : Dictionnaire des Peintres, Sculpteurs, Graveurs, 1830-1962*, 27.

picturesque, ahistorical scenes over representations of labor and industry.<sup>34</sup> In her view, such pictures, while dreamlike in their expressive content, are charged with latent colonial violence: “Only on the brink of destruction, in the course of incipient modification and cultural dilution, are customs, costumes, and religious rituals of the dominated finally *seen* as picturesque.”<sup>35</sup> Associating scenic, aesthetically-oriented depictions of the Middle East with colonial invasion and impending cultural collapse, Nochlin establishes a direct link between Orientalist easel painting and the destructive force of colonization.

The relationship between physical and pictorial conquest in a French-Algerian context is further explored by francophone literature scholar Mary Vogl in a text entitled “Algerian Painters as Pioneers of Modernism.” Highlighting the violence of the French colonial project, she notes that the invasion of Algeria by the Armée d’Afrique throughout the nineteenth century resulted in the deaths of as many as three million Algerians.<sup>36</sup> Beyond her discussion of the destructive consequences of French military operations, she emphasizes the cultural violence inflicted upon Algerians by French colonial forces, noting that colonialism directly impacted the nature of arts education in Algeria. According to Vogl, imposed pedagogical systems “alienated Maghrebis from their own past and promoted a model of French supremacy” by elevating academic easel painting above indigenous arts, which came to be regarded as “crafts.”<sup>37</sup> Such patterns extended into the late-nineteenth and twentieth centuries as French artists and educators

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<sup>34</sup> Linda Nochlin, “The Imaginary Orient,” In *The Politics of Vision: Essays on Nineteenth-Century Art and Society* (New York: Harper & Row, 1989), 36; 39.

<sup>35</sup> Nochlin, “The Imaginary Orient,” 50.

<sup>36</sup> Mary Vogl, “Algerian Painters as Pioneers of Modernism,” in *A Companion to Modern African Art*, edited by Gitti Salami and Monica Blackmun Visonà (West Sussex, UK: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2013), 199.

<sup>37</sup> Vogl, “Algerian Painters as Pioneers of Modernism,” 199.

increasingly dominated the cultural institutions of Algiers, including the École des Beaux-Arts and the National Museum of Fine Arts.<sup>38</sup>

Because the French introduction of easel painting in Algeria coincided with a destructive program of subjugation, we might read Bouzar's commitment to figurative oil painting as an anti-colonial gesture. While this particular interpretation of Bouzar's project is certainly feasible, it risks limiting the scope of her expressive potential to the discursive realm of postcolonial trauma. In fact, when asked about the degree to which colonialism shapes the thematic dimensions of her oeuvre, she noted that she addresses colonial history *indirectly* by situating it within a broader "system of domination."<sup>39</sup> Interested in the slippage that can occur between "victims" and "*colons*" (colonizers) over time, she associates colonialism with a broader history of power relations, which she conceptualizes in the form of binary oppositions: man/woman, adult/child, humanity/nature, and self/Other.<sup>40</sup> With this in mind, it would appear that her artistic practice invokes the role of easel painting not only as a symbol of the fraught colonial dynamics between France and Algeria but also – perhaps more so – as a mechanism for her own thematic exploration of power and identity.

As I will soon demonstrate, Bouzar's series does not reject but, rather, revives and transforms the imaginative impulse at the core of the Orientalist tradition in Western art. Several aspects of Delacroix's *Femmes d'Alger* incarnate this tradition of imaginative artistic production, including the preparatory methods by which he designed the composition. The monumental painting presents a highly specific vision of Algerian

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<sup>38</sup> Vogl, "Algerian Painters as Pioneers of Modernism," 199-200.

<sup>39</sup> Dalila Dalléas Bouzar, Interview by Charlotte G. Reynders, October 28, 2018.

<sup>40</sup> Dalila Dalléas Bouzar, Interview by Charlotte G. Reynders, October 28, 2018.

women that the artist assembled through a recombination of observational sketches, fleeting memories, and dreamlike projections. For instance, as Delacroix specialist Lee Johnson notes in a catalogue of the artist's work, the final composition for *Femmes d'Alger* incorporated elements from various small-scale watercolor sketches that Delacroix had completed during his travels in and around Algiers, including a whimsical depiction of an interior space with a tiled wall from which an elaborately framed mirror hangs at an angle, a labeled sketch of two women named Moûnî and Zohra Bensoltane seated on either side of a hookah, and an individual portrait of a woman wearing layers of patterned garments.<sup>41</sup> These sketches confirm that Delacroix's process of developing *Femmes d'Alger* involved not only direct observation but also deliberate acts of creative synthesis.

In addition to Delacroix's approach to organizing his composition, his chosen subject matter aligns with the thematic preoccupations of the Orientalist tradition. The painting depicts a group of Algerian women clustered around a hookah in the corner of an extensively decorated domestic interior, which scholars have described as a harem.<sup>42</sup> In Algerian writer and critic Malek Alloula's text *The Colonial Harem*, through which he explores the "phantasmic" qualities of early-20<sup>th</sup> century postcards used by the French in Algeria, he conceptualizes the hookah as a "symbol of the inner harem" and as a "stereotypical reference to the Orient."<sup>43</sup> Claiming that "[t]here is no Orient without the hookah," he states that the object "suffices to give life to a world of dreamy feminine

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<sup>41</sup> Lee Johnson, *The Paintings of Eugène Delacroix: A Critical Catalogue*, Volume III (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), 166-167.

<sup>42</sup> See Sébastien Allard, et al., *Delacroix*, 91-93; Cazenave, *Les Artistes de L'Algérie: Dictionnaire des Peintres, Sculpteurs, Graveurs, 1830-1962*, 28 ; Johnson, *The Paintings of Eugène Delacroix: A Critical Catalogue*, 166.

<sup>43</sup> Malek Alloula, *The Colonial Harem*, translated by Myrna Godzich and Wald Godzich (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 74.

presences, in various states of self-abandonment and lasciviousness, welcoming and without reserve.”<sup>44</sup> Through his ekphrastic analysis of French-Algerian postcards, Alloula reveals not only the significance of the harem and the hookah as stereotypical focal points of the Orientalist imagination but also the centrality of photography to the proliferation of Orientalist fantasies throughout Europe in the late-nineteenth century.<sup>45</sup>

Although Delacroix completed *Femmes d’Alger* in the 1830s whereas the first daguerreotype of Algiers was taken in the 1840s, several aspects of his painting reflect a particular way of seeing that could be analogized to the aesthetics of Orientalist photography.<sup>46</sup> Specifically, the microscopic level of detail throughout the scene creates the illusion of a snapshot, evoking a visually precise yet fleeting moment in time. For instance, the red doors to the cabinet of vessels in the background are visibly ajar, which, much like the parting coral-red lips of the woman holding the hookah mouthpiece, communicates a sense of liminality and potential energy. Similarly, the slippers in the foreground create the impression that Delacroix has captured a transient moment, as does the right heel of the servant woman, which parts from the sole of her shoe as she takes a step. In fact, one of the stray slippers closely resembles the servant’s red and gold footwear and is positioned in such a way that it appears to map the hypothetical path that the servant would have taken – just moments before – from one side of the interior space to the other. Moreover, as a result of the painting’s golden tonality and smooth finish, the

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<sup>44</sup> Alloula, *The Colonial Harem*, 74.

<sup>45</sup> Discussing the impact of French colonialism on the visual arts of the Maghreb, art historian Roger Benjamin places photography and easel painting on the same plane: “Two visual arts, painting and photography, were colonial imports, the practice of which was central to bringing the colonized into representation, and hence the purview of Europeans” (see Roger Benjamin, “Colonial Tutelage to Nationalist Affirmation: Mammeri and Racim, Painters of the Maghreb,” in *Orientalism’s Interlocutors: Painting, Architecture, Photography*, eds. Jill Beaulieu and Mary Roberts [Duke University Press, 2002], 43).

<sup>46</sup> Mohamed Sadek Messikh, *L’Algérie des Premiers Photographes* (Paris : Editions du Layeur, 2003), 15.



majority of the surface of the canvas has a honey-glazed quality that simultaneously evokes the uniform surface of a photograph and the glamourizing effects of reverie. In this sense, we could read Delacroix's mode of representation as a precursor to the Orientalist gaze that Alloula associates with representations of *algériennes* in French-Algerian photographs and postcards.<sup>47</sup>

Additional evidence of the imaginative processes underlying Delacroix's Orientalist composition lies in his harmonious integration of the women into their physical environment. Prioritizing surface over substance in his brushwork, Delacroix elaborates an Orientalist fantasy designed to visually communicate his own cognitive experience at the nexus of memory and imagination. For example, the crouched woman closest to the servant raises her left knee, tucking her right leg behind her planted left foot. Notably, her crossed ankles echoes the form of the flexible hookah stem, which produces a triangular loop as it intersects itself. Comparable staging processes are evident in the vegetal wall detail that recalls the silhouette of the hookah, as well as in the burgundy and gold panels of striped fabric that rest on the laps of the other two seated figures, mirroring the striped pattern of the rugs beneath them. While Delacroix likely did observe elements of this scene in person, the proliferation of harmonious forms throughout the composition points to a deliberate construction of visual relationships. This claim aligns closely with a statement that art historian Ewa Lajer-Burcharth has made regarding the creative capacities of Delacroix as an artist: "Delacroix *activated* the medium of painting, unleashing all its uniquely persuasive visual and tactile means to plunge his viewers into a spectacle [...] of his own invention."<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Alloula, *The Colonial Harem*, 5.

<sup>48</sup> Lajer-Burcharth, "Through the Past, Darkly," paragraph 2.

If Delacroix activated the medium of painting, then Bouzar *reactivates* it by taking up elements not only of Delacroix's technical approach to painting but also of his composition and chosen subject matter. For instance, a *croquis* that Bouzar completed on semi-transparent paper in preparation for the most recent installment in her *Femmes d'Alger* series reveals that, like Delacroix, she made use of exploratory drawings to test possible arrangements of figures in space (Fig. 8).<sup>49</sup> This loosely cross-hatched drawing of four fantastical figures against a minimalistic, mountainous backdrop bears witness to the artist's personal process of visualizing the "women of Algiers" as a hypothetical collective entity. According to Bouzar, when she first encountered *Femmes d'Alger* at the Louvre, the title resonated with her self-concept as a woman of Algerian heritage and inspired her to launch an independent investigation of the same subject matter. On the one hand, she admired Delacroix's expressive style and understood his picture as a striking interpretation of his chosen subject matter; on the other hand, upon experiencing the work in person, she was prompted to ask herself, "what is *my* vision?"<sup>50</sup>

### ***Lieux de Mémoire: Continuity and Transformation***

Some might argue that, by directly calling to mind Delacroix's work, Bouzar revives a canonical tradition of representation rather than communicating the limitations of that tradition. In the fourth chapter of a text titled *Algeria Cuts: Women and*

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<sup>49</sup> As Delacroix specialist Lee Johnson notes in a catalogue of the artist's work, the final composition for *Femmes d'Alger* incorporated elements from various small-scale watercolor sketches that Delacroix had completed during his travels in and around Algiers, including a whimsical depiction of an interior space with a tiled wall from which an elaborately framed mirror hangs at an angle, a labeled sketch of two women named Moûnî and Zohra Bensoltane seated on either side of a hookah, and an individual portrait of a woman wearing layers of patterned garments (see Johnson, *The Paintings of Eugène Delacroix: A Critical Catalogue*, 166-167).

<sup>50</sup> Dalila Dalléas Bouzar, Interview by Charlotte G. Reynders, October 28, 2018.

*Representation, 1830 to the Present*, feminist literary critic Ranjana Khanna discusses the afterlives of Delacroix's *Femmes d'Alger dans leur Appartement* and alludes to the concept of citation, associating the process with trauma and melancholy. In Khanna's view, "[c]itation as a psychoanalytic process resembles that of mourning and melancholia" in that "[b]oth mourning and melancholia involve the ingestion of a lost object."<sup>51</sup> Furthermore, she claims that "[t]hrough citation, the subject reiterates" a "signifier of loss."<sup>52</sup> Given Khanna's understanding of citation, she would likely view Bouzar's citation of Delacroix as a melancholic "reiterate[ion]" of the violence of the French colonial project, including the Orientalist gaze associated with Delacroix's *Femmes d'Alger*. However, in reality, her imaginative approach to figurative oil painting in her series titled *Les Femmes d'Alger* equips her to communicate meaning beyond the melancholic reiteration of destructive colonial legacies.

Mobilizing the monumental status of Delacroix's painting within a French cultural context as a pictorial *lieu de mémoire*,<sup>53</sup> Bouzar reactivates the expressive content of the painting on her own terms, generating imaginative discourse that both addresses and extends beyond the theme of colonial violence. In fact, in an article titled "Colonial/Postcolonial Intersections: 'Lieux de mémoire' in Algiers," historian Zeynep Çelik directly presents Delacroix's *Femmes d'Alger* painting as a "portable" *lieu de mémoire* that, in her view, closely shaped processes of identity formation in both colonial

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<sup>51</sup> Ranjana Khanna, *Algeria Cuts: Women and Representation, 1830 to the Present* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2008), 147.

<sup>52</sup> Khanna, *Algeria Cuts: Women and Representation*, 148.

<sup>53</sup> French historian Pierre Nora introduces this concept in *Les Lieux de Mémoire*, in which he discusses the mechanisms by which objects, events, and physical locations can become historically charged "sites of memory" with enduring symbolic significance, particularly in relation to French national identity (see Pierre Nora, *Les Lieux de Mémoire* [Paris: Gallimard, 1984]).

and post-colonial contexts.<sup>54</sup> To support her reading of Delacroix's *Femmes d'Alger* as a pivotal site of identity formation, she highlights its afterlives, citing in particular the fifteen *Femmes d'Alger* paintings that Picasso produced between 1954 and 1955, a documentary film of the same title directed by Kamal Dahane, and a text titled *Femmes d'Alger dans leur Appartement* by Algerian novelist Assia Djebar.<sup>55</sup> While Çeylik emphasizes the status of the Delacroix painting as a "symbol of French colonialism," she notes that re-interpretations of the painting have succeeded in "reloading colonial cultural formations with new meanings."<sup>56</sup> I would argue that Bouzar, too, reactivates colonial imagery with "new meanings." Specifically, by using oils to re-envision a widely recognized masterwork of Orientalist painting, she returns to a mode of representation at the nexus of memory and imagination, actively extending the realm of possibilities regarding visualizations of Algerian womanhood. In the words of museologist Bernadette Saou-Dufrêne, whose comments on Bouzar's work were featured in a press release for an exhibition called *Vu d'Alger* held in September 2018 at Galerie Richard in Paris, "Dans un va-et-vient avec le tableau de Delacroix, l'artiste algérienne émet dans le temps plusieurs propositions [...]."<sup>57</sup>

One of the ways in which Bouzar advocates a multivalent conception of Algerian womanhood is through the serial nature of her project. *Les Femmes d'Alger* comprises six oil paintings, all of which are either 200 by 150 centimeters or 200 by 170 centimeters

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<sup>54</sup> Zeynep Çelik, "Colonial/Postcolonial Intersections: 'Lieux de mémoire' in Algiers," *Historical Reflections* 28, no. 2 (2002), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41299231>, 144.

<sup>55</sup> Çelik, "Colonial/Postcolonial Intersections: 'Lieux de mémoire' in Algiers," 160-161.

<sup>56</sup> Çelik, "Colonial/Postcolonial Intersections: 'Lieux de mémoire' in Algiers," 160-161.

<sup>57</sup> Bernadette Saou-Dufrêne, "Vu d'Alger." Galerie Richard, accessed February 5, 2019, [https://www.galerierichard.com/com\\_presse\\_ef.php?id=200](https://www.galerierichard.com/com_presse_ef.php?id=200), paragraph 8.

– only slightly smaller in area than the original painting by Delacroix.<sup>58</sup> While substantial formal and compositional differences exist among the six paintings, each features a cluster of humanoid figures – some of which resemble women, others of which resemble outlines or apparitions – that collectively occupy an otherworldly space. Given the paintings’ variations in formal content and proximity in size to the Delacroix original, Bouzar’s series could be interpreted as a presentation of six new iterations of the imaginative scene that Delacroix constructed in 1834. By reworking Delacroix’s famous genre scene, Bouzar not only renews interest in the painting as a *lieu de mémoire* but also de-canonizes its subject matter, advocating continued imaginative engagement with the same thematic motif that originally inspired Delacroix.

Moreover, through her approach to paint application, Bouzar develops visions of Algerian women that depart from the realm of mimesis, drawing attention, instead, to the two-dimensionality of her canvas and, in turn, to her imaginative act(s) of representation. In late October, when I visited Bouzar at her studio in Bordeaux, she was in the process of preparing a series of large-format paintings for the 2018 Also Known As Africa (AKAA) art and design fair in Paris, so I had the opportunity to witness the technical approach that she would have taken to *Les Femmes d’Alger*. When creating large-scale oil paintings, Bouzar props her canvases on a wide floor easel and builds up planes of color layer by layer using oil medium, Turpenoid, and a variety of paints ranging from ivory black and zinc white to shades of yellow, blue, umber, and sienna. Next to her palette, she keeps a mound of pink putty rubber (presumably to serve as an eraser during

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<sup>58</sup> In producing multiple paintings within the same thematic framework, Bouzar draws upon a precedent set by Delacroix, who, in 1849, created a second version of *Femmes d’Alger dans leur Appartement*. Scholars have described the later painting as Rembrandtesque due to the artist’s use of chiaroscuro (see Allard and Fabre, page 90).

her underdrawing process), several rags, and over fifteen brushes of varying sizes (Fig. 9). While she certainly experiments with superimposed washes and passages of liberated brushwork, she tends to juxtapose flat swaths of color – and, in some cases, pattern – across the surfaces of her linen canvases, harnessing the expressive potential of individual hues and their interdependent effects. These methods and visual phenomena emerge across all of Bouzar’s iterations of *Femmes d’Alger* and prove central to her dynamic mode of pictorial worldbuilding.

Combining figurative representation and abstraction, Bouzar reimagines the subject matter and composition of Delacroix’s painting, producing multivalent, dreamlike visions of Algerian womanhood. By returning to the medium that Delacroix used to create *Femmes d’Alger dans leur Appartement* and by producing a semi-abstracted series inspired by the same subject matter, Bouzar challenges the singular status of Delacroix’s lauded masterwork, visually asserting that his painting represents only one of many possible interpretations of the subject at hand. Within the scope of her series, she extends upon Delacroix’s vision in a variety of ways, particularly through her approach to space and time, her representations of the human body, and her integration of symbolic elements throughout her compositions.

An especially evocative example of her approach to rendering space and time is the first of the six paintings in the series, which she completed in 2003. Its composition directly mimics the general organization of Delacroix’s work, as evidenced by the three seated figures at the center of Bouzar’s picture, arranged in the same positions as the subjects of Delacroix’s *Femmes d’Alger*. However, in the context of Bouzar’s picture, the figures are immersed not in a highly ornamental architectural setting but, instead, in a

cavernous environment. In the background, smooth transitions between raw umber, slate gray, shadowy blue, and brick-orange create the impression of flames dancing on cool stone. At the same time, in the upper left-hand corner of the picture plane, Bouzar has clearly delineated the edge of a wall across which falls a sharp diagonal shadow, producing a sense of slippage between a cave-like atmosphere and a domestic interior. In the top right-hand corner of the painting, a swath of glacial blue cascades downward and contrasts starkly with an adjacent patch of deep umber paint, which resembles a mound of jagged rock. Together, the fiery tones that fill the bottom left-hand corner of the picture, the earthy umber backdrop, and the icy cerulean patch enact a sort of visual clash among the elements of nature, instilling in viewers an impression of deep prehistoric temporality. In contrast to the ornate stillness of Delacroix's harem scene, Bouzar imagines an abstracted site in which chaotic relationships among colors and forms prevail.

Across the surface of the painting, uncertain distinctions between solid forms and negative space prompt further questions regarding the structure of the physical environment that she depicts. Directly below the half-kneeling figure, parallel, diagonal strokes of neon pink overlaid with red paint create a grate-like system of sharp, thick brushstrokes, reimagining the striped pattern of the rug in Delacroix's painting. These reds and pinks reappear in the backdrop, which brims with roughly rendered patches of swirling, deep red strokes that simultaneously evoke embers and entrails. Such passages, coupled with the acidic pinks and greens at the center of the composition, infuse the painting with a visceral – even violent – atmosphere of unease that counteracts the harmonious arrangement of the figures. Through these stylistic choices, Bouzar resituates

the women of Algiers outside the realm of leisure and pleasure incarnated by Delacroix's painting. In *The Colonial Harem*, Alloula states that "it is the nature of pleasure to scrutinize its object detail by detail, to take possession of it in both a total and a fragmented fashion."<sup>59</sup> While this passage aligns with Delacroix's detail-oriented mode of representation, it contrasts notably with the starkness and roughness of the space that Bouzar constructs. She transforms the luxurious décor and implied aroma of incense in Delacroix's painting into broad-brush evocations of fires, floods, and gore. In so doing, she prompts alternative visions that extend beyond the trope of the harem, conceptualizing Algerian women as individuals capable of finding identity and belonging in viscerally chaotic contexts.

Another distinctive aspect of Bouzar's treatment of space in her 2003 version is the prevalence of abstract geometric forms. For example, a slanted patch of asymmetrical polygons in the foreground loosely evokes the floor pattern in Delacroix's painting, diverging from his mimetic approach to pattern and perspective. Moreover, a stark black rectangle is positioned behind the head of the bright white figure at the center of the composition. Visually encapsulating the basic geometric shape of the dark chest in the background of Delacroix's composition, the black rectangle oscillates between substance and void, drawing the viewer's eye inward while, at the same time, evoking processes of concealment or blotting out. By infusing the scene with elements of abstraction, Bouzar signals that she is constructing an imaginative vision. Because the black square, for example, appears to float in space, bearing an ambiguous relationship to its surroundings, it creates a visual platform for cognitive processes of reflection, passage, and projection.

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<sup>59</sup> Alloula, *The Colonial Harem*, 49.



Similar elements recur throughout the other paintings in the series, as in the minimalist coral pink doors in the background of Bouzar's second version (see Fig. 3). Recalling the half-open position of the red wall cabinet in Delacroix's painting, the crisp geometric detail reads as a point of access to spaces, objects, or experiences beyond the scope of the scene depicted. Rather than constructing a closed system, Bouzar deliberately introduces an opening that reminds the viewer to pass in and out of the picture and weigh its expressive content alongside alternative visions.

In certain cases, such geometric details result in a multifaceted sense of space, particularly in the context of the fifth painting in the series (see Fig. 6). In the background, a cleanly delineated quadrilateral implies a diagonal plane that defies the logic of the gridlines structuring the remainder of the composition. While the horizon line formed where the slate-blue background meets the grid along the bottom of the picture is exactly parallel to the top and bottom edges of the canvas, the gridlines appear to slant downwards to the right, resulting in an ambiguous sense of perspective. Moreover, abstract white objects, including a cube and two organic forms that evoke glaciers or mounds of rock, are dispersed across the surface of the grid. Their scale with respect to one another and with respect to the four humanoid figures raises questions about the distance of those objects from the viewer, exacerbating the perspectival ambiguity of the space. By placing abstract objects of varying sizes within a seemingly continuous matrix, Bouzar evokes both an infinite progression of forms and an unconstrained variety of perspectival systems. These details visually manifest her process of de-canonization, incarnating her commitment to situating Delacroix's painting within a plurality of perspectives.

The motif of the continuous grid proves especially significant in light of Bouzar's own reflections on her relationship to art historical tradition. In an interview for *Contemporary And*, an art magazine dedicated to contemporary African art and its diaspora, Bouzar claimed that "there is no such thing as discontinuity in the history of art."<sup>60</sup> In her view, "[t]his history belongs to everyone, to Westerners as well as to those whose parents are from the former colonies. It's about resituating art in a kind of timelessness that refuses the notion of history as moving in one direction only, as linear."<sup>61</sup> Placing her imagined women of Algiers in a continuous zone of geometric abstraction with multiple vanishing points, she resituates Delacroix's subject matter within a field of boundless interpretive possibilities. As Çelik notes in an article on the legacies of Orientalism in art and architecture, Delacroix's painting was a commissioned extension of French colonial conquest that "alluded to penetrating into the most private, the most sacred part of Algerian society."<sup>62</sup> With this in mind, it would appear that Bouzar advocates a way of seeing that diverges substantially from Delacroix's voyeuristic picture. Whereas his painting expresses one privileged view of a private scene, hers removes the implication of privacy and containment, liberating the women both from their enclosed pictorial environment and from the rarified space of the Western canon.

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<sup>60</sup> Dalila Dalléas Bouzar, "In Conversation with Dalila Dalléas Bouzar: 'My Paintings Show That There is No Such Thing as Discontinuity in the History of Art,'" Interview by Sophie Eliot, *Contemporary And* (October 15, 2013), <https://www.contemporaryand.com/magazines/my-paintings-show-that-there-is-no-such-thing-as-discontinuity-in-the-history-of-art/>.

<sup>61</sup> Bouzar, "In Conversation with Dalila Dalléas Bouzar: 'My Paintings Show That There is No Such Thing as Discontinuity in the History of Art,'" Interview by Sophie Eliot.

<sup>62</sup> Zeynep Çelik, "Speaking Back to Orientalist Discourse," in *Orientalism's Interlocutors: Painting, Architecture, Photography*, edited by Jill Beaulieu and Mary Roberts (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 36.

## Bodies in Space: Subjectivity, Spirituality, and Science Fiction

In addition to transforming the nature of the physical setting that the female subjects occupy in Delacroix's painting, Bouzar adopts a heterogeneous approach to rendering the human body. Whereas the three female figures in Delacroix's composition have similar physical characteristics, including a fair complexion, plump lips, and bow-like eyebrows, Bouzar depicts her "women of Algiers" in a variety of styles (ranging from realistic to expressionistic) and deliberately introduces disparities in their skin tones and physical features. Although Bouzar frees herself from the constraints of a consistent mode of representation vis-à-vis the human body, her paintings do not necessarily present Algerian womanhood as a condition of boundless freedom. Rather, by adopting a spectrum of styles, Bouzar associates each of the female figures with a unique subjective experience that encompasses elements of both oppression and agency. In the first painting in the series, Bouzar adopts a range of techniques to characterize each female subject. For instance, the peach-yellow skin of the leftmost figure appears to spill towards the viewer along a tilted horizontal plane. Where the figure's legs should be, a network of interconnected brown segments, both rectilinear and curvilinear, generates a framing device for the pools of color beneath. On the one hand, the line segments appear to entrap the figure, rendering her body immobile. On the other hand, the figure's mask-like face defies the trope of the languid *odalisque*, which Alloula has described as the "highest expression" of the harem.<sup>63</sup> Her red iris and lips coupled with her bile-green complexion communicate a bitter vitality that extends beyond the passive elegance of Delacroix's intricately rendered *algériennes*.

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<sup>63</sup> Alloula, *The Colonial Harem*, 74.

Bouzar gestures to slightly different forms of subjective experience through her approach to the other seated figures in the painting. For instance, a macabre patch of brushwork over the central figure's abdomen conjures images of blood-soaked organs and arteries, offsetting the bright white shock of her skin. While her stark pallor and blood-red abdomen separate her from the figures seated next to her, framing her as a solitary victim of violence, the swirling strokes of red paint in the background and the harsh parallel strokes of neon pink along the floor mimic the appearance of her torso. As a result, Bouzar seems to visually establish an intersubjective connection among the seated figures, implying either that these women are united in their relationship to violence or, alternatively, that the victimization of *one* indirectly affects the experience of the *many*. While the skeletal body of the central figure brims with visceral evocations of violence, the half-kneeling figure to the right sends quite the opposite message. Her swollen abdomen connotes pregnancy and, by extension, new life. This particular aesthetic choice departs notably from Delacroix's painting and suggests that Bouzar associates female Algerian identity with motherhood. It remains unclear whether Bouzar views this condition as a restrictive expectation, which the thick black band around the figure's neck would appear to suggest, or, instead, as an empowering form of transformation – an interpretation supported by the neon green tiger-stripe motif across the surface of her body. Both readings are possible, and they point to the artist's effort to re-envision Algerian womanhood as a complex spectrum of subjectivities.

In the second and third iterations of *Femmes d'Alger*, Bouzar's treatment of the human body demonstrates her efforts to re-process and transform the conventions of the Western canon (see Figs. 3 and 4). A key commonality between the two paintings is the

presence of nude or partially nude figures. Depictions of nude Algerian women pervade the Orientalist painting tradition, as Jordanian art historian and diplomat Wijdan Ali notes in *Modern Islamic Art: Development and Continuity*, specifically when she discusses the work of Alphonse-Étienne Dinet (1861-1929).<sup>64</sup> However, through Bouzar's approach to the nude figure in the second installment in her series, she appears to be alluding to instances of voyeurism and exoticism in the history of French painting more broadly. Specifically, the long, sleek hair of the lounging nude figure in the foreground closely resembles Paul Gauguin's depictions of Polynesian women, as evidenced by a painting that he completed in 1899 titled *Two Tahitian Women* (Fig. 10). In the words of anthropologist Miriam Kahn, "Gauguin's penchant for imaginative embellishments on canvas is now well known."<sup>65</sup> With this in mind, it would appear that Bouzar reclaims the imaginative practices not only of Delacroix but also of Gauguin, transforming an exoticist strand in the French painting tradition into creative visions of her own. She even gives the lounging figure wings, visually endowing her with a supernatural source of agency, and she conceals her breasts with a rectangular patch of brown, defying the trope of the "bare-breasted Tahitian woman."<sup>66</sup> Thus, she expresses her knowledge of the Western canon while, at the same time, expanding its scope to accommodate alternative possibilities.

All three of the female figures in Bouzar's third version of *Femmes d'Alger* are nude, and they stand in a cluster, facing the back corner of an abstracted space where a

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<sup>64</sup> Wijdan Ali, *Modern Islamic Art: Development and Continuity* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1997), 56.

<sup>65</sup> Miriam Kahn, *Tahiti Beyond the Postcard: Power, Place, and Everyday Life* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2011), 57.

<sup>66</sup> Kahn, *Tahiti Beyond the Postcard: Power, Place, and Everyday Life*, 34.

pale-yellow wall meets a stylized, gray-purple curtain. Stripped of the decorative fabrics that encircle Delacroix's female subjects, these nude women are faceless and devoid of accessories. In fact, the central figure, who appears in profile, lacks visible arms and has no hair on her head – she resembles an incomplete clay sculpture, locked in a contrapposto pose. Similarly, the figure to her left, whose body is a uniform off-white color, maintains a rigid, symmetrical stance and faces away from the viewer. Together, the female subjects' simplified formal qualities, relative positions in space, and varied skin tones suggest that Bouzar has visually reimagined the women in their most fundamental state of being. In comparison to the subjects of the second painting in the series, the women in the third painting are poised to examine what lies beyond the curtain in the background. Evading the viewer's gaze, they prepare for an impending extension of the space they inhabit.

Thus far, in my discussion of Bouzar's approach to depicting bodies in space, I have focused upon her representations of the female body. However, Bouzar explores other forms or degrees of embodiment in her paintings as well, as evidenced by the recurrence of spectral mediating figures throughout the series. For example, in her second and third versions of *Les Femmes d'Alger*, a faceless, infant-esque figure occupies the same space as the female subjects, providing the viewer with a visual point of entry into each scene. In the second painting, the mediating specter crouches on the floor, as if concealing itself behind the half-kneeling woman. Huddled and unmoving, the specter seems to occupy an ambiguous, liminal state. Due to its simplified oval head and nonexistent facial expression, it is unclear whether it is facing the viewer, the group of women, or the space behind the curtain in the background. The figure's simplified

appearance with respect to the three women suggests that it exists on the margins of the scene depicted, and the unclear orientation of its head guides the viewer in perceiving the scene from a variety of perspectives. The same infant-esque figure appears in the third painting, but its pose is slightly more dynamic. Nearly blending in with the pale wall behind it, the specter stands mid-motion in the corner, capturing the three women's attention, as if it has prompted them to rise and examine the curtain in the background. Given the cream-colored specter's resemblance to a young child, the possible pregnancy imagery in the first painting takes on new meaning. By framing the "women of Algiers" as motherly figures, Bouzar may be emphasizing the role of future generations (their "children") in mediating or disrupting conventional perceptions of Algerian womanhood.

While the spectral figures in Bouzar's paintings help to structure the viewer's engagement with each scene and confirm the imaginative register in which Bouzar is operating, they also introduce potential grounds for a critique of her work. An evocative example of the potential limitations of Bouzar's body of work appears in the first painting in the series in the form of what appears to be the outline of a nude male body passing from the patch of polygonal motifs in the foreground into an unelaborated swath of beige at the right-hand edge of the canvas. The youthful figure's head has been concealed or replaced by an abstract cone-shaped form, rendering him anonymous and detached from the rest of the scene. Although the spectral nude figure both provides a counterpoint to the female subjects and visually guides viewers to extend their contemplation of Algerian womanhood beyond the scope of the picture plane, it is significant that the transparent apparition has replaced the black servant woman in Delacroix's painting. One could argue that by abandoning the question of race, Bouzar fails to address historical relations

of power in the former French colonies in their full complexity.<sup>67</sup> Differences in skin tone do emerge throughout the series as a whole, particularly in the fourth painting, which features two nearly identical humanoid figures seated side by side, one of which has a warm brown skin tone, the other of which has a fair complexion (see Fig. 5). However, because the figures so closely resemble one another in their positions and proportions, it would appear that their skin colors function not so much as expressions of power relations but, rather, as celebrations of the heterogeneity of Algeria as the homeland of Arabs and Berbers alike and as a site of overlap between the European and African continents.<sup>68</sup>

One of the final ways in which Bouzar expresses the heterogeneous nature of Algerian female subjectivity is through her allusions to spirituality, both through expressive brushwork and through her direct incorporation of symbolic elements. For example, in the fourth painting in the series, an angelic figure in profile is seated against a black, mountainous backdrop, holding her knees. Vigorous strokes of white project from the figure's back like wings, and blended vertical streaks of cerulean blue and bright green surround her head like a gas flame, as if translating the energy of her cognitive processes into material form. Similarly, the focal point of the fifth iteration of *Les Femmes d'Alger* is a frontally-oriented, kneeling human figure consumed in a cluster of flame-like patches of color (see Fig. 6). Delineated by a soft black outline, the

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<sup>67</sup> For a comparable critique of Assia Djebar's exclusion of the black female servant from her description of the *Femmes d'Alger* series by Delacroix and Picasso, see Emer O'Beirne, "Veiled Vision: Assia Djebar on Delacroix, Picasso, and the *Femmes d'Alger*," *Romance Studies* 21, no. 1 (2003), DOI: 10.1179/ros.2003.21.1.39, 45-46.

<sup>68</sup> The historic heterogeneity of the Algerian population has shaped painters' experiences depicting the region since the nineteenth century. (See Peter Benson Miller, "'Des Couleurs Primitives': Miscegenation and French Painting of Algeria," *Visual Resources* 24, no. 3 [March 18, 2010], DOI: 10.1080/01973760802284638, 277).



androgynous figure holds its arms rigidly at its sides and appears to raise one thigh slightly above the ground, as if it is proceeding forwards on its knees. While the majority of the figure's body is fully immersed in overlapping ovoid zones of red-orange, yellow-orange, yellow-green, and neon green, its exposed hands and thighs are the color of charcoal. In each composition, Bouzar's evocations of wings and colorful flames produce otherworldly auras that facilitate the visual transcendence of individual figures. In this sense, she develops a vision of Algerian womanhood that centers upon spiritual vitality, extending beyond the decorative emphasis of Delacroix's picture.

Bouzar gestures to spirituality as a formative element of Algerian female subjectivity not only through passages of vibrant color and expressive brushwork but also through her use of historically-charged symbols. In the bottom right-hand corner of the third painting in the series, the coiled bodies of two bright green snakes spill over the lip of a basket (see Fig. 4). One of the creatures crawls up the right leg of a nude female figure, whose back faces the viewer. On the one hand, the image of snakes in a basket alludes to the practice of snake charming, descriptions of which appear in French and English writings on North African culture as early as the late eighteenth century.<sup>69</sup> On the other hand, the pairing of a nude female body with serpentine imagery evokes the Biblical concept of the fall of man, confirming that Bouzar's project extends beyond mimetic detail to encompass broader inquiries into the nature of womanhood, knowledge, and desire. Within the scope of the same painting, a deep purple star of David is visible in the foreground, and a frontally-oriented outline of an Islamic-style window occupies the upper-right quadrant of the canvas. Drawing upon global religious and cultural traditions

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<sup>69</sup> Jessica L. Tingle and Tahar Slimani, "Snake Charming in Morocco," in *The Journal of North African Studies* 22, no. 4, DOI: 10.1080/13629387.2017.1296357, 560.

that extend beyond the French-Algerian colonial context of Delacroix's painting, Bouzar engages in visual explorations of spirituality as it intersects with Algerian womanhood. These symbolic passages in Bouzar's paintings align closely with her assertion that, although she certainly processes the implications of colonialism in her work, she does so through a broader consideration of universal themes that establish a continuum between past and present.

Of all the paintings in the series, the version that Bouzar completed in 2018 captures most closely the extent of her imaginative reactivation of the figurative painting tradition (see Fig. 7). At the center of the canvas, a female figure grips two long swords that bear a close resemblance to *flyssa*, the traditional sword used by the Kabyle people of the mountainous North African coast (Fig. 11).<sup>70</sup> The *flyssa*-wielding female figure engages the viewer with a sideways glance and appears to step forward, placing her right foot in front of her left. Around her right foot, phantom sketch lines both bear witness to the artist's creative process and illustrate the subject's path of motion along the vibrant yellow earth beneath her. On the one hand, Bouzar grounds the figure in a system of concrete evocations of Algerian national identity, ranging from the geological features of the Algerian landscape to the cerulean silhouette of a mosque. However, on the other hand, Bouzar's recombination of naturalistic, abstract, and otherworldly forms throughout the picture reflects an innovative sensibility that verges on science fiction. On the surface of the central figure's stomach, Bouzar has reimagined the visual effects of abdominal muscles by sketching a cluster of six bulbous forms that resemble the ovules

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<sup>70</sup> George Cameron Stone, *A Glossary of the Construction, Decoration and Use of Arms and Armor In All Countries and In All Times, Together with Some Closely Related Subjects* (Portland, Me.: The Southworth Press, 1934), 234-236.

of a flower. Moreover, electric blue tendrils extend from the figure's head like flagella, mimicking the appendages of the arthropod-esque creature that appears to droop downwards from the top of the canvas. On the left side of the composition, a slate-gray female body similarly hangs upside down from the top of the picture plane, counteracting the verticality of the central subject, the mountainous land masses, and the blue minaret. In place of naturalistic features, a vertical slit occupies the entirety of her face such that her head appears to open like a seed.

While the cold black sky and stylized rings of moonlight in the background mimic the starkness of a graphic illustration, the warm beige of the central figure's body echoes the textural mound of umber, sienna, ochre, and white that cascades diagonally downwards from the right-hand border of the canvas. Upon closer examination of the geological formation, roughly rendered figures become visible in the mound of rocky earth. By integrating women's bodies into the elemental matter of an imagined landscape that simultaneously features extraterrestrial elements, Bouzar both communicates a visceral impression of rootedness – even entrapment – and expresses an imaginative vision of Algerian womanhood. The sketchily rendered female bodies embedded in the mountainous land mass illustrate the degree to which Western traditions of representation have roughly fused Algerian women's identities into generalizations, including the Orientalist trope of the *algérienne*. Such connotations of entrapment are further expressed through the form of the nearby kneeling figure, whose face and neck are concealed by an opaque triangle. While the gender of the kneeling figure remains uncertain, the triangular form physically imposes anonymity and isolation, incarnating the passive silence that exoticist modes of representation have ascribed to the Algerian woman over time.

Transforming this tradition, the central figure lays bare her strong body and emanates dynamic energy in the form of a tentacular halo. Just as the sci-fi warrior traverses a reimagined Algerian landscape, Bouzar liberates herself from history by passing through it. Rethinking canonical representations of Algerian womanhood by recombining spatial environments, bodies, and knowledge-bearing symbols, she wields her brushes like *flyssa*, carving space for new subjective visions.

## CHAPTER 2 – ARCHIVE REVIVAL

[...] can we empathize without taking  
on the trauma?: can we pursue cognition by  
a path that cuts through the body but bypasses  
the gut?

- Evie Shockley, “Cogito Ergo Loquor”

While Bouzar’s *Femmes d’Alger* compositions expand the spectrum of interpretive possibilities vis-à-vis the French-Algerian past through a reimagination of the Orientalist painting tradition, her two series titled *Princesse* (2015-2016) and *Algérie, année 0 ou quand commence la mémoire* (2011-2012) do so through the reinterpretation of twentieth-century archival material. Featured in the 2016 iteration of Dak’Art, the largest contemporary art biennial in Africa, *Princesse* comprises twelve painted portraits measuring forty by fifty centimeters each (Fig. 12).<sup>71</sup> Based directly upon photographs of forcibly unveiled women taken by Marc Garanger during the Algerian War of Independence, the series transforms unwilling sitters into bejeweled icons.<sup>72</sup> Although *Princesse* differs substantially in medium and style from the archive-inspired drawings that constitute Bouzar’s *Algérie, année 0* series, both projects originated from the same historical research.<sup>73</sup> Using the internet and other readily available resources to study archival photographs not only from the Algerian War of Independence but also from the Algerian Civil War, Bouzar compiled a total of forty snapshots that she found to be especially compelling and then created acrylic-embellished line drawings inspired by her

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<sup>71</sup> “Dak’Art 2016 Presents Rich Variety of Contemporary African Art,” *DW*, Deutsche Welle, accessed January 28, 2019, <https://www.dw.com/en/dakart-2016-presents-rich-variety-of-contemporary-african-art/g-19240594>; Dalila Dalléas Bouzar, “Princesse,” accessed May 5, 2019, <http://www.daliladalleas.com/>.

<sup>72</sup> Simon Njami, ed., *La Cité dans le Jour Bleu : Réenchantements* (Bielefeld : Kerber Verlag, 2016), 103.

<sup>73</sup> Dalila Dalléas Bouzar, « Dalila Dalléas Bouzar: Le Geste Pictural Comme Récit d’une Mémoire en Devenir, » interview by Elsa Guily, *Intense Art Magazine*, May 25, 2016, <http://www.iam-africa.com/dalila-dalleas-bouzar-le-geste-pictural-comme-recit-dune-memoire-en-devenir/>.

selections.<sup>74</sup> In this chapter, through a close examination of *Princesse* and *Algérie, année 0*, I suggest that Bouzar challenges the taboos that have cordoned off events in Algerian history and their representation, engaging in modes of making – namely drawing and painting – that indexically map her prolonged, personal engagement with French-Algerian history in its full complexity. Moreover, I argue that the interplay of abstraction and figuration in both series generates opportunities for discovery and learning by freeing archival material from the realm of documentary specificity.

### **Official Memory, Official Forgetting**

As in the first chapter, I will make use of the concept of taboo as a framing device to illustrate the ways in which Bouzar frees herself from conventional approaches to Algerian history. Throughout my discussion of the *Femmes d'Alger* series, I claimed that Bouzar challenges the taboo status of figurative oil painting as a “dying art” by conceptualizing the history of art as a continuum, reactivating traditional modes of representation in the present. This particular application of the concept also applies to the paintings that I will examine in this chapter. However, in my analysis of *Princesse* and *Algérie, année 0*, I extend my use of the term “taboo” to encompass trends in historical discourse more broadly. In France and Algeria, for instance, processes of official memory construction have discursively cordoned off the violent realities of the Algerian War of Independence and Algerian Civil War, constructing taboos around particular events and phenomena. This culture of taboo has prevailed in both French and Algerian contexts not only on the level of the state but also on an individual level through widespread processes

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<sup>74</sup> Érika Nimis, « Passeuses d'Histoires : des Archives 'Miniscales' pour Dire les Silence de l'Histoire Algérienne, » in *Archive (Re)mix : Vues d'Afrique*, edited by Maëline le Lay, Dominique Malaquais and Nadine Siegert (Rennes : Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2015), 45.

of willed forgetting, which I will now trace in more detail to clarify the historical foundations of Bouzar's creative practice.

Over the past several decades, scholars specializing in the history of Algeria have taken up the theme of historical amnesia to shed light on the legacy of the Algerian War of Independence in both France and Algeria. Among such scholars is French historian Benjamin Stora, whose work has explored the evolution of French and Algerian approaches to the nations' shared colonial past. For instance, in an article titled "Algérie: Les Retours de la Mémoire de la Guerre d'Indépendance," Stora describes the War of Independence as « une guerre sans images » (a war without images), highlighting the impact of state censorship on visual representations of the conflict.<sup>75</sup> Not only the dearth of images of the Algerian War but also the series of violent conflicts that erupted between Islamic insurgents and the Algerian state in the last decade of the twentieth century solidified existing taboos around Independence-era human rights violations, at least on an official level. While some Algerian political commentators openly identified parallels between the War of Independence and the Algerian Civil War as it unfolded, highlighting the prevalence of executions, torture, and urban terrorism in both conflicts, the Algerian government remained largely silent throughout the 1990s regarding the use of torture in the War of Independence in order to avoid comparable discussions of contemporary state violence.<sup>76</sup> Through Stora's analysis, we see that the Algerian government made efforts to shroud the violent realities of Independence in an atmosphere of taboo during and after the Algeria War.

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<sup>75</sup> Benjamin Stora, « Algérie: Les retours de la mémoire de la guerre d'indépendance » *Modern & Contemporary France* 10, no. 4 (2002), DOI: 10.1080/0963948022000029547, 466.

<sup>76</sup> Stora, « Algérie: Les retours de la mémoire de la guerre d'indépendance, » 467, 469.

Themes of official memory and taboo resurface in *Algeria 1830-2000: A Short History*, in which Stora traces not only the rise and fall of the French colonial presence in Algeria but also the myriad ways in which both nations have rendered forbidden and inaccessible the violent dimensions of the nation's colonial past. According to Stora, the French registered the paradoxes inherent in their colonization of Algeria even before the War of Independence had erupted in full. While French nationalism had once rested upon the principles of *liberté, égalité* and *fraternité*, both the pro-German operations of the Vichy regime during World War II and the intensification of the French government's colonial agenda throughout the mid-twentieth century raised questions about the status of those principles as guideposts of the French Republic.<sup>77</sup> In Stora's words, the Algerian War resulted in "the crisis of French nationalism": while the French colonial presence in the Maghreb functioned as an expression of political and military might, it simultaneously undermined the French nation's republican values.<sup>78</sup> Although General Charles de Gaulle eased the palpable friction between French nationalism and French colonialism in 1959 by expressing support for Algerian independence, the fact that the Algerian War resulted in the forced evacuation of one million *pieds-noirs* and the death of hundreds of thousands of Algerian civilians transformed the crisis of nationalism into a veritable "crisis of conscience."<sup>79</sup> In other words, the war and its effects not only undermined the foundations of nationalist fervor in France but also generated an atmosphere of silence and shame that would continue to shape perceptions of the French-Algerian past.

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<sup>77</sup> Benjamin Stora, *Algeria, 1830-2000: A Short History* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001), 111.

<sup>78</sup> Stora, *Algeria, 1830-2000: A Short History*, 111.

<sup>79</sup> Stora, *Algeria, 1830-2000: A Short History*, 112.



In response to this “crisis of conscience,” the French government sought to control the national legacy of the Algerian War. As Stora writes, “The memory of the Algerian War became encysted, as if within an invisible fortress, not in order to be ‘protected,’ but to be dissimulated [...].”<sup>80</sup> In evoking a “fortress,” Stora conveys the extent to which the French state suppressed the lived realities of the war, rendering them forbidden or taboo. Part and parcel of this willed forgetting of the destructive realities of the Algerian War was a series of amnesty laws that removed blame from French stakeholders in the conflict. For example, in December 1964, just over two years after Algeria had become independent from France, de Gaulle pardoned former members of the OAS (Organisation de l’armée secrete), a group of Algerian War veterans who had made a violent attempt to wrest control over Algiers in 1961.<sup>81</sup> This legislative act is especially noteworthy in light of the extreme violence perpetuated by OAS members in the early 1960s, ranging from bomb attacks across Paris and Algiers to the burning of the Algiers University library.<sup>82</sup> By pardoning those associated with the crimes committed by the OAS, the de Gaulle administration acted in line with the principle of “forgive and forget,” deemphasizing wartime violence for the sake of rebuilding national identity.

In the Algerian context, various social, economic, and political developments throughout the 1960s further engendered a culture of silence around the violence of the Algerian War. According to Stora, “Algeria’s colonial past was completely transformed into a foil, a point of reference for the self-justification the social present needed.”<sup>83</sup> In the post-war years, Algerian individuals relocated from rural areas to urban

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<sup>80</sup> Stora, *Algeria, 1830-2000: A Short History*, 113.

<sup>81</sup> James McDougall, *A History of Algeria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 229.

<sup>82</sup> McDougall, *A History of Algeria*, 230.

<sup>83</sup> Stora, *Algeria, 1830-2000: A Short History*, 114.

environments, bought back lands from the French, and took part in the newly nationalized petroleum industry.<sup>84</sup> By emphasizing industrial expansion as a means of overcoming the “dark” era of colonial rule, Algerian officials suppressed the national memory of the war in an effort to lay the foundations for future growth. Later in the twentieth century, the Algerian state would continue to frame and reframe the War of Independence to serve contemporary political needs. For instance, President Houari Boumédiène effectuated a “complete concealment of Algerian history in all its complexity” over the course of his administration in the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>85</sup> However, in the 1980s, the Front de Libération National (FLN) advanced a nationalist agenda by encouraging not simply the study of the Algerian War but, more specifically, the conceptualization of the historical event as a heroic revolution.<sup>86</sup> Through this construction of “official history,” the FLN not only insisted upon the post-colonial “legitimacy” of the nation but also perpetuated acts of official “forgetting,” strategically de-emphasizing information that undermined their mythologized vision of the past.<sup>87</sup>

While the construction of “official” histories in France and Algeria gave rise to taboos on a national level, such processes of reframing and forgetting have also taken place on the level of individuals and their families from 1962 to the present. This is certainly the case for Bouzar, whose father was recruited as a young man to fight for the French army during the War of Independence.<sup>88</sup> In her view, her father, as well as her uncles and aunts, inherited a tradition of silence and amnesia vis-à-vis the events in

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<sup>84</sup> Stora, *Algeria, 1830-2000: A Short History*, 114

<sup>85</sup> Stora, *Algeria, 1830-2000: A Short History*, 189.

<sup>86</sup> Stora, *Algeria, 1830-2000: A Short History*, 189.

<sup>87</sup> Stora, *Algeria, 1830-2000: A Short History*, 190.

<sup>88</sup> Guylaine Tappaz, « Quand l’Algérie ‘Panse’ sa Décennie Noire, » *DW*, Deutsche Welle, October 22, 2012, <https://www.dw.com/fr/quand-lalge%C3%A9rie-panse-sa-d%C3%A9cennie-noire/av-16322874>.

Algeria, which prevented her from accessing the complexities of that history.<sup>89</sup> Part of her project as an artist has involved questioning officially imposed and privately internalized taboos that have had a notably fragmenting effect on perceptions of Algerian history. Through her archive-inspired drawings and paintings, she restores a sense of unity to her homeland's history by reactivating imagery originally associated with tabooed aspects of the Algerian past.

### ***Princesse, Garanger, and the Photographic-Military Apparatus***

Thus far, I have drawn upon Stora's historical analysis and upon Bouzar's personal experience to illustrate the various mechanisms by which French and Algerian forces (ranging from the level of the nation to the level of the individual) have strategically shaped the legacy of the Algerian War of Independence, constructing taboos around war-era violence and victimization. However, before turning to Bouzar's series *Princesse* and the photographs that inspired it, I will examine in more detail a particular subcategory of wartime violence that, in the post-war years, adopted a taboo status – namely, violence against women. In fact, in a paper entitled “Violence, Viols et Symbolique Sexuelle: l’Algérie d’une Guerre à l’Autre,” anthropologist Abderrahmane Moussaoui uses the term *tabou* to describe conventional perceptions of rape during the Algerian War.<sup>90</sup> While no official statistics are available regarding the prevalence of sexual violence during the war, Moussaoui estimates that hundreds of women were likely raped by armed soldiers.<sup>91</sup> In fact, in *Algérienne*, published in 2001, former FLN

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<sup>89</sup> Tappaz, « Quand l’Algérie ‘Panse’ sa Décennie Noire. »

<sup>90</sup> Abderrahmane Moussaoui, « Violence, Viols et Symbolique Sexuelle : L’Algérie d’une Guerre à l’Autre, » in *Guerre d’Algérie : Le Sexe Outragé* by Catherine Brun and Todd Shepard (Paris : CNRS Éditions, 2016), 88.

<sup>91</sup> Moussaoui, « Violence, Viols et Symbolique Sexuelle : L’Algérie d’une Guerre à l’Autre, » 89.

combatant Louissette Ighilahriz describes in depth her arrest, torture, and rape, providing an autobiographical case study of war-era violence against women.<sup>92</sup> Importantly, the victimization of women surfaced not only as a lived reality but also as a convention of representation during and after the Algerian War. For instance, in an article titled “Représentations Artistiques Postcoloniales des Femmes en Guerre d’Algérie: Dévoilement d’une ‘Non-Histoire,’” art historian Émilie Goudal notes that although certain artists (including the French painter Boris Taslitzky) used visual media to celebrate the revolutionary activities of female insurgents, the vast majority took up female victimization as a theme: “Les femmes algériennes sont en effet beaucoup plus évoquées en tant que victimes premières de ce conflit.”<sup>93</sup> This visual and thematic preoccupation with Algerian female victimhood is notably operative in the photographs of Algerian women by Garanger that inspired *Princesse*.

In the photographs and writings of Garanger, themes of taboo and victimization loom large. On the one hand, Garanger’s reflections on his firsthand experience of the war highlight the hypocrisy of French colonial operations in Algeria and point to the shame and silence that have historically typified French perceptions of the war. For instance, in *La Guerre d’Algérie Vue par un Appelé du Contingent*, Marc Garanger states, « cette guerre est tabou. Dans les écoles, on n’en parle pas. Toute ma génération vit encore dans ce mutisme pour essayer en vain d’oublier. »<sup>94</sup> Not only does Garanger make direct use of the term taboo, but he also illustrates the forbidden status of the French-

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<sup>92</sup> Moussaoui, « Violence, Viols et Symbolique Sexuelle : L’Algérie d’une Guerre à l’Autre, » 87.

<sup>93</sup> Émilie Goudal, « Représentations Artistiques Postcoloniales des Femmes en Guerre d’Algérie : Dévoilement d’une ‘Non-Histoire,’ » in *Guerre d’Algérie : Le Sexe Outragé* by Catherine Brun and Todd Shepard (Paris : CNRS Éditions, 2016), 67.

<sup>94</sup> Marc Garanger, *La Guerre d’Algérie Vue par un Appelé du Contingent* (Paris : Éditions du Seuil, 1984), 14.

Algerian encounter in the French context by describing its absence from school curricula and from conversations among his peers. While Garanger's post-war writings convey a critical perspective, his photographic portraits enact a visual justification of the physical, psychological, and cultural violence inflicted upon Algerian civilians in the 1950s and 1960s. As an *appelé* (conscript) during the Algerian War, Garanger was recruited by his commander to take identification photographs of members of the native Algerian population whom the French army had forcibly displaced from their villages over the course of *regroupement*, a military campaign whereby French forces relocated three million Algerians to spur the "development" of the rural Algerian landscape.<sup>95</sup> In his handwritten preface to *Femmes Algériennes 1960*, a published collection of his portraits of Algerian women, Garanger claims that he photographed nearly 2000 indigenous Algerians in total (the majority of whom were women) at a rate of 200 per day.<sup>96</sup> In light of Garanger's intimate relationship to what Edward Welch and Joseph McGonagle have termed the "French military apparatus,"<sup>97</sup> it would appear that his *Femmes Algériennes* functioned in tandem with the violence of military operations in Algeria, undermining the subjects' sense of agency.<sup>98</sup> In one of his photographs, the sitter visibly frowns as she

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<sup>95</sup> McDougall, *A History of Algeria*, 218; Edward Welch and Joseph McGonagle, *Contesting Views: The Visual Economy of France and Algeria* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013), 49.

<sup>96</sup> Marc Garanger, *Femmes Algériennes 1960* (Anglet : Atlantica, 2002), n.p.

<sup>97</sup> Welch and McGonagle, *Contesting Views: The Visual Economy of France and Algeria*, 49.

<sup>98</sup> Garanger's role as both a soldier and a documentary photographer calls to mind a broader scholarly discourse surrounding the contemporary relationship between photography and war. In *Regarding the Pain of Others*, Susan Sontag harnesses the dual connotations of the word "shoot" to analogize the camera to a gun in her discussion of a photograph from the Spanish Civil War in which a "Republican soldier [is] 'shot' by Robert Capa's camera at the same moment he is hit by an enemy bullet" (see Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* [New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003], 22). Along similar lines, Roland Barthes has examined the philosophical dimensions of the violent process by which a subject becomes an object through the medium of photography. In fact, in *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, he characterizes the process of being photographed as a "micro-version of death" (see Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, translated by Richard Howard [New York: Hill and Wang, 1981], 14).

stares back at the camera, confirming the extent to which the photographer has acted against her will (Fig. 13).

In my own conversation with Bouzar, she drew a comparison between her first encounter with Garanger's photographs of Algerian women and her experience viewing Delacroix's *Femmes d'Alger* for the first time. From her perspective, Garanger's work, much like the vast oil painting by Delacroix, had a notable strength and beauty that she hoped to revive in her own work.<sup>99</sup> An additional parallel between the works of Garanger and Delacroix as they relate to Bouzar's oeuvre emerges when we consider the role that Garanger's *Femmes Algériennes* played on the world stage in the wake of their publication. Initially circulated in a 1961 edition of *L'Illustré Suisse*, a weekly French-language magazine published in Switzerland, the portraits became globally accessible cultural artifacts the moment Garanger won the Prix Niépce in 1966, which cemented his status as a renowned professional photographer in France.<sup>100</sup> By engaging closely with Garanger's work, Bouzar draws upon a *lieu de mémoire* that, for many, has come to visually encapsulate the historical relationship between France and Algeria, much like Delacroix's orientalist vision. Inscribing herself within a historically specific tradition of representation, Bouzar models new approaches to processing the past.

While Bouzar certainly admired the emotive quality of Garanger's photographs, *Princesse* diverges from Garanger's project by liberating the unveiled Algerian subjects of Garanger's portraits from the taboos that surround the colonial violence and oppression associated with the Algerian War. In my interview with Bouzar, she stated, "I

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<sup>99</sup> Dalila Dalléas Bouzar, Interview by Charlotte G. Reynders, October 28, 2018.

<sup>100</sup> Garanger, *Femmes Algériennes* 1960, 122.

don't want to see them as [...] victim[s] of the war.”<sup>101</sup> Through *Princesse*, Bouzar simultaneously confronts the historical realities of violence that French and Algerian forces have conventionally deemed taboo and counteracts the tendency among artists (including painters and professional photographers) to represent Algerian women as the disempowered targets of such unspoken acts of violence. Bouzar diverges further from Garanger's representations of Algerian women in her choice of medium. While she certainly relied on the physical features of Garanger's subjects as a point of departure, she engaged in extensive acts of reimagination and invention through her palette and brushwork: “from the photos, I just took the line of the face, but I create[d] the color, I create[d] the parure.”<sup>102</sup>

In my own research, I found that many of the paintings in the *Princesse* series could be immediately traced to specific portraits by Garanger based upon the subjects' head positions and facial features. Accordingly, I organized images of six out of the twelve *Princesse* paintings into a table along with scanned copies of the Garanger photographs that likely inspired them in order to facilitate comparative analysis (Fig. 14). By studying *Princesse* alongside the original photographs by Garanger, we see that Bouzar's approach to composition and paint application transforms a set of historically specific documentary photographs into timeless pictures that elevate victims into icons, liberating them from historical taboos and creating opportunities for an exploratory contemplation of the French-Algerian relationship.

While several aspects of Garanger's photographs visually convey contextual knowledge from the past, Bouzar's paintings facilitate the creative production of

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<sup>101</sup> Dalila Dalléas Bouzar, Interview by Charlotte G. Reynders, October 28, 2018.

<sup>102</sup> Dalila Dalléas Bouzar, Interview by Charlotte G. Reynders, October 28, 2018.

knowledge in the present. In *Femmes Algériennes*, for example, the choice of black and white not only standardizes the appearance of the portraits, reaffirming their strict function as a means of visual identification, but also implies Garanger's role as a reporter of information by evoking the conventions of photojournalism that prevailed at the time.<sup>103</sup> Furthermore, in each of Garanger's portraits, a female subject is positioned against a neutral backdrop (often a stucco or stone wall), which both draws attention to the details of each woman's physical characteristics and bears witness to the staged nature of the images. Not only did French *appelés* physically relocate these women to a military camp, but they also forced them to stand against flat surfaces that would promote their immediate identification in photographic form. Furthermore, the neutral backdrop of each photograph highlights the shallowness of the space between the subject and the camera lens, visually manifesting the restrictive and homogenizing treatment of Algerian civilians during the *regroupement*. Just as the background of each portrait communicates aspects of the historical context in which the photographs were produced, features of the women's physical appearance (including their hair, facial expressions, clothing and accessories) serve as markers of historical context. In several images, the subject's hair appears tangled and tousled – an aftereffect of the removal of fabric from their heads. In this sense, the images recall the women's forced unveiling, inscribing the expressive content of Garanger's series within a precise time and place. Similarly, the women's tightly closed lips, rigid brows, and, in some cases, narrowed eyes, convey the visceral conflicts of interest between the photographer and the depicted subjects.

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<sup>103</sup> Only from the mid-1960s onward did color photography become a widespread phenomenon across editorials and news sources (see Adam D. Weinberg, *On the Line: The New Color Photojournalism* [Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 1986], 34).



While the women's hair and facial expressions bear witness to the violent process by which they were photographed, their clothing, jewelry, and facial tattoos serve as signals of cultural identity that tether Garanger's project to rural Algeria. For instance, the women wear layers of shawls and scarves, some of which are striped, others of which brim with floral patterns, providing a window into conventions of dress among the women of Aïn Terzine.<sup>104</sup> The detail with which Garanger's camera has captured the surface patterns of the fabric, as well as the minerals and metals that compose the women's jewelry, makes it possible to locate these images in their historical and cultural context. In the same vein, the women's face tattoos speak to their identity as inhabitants of rural Algeria. Such facial tattoos, according to a 1931 study conducted in Aït Warain and Aït Seghroûchen by Georges Marcy, have historically been prevalent among nomadic Berber populations in the Maghreb.<sup>105</sup> As Marcy notes, these tattoos tend to feature symmetrical crosses, points, dashes, arcs, and stylized tree designs along the vertical axis of the face.<sup>106</sup> In fact, the arrangements of tattooed marks on the foreheads, cheeks, and chins of the women in Garanger's photographs bear a strong resemblance to a diagram by Marcy of Berber facial tattoos typical of the Aït Seghroûchen region (Fig. 15).

In her reinterpretations of Garanger's photographs, Bouzar blurs the line between figuration and abstraction, selectively emphasizing and de-emphasizing the historically circumscribed details that pervade Garanger's *Femmes Algériennes*. As a result, she both promotes a return to the archive and generates opportunities for imagination and

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<sup>104</sup> Garanger, *Femmes Algériennes* 1960, 123.

<sup>105</sup> G. Marcy, "Origine et Signification des Tatouages des Tribus Berbères," *Revue de l'Histoire des Religions* 102 (1931), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23664621>, 30.

<sup>106</sup> Marcy, "Origine et Signification des Tatouages des Tribus Berbères," 31.

contemplation in the present. For instance, by replicating the facial features of the photographed women, she reintroduces historical material to contemporary viewers, placing her work in direct dialogue with Garanger's series. However, she transforms the female subjects into frontally oriented, approximately life-sized floating heads, facilitating intimate visual encounters between viewer and subject. In addition to the frontality of the portraits, Bouzar's approach to paint application recalls the flatness of an icon – she renders the women's skin and hair through simplified, monochromatic swathes of paint that call attention to the surface of the canvas.<sup>107</sup> In the same vein, she transforms the women's jewelry into broad flecks and streaks of gold paint, adopting a semi-abstract mode of representation (see Figs. 13a and 13f). Similarly, she uses clusters of blue and brown strokes to mimic the women's facial tattoos. Just as her evocations of jewelry hover on the surface of the canvas like decorative Byzantine embellishments, her representations of tattoos have an organic, painterly quality that removes Garanger's subjects from the realm of representational precision. Her brushwork encourages close reengagement with French-Algerian history both by translating Garanger's work into icon-esque images that recall a history of private spiritual veneration and by indexically tracing the time that the artist spent studying Garanger's pictures and formulating her own interpretations.

While Bouzar quotes the Algerian women's physical features, tattoos, and jewelry, she takes liberties that permit readings of the female subjects both within and

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<sup>107</sup> On the one hand, we might interpret her deliberate variation of the women's skin color as a reference to the dynamism of the Algerian population as a heterogeneous community of Berbers and Arabs alike – a subject that figures prominently in an article on skin color in French paintings of Algerian subject matter by Peter Benson Miller (see Peter Benson Miller, “Des Couleurs Primitives’: Miscegenation and French Painting of Algeria,” *Visual Resources* 24, no. 3 [2008], DOI: 10.1080/01973760802284638, 277). On the other hand, she might simply be using her palette to emphasize the women's individuality, marking each painting as a distinct opportunity to produce new forms of knowledge vis-à-vis the *femmes algériennes*.

outside the bounds of historical specificity. For instance, by (re)imagining their facial tattoos and skin color, adjusting their facial expressions, and designing gilded accessories far more imaginative and stylized than the jewelry that appears in the photographs, Bouzar frees Garanger's pictures from the connotations and modes of representation typically associated with the War of Independence. For example, while Garanger's photos bear witness to mechanisms of victimization, Bouzar's paintings confer agency upon the female subjects, creating opportunities to contemplate Algerian history along a variety of thematic vectors, including but not limited to the discourse of violence and victimization. In each portrait, this sense of agency manifests itself in the form of a black backdrop that envelops the subject's ears and neck as would a *hijab*. In this way, the artist re-veils the women, in turn re-empowering them as subjects.<sup>108</sup> In fact, the exhibition catalogue titled *Réenchantements: La Cité dans le jour bleu*, which accompanied Dak'Art 12, includes a quote by Bouzar in which she describes the personal ambitions that motivated *Princesse*: "Through my paintings, I wanted to honor them. This choice of mine is not to denounce the humiliations suffered by these women, but to shed the role of the victim by reappropriating these images. I wanted to show the beauty of these women, restore their dignity and say that despite this forced unveiling, these women are princesses."<sup>109</sup> In summary, her series challenges a culture of taboo by reintegrating

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<sup>108</sup> In *Algeria Unveiled*, renowned postcolonial philosopher Frantz Fanon discusses the veil as a target of the French colonial apparatus and as a means of resistance among Algerian women. He speaks in particular of the frustration that the French colonizer experienced due to the inaccessibility of Algerian female beauty and claims that the French used the veil as a means of characterizing Algerian men as 'backwards' and oppressive (see Frantz Fanon, "Algeria Unveiled," in *A Dying Colonialism*, translated by Haakon Chevalier [New York: Grove Press, 1965], 38, 44). In light of Fanon's argument, we might interpret Bouzar's visual "re-veiling" of Algerian women as an act of non-violent resistance not only against the past actions of the French colonial apparatus but also against the fragmentation of Algerian history perpetuated by officially reinforced "taboos."

<sup>109</sup> Simon Njami, ed., *La Cité dans le Jour Bleu : Réenchantements* (Bielefeld : Kerber Verlag, 2016), 103.

histories of violence into a more holistic conception of the Algerian past, to which viewers gain access through intimate aesthetic experiences with her work.

### ***Algérie, Année 0: Marking New Beginnings***

While *Princesse* reimagines photographs taken during the War of Independence, Bouzar's series *Algérie, année 0* draws upon archival material from both the War of Independence and the Civil War of the late twentieth century. Towards the beginning of this chapter, I discussed the "taboo" status of the War of Independence as expressed through official and individual efforts to reframe aspects of that particular era in Algerian history. However, it is important to note that such processes of official censorship extended into the 1990s and early 2000s. For example, according to Benjamin Stora, even thirty years after Independence, violent acts ranging from military campaigns to terrorist incidents were rarely displayed on French or Algerian television in their full complexity due to the control that the Algerian government maintained over visual representations of the conflict.<sup>110</sup> In "Dispelling the Myth of Invisibility: Photography and the Algerian Civil War," French cultural historian Joseph McGonagle further discusses the means by which the Algerian government controlled visual depictions of the Civil War. Although his project centers upon the role of photojournalists in documenting a war that historians (including Stora) have characterized as imageless, he acknowledges the substantial risks that journalists and photographers encountered in the 1990s. For example, the government censored any content deemed critical of the state and often rejected

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<sup>110</sup> Stora, « Algérie: Les retours de la mémoire de la guerre d'indépendance, Modern & Contemporary France, » 466.

journalists' requests to visit geographic locations where attacks had taken place.<sup>111</sup> In some cases, those who worked in media and communications faced extreme acts of violence – as many as fifty-eight Algerian journalists were killed between 1993 and 1997.<sup>112</sup>

Even after the Civil War, the Algerian government continued to control public perceptions of state violence, which resulted in the intensification of taboos, namely around the “disappearance” of individuals. Throughout the 1990s, as the Algerian government took steps to quash the violent activity of Islamist rebels and their supporters, suspects were forcibly “disappeared” – that is, held by the state in “undocumented detention,” where they were subjected to torture in the form of “beatings, electricity, water, electric irons, drills, and soldering tools.”<sup>113</sup> In 2006, Algerian President Abdelaziz Bouteflika translated a nationwide taboo around this particular form of state violence into a formal piece of legislation through the Charter for Peace and National Reconciliation, an article of which prohibited public discourse around the “disappeared.”<sup>114</sup> In conjunction with the broader scholarly literature on national memory vis-à-vis contemporary Algerian history, the Charter confirms that the historical era encompassing Independence and the Civil War was characterized by a continuous interplay between acts of violence against the Algerian people and efforts to silence or obscure such acts of violence in the public sphere. Moreover, official efforts to control public perceptions of both historical events barred the Algerian populace from registering the connections

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<sup>111</sup> Joseph McGonagle, “Dispelling the Myth of Invisibility: Photography and the Algerian Civil War,” in *The Violence of the Image: Photography and International Conflict* (London: I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd, 2014), 79.

<sup>112</sup> McGonagle, “Dispelling the Myth of Invisibility: Photography and the Algerian Civil War,” 79.

<sup>113</sup> McDougall, *A History of Algeria*, 314.

<sup>114</sup> McGonagle, “Dispelling the Myth of Invisibility: Photography and the Algerian Civil War,” 85-86.

between them. Bouzar experienced this phenomenon in person in 2011, when she interviewed a group of about twenty Algerian citizens to learn more about their backgrounds and, more specifically, their perceptions of contemporary historical events.<sup>115</sup> When she asked her interviewees whether they perceived a “link” between the two wars, they all replied that there was no connection between them.<sup>116</sup> However, to her, “the link was obvious” and derived from broader historical mechanisms by which violence had passed through Algerian society.<sup>117</sup> *Algérie, année 0* represents Bouzar’s personal inquiry into the interplay between violence and taboo that has shaped the course of contemporary Algerian history. Transforming archival photographs from the two most prominent conflicts in recent Algerian history into playful, visually accessible drawings, she frees imagery with violent underpinnings and implications from the confines of official taboo.

Before examining individual drawings from the *Algérie, année 0* series, I will sketch the various sources of inspiration that motivated Bouzar to develop the project. First, between 2010 and 2014, Bouzar lived in Berlin, which she has characterized as a “veritable city of memory.”<sup>118</sup> As a resident of Berlin, she found herself steeped in an environment in which questions of history and memory permeated everyday life. In her words, the city is “visibly marked by history, revealing the traces of traumatic events such as the genocide of the Jews during the Second World War, or, more recently, the

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<sup>115</sup> Dalila Dalléas Bouzar, “About,” accessed May 5, 2018, <http://www.daliladalleas.com/>.

<sup>116</sup> Dalila Dalléas Bouzar, Interview by Charlotte G. Reynders, October 28, 2018.

<sup>117</sup> Dalila Dalléas Bouzar, Interview by Charlotte G. Reynders, October 28, 2018; see Abderrahmane Moussaoui, *De la Violence en Algérie : Les Lois du Chaos* (Arles: Actes Sud/MMSH, 2006) for an anthropological investigation of the historical origins and trajectory of political violence and Algeria.

<sup>118</sup> Dalila Dalléas Bouzar, “In Conversation with Dalila Dalléas Bouzar: ‘My Paintings Show That There is No Such Thing as Discontinuity in the History of Art,’” Interview by Sophie Eliot, *Contemporary And* (October 15, 2013), <https://www.contemporaryand.com/magazines/my-paintings-show-that-there-is-no-such-thing-as-discontinuity-in-the-history-of-art/>.

Berlin Wall.”<sup>119</sup> Since the mid-twentieth century, German scholars and artists alike have made it their mission to process historical regimes of violence, guilt, and taboo. As an example, we might consider the work of Aleida Assmann, whose book *Shadows of Trauma: Memory and the Politics of Postwar Identity* discusses various types of memory, ranging from the “individual” to the “collective” and from the “cultural” to the “political.”<sup>120</sup> Especially relevant to the visual arts is Assmann’s discussion of “functional” and “storage” memory – subcategories of cultural memory that ensure the transmission of historical knowledge over time through processes of canonization, as well as through material archives, texts and images.<sup>121</sup> While Assmann takes a theoretical approach to the structures of human memory, German artists have used material explorations of historical themes to disrupt what Assmann has termed the “tabooing of the past.”<sup>122</sup> In fact, the work of contemporary Berlin-based artists such as Christian Boltanski and Jochen Gerz inspired Bouzar to launch a comparable investigation into the French-Algerian encounter and its aftermath.<sup>123</sup>

While in Berlin, Bouzar was exposed to an additional source of inspiration that reaffirmed her desire to probe the underlying complexities of contemporary Algerian history. In the fall of 2010, she saw *Algérie(s)*, a documentary film on the Algerian Civil

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<sup>119</sup> Bouzar, “In Conversation with Dalila Dalléas Bouzar: ‘My Paintings Show That There is No Such Thing as Discontinuity in the History of Art,’” Interview by Sophie Eliot.

<sup>120</sup> Aleida Assmann, *Shadows of Trauma: Memory and the Politics of Postwar Identity*, translated by Sarah Clift (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016), 22.

<sup>121</sup> Assmann, *Shadows of Trauma: Memory and the Politics of Postwar Identity*, 42.

<sup>122</sup> Assmann, *Shadows of Trauma: Memory and the Politics of Postwar Identity*, 78.

<sup>123</sup> Here, I do not intend to establish a direct parallel between the devastating regimes of violence that emerged in Germany and Algeria during the Second World War and the Algerian War of Independence, respectively. Instead, I aim to suggest that the historically-oriented culture of Berlin in which Bouzar found herself immersed between 2010 and 2014 prompted her creative exploration of traumatic historical events that held weight for her on a personal and intellectual level.

War directed by Thierry Leclère, Malek Bensmail, and Patrice Barrat.<sup>124</sup> Released in 2002, the film is composed of two parts: “Un Peuple Sans Voix” (A Voiceless People) and “Une Terre en Deuil” (Land in Mourning). Both sections of the film feature video clips from the 1980s and 1990s, as well as interviews with relevant stakeholders ranging from journalists to military leaders to prominent French and Algerian political figures. First, the documentary outlines the sociopolitical climate of Algeria in the 1980s, touching upon the postwar agrarian revolution, the challenges of balancing *Berberisme*, *Islamisme*, and *Arabisme* on a national scale, and the economic crisis associated with the fall of oil prices in the mid-1980s.<sup>125</sup> Most notably, the film traces the rise of the militant Front Islamique du Salut (FIS), a Salafist group that grew its influence through clandestine networks and training programs, proclaiming Islam as the destiny of the Algerian state.<sup>126</sup>

As the various video clips and interviews suggest, members of the FIS increasingly took up arms to defend themselves as the Algerian army intensified their efforts to disband the Islamist movement, which laid the groundwork for the widespread violence of the 1990s. Key historical turning points addressed in the documentary include the national army’s suppression of riots in and around Algiers in 1988, which resulted in nearly 500 deaths, and the assassination on live television of the anti-Islamist Algerian president Mohammad Boudiaf in 1992.<sup>127</sup> The final shot of the first section of the documentary visually enacts the nation’s descent into the *décennie noire*: we see the view

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<sup>124</sup> Nimis, « Passeuses d’Histoires : des Archives ‘Miniscules’ pour Dire les Silence de l’Histoire Algérienne, » 45.

<sup>125</sup> *Algérie(s) Part 1 : Un Peuple Sans Voix*, directed by Thierry Leclère, Malek Bensmail, and Patrice Barrat (Article Z, 2002), <https://vimeo.com/ondemand/algeriespartie1?autoplay=1>.

<sup>126</sup> *Algérie(s) Part 1 : Un Peuple Sans Voix*.

<sup>127</sup> *Algérie(s) Part 1 : Un Peuple Sans Voix*.



from the back of a train as it moves from a verdant landscape into a dark tunnel.<sup>128</sup>

Throughout the second section of the film, the directors present interviews and footage that bear witness to the extreme violence that erupted across Algeria throughout the 1990s in the form of torture, terror, and civilian massacres.<sup>129</sup>

Upon viewing *Algérie(s)*, Bouzar realized just how invisible the late-twentieth-century wave of conflict and confusion in Algeria had been on a global scale, and she resolved to bring that history – and its connection to the War of Independence – to light.<sup>130</sup> In the acknowledgements section of the *Algérie, année 0* catalogue, she gives further insight into the factors that motivated her historical inquiry by thanking contemporary historian Daho Djerbal for speaking to her about the history of her home country and for encouraging her in her creative endeavors.<sup>131</sup> Djerbal's essay titled "History Writing: Another Episteme," which addresses the challenges that Algerians have faced in making sense of recent events, helps to elucidate the culture of silence and uncertainty to which Bouzar was responding as she crystallized the objectives of her *Algérie, année 0* series. In Djerbal's view, "Algerian society continues to be shaken by compulsive movements because it has not been able to put its traumas into words or make its differences and internal contradictions an object of knowledge."<sup>132</sup> What Djerbal

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<sup>128</sup> The phrase "décennie noire" (Dark Decade) is conventionally used to refer to the violence of the Algerian Civil War (for example, see Nimis, « Passeuses d'Histoires : des Archives 'Miniscales' pour Dire les Silence de l'Histoire Algérienne, » 45).

<sup>129</sup> *Algérie(s) Part 2 : Une Terre en Deuil*, directed by Thierry Leclère, Malek Bensmaïl, and Patrice Barrat (Article Z, 2002), <https://vimeo.com/ondemand/algeriespartie2?autoplay=1>.

<sup>130</sup> Nimis, « Passeuses d'Histoires : des Archives 'Miniscales' pour Dire les Silence de l'Histoire Algérienne, » 45.

<sup>131</sup> She writes, « Un remerciement spécial à Daho Djerbal, le premier historien algérien à m'avoir parlé de mon histoire et encouragée dans mon entreprise » (see Dalila Dalléas Bouzar et al., *Algérie, Année 0 ou Quand Commence la Mémoire* [Alger : Éditions Barzakh, 2012], 4).

<sup>132</sup> Daho Djerbal, "History Writing as Cultural and Political Critique, or the Difficulty of Writing the History of a (De)colonized Society," *The Romantic Review* 104, no. 3-4 (New York: The Trustees of Columbia University, 2013), 245.

identifies through this statement is a problem of processing; we can infer from his claim that a productive understanding of Algerian history requires the expression of past realities through words or other media that facilitate the production of unified forms of knowledge. Perhaps the drawings in the *Algérie, année 0* series can be read as “objects of knowledge” in the sense that they create opportunities for viewers to revisit the Algerian archive, conceptualize such material through a variety of lenses, and freely establish connections not only among historical events but also between the past and the present.

In fact, during my interview with Bouzar, she expressed a desire to promote unconstrained processes of discovery through her art, for herself and for her viewers. She takes issue with artists who reiterate traumatic aspects of colonial history, for instance, without expressing some “new element.”<sup>133</sup> Such projects, in her view, can be classified as “propaganda” because they “deny some element of the story” and “force” viewers to respond in a particular way.<sup>134</sup> In her view, works of art that explicitly “cross the political field” are “dangerous” because they advance arguments tethered to particular societal issues rather than accommodating a broad spectrum of reactions and interpretations.<sup>135</sup> While she uses politically charged archival material as a point of departure for *Algérie, année 0*, her visual reinterpretations of these found images strip away overt historical reference points and, as a result, enable viewers to originate their own systems of knowledge.

Bouzar’s interest in facilitating the active remembrance and reconsideration of the Algerian past is especially evident in her preface to the *Algérie, année 0* catalogue, in

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<sup>133</sup> Dalila Dalléas Bouzar, Interview by Charlotte G. Reynders, October 28, 2018.

<sup>134</sup> Dalila Dalléas Bouzar, Interview by Charlotte G. Reynders, October 28, 2018.

<sup>135</sup> Dalila Dalléas Bouzar, Interview by Charlotte G. Reynders, October 28, 2018.

which she sketches her ambition to liberate her homeland from a history of amnesia. When describing the significance of the “0” in the title of her series, she states that “the ‘0’ means the birth of a beginning or one coming into being.”<sup>136</sup> In other words, she aims to lay the foundations for a liberated approach to Algerian history – a new era in which viewers will apprehend the twin pillars of contemporary Algerian history with new eyes. While Bouzar evokes “beginning[s]” and foundations through her chosen title for the series, she also does so in a material sense through her chosen medium. All works in the series are pencil sketches on paper with passages of acrylic embellishment, recalling Bouzar’s claim that “drawing is [her] foundation.”<sup>137</sup> By transforming the documentary realism of archival photographs into simplified pencil sketches, Bouzar reincarnates the material origins of her creative practice. In fact, drawing was “a part of [her] construction as a child” – she initially learned to draw by copying cartoons from books.<sup>138</sup> Revisiting this mode of making as an adult, she copies primary sources, develops her own vision, and, as I will argue, practices regarding the Algerian past with the curious and unencumbered worldview of a child in order to free herself from historical regimes of representation.

Several essays throughout the *Algérie, année 0* catalogue point to the youthful vitality of Bouzar’s drawings, but few discuss in depth the implications of this particular way of seeing for the series as a whole. For instance, in journalist Kamel Daoud’s essay titled “Beyond & Co. Hotel,” he associates Bouzar’s pictures with imaginary realms accessible to children: “Let us imagine the kind of universe Saint-Exupéry’s ‘Little

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<sup>136</sup> Bouzar et al., *Algérie, Année 0 ou Quand Commence la Mémoire*, 10.

<sup>137</sup> Dalila Dalléas Bouzar, Interview by Charlotte G. Reynders, October 28, 2018.

<sup>138</sup> Dalila Dalléas Bouzar, Interview by Charlotte G. Reynders, October 28, 2018.

Prince' lived in: a world of single lines and simple colours [...] We then see a child's quest, an untangled rhyme and the fascinating lightness that gives the weight of evidence to whole planets."<sup>139</sup> On the one hand, his allusion to Saint-Exupéry supports the argument that Bouzar's drawings – miniature "world[s] of single lines and simple colours" in their own right – promote discovery and learning through a visually simplified mode of representation. On the other hand, the majority of his essay takes the form of a creative, ekphrastic response to Bouzar's work, celebrating its whimsicality without addressing the ways in which her simplified *graphisme* aligns with her serious commitment to knowledge production.

A comparable discussion of the youthful worldview that Bouzar takes on in *Algérie, année 0* emerges in film and literature scholar Cloé Korman's essay, "Core Target." Describing Bouzar's stylistic approach, she presents readers with a sequence of images: "Lines in a schoolchild's exercise book, a student's yellow marker highlighting the important things to remember, something crossed out, here and there a mistake (surprise?) on the page."<sup>140</sup> Through Korman's allusions to highlighters and writing exercises, which align most closely with Bouzar's group of drawings titled *Écritures*, she loosely describes her personal encounter with Bouzar's work but does not advance a direct argument regarding the artist's approach to mark-making and color. Far from an incidental effect, the resemblance of Bouzar's drawings to the notes or drawings that a student might produce with highlighters and pencils provides useful insight into the entirety of the series. In each of Bouzar's drawings, cross-hatched pencil marks are clearly visible against the bleach-white paper, laying bare the creative process by which

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<sup>139</sup> Kamel Daoud, "'Beyond & Co.' Hotel," in *Algérie, Année 0 ou Quand Commence la Mémoire*, 46.

<sup>140</sup> Cloé Korman, "Core Target," in *Algérie, Année 0 ou Quand Commence la Mémoire*, 67.

the drawings were constructed. Much like a student's notes and sketches, these small-scale drawings are process-oriented. They signal not a static product but, instead, a preparatory first step in re-envisioning Algerian identity, both individual and collective.

Among the works in the series that most closely conveys the significance of the youthful dimension of Bouzar's approach to representation in *Algérie, année 0* is her drawing titled *Enfants du Soleil*, or, Children of the Sun (Fig. 16).<sup>141</sup> The drawing is directly based upon a black and white photograph of a group of fourteen young boys standing in a loose row in front of a stone building (Fig. 17).<sup>142</sup> Many of the boys in the picture face the viewer directly, squinting in the sunlight. An oblong shadow extends across the dirt path beneath their feet, contrasting starkly with the bright light hitting their faces and torsos. Some of the children appear tense and uncomfortable, opening their mouths (as if to speak or protest) or setting their hands firmly by their sides. Others smile or raise their brows, communicating varying degrees of curiosity and hesitation. In Bouzar's drawing, she omits three of the fourteen figures that appear in the photograph, perhaps to simplify the composition, and she replaces the background in its entirety with a layer of neon yellow acrylic paint, such that only the children and the long shadow beneath them remain. Furthermore, she adjusts the density and directionality of her cross-hatching to capture a full range of values, and she incorporates non-representational details into the picture, including five red stars, which she disperses throughout the group

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<sup>141</sup> Bouzar does not mention this explicitly in the *Algérie, année 0* catalogue, but *Les Enfants du soleil* was the title of a French musical by Alexandre Arcady and Didier Barbelivien that debuted in 2004. The musical follows the lives of three families who left Algeria in 1962, addressing the varied circumstances of Harkis, *pieds-noirs*, and Jews. See Géraldine Enjelvin and Nada Korac-Kakabadse, "France and the Memories of 'Others': The Case of the Harkis," *History & Memory* 24, no. 1 (2012), <https://muse.jhu.edu/>, 178, note 79.

<sup>142</sup> Bouzar did not specify where exactly she located the archival photographs and video stills that inspired *Algérie, année 0*, but she did share a folder with me containing eighteen snapshots upon which she based her drawings.

of figures, and a thin, red line that extends horizontally from the bottom left of the picture, projects upwards in a peak at the center of the composition, and proceeds horizontally, slightly above the original level of the line, to the right side of the picture plane. While the significance of these details is uncertain, the star symbols evoke the red star on the Algerian flag, perhaps signaling the subjects' national identity. The peaked line not only guides the viewer's gaze across the surface of the composition but also evokes a heart monitor or a graph of change over time. By calling to mind processes of modeling and measuring, the rectilinear detail reiterates the drawing's status as an object of knowledge derived from an exploratory study of archival material.

In his essay "Dalila Dalléas Bouzar, An Artist in the City," sociologist Hassan Remaoun interprets *Les Enfants du Soleil* as an "ode to optimism," reading the neon yellow background as a symbol of "hope" and a "bright future."<sup>143</sup> Insisting upon the positive mood of the picture, he uses the drawing as an example of the "joyful knowledge" that Bouzar assembles through *Algérie, année 0*. While the vibrant acrylic paint and the age of the depicted subjects certainly create an atmosphere of youthful vitality, the young boys' contorted, uncertain expressions in both the original photograph and the drawing raise questions about Remaoun's emphasis upon "optimism." Through Bouzar's use of quotidian materials associated with the learning process, she transforms an archival photograph into a newly legible aesthetic object while retaining the thought-provoking ambivalence of the original image. Moreover, by resituating the figures against a universalizing yellow backdrop and omitting specific information about the time period in which the original photograph was taken, she allows the crowd of children

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<sup>143</sup> Hassan Remaoun, "Dalila Dalléas Bouzar, An Artist in the City," in *Algérie, Année 0*, 23.

to stand in for multiple possible generations – including, perhaps, those who have yet to learn about the Algerian past. Arranged in a static row, the young subjects resemble an expectant audience, prompting viewers to engage in dynamic explorations of Algerian history and its implications for the past, present, and future.

According to art historian Érika Nimis, Bouzar’s drawings remove all suggestions of violence by transforming archival photographs into semi-abstract compositions :

“Transformées par le traitement du dessin et de la peinture, les images d’archive d’*Algérie, année 0* sont comme vidées de leur violence, neutralisées, mises à distance dans une quasi-abstraction.”<sup>144</sup> As a result, she claims, Bouzar creates space for viewers to embark upon processes of reflection and mourning.<sup>145</sup> Although Bouzar certainly transforms archival material through a synthesis of abstraction and figuration, not all of her compositions can be read as “neutralized” or “devoid of violence” as Nimis suggests. For instance, in her drawing “Bentalha,” she replicates the rigid bodies of victims of the Bentalha massacre of 1997, which resulted in approximately 250 deaths and was perpetrated either by actual members of an Islamist insurgent group called *le groupe islamiste armé* (GIA) or by “covert army death squads only masquerading as Islamists” (Fig. 18).<sup>146</sup> In the background of Bouzar’s picture, dense passages of rigid, vertically oriented scribbles visually communicate the brutality of the massacre. Overlaying these harsh pencil marks along the central axis of the drawing is a cluster of blue-black and red circles that resemble bullet holes. Additionally, repetitions of the letter “Z” throughout

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<sup>144</sup> Nimis, « Passeuses d’Histoires : des Archives ‘Miniscules’ pour Dire les Silence de l’Histoire Algérienne, » 46.

<sup>145</sup> Nimis, « Passeuses d’Histoires : des Archives ‘Miniscules’ pour Dire les Silence de l’Histoire Algérienne, » 46.

<sup>146</sup> McDougall, *A History of Algeria*, 312.

the background evoke sleep, generating an unsettling slippage between sleep and death and, perhaps, expressing the passivity of the onlookers in the original photograph (Fig. 19). Behind the dead bodies, a densely cross-hatched male figure occupies the upper right-hand corner of the picture plane. In the original photograph, the man leans against a tree with his left hand on his hip and stares outwards towards the viewer. In Bouzar's composition, she clearly delineates the figure's eyes, creating an access point for the viewer, but she transforms the tree into a roughly rendered diagonal line evoking an oar or a staff, such that the male figure resembles a Charon-esque specter – a mediator between the world of the living and the world of the dead. Rather than fully counteracting the violence of the original image, Bouzar re-expresses such violence through her approach to mark-making, transforming gruesome documentary imagery into legible maps that prompt discussion of Algerian history in its full complexity, including but by no means limited to questions of violence and victimization.

Bouzar's drawing "Fraternité" further exemplifies the artist's process of weaving historical violence into a broader system of interpretational possibilities via her distinctive approach to representation and mark-making. This particular drawing was featured in an exhibition titled "L'Algérie pour Mémoire: Témoignages Autour de *La Question* 1958-2018," which was held at the Algerian Cultural Center in Paris from September 22 to November 10 2018. According to the wall label, the drawing depicts three combat-ready soldiers in the Algerian War (Fig. 20).<sup>147</sup> Juxtaposed against the mountainous, tree-filled Algerian landscape, the three men stand hand in hand and appear to step towards the viewer. Varied pencil marks (some vertical, some cross-hatched)

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<sup>147</sup> Wall label for Dalila Dalléas Bouzar, "Fraternité" in *Algérie, année 0*, Paris, Algerian Cultural Center, October 29, 2019.



transform the surface of the drawing into a visually compelling map of the artist's engagement with the archive. Departing from the original photograph, Bouzar has sketched a circular form in the background that evokes at once a stylized sun and a bullseye. This symbolic element prompts associations with both life-giving light and wartime violence. Similarly, the military gear of the soldiers coupled with their gestures of camaraderie result in complex evocations of both interpersonal connection and impending violence. Moreover, the horizontal streak of red ink at the bottom of the page contributes to Bouzar's multidimensional visual message. On the one hand, the ink bleeds into the surface of the paper, viscerally evoking the violence of war. On the other hand, as a result of the presence of the horizontal band of ink, the three men appear to be on the verge of passing through a ribbon or strip of tape. In this sense, Bouzar visually suggests a new beginning – an impending liberation of historical secrets from widespread instances of suppression and “tabooing.”

This liberation is perhaps most clearly expressed in Bouzar's pictures titled “Écritures,” in which she records stream-of-consciousness reflections on her historical investigation. Filling entire pages with repeated fragments that capture the full range of her subjective experience, she gives viewers access to her process of constructing personalized systems of knowledge vis-à-vis Algerian history. In one of the drawings in the “Écritures” group, she layers multiple rows of cursive writing in French over one another, communicating a series of interrelated fears and desires: “Il y a un monstre il est énorme et ignoble sanguinaire je sais qu’il est devant moi mais je ne le vois pas [...] je pense que je ne veux pas le voir Peut être que j’ai trop peur Pourtant il est énorme il ne se cache pas [...]” (Fig. 21). Her choice to abandon punctuation communicates the energy

and momentum of this deeply personal act of expression in which she describes a horrible monster that she knows is in front of her but does not want to see. Across the background, she repeats the French word “*libre*,” further emphasizing the role of her written reflections as an act of liberation. Because the surface layer of cursive writing begins with the phrase “Il y a un monstre il est énorme,” it appears that Bouzar begins her project from the imaginative and uninhibited perspective of a child in order to proceed with more in-depth and increasingly liberated reflections. This is the case not only within the scope of “*Écritures*” but also across *Algérie, année 0*. By adopting youthful, exploratory modes of visual and written expression, Bouzar facilitates freeform processes of knowledge production. Towards the center of the page, a broad, neon-yellow circle is layered over Bouzar’s cursive writing, resembling a sun or spotlight. While the vibrant color of the acrylic paint gestures to Bouzar’s process of elucidating previously concealed or tabooed aspects of Algerian history, the circular form further evokes unity and continuity. Perhaps through this detail she expresses not only a sense of continuity between past and present but also an impression of unity between viewer and artist. As we subvocalize the contents of “*Écritures*,” we replicate her own internal monologue, echoing her process of thinking through historical realities. In this way, Bouzar overcomes the fragmenting force of taboo via her art’s audience, re-establishing links across historical eras.

In the final analysis, Bouzar’s archive-inspired series *Princesse* and *Algérie, année 0* reimagine documentary photographs by translating their contents into indexically rich modes of expression. As I have attempted to sketch over the course of this chapter, processes of official memory construction in both France and Algeria have perpetuated

taboos that cordon off or prevent access to historical realities of violence and victimization. Through Bouzar's work, she challenges the fragmentary force of taboo, integrating questions of violence into pictures that facilitate multiple forms of empathic engagement with stakeholders across contemporary Algerian history, ranging from the unveiled subjects of Garanger's photographs to the victims of the Bentalha massacre. One could make the claim that her imaginative princess portraits and highlighter-yellow illustrations detract from the gravity of historical events or obscure their social and political significance. That said, contextual detail in itself does not necessarily translate into meaningful knowledge production. By synthesizing traces of historical specificity with abstraction and expressive mark-making, Bouzar transforms tabooed imagery into objects of curiosity, joy, desire, fear, nostalgia, ambivalence – a full spectrum of subjective experiences formerly excluded from the closed system of the hidden archive. In consequence, she not only restores a sense of unity between past and present, promoting the future conceptualization of Algerian history as a continuum, but also advances a framework for knowledge production that hinges upon the triangulation of subjective visions.

### CHAPTER 3 – ENVISIONING SELFHOOD

*Si espoir il y a,  
Espoir dans toutes ces belles images  
qui prennent le chemin de la révolte,  
Celui du retour vers soi.*

*(But yes, there is hope,  
Hope in all these beautiful images  
that take the path of revolt,  
That of the return to the self).<sup>148</sup>*

- Samira Negrouche, *L'Opéra Cosmique*

If Bouzar indeed “frees herself from history,” she does so by engaging closely with hegemonic norms and taboos that have shaped not only the history of art but also the contemporary history of Algeria. Through her commitment to figurative painting and her explicit quotation of art historical *lieux de mémoire*, she proclaims the validity of her creative practice and generates fresh discourse around the French-Algerian past and its corresponding history of representation. Moreover, her reinterpretations of archival material give new life to documentary photographs rooted in tabooed aspects of Algerian history, transforming wartime imagery into opportunities for discovery and knowledge production. Given her substantial engagement with primary sources, perhaps she does not so much free herself from history as liberate her own processes of historical inquiry and identity formation from the confines of discursive convention. Bouzar’s labor of creative self-liberation involves a dual deconstruction of taboos: she at once commits herself to a “forbidden” medium and reintegrates “forbidden” subject matter into present-day discourse regarding the history of Algeria and its intersection with the French colonial project.

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<sup>148</sup> My translation.

In this chapter, I examine several self-portraits from Bouzar's series titled *Taboo* (2013) to further explore the mechanisms by which she liberates herself from conventional approaches to Algerian history. Bouzar began *Taboo* soon after completing *Algérie, année 0* and saw the project as an extension of her efforts to focus her artistic practice on drawing and painting.<sup>149</sup> The series comprises seven self-portraits in black, white, beige, and pink, as well as six paintings of abstracted, explosive floral motifs juxtaposed against muddled green backdrops. While Bouzar has asserted that the title of the series refers to the status of figurative painting in France in the late 1990s and early 2000s, when she was a student at the École des Beaux-Arts, she has also acknowledged that the series more broadly thematizes the struggle to “find yourself” and “be what you are.”<sup>150</sup> My analysis focuses on the paintings themselves and their relation to the properties and problems of self-portraiture as a genre, but I draw upon theoretical sources from two critical contexts – namely postcolonial theory and phenomenology – to clarify the notions of selfhood and subjectivity relevant to her portraits. Later in the chapter, I explore Bouzar's live painting performances as an approach to identity articulation. Ultimately, I argue that through Bouzar's self-portraits and painting performances, she engages in a process of identity formation that visually reifies “interstitial” narratives, particularly those that fall between borders or that occupy forbidden rifts in official histories.<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>149</sup> Dalila Dalléas Bouzar, Interview by Charlotte G. Reynders, October 28, 2018.

<sup>150</sup> Dalila Dalléas Bouzar, Interview by Charlotte G. Reynders, October 28, 2018.

<sup>151</sup> Here, I borrow the term “interstitial” from Homi Bhabha's *Location of Culture* (1994), as I describe in the following section.

## Interstitial Identity and the “Quest for Flesh Pink”

Among the only published commentary that exists on Bouzar’s *Taboo* series appears in a monographic catalogue edited by the German arts organization Goldrausch Künstlerinnenprojekt. The short catalogue features an essay on two of Bouzar’s series, *Taboo* and *Topographies des Terror* (2012-2013), as well as a transcription of an interview with the artist, both by Johan-Hilel Hamel, Director of Culture for Angoulême, a commune in southwestern France. In his discussion of *Taboo* in particular, Hamel suggests that the paintings express Bouzar’s in-depth exploration of her personal identity. However, he places overwhelming emphasis on the themes of violence and victimhood, claiming that her work “can be viewed as a complex pathway through the maze of her own fears and through the barely healed wounds of contemporary history.”<sup>152</sup> To Hamel, Bouzar’s self-portraits represent intimate explorations of the horrors and challenges of recent events in Algerian history and, at the same time, illustrate Bouzar’s approach to processing personal trauma. For instance, later in his commentary, he describes the “deep melancholy” of her portraits and associates the floral motifs that recur across the *Taboo* series with a “background of sexual violence.”<sup>153</sup> While the wide range of self-portraits in the series supports Hamel’s interpretation of *Taboo* as a visual representation of Bouzar’s creative inquiry into “her own depths,” his allusions to violence and melancholy confine the expressive potential of the series.<sup>154</sup> Instead, as I will argue, Bouzar appears to be interested in synthesizing multiple facets of her personal identity, ranging from fears to desires, by way of a hybrid approach to the medium of oil paint.

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<sup>152</sup> Dalila Dalléas Bouzar and Johan-Hilel Hamel, *Taboo* (Berlin: Goldrausch Künstlerinnenprojekt, 2013), 13.

<sup>153</sup> Dalila Dalléas Bouzar and Johan-Hilel Hamel, *Taboo*, 13.

<sup>154</sup> Dalila Dalléas Bouzar and Johan-Hilel Hamel, *Taboo*, 13.

Through an examination of Bouzar's artist statement for *Taboo*, we see that the series takes up multiple areas of thematic interest, including but not limited to those addressed by Hamel. On Bouzar's website, she outlines her creative motivations for the series, stating the following: "My painting is a quest for flesh pink. The pink of the skin, of the flesh. I am obsessed with pink. Pink makes me think of cannibalism. Eating human flesh. Eating yourself. The taboo. Since I started painting, I paint self-portraits, as if it were a statement, as if I had to convince myself that I exist."<sup>155</sup> Throughout Bouzar's commentary, the operative term "flesh" gestures to the thematic dimensions of the series as a whole. For example, by alluding to her "quest for flesh pink" and by emphasizing her personal obsession with the color, Bouzar indirectly broaches the theme of desire, rooting her creative practice in her innermost preoccupations and aspirations. While her violent evocations of cannibalism in this passage similarly point to an all-consuming, even carnal desire at the heart of her creative process, they also intersect the realm of nightmarish fantasy, resulting in a visceral entanglement of desire and fear. Lastly, her aim to "convince" herself of her own existence confirms the function of *Taboo* as an exercise in personal identity formation.

To launch my discussion of Bouzar's self-portraits in light of these thematic interests (namely, the themes of self-formation and the theme of desire, including desire's complex intersections with violence and repulsion), I will turn to a text by cultural theorist Homi Bhabha titled *The Location of Culture* (1994).<sup>156</sup> While Bhabha has gained vast recognition for his contributions to the field of postcolonial studies, I should note that in applying *The Location of Culture* to Bouzar's paintings, I by no means intend to

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<sup>155</sup> Dalila Dalléas Bouzar, "Taboo," accessed January 29, 2019, <http://www.daliladalleas.com/>.

<sup>156</sup> Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994).

confine her work to the “postcolonial” category. In fact, when I asked her whether she saw herself as a “postcolonial” or “anticolonial” artist, she replied that she is very much “aware” of colonialism and its implications but intends to avoid being inscribed “in a box.”<sup>157</sup> That said, several concepts in Bhabha’s text prove useful in mapping the ways in which Bouzar crafts selfhood through her portraits. Originally published just four years before Bouzar entered art school, *The Location of Culture* advances a vision of intercultural relations that, much like Bouzar, questions the crisp borders and compartments of hegemonic discourse, attending to narratives that occupy the margins or crevices of official histories.

Central to Bhabha’s project is the elaboration of a theory of selfhood that departs from historical norms of discrete categorization. In his view, the late twentieth century was marked by a shift away from “the singularities of ‘class’ or ‘gender’ as primary conceptual and organizational categories” and by an overarching “need to think beyond narratives of originary and initial subjectivities.”<sup>158</sup> He understands subject formation not as a delimited phenomenon that takes place at birth but, instead, as part and parcel of the active negotiation of “cultural differences” across or outside of traditional categories of identity.<sup>159</sup> Importantly, he claims that the “interstices” – that is, the zones between and beyond normative identity categories – create space for the development of new “strategies of selfhood – singular or communal [...]”<sup>160</sup> In my view, Bhabha’s concept of the “interstices” and his phrase “strategies of selfhood” prove notably relevant to Bouzar’s creative practice. Jewish, born to Algerian parents, and raised in France, Bouzar

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<sup>157</sup> Dalila Dalléas Bouzar, Interview by Charlotte G. Reynders, October 28, 2018.

<sup>158</sup> Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 1.

<sup>159</sup> Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 1.

<sup>160</sup> Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 1-2.



very much occupies an “interstitial” space amid a variety of cultural traditions. While she explores her heterogeneous identity throughout her oeuvre in its entirety, she does so especially in her self-portraits. Additionally, the plural formulation of the phrase “strategies of selfhood” aligns with the approach that Bouzar adopts in her *Taboo* series: she develops multiple self-portraits, each of which reflects a slightly different process of identity articulation. Lastly, Bhabha’s characterization of the “interstices” as arenas of struggle, negotiation, and contradiction resonates with the challenges of self-interrogation and self-representation that apply not only to *Taboo* but also to the broader genre of self-portraiture.

Art historian T.J. Clark elucidates some of these challenges in an essay titled “The Look of Self-Portraiture,” which helps us to situate Bouzar’s “strategies of selfhood” with respect to their art-historical origins. In Clark’s view, among the most difficult aspects of self-portraiture is the continuous interplay between body and mind as expressed through the paradoxical “look” of the subject – a look that, at once, emanates academic “self-possession” and “intends to break through the surface to some truth within.”<sup>161</sup> In the context of *Taboo*, it is not only Bouzar’s “look” but also her approach to paint application that oscillates between academic composure and liberated subjective expression. For instance, in a particularly evocative painting from the series, Bouzar depicts a three-quarter view of her face at the center of the canvas surrounded by swaths of black, beige, and pink (Fig. 22). Across her depiction of the surface of her face, Bouzar intersperses patches of yellow-beige and pale pink, creating a subtle impression of dimensionality. Additionally, her cream-colored forehead forms a near-perfect

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<sup>161</sup> T.J. Clark, “The Look of Self-Portraiture,” *The Yale Journal of Criticism* 5, no. 2 (1992), 109.

hemisphere, which is emphasized by the arcing patch of black juxtaposed against the subject's head. By idealizing the shape of her forehead and by positioning her head at the center of the composition, Bouzar communicates the centrality of her intellect to the vision of self that she elaborates in this painting. While her tight-lipped expression produces an aura of austerity, her sideways glance disrupts her composure, registering simultaneously as an expression of doubt or unease and as a refusal to reciprocate the viewer's gaze.

Thus far, the aspects of Bouzar's painting to which I have alluded align with Clark's characterization of the traditional "look" in self-portraiture: Bouzar at once radiates self-possession and expresses emotional or psychological tension that hovers beneath the surface of the composition. Such effects are prevalent across the European painting tradition, as Clark suggests in "The Look of Self-Portraiture" through his references to works by Rembrandt and Jacques-Louis David.<sup>162</sup> For our purposes, an especially productive point of comparison might be the self-portrait that Delacroix completed in 1837, currently housed at the Louvre (Fig. 23). While his static, upright position and diagonal orientation correspond to norms of Western portrait painting, his subtly furrowed brows and the theatrical play of light and shadow across his face infuse the portrait with undercurrents of doubt that allow for an infinite variety of (re)interpretations with each visual encounter between viewer and subject. Among the most distinctive aspects of Delacroix's painting is its varying degrees of finish, as illustrated by the contrast between his opaque, deep green lapel and the streaky wash of earth tones that fills the background. Elevating the sketchy quality of his oil washes to the

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<sup>162</sup> Clark, "The Look of Self-Portraiture," 110-111.

status of a finished painting, he lays bare his creative practice and, in so doing, adopts a process-oriented approach to his expression of selfhood. Bouzar, too, experiments with varying degrees of finish, but she extends beyond Delacroix in this endeavor, leaving vast patches of raw, linen canvas perceptible to the viewer. On an unprimed ground, her hair dissolves into amoebic zones of black that bleed together like ink, and clustered shades of beige frame her face, visually enacting the artist's "quest for flesh pink." Furthermore, across the bottom half of the canvas, she appears to have used turpentine to remove thin, dynamic strokes of bright pink paint – ghost marks indexically map the artist's deliberate acts of erasure.

In light of the intentional unfinish of the portrait, a return to Bhabha's discussion of interstitial identity formation helps to elucidate the potential relationship between the artist's handling of paint and the vision of selfhood that she puts forth in this particular painting and through *Taboo* as a whole. While Bouzar situates her likeness at the center of the composition, adopting the egocentric mode of Western self-portraiture, her surroundings dissolve into abstraction such that vast areas of her body and environment remain entirely invisible. In the chapter of *The Location of Culture* titled "Interrogating Identity," Bhabha explicitly associates "invisibility" with the status of migrants and other inhabitants of the interstices and, furthermore, explores the ways in which such invisibility can become a source of empowerment. For instance, he cites a poetry excerpt in which the speaker, a migrant woman, discusses the power of concealing her body from view as she gazes at those who once denied her presence.<sup>163</sup> According to Bhabha, the poet challenges the notion of "identity as the satisfaction of a totalizing, plenitudinous

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<sup>163</sup> Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 46.

object of vision” and “disrupt[s] the stability of the ego” by articulating her own identity in the form of an “anxious absence.”<sup>164</sup> Similarly, Bouzar creates “anxious absences” on the surface of her canvas that “disrupt” traditional methods of self-presentation. Just as the “subject” of the poem “cannot be apprehended without the absence or invisibility that constitutes it,” Bouzar’s self-portrait registers as an amalgamation of presences and absences that speak to the interstitial nature of her identity.<sup>165</sup> To give an example, the surge of jet black around her head and the wavering wash of black and pink that progresses diagonally from the back of the subject’s neck to the bottom left-hand corner of the raw canvas vaguely evoke coastlines or continents. With this in mind, we might interpret the artist’s likeness as the bridge between two abstractly rendered *rivages* – an interstitial expression of identity between the European and North African shorelines.

In summary, the portrait reflects the composite nature of Bouzar’s act of self-representation: she both mimics the one-self, one-ego model of conventional Western portraiture and brings that model into question through her strategic use of raw canvas and abstract form. Synthesizing disparate modes of representation into a single composition, she presents a heterogeneous vision of selfhood that questions notions of fixity and totality as they relate to identity formation. To borrow Clark’s language, “We can take the movements of seeing and mind to add up to a unity or we can revel in their unraveling. We can have the self or its negation: intimacy can disperse into otherness, unity into multiplicity, soul into matter [...]”<sup>166</sup>

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<sup>164</sup> Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 47.

<sup>165</sup> Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 47.

<sup>166</sup> Clark, “The Look of Self-Portraiture,” 114.

Flickering between discordant passages in the painting (a singular “look” on the one hand, a complete dissolution of form on the other), the viewer confronts the portrait’s underlying ambivalence – a concept that I will now explore in more depth in the contexts of Bhabha’s theory of interstitial subjectivity and the *Taboo* series as a whole.

### **Ambivalent Desire: Navigating Selfhood and Otherness**

As I have established, Bhabha takes particular interest in processes of identity formation that occur in the spaces between and across conventional categories of belonging. Central to these interstitial zones in which individuals differentiate between self and Other is, in Bhabha’s view, “the ambivalence and the antagonism of the desire of the Other.”<sup>167</sup> According to Bhabha’s model, the relationship between self and Other is by no means a polar opposition. Instead, processes of self-formation involve apprehending the Other with a combination of desire and disgust, admiration and repulsion, such that the Other is at once distinct from and constitutive of the self. Notably, Bhabha sees value in the equivocal nature of the self/Other relationship, expressing interest in what he understands to be “the *productive* ambivalence of the object of colonial discourse – that ‘otherness’ which is at once an object of desire and derision [...]”<sup>168</sup> To summarize his view, the articulation of selfhood involves a positioning of one’s personal identity with respect to the Other; however, this positioning process is characterized by an underlying ambivalence that combines competing impulses of “desire” and “derision.” Such competing impulses are visibly traceable in Bouzar’s self-portraits as she navigates her identity between France and Algeria, both aligning

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<sup>167</sup> Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 52.

<sup>168</sup> Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 67.

herself with and taking apart the conventions of the European painting tradition. As I will show, she collapses the historical dynamics of ambivalent desire between colonizer and colonized (and vice versa) into a personal expression of desire for self-knowledge. Through her semi-abstracted self-portraits, she conveys her own admiration of the European cultural canon – her desire to emulate a mode of representation that once felt inaccessible. At the same time, she transforms the intimate violence of fetishistic desire as expressed through Western portraits of women, particularly women of colonized countries, into an embodied quest for personal identity.

One painting in the *Taboo* series that illustrates the mechanisms by which Bouzar reimagines the desire/derision model of interstitial identity formation is a self-portrait of the artist with Berber facial tattoos (Fig. 24). The blue, arrow-like marks on her forehead and chin not only direct the viewer's eye towards the center of her face but also allude symbolically to her North African heritage.<sup>169</sup> In this portrait, the subject tilts her chin, purses her lips, and glances downwards and sideways in the viewer's direction. Thin, parallel curves articulate the shape and position of her neck, drawing attention to its elongation, and her right eyebrow forms an arch, communicating subtle judgment or inquisitiveness. Given the position of her head and the nature of her gaze, the portrait could be read either as an emulation of the distinguished air typical of sitters in Western figurative portraits or as an exaggerated parody of the egoism inherent in figurative self-portraiture. In this sense, Bouzar articulates her relationship to the Western painting

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<sup>169</sup> For more information on the history and typical visual characteristics of North African Berber tattoos (as discussed in Chapter 2), see G. Marcy, "Origine et Signification des Tatouages des Tribus Berbères," *Revue de l'Histoire des Religions* 102 (1931), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23664621>.

tradition through a “productive ambivalence” that encompasses both desire and derision, visually questioning the “stability of the ego.”

At the same time, we might read Bouzar’s look as a defiant one that challenges the combination of desire and derision historically leveled on women, especially women of colonized territories, by male European artists.<sup>170</sup> In *The Painted Face: Portraits of Women in France 1814-1914*, art historian Tamar Garb discusses the evolving status of female portraiture in nineteenth-century French society, illustrating the ways in which paintings of women not only incarnated sensual desire but also reflected their subjects’ subordinate status with respect to their male counterparts. For instance, Garb states that in a nineteenth-century context, women were understood to be “less endowed with a characteristic identity than men, and female portraiture offered a space for the imagined fabrication of surrogate subjects, viewed, like painting itself, as objects of sensual delight.”<sup>171</sup> Tracing this phenomenon back to the Renaissance, Garb identifies connections between the *Mona Lisa*, Raphael’s *Fornarina*, and Jean-Dominique Ingres’ portrait of Madame de Senonnes (completed in 1815), claiming that “Ingres’s painted figure has been conferred with a seductive appeal designed to captivate men and provide a screen for the projection of their fantasies.”<sup>172</sup> While Garb focuses her first chapter on Ingres’s depiction of Madame de Senonnes, she ultimately places the portrait in conversation with Ingres’s *La Grande Odalisque*, an Orientalist painting that doubly

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<sup>170</sup> See philosopher Achille Mbembe’s essay titled “The Society of Enmity” for a discussion of the destructive dimensions of desire as it relates to colonial history. Mbembe is particularly interested in what he calls the “master desire,” which he characterizes as a desire for an enemy – a desire to construct an “other” (Achille Mbembe, “The Society of Enmity, *Radical Philosophy* 200 [2016], 23).

<sup>171</sup> Tamar Garb, *The Painted Face: Portraits of Women In France, 1814-1914* (New Haven [Conn.]: Yale University Press, 2007), 21.

<sup>172</sup> Garb, *The Painted Face: Portraits of Women In France, 1814-1914*, 21.

others its female subject through a visual language of exoticism and objectification.<sup>173</sup>

With this history of female portraiture in mind, it would appear that Bouzar, by choosing to represent herself in the mode of figurative oil painting, operates against the desirous condescension with which certain male painters regarded the female subjects of their portraits from the Renaissance to the nineteenth century. Specifically, her high collar and commanding facial expression, coupled with the stark absence of her body and environment from the picture, deny viewers the possibility of fantastical projection. She portrays herself not as an object of ambivalent external desires but, instead, as an expression of her personal desire to crystallize an independently determined vision of selfhood.

Bouzar further expresses the ambivalence of her relationship to the Western painting tradition – and to the structures of cultural and political power associated with that tradition – through two nude self-portraits, one of which is a frontal portrait cropped just below her breasts (Fig. 25). Bare-chested, lips locked, rigid brows bracketing her dark eyes, she occupies three-quarters of the canvas, confronting the viewer with her gaze. Thin strokes of black paint roughly outline her figure and delineate her clavicle, emphasizing the tension in her neck as she faces forward. Through the starkness of the outline and the frontality of her pose, Bouzar proclaims her presence on the raw linen canvas, in command of her unclothed body and its representation.<sup>174</sup> Moreover, she angles her right shoulder backwards such that her arm is hidden from view, which further conveys the control she maintains over what the viewer can and cannot see. Bouzar's

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<sup>173</sup> Garb, *The Painted Face: Portraits of Women In France, 1814-1914*, 52.

<sup>174</sup> During my visit with Bouzar, she explained that she is drawn to linen canvas due to the way in which it absorbs paint and shapes the appearance of color.



handling of paint further challenges the conventions surrounding European portraits of women as described by Garb. To render her skin, Bouzar layers rough strokes of warm beige paint over one another, creating matte zones of color that seep into the linen surface, and she leaves small patches of canvas visible across the figure's torso. Similarly, the artist appears to have scrubbed a broad brush back and forth to depict her dark hair, which intersects the top edge of the canvas, as if extending beyond the picture plane. By cropping the portrait in this way and by leaving the background blank, Bouzar challenges the concept of selfhood as a "totality." On the whole, the painting diverges substantially from the glossy sheen, precise linework, and warped formal properties of the Ingres portraits that Garb addresses in her essay, emphasizing instead the material properties of canvas and skin.

Not only Bouzar's frontal nude portrait but also a painting of her bare back illustrates the ways in which the artist navigates her hybrid identity by both adopting elements of the Western painting tradition and disrupting the conventions of that tradition (Fig. 26). On the one hand, Bouzar embraces the conventions of figurative oil painting by formulating a representational image of her body stroke by stroke. For instance, the vertical row of pale beige flecks representing her vertebrae demonstrate her underlying interest in the capacity of oil paint as a medium to express the structure and motion of the human body. Furthermore, the position of the figure in space points to the traditional role of the painted portrait as an expression of a complex interplay between body and mind. By turning her back to the viewer, she shields herself from view, raising questions about her physical and emotional state of being. Due to the streaky, unfinished quality of her elbows, she appears to be crossing or extending her arms in front of her. The sweeping

strokes of dark brown paint representing her hair are shorter at the nape of her neck than they are by her shoulders, suggesting that she is angling her head downwards – a gesture that calls to mind a broad spectrum of associations ranging from shame and grief to reflection and prayer. In this sense, Bouzar crafts an intimate, representational painting that is perhaps just as emotionally evocative as a frontal self-portrait. However, at the same time, we might read her body position as a rejection of the discourses and conventions associated with the Western painting tradition. What Clark terms the “look of self-portraiture” is entirely absent from this composition – the subject’s face remains elusive, as if Bouzar is refusing to entertain the desires of potential viewers. In so doing, she may be taking steps to counteract the history of ambivalent desire associated with portraits of women from the Renaissance through the nineteenth century.<sup>175</sup>

While the position of the figure in the painting points to the “productive ambivalence” of Bouzar’s relationship to European art historical discourse, I would argue that it also has the potential to reproduce in the viewer a sensation of ambivalent desire comparable to that which Bouzar experiences as she articulates her vision of selfhood. Faced with Bouzar’s bare back and barred from observing her facial expression and hand gestures, some might register the subject of the painting as an undeniable “Other” and confront the impossibility of gaining insight into her experience. In this sense, the portrait indirectly acknowledges that parts of Bouzar’s identity remain elusive or incomprehensible, especially to those unable to empathize with her hybrid identity.

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<sup>175</sup> As Garb notes, male viewers of such paintings, ranging from the *Mona Lisa* to Ingres’ portrait of Madame de Senonnes, regarded women with both admiration and disdain. These portraits of women sparked ambivalent desire – admiration tempered by asymmetrical relations of power – and gave male viewers the license to “indulge in their own reveries without rebuttal.” See Garb, *The Painted Face: Portraits of Women In France, 1814-1914*, 21.

However, for others, the combined impression of physical proximity and psychic distance generated by the painting might prompt an ambivalent desire to access the unknown – an ambivalence comparable to the push-and-pull that Bouzar experiences as she traverses boundaries of difference between the French and Algerian facets of her identity. In this sense, the painting could (re)create for certain viewers the struggle of navigating ambiguous boundaries between self and Other – between the intimately accessible and the “forbidden.” By allowing viewers to share in this experience through their visual engagement with her work, Bouzar demonstrates a process-oriented, interstitial mode of subject formation on an individual level and for a global audience.

Beyond expressing the ambivalent character of the interstitial zones in which individuals formulate complex distinctions between self and Other, Bouzar’s frontal nude portrait and her painting of her bare back physically embody the artist on multiple levels, establishing an intimate link between her painting practice and her desire for self-knowledge. In both paintings, visible strokes of paint not only illustrate Bouzar’s physical features, ranging from her vertebrae to her collar bone, but also serve as indexes of the artist’s bodily movements, mapping her treatment of paint across the surface of the canvas. The embodied nature of her creative practice is perhaps most clearly expressed in her painting of her back, through which she transforms the canvas into a plane of bare skin: her waist, her shoulders, and the nape of her neck are contiguous with the edges of the canvas, and her spine establishes a vertical line of symmetry along the center of the picture (see Fig. 26). Through her chosen composition, Bouzar analogizes the surface of her skin to the blank surface of her canvas, confirming the closeness of her relationship to her materials as she articulates her personal identity. Furthermore, by depicting her own

back, she engages in an act of representation that extends beyond the limits of perception. Given that she is physically incapable of seeing her own back in real life without the aid of mirrors or photographs, she relies on creative tools to develop a cohesive vision of otherwise invisible or inaccessible components of her identity. In this sense, the painting links the *Taboo* series to Bouzar's broader oeuvre, manifesting her commitment to filling blind spots in her personal and cultural history.

### **Postcolonial Subjectivity: Embodied Perception and the Flesh**

Thus far, I have argued that the self-portraits in Bouzar's series *Taboo* incarnate her self-liberation from history. Overcoming blind spots and taboos, she articulates her hybrid identity on her own terms, outside the confines of official narratives. The artist's process of reifying visible and invisible components of her personal identity manifests itself visually through the unfinished quality of many of her portraits. By exposing patches of raw linen alongside swaths of colored pigment in each canvas, Bouzar illustrates her broader project of reintegrating the invisible or "forbidden" aspects of her personal and cultural history into present-day discourse. In this sense, it is significant that Bouzar completed *Taboo* after *Algérie année 0*, a project that involved extensive archival research. Equipped with knowledge of contemporary Algerian history, she gained a newfound appreciation for the visible and invisible dimensions of her personal identity. In my analysis of her paintings, I have drawn upon art historians Clark and Garb to illustrate the ways in which Bouzar both situates herself within and challenges the conventions of canonical French self-portraiture. Through her combination of figuration and abstraction, Bouzar expresses an ambivalent relationship to the European figurative painting tradition. Borrowing from Bhabha's framework for interstitial identity

formation, I have suggested that this is a “productive ambivalence” that empowers Bouzar to develop a multivalent expression of self between and across conventional boundaries of difference.

One thematic strand that has reemerged throughout my discussion of *Taboo*, encircling and intersecting the concepts of ambivalent desire and identity formation, has been that of embodiment. Specifically, I have discussed the relationship between *self-portraits*, which constitute visual representations of the artist’s physical form, and the *act of painting* – an embodied process through which Bouzar incrementally transfers pigment onto the canvas. Bouzar herself has insisted upon the connection between her physical, embodied existence and her creative practice by characterizing *Taboo* as a “quest for flesh pink.” For the artist, her return to the medium of oil paint signaled a return to her embodied existence in the world. In fact, during our interview, one of the only instances in which she spoke in French rather than in English – confirming the intuitive nature of the sentiments she was expressing – was the moment when she described her journey towards finding herself again through the material substance of oil paint: “je me retrouve moi-même.”<sup>176</sup> In this section, I will revisit the concept of “flesh” to more clearly establish the grounds upon which we can understand *Taboo* as an embodied act of interstitial identity formation. Using Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s concept of *chair* (flesh) as a point of departure, I advocate phenomenology as a useful lens through which to conceptualize the process-oriented, embodied subjectivity that Bouzar expresses through her portraits and, ultimately, through her painting performances.

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<sup>176</sup> Dalila Dalléas Bouzar, Interview by Charlotte G. Reynders, October 28, 2018.

To begin, I will outline the concept of flesh as it pertains to Merleau-Ponty's unfinished text *Le Visible et L'Invisible* (*The Visible and the Invisible*, written between 1959 and 1961), in which he develops a model of perception characterized by bodily immersion and reflexivity.<sup>177</sup> For Merleau-Ponty, flesh is not a material substance but is, instead, a “texture” that joins together visible and invisible phenomena in the world.<sup>178</sup> He characterizes flesh as a sort of connective fabric that interweaves the internal and external horizons of experience.<sup>179</sup> Through this concept of the flesh, Merleau-Ponty introduces a vision of the world in which beings are perceived not from the outside as discrete objects but, rather, from within.<sup>180</sup> Philosopher Mauro Carbone elaborates upon this distinctive model of perception and its implications for various forms of visual media in *The Flesh of Images: Merleau-Ponty Between Painting and Cinema*. According to Carbone, “Merleau-Ponty affirms the *cobelonging* of the sentient and the sensible to the same ‘flesh’ that interweaves our body, the other’s body, and the things of the world, and that envelops them in a horizon of ‘brute’ or ‘wild Being’ in which the subject and the object are not yet constituted.”<sup>181</sup> That is, in Merleau-Ponty’s view, there can be no separation between sentient beings and objects in the world – the flesh integrates all that *perceives* and all that *is perceived* into a continuum of existence. Fundamental to this continuum is the concept of reciprocity: through the “flesh,” the closely related processes of seeing and being seen, touching and being touched (moving and being moved, et

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<sup>177</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Le Visible et L'Invisible suivi de Notes de Travail* (Paris : Éditions Gallimard, 1964), 9-10.

<sup>178</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Le Visible et L'Invisible suivi de Notes de Travail*, 189-90.

<sup>179</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Le Visible et L'Invisible suivi de Notes de Travail*, 171. Original text : « tissu conjonctif des horizons extérieurs et intérieurs. »

<sup>180</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Le Visible et L'Invisible suivi de Notes de Travail*, 151.

<sup>181</sup> Mauro Carbone, *The Flesh of Images: Merleau-Ponty Between Painting and Cinema*, translated by Marta Nijhuis (Albany, New York: SUNY Press, 2015), Ebook Central, 9.

cetera) all enter into cyclical relations, such that there can be no logical separation among entities in the perceptible world.<sup>182</sup>

Notable areas of overlap emerge between Merleau-Ponty's concept of flesh and Bhabha's notion of the "interstices." For Bhabha, the interstices constitute zones of flux and ambivalence in which cultural differences are negotiated. Challenging the notion of personal identity as a "plenitudinous object," Bhabha emphasizes the dynamism and hybridity of the postcolonial subject. Importantly for Bhabha, expressions of identities that are forged in the interstices often disrupt conventional models of recognition and representation, blurring the boundaries between presence and absence, visibility and invisibility.<sup>183</sup> In his words, "the subject cannot be apprehended without the absence or invisibility that constitutes it."<sup>184</sup> That is, narratives once considered to be marginal or invisible find expression through an empowered re-expression of that invisibility. Just as Bhabha's model of identity formation focuses upon "interstitial" spaces in which visible and invisible aspects of identity articulate one another in a continuous dynamic, forging subjectivities outside the framework of the singular ego, Merleau-Ponty's model of perception centers upon an intervening "flesh" in which visible and invisible elements perpetually coalesce. Although Bhabha and Merleau-Ponty differ substantially from one another in their historical contexts and intellectual priorities, both *The Location of Culture* and *The Visible and the Invisible* present innovative alternatives to the notion of

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<sup>182</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Le Visible et L'Invisible suivi de Notes de Travail*, 185-6. Original text : « Il y a un cercle du touché et du touchant, le touché saisit le touchant ; il y a un cercle du visible et du voyant, le voyant n'est pas sans existence visible. »

<sup>183</sup> Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 47.

<sup>184</sup> Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 47.

the human subject as a discrete, contained entity – a notion that Bouzar similarly challenges through her portraits.

By drawing together the dynamic notions of subjectivity proposed by Bhabha and Merleau-Ponty, we gain insight into the ways in which Bouzar's self-portraits function both as sites of identity formation and as sites of embodied perception. While we could view Bouzar's canvases as interstitial zones in which the artist develops "strategies of selfhood," exploring – and perhaps reconciling – aspects of her heterogeneous background, we could also analogize them to Merleau-Ponty's concept of "flesh" in the sense that, through the medium of her canvas, reciprocal processes of seeing and being seen, consuming and producing, touching and being touched, enter into dynamic relations with one another. For instance, in the case of her frontal nude portrait, we can imagine the artist perceiving her own image by contemplating her physical appearance (using a mirror, a photograph, or her memory) and interacting physically with the surface of the canvas, producing gestures that are reflected back in the form of visible colors and brushstrokes. In this sense, the raw linen canvas becomes a site of slippage between the act of perceiving and the state of being perceived, especially in the nude portrait, in which she directly returns the viewer's gaze. On the whole, her canvases are analogous in a theoretical sense to Merleau-Ponty's "flesh," given that they too function on the principle of reversibility, at once absorbing and reflecting back the artist's acts of self-representation.

Particularly relevant to Bouzar's series of self-portraits is Merleau-Ponty's claim that the "flesh" most clearly manifests itself through moments in which we become conscious of our own bodily existence – moments in which we touch or see ourselves as



we perceive the world around us.<sup>185</sup> In these moments, according to Merleau-Ponty, the dynamics of reflexivity and reciprocity generated by the flesh find their most powerful expression. This claim relates closely to Bouzar's conception of *Taboo* as an effort to convince herself of her own existence. Through her portraits, she perceives herself in the act of perceiving, in turn gaining awareness of – and visually reifying – her embodied existence. An example of this phenomenon would be her frontal nude portrait, particularly in light of the fixity and outward orientation of the depicted subject's gaze. As we imagine the cyclical visual encounter between the artist and her painted likeness, we become acutely aware of the mediating function of her canvas as a sort of Merleau-Pontian flesh – a “texture” of subtle differences among *invisible processes* – such as imagination and cognition – and the *visible forms* indirectly articulated by those processes. Given Merleau-Ponty's understanding of flesh as a *texture* that has no material existence on its own, this analogy between Bouzar's canvas and Merleau-Ponty's flesh is strictly theoretical. However, in introducing the comparison, I aim to illustrate the collapse between bodily experience and visual representation that takes place not only in the context of phenomenology but also within the scope of Bouzar's “quest for flesh pink.” She simultaneously inhabits her physical flesh and, by way of her canvas (which acts as a neutral, mediating “flesh” in Merleau-Ponty's sense of the word), develops visual representations that themselves contain – and reciprocally reflect – traces of the embodied processes through which they were created.

To further elucidate the ways in which Bouzar frees herself from history by way of self-portraiture, I will turn to a final area of overlap between the forms of subjectivity

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<sup>185</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Le Visible et L'Invisible suivi de Notes de Travail*, 189. Original text : « la chair [...] est attesté notamment quand le corps se voit, se touche en train de voir et de toucher les choses ».

described by Bhabha and Merleau-Ponty – namely, the treatment of the concepts of space and time. In Merleau-Ponty’s view, the perceptible world is not contained *within* time and space but, instead, exists through a mediating flesh or “pulp” of spatiality and temporality.<sup>186</sup> That is, space and time pass through and around the perceiving subject rather than structuring the world into sequences of discrete events. A comparable conception of time and space emerges in Bhabha’s theory of cultural identity, which focuses primarily upon a postcolonial state of being in which identities are developed across time and space through the “overlap and displacement of domains of difference.”<sup>187</sup> De-emphasizing chronology, linearity, and causality, Bhabha takes an interest in lateral strategies of identity formation that operate outside the constraints of “hegemonic” historical accounts.<sup>188</sup> Along similar lines, Bouzar’s self-portraits remain free from the confines of geographic and historical specificity. By situating her own likeness against abstract, unfinished backdrops that elude associations with particular moments in time or locations in space, she is able to engage in a timeless thematic exploration of identity, desire, embodiment, and the relationship between self and Other.

### **Flesh of the Image, Flesh of the World: Painting as Performance**

While Bhabha and Merleau-Ponty’s theoretical frameworks prove useful in modeling the individual processes of identity formation and perception at play throughout Bouzar’s self-portraits, both frameworks can be just as effectively applied to collective

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<sup>186</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Le Visible et L’Invisible suivi de Notes de Travail*, 151. Original text : « L’espace, le temps des choses, ce sont des lambeaux de lui-même, de sa spatialisation, de sa temporalisation, non plus une multiplicité d’individus distribués synchroniquement et diachroniquement, mais un relief du simultané et du successif, une pulpe spatiale et temporelle où les individus se forment par différenciation ».

<sup>187</sup> Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 2.

<sup>188</sup> Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* 171.

contexts. For example, although Bhabha explores individual examples of interstitial subject formation (as in his migrant poet case study), he claims that the “interstices” are, at the same time, zones in which “the intersubjective and collective experiences of *nationness*, community interest, or cultural value are negotiated.”<sup>189</sup> That is, while he examines postcolonial “strategies of selfhood” on the level of the individual, he is ultimately interested in the implications of the interstices for broader patterns of collective identity formation and association. Just as Bhabha’s vision of the “productive ambivalence” of postcolonial subjects can be extrapolated to a collective context, Merleau-Ponty’s model of perception – specifically his discussion of “flesh” – gives prominence to the concepts of connectivity and intersubjectivity. As a unifying medium that encompasses a continuum of interactions among perceiving subjects and perceived objects in the world, the flesh enmeshes all individuals within a vast field of collective perceptual experience.

Along similar lines, Bouzar’s portraiture ranges in scope from the intimate context of self-portraiture to the public context of live portrait painting. For example, in May 2018, Bouzar participated in Dak’Art OFF, a series of art exhibitions and demonstrations organized around the Dakar Biennale in Senegal.<sup>190</sup> While in Dakar, she set up a mobile studio in the back of a large van and traveled around the city, getting to know local residents and painting colorful portraits of the many acquaintances she made along the way.<sup>191</sup> Through this particular project, she demonstrated her commitment to the expression of interstitial identities on a global scale, removing herself from the

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<sup>189</sup> Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 2.

<sup>190</sup> “Le OFF,” *Biennale de Dakar Edition 2018*, accessed January 29, 2019, <http://biennaledakar.org/le-off/>.

<sup>191</sup> *theMatter*, “theMatter Résidence#2\_Avril2018/Dalila Dalléas Bouzar,” filmed May 2018, YouTube video, 7:26, posted May 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LUaxTGulqYI&t=145s>.

geographic constraints of her studio in Bordeaux to facilitate collective opportunities for discovery and connection. At once inscribing herself within the Western painting tradition and playing with the modes of expression typical of that tradition, she crafted portraits of members of the local population in Dakar on raw canvas using dark paint and a thin brush to develop simplified outlines of their features. In each case, she painted the sitter's name in capital white letters along the bottom edge of the canvas, and, in some cases, she filled in her simplified outlines with shades of blue, yellow, or pink.<sup>192</sup> In the context of this extended painting performance, we could read her canvases as a kind of perceptual “flesh” through which her processes of perception and creative expression not only reflect back upon themselves but also intertwine with a vast range of subjectivities. The immersive and intersubjective nature of her performance – over the course of which she not only painted individual sitters but also encouraged members of the community to watch, ask questions, and even create portraits of their own – aligns closely with Merleau-Ponty's vision of perception as a dynamic, embodied experience connecting all subjects and objects in the world. Recalling Merleau-Ponty's conception of time and space as a “pulp” rather than as containers of experience, Bouzar states in the video on her Dakar OFF performance that she envisioned the project as a sort of “*décloisonnement*” or liberation of art from the constraints of time and place.<sup>193</sup> Through her live painting performance in Dakar, she produced a total of sixty-eight portraits, one of which was a self-portrait – a visual testament to her interest in resituating her personal process of interstitial identity formation within a global macrosystem.<sup>194</sup>

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<sup>192</sup> Dalila Dalléas Bouzar, “Studio Dakar,” accessed January 29, 2019, <http://www.daliladalleas.com/>.

<sup>193</sup> *theMatter*, “theMatter Résidence#2\_Avril2018/Dalila Dalléas Bouzar,” filmed May 2018, YouTube video, 7:26, posted May 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LUaxTGu1qYI&t=145s>.

<sup>194</sup> Dalila Dalléas Bouzar, “Studio Dakar,” accessed January 29, 2019, <http://www.daliladalleas.com/>.

Six months later, Bouzar organized another painting performance for a public audience, this time in Paris. As part of the 2018 iteration of the art and design fair Also Known As Africa (AKAA), which originated in 2016 as a platform for showcasing contemporary African art, Bouzar used face paint to create colorful, mask-like designs on the faces of fairgoers and created live portraits of those individuals within five-hour windows on each day of the fair (Fig. 27).<sup>195</sup> For Bouzar, it was especially significant that the performance took place in Paris, which she perceives to be a symbolically charged site of European artistic production and appreciation.<sup>196</sup> Traversing boundaries between body and canvas, her performance reimagined the practice of painting outside the confines of two-dimensional representation. When interviewed by France24, she stated that she was interested in body paint as a form of spiritual activation through which individuals from African contexts and beyond had historically connected themselves with “*un monde invisible*” (an invisible world).<sup>197</sup> Extending her painting practice to a vast, interactive system of bodies and canvases, she realized her creative quest for “flesh” not simply by developing her palette and technique independently but also – in line with Merleau-Ponty’s theory of perception – by immersing her work in a broader field of creation and reception.

In conclusion, by placing *The Location of Culture* in conversation with *The Visible and the Invisible*, I have attempted to develop a conception of subjectivity at the

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<sup>195</sup> See “AKAA – Also Known As Africa 2016,” *Contemporary And (C&)*, accessed January 29, 2019, <https://www.contemporaryand.com/exhibition/akaa-also-known-as-africa/>; Dalila Dalléas Bouzar, “StudioParis, performance de peinture à Akaa 2018, de Dalila Dalléas Bouzar,” filmed November 2018, 6:24, posted November 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RtwKrYuPwfc>.

<sup>196</sup> Dalila Dalléas Bouzar, “StudioParis, performance de peinture à Akaa 2018, de Dalila Dalléas Bouzar,” filmed November 2018, 6:24, posted November 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RtwKrYuPwfc>.

<sup>197</sup> Dalila Dalléas Bouzar, “StudioParis, performance de peinture à Akaa 2018, de Dalila Dalléas Bouzar,” filmed November 2018, 6:24, posted November 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RtwKrYuPwfc>.

crossroads of postcolonial theory and phenomenology, which, in my view, sheds light on the mode of expression in which Bouzar is engaged through her *Taboo* series and through her painting performances.<sup>198</sup> This combination of discourses seems especially appropriate in light of the artist's hybrid French-Algerian identity and commitment to inscribing herself within the Western art-historical tradition. On the whole, Bhabha's theoretical framework helps to elucidate the ambivalent attitudes and complexities that characterize postcolonial processes of identity formation in the intervening space between colonizer and colonized. At the same time, Merleau-Ponty's text, which has famously been applied to the work of Cézanne, introduces an opportunity to situate Bouzar not only within the category of contemporary postcolonial artists but also along a broader historical continuum of French artists committed to reimagining the conventions of figurative oil painting.<sup>199</sup>

Ultimately, by drawing upon the discourses of postcolonial theory and phenomenology, I have attempted to frame Bouzar's self-proclaimed "quest for flesh pink" as an embodied act of identity exploration realized through the artist's intimate connection to figurative painting. By extending her painting practice outside of the private context of her studio, she transforms the medium into a broader affirmation of bodily existence. Not only does she convince herself of her own existence, but she also

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<sup>198</sup> In sketching a particular conception of subjectivity and using it as a lens through which to understand Bouzar's work, I am very much subscribing to a claim that T.J. Clark advances in the extended version of his essay on self-portraiture. In Clark's view, an artist's approach to depicting "stuffs and flesh" on canvas is closely tied to a particular "notion of subjectivity." Specifically, Clark analyzes Jacques-Louis David's *Gross David with the Swoln Cheek* (1794) by first reconstructing what he believes David's understanding of the mind-body relationship would have been at the time he created his self-portrait (see T.J. Clark, "Gross David with the Swoln Cheek: An Essay on Self-Portraiture," in *Rediscovering History: Culture, Politics, and the Psyche*, edited by Michael S. Roth [Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1994], 253).

<sup>199</sup> See, for example Merleau-Ponty's seminal essay on Cézanne (Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "Cézanne's Doubt" [1945], in *Sense and Non-Sense*: 9-25 [Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1964]).

introduces an analogy between canvas and human skin by painting others' faces and replicating the same designs on her canvases. In so doing, she collapses human skin and linen canvas into the continuous mediating texture of perception that Merleau-Ponty would call "la chair du monde" (the flesh of the world).<sup>200</sup> Although much of her work from the past decade incorporates well-known *lieux de mémoire* and appropriated archival material as discussed in Chapters 1 and 2, I have aimed in this discussion to show that Bouzar does not exclusively "re-mix" primary source material.<sup>201</sup> In fact, by developing a series of self-portraits and by organizing collaborative painting performances, she creates primary sources of her own, both laying bare her personal efforts to parse the complex legacies of the French-Algerian encounter and transforming public discourse by giving visual expression to a spectrum of formerly invisible narratives.

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<sup>200</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Le Visible et L'Invisible suivi de Notes de Travail*, 114.

<sup>201</sup> Here, I borrow the term "re-mix" from *Archive (Re)mix: Vues D'Afrique*. See Maëline Le Lay, Dominique Malaquais, and Nadine Siegert, *Archive (Re)mix: Vues D'Afrique* (Rennes : Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2015).

## CONCLUSION

*Ils attendent la fin du monde, j'attends le début de l'humanité.  
(They are waiting for the end of the world, I am waiting for the beginning of  
humanity).*<sup>202</sup>

- Youssoupha, “Polaroid Experience”

This study began with Bouzar’s statement of her “ambition” to “free [her]self from history.” I have endeavored to show that through her paintings, she liberates herself not so much from history *per se* as from hegemonic approaches to the construction of art-historical, national, and individual narratives. Central to my analysis of Bouzar’s work has been the theme of taboo, which relates closely to her engagement with art historical tradition, her exploration of contemporary Algerian history, and her overarching interest in the articulation of personal identity.

In broad strokes, I have used the term “taboo” to refer to the social forces that designate particular phenomena as forbidden, excluding them from public discourse and practice. In Bouzar’s life and work, she has confronted and disrupted taboos on multiple fronts. For example, by committing herself to figurative drawing and painting, she has challenged the taboos established by her advisors in the Parisian Beaux-Arts community, who insisted upon the obsolescence of figurative painting. While Bouzar herself has used the term “taboo” only in reference to the French art world’s perception of figurative painting in the late 1990s, I have argued that she has encountered and challenged taboos not only through her chosen methods and materials but also through her engagement with Algerian history. As I have demonstrated, the governments of France and Algeria alike

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<sup>202</sup> My translation. Bouzar mentions this song by Youssoupha, a French-Congolese rapper, in an interview with Axel Ingé, a fellow member of her artist collective, grOEp (see Dalila Dalléas Bouzar and Axel Ingé, *RadiogrOEp*, “Paroles de Dalila Dalléas Bouzar,” SoundCloud audio [December 6, 2018], <https://groep.fr/>).



have constructed national taboos in their processes of developing official histories. For example, in the wake of the Algerian War of Independence, the French government has remained largely silent regarding the French forces' use of torture against Algerian nationalists and their allies. (Only in September 2018 did the President of the French Republic, Emmanuel Macron, acknowledge that the French army was responsible for the death of Maurice Audin, a young mathematician who supported the anticolonial agenda during the war.)<sup>203</sup> Along similar lines, the Algerian government has enforced a culture of silence around the "disappearance" of pro-Islamist civilians during the Algerian Civil War. The effects of these official taboos have trickled down to individuals, as exemplified by the silence that Bouzar's father has maintained regarding his involvement in the War of Independence.

To perpetuate a taboo around a particular mode of art-making or a particular event in history is to introduce a rupture in the (art-)historical continuum. Taboos designate certain experiences as forbidden, resulting in the construction of narratives and identities that are notably incomplete. Throughout her oeuvre, Bouzar challenges modes of knowledge production that involve such deliberate acts of exclusion and selection. Instead, she advocates multivalent approaches to navigating history and personal identity. By developing a series of paintings inspired by Delacroix's *Femmes d'Alger dans leur Appartement*, for instance, she engages in an act of de-canonization, challenging the singular status of Delacroix's Orientalist masterwork and promoting a plurality of visions

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<sup>203</sup> Adam Nossiter, "French Soldiers Tortured Algerians, Macron Admits 6 Decades Later," *The New York Times* (September 13, 2018), <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/09/13/world/europe/france-algeria-maurice-audin.html>.

of Algerian womanhood. In her reinterpretations of Algerian archival material, she enables viewers to conceptualize the subjects of that material apart from the realm of documentary specificity (and, by extension, the realm of taboo), buffering viewers' encounters with historical violence through an inviting and exploratory style. Lastly, her self-portraits and painting performances incarnate her ambition to liberate herself from history. Through her personal "quest for flesh pink" (which, by way of her interactive painting performances, extends its reach to the "flesh of the world"), she models a process of interstitial identity formation. In this sense, her portraits advance a dynamic approach to knowledge production – both on the level of the individual and on the level of the global community – that accommodates ambivalence and plurality, blurs distinctions between marginal and dominant narratives, and validates in-between states of being and belonging.

While I have been largely affirmative in my discussion of Bouzar and her work, I have identified a few grounds for potential critique, an endeavor which could be extended in future analyses of her oeuvre. For instance, in her *Femmes d'Alger* series, she evades questions of race and power by transforming the black servant in Delacroix's painting into a range of specter-like mediating figures, limiting the extent to which her series can be understood as an inclusive vision of Algerian womanhood. In her archive-inspired projects, she transforms historical photographs into icon-esque portraits (in the case of *Princesse*) and imaginative illustrations (in the case of *Algérie année 0*) that, one could argue, obfuscate historical realities. Furthermore, these series raise questions about the degree to which it is helpful or harmful to present traumatic historical events via modes of representation that cultivate admiration, childlike curiosity, nostalgia, or joy. Lastly,

while I have interpreted her self-portraits (in light of their various combinations of figuration and abstraction, finish and unfinish) as innovative acts of interstitial identity formation, the detail and care with which she renders her physical features throughout the series as a whole might also be used as evidence of her conformity to the egocentric conventions of Western portraiture, which would undermine the role of her oeuvre in re-processing and transforming canonical forms of representation and knowledge production.

In the final analysis, Bouzar's oeuvre functions against the exclusionary – even violent – force of taboo, challenging hegemonic discourses that set limits on artistic creation and interpretation, national histories (both French and Algerian), and conceptions of the self. What emerges from her body of work is a model of knowledge production in which universal themes serve as a point of departure for the active development of multiple perspectives. In this vein, I will conclude with a painting that Bouzar completed of her son in 2015 as part of a series called *Soléman* (Fig. 28).

Centered on a white-flecked black backdrop that resembles a galaxy of stars, the young boy extends his fists in a variety of positions, such that he appears to have multiple arms. On the one hand, the network of overlapping contours around the boy's shoulders, as well as the playful, humanizing details of his green shorts and gap-toothed expression suggest that the artist may have painted her son from life in a range of poses and subsequently synthesized multiple visions into a unified composition. At the same time, the portrait strays from the terrestrial realm, enacting a sort of sci-fi apotheosis. Writhing and bending, *Soléman* appears to undergo a mid-air transformation – his feet are pointed downward, as if he is standing on his toes or, alternatively, being lifted from above.

Floating in an ambiguous void structured only by constellations, he occupies the interstices, raising six fists to proclaim a multivalent identity. As a representation of the artist's son, this painting can be read as an oblique, forward-looking self-portrait charged with questions of intergenerational identity formation and knowledge production. Historian Benjamin Stora once said that "[t]he loss of Algeria was experienced in France as a sort of amputation."<sup>204</sup> Bouzar counteracts the violence of "amputation," filling the void with a profusion of possibilities.

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<sup>204</sup> "Years of Fire," *The Economist* (February 19, 2011), <https://www.economist.com/books-and-arts/2011/02/17/years-of-fire>.

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## IMAGES



Figure 8. Eugène Delacroix, *Femmes d'Alger dans leur Appartement*, 1834, Oil on canvas, 180 x 229 cm. Photograph by Charlotte Reynders.



Figure 9. Dalila Dalléas Bouzar, *Les Femmes D'Alger*, 2003, Oil on canvas, 150 x 200 cm. Accessed from <http://www.daliladalleas.com/>.



Figure 10. Dalila Dalléas Bouzar, *Les Femmes D'Alger*, 2009, Oil on canvas, 150 x 200 cm. Accessed from <http://www.daliladalleas.com/>.



Figure 11. Dalila Dalléas Bouzar, *Les Femmes D'Alger*, 2011, Oil on canvas, 150 x 200 cm. Accessed from <http://www.daliladalleas.com/>.



Figure 12. Dalila Dalléas Bouzar, *Les Femmes D'Alger*, 2017, Oil on canvas, 170 x 200 cm. Accessed from <http://www.daliladalleas.com/>.



Figure 13. Dalila Dalléas Bouzar, *Les Femmes D'Alger*, 2017, Oil on canvas, 170 x 200 cm. Accessed from <http://www.daliladalleas.com/>.





Figure 14. Dalila Dalléas Bouzar, *Les Femmes D'Alger*, 2018, Oil on canvas, 170 x 200 cm. Accessed from <http://www.daliladalleas.com/>.

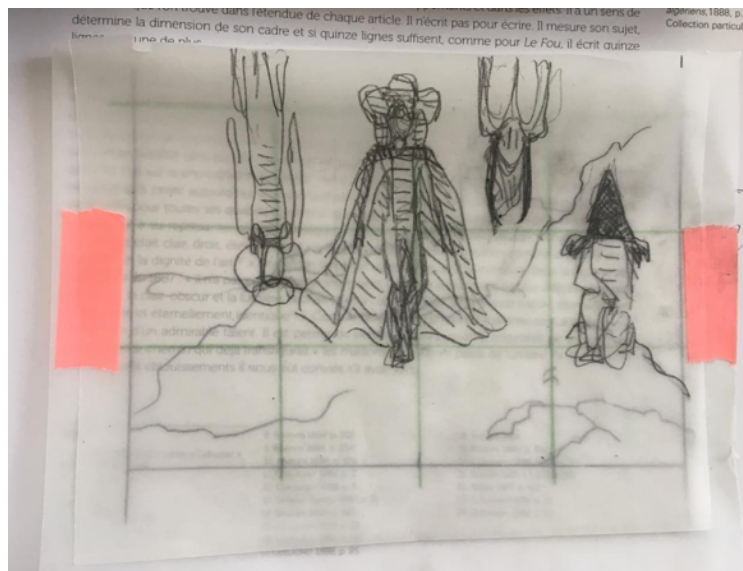


Figure 8. Dalila Dalléas Bouzar, *Croquis*, Instagram, August 14, 2018. Accessed from [https://www.instagram.com/p/Bmd2\\_J9hhzE/](https://www.instagram.com/p/Bmd2_J9hhzE/).

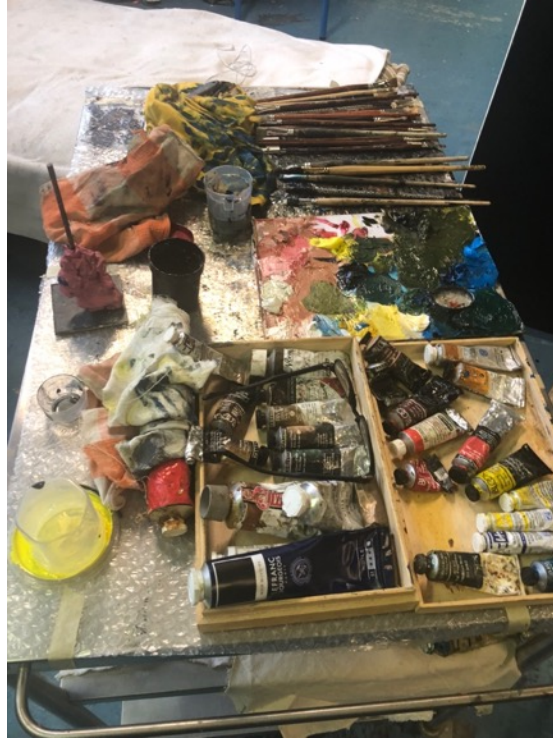


Figure 9. Palette of Dalila Dalléas Bouzar. Photograph by Charlotte Reynders. October 28, 2019.

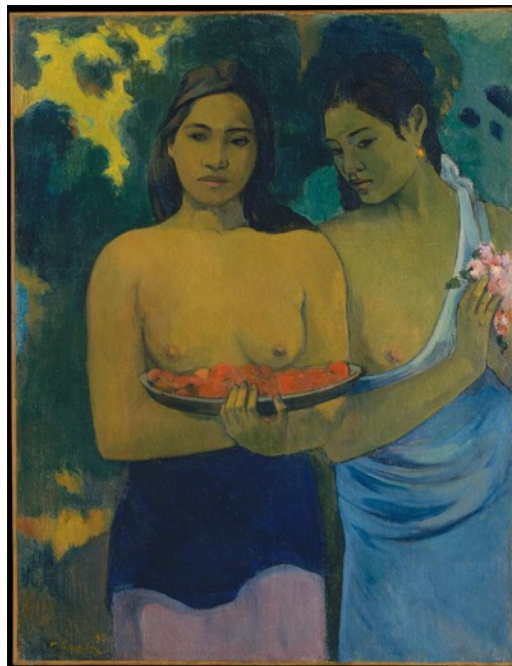


Figure 10. Paul Gauguin, *Two Tahitian Women*, 1899, Oil on canvas, 94 x 72.4 cm, The Metropolitan Museum of Art. ARTSTOR.



Figure 11. Flyssa, in George Cameron Stone, *A Glossary of the Construction, Decoration and Use of Arms and Armor In All Countries and In All Times, Together with Some Closely Related Subjects* (Portland, Me.: The Southworth press, 1934), 236.



Figure 12. Dalila Dalléas Bouzar, *Princesse*, 2015-2016, Oil on canvas, twelve 50 x 40 cm canvases, view of exhibition at Dak'Art in Senegal, Photo courtesy of the artist.





Figure 13. Table comparing *Femmes Algériennes* photographs by Marc Garanger and *Princesse* paintings by Dalila Dalléas Bouzar. See Marc Garanger, *Femmes Algériennes 1960* (Anglet : Atlantica, 2002) ; Dalila Dalléas Bouzar, Accessed from <http://www.daliladalleas.com/>. Table by Charlotte Reynders.

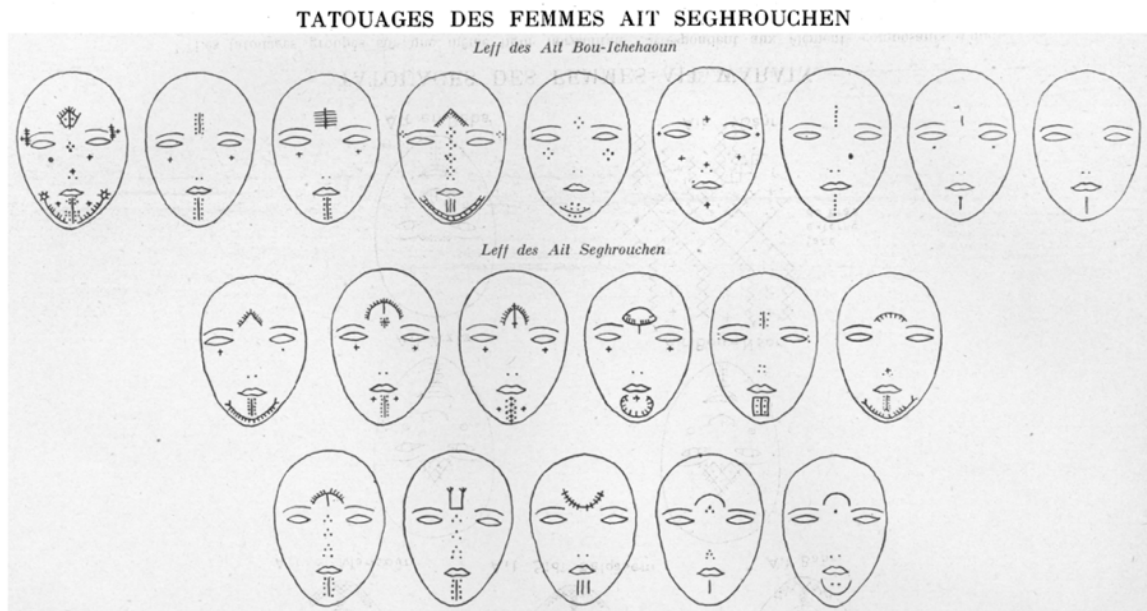


Figure 14. *Tatouages des Femmes Ait Seghrouchen*. In G. Marcy, "Origine et Signification des Tatouages des Tribus Berbères," *Revue de l'Histoire des Religions* 102 (1931), Accessed from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23664621>, 28.

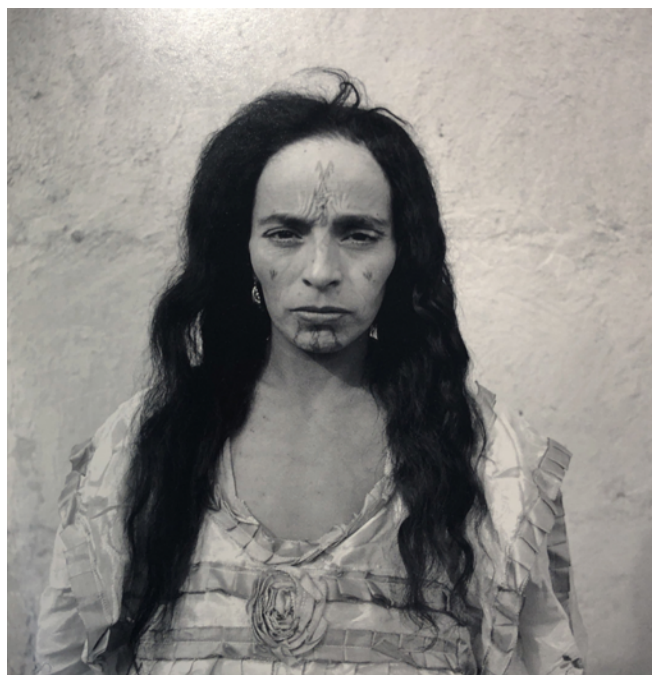


Figure 15. Marc Garanger, *Femme Algérienne*, 1960, Gelatin silver print, 26.7 x 26.7 cm, in Marc Garanger, *Femmes Algériennes 1960* (Anglet : Atlantica, 2002).



Figure 16. Dalila Dalléas Bouzar, *Les Enfants du Soleil*, 2011-2012, Pencil and acrylic on paper, 220 x 150 cm, Accessed from <http://www.daliladalleas.com/>.



Figure 17. Copy of archival photograph that inspired *Les Enfants du Soleil*, 2011-2012, Photograph courtesy of Dalila Dalléas Bouzar.





Figure 18. Dalila Dalléas Bouzar, *Bentalha*, 2011-2012, Pencil and acrylic on paper, 40 x 30 cm, Accessed from <http://www.daliladalleas.com/>.



Figure 19. Copy of archival photograph that inspired *Bentalha*, 2011-2012, Photograph courtesy of Dalila Dalléas Bouzar.

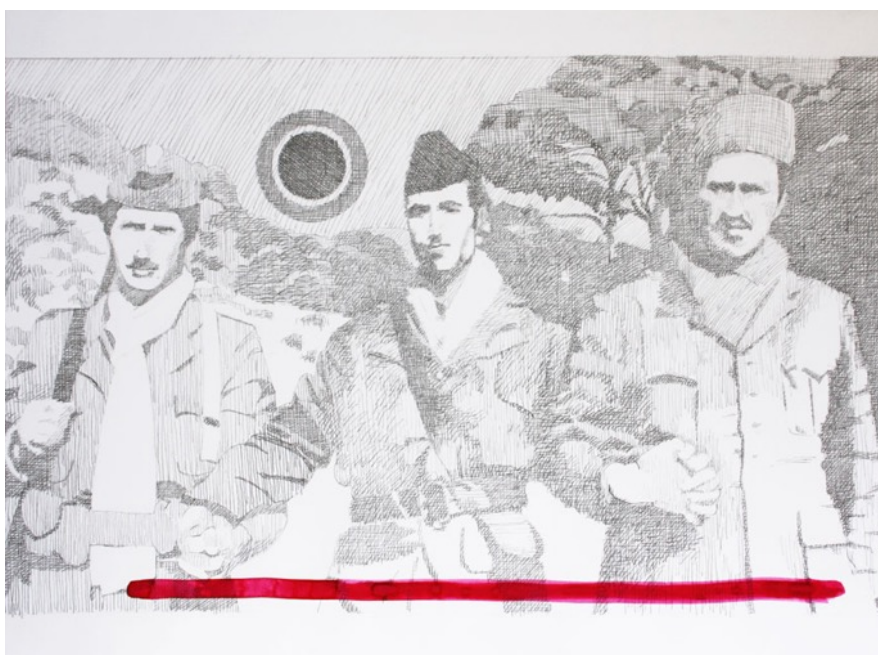


Figure 20. Dalila Dalléas Bouzar, *Fraternité*, 2011-2012, Pencil and acrylic on paper, 40 x 30 cm, Accessed from <http://www.daliladalleas.com/>.

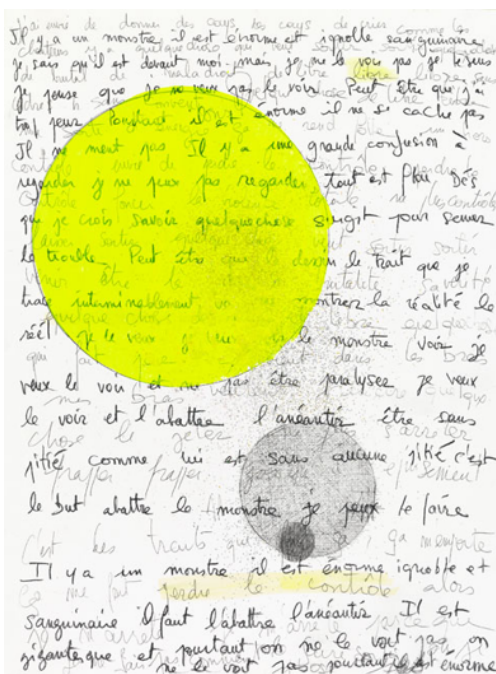


Figure 21. Dalila Dalléas Bouzar, *Écritures*, 2011-2012, Pencil and acrylic on paper, 40 x 30 cm, Accessed from <http://www.daliladalleas.com/>.



Figure 22. Dalila Dalléas Bouzar, *Taboo*, 2013, Oil on canvas, 50 x 40cm, Accessed from <http://www.daliladalleas.com/>.



Figure 23. Eugène Delacroix, *Self-Portrait*, 1837, 65 x 54.5cm, Louvre. ARTSTOR.



Figure 24. Dalila Dalléas Bouzar, *Taboo*, 2013, Oil on canvas, 50 x 40cm, Accessed from <http://www.daliladalleas.com/>.

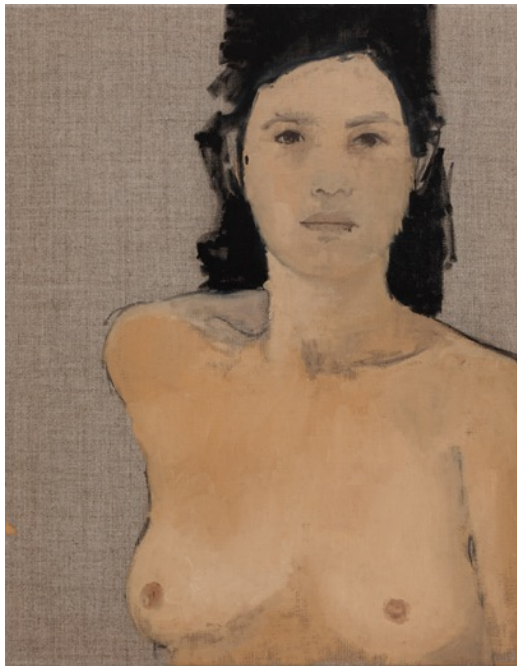


Figure 25. Dalila Dalléas Bouzar, *Taboo*, 2013, Oil on canvas, 50 x 40cm, Accessed from <http://www.daliladalleas.com/>.





Figure 26. Dalila Dalléas Bouzar, *Taboo*, 2013, Oil on canvas, 50 x 40cm, Accessed from <http://www.daliladalleas.com/>.



Figure 27. Dalila Dalléas Bouzar, *Studio Paris*, 2018, Photo courtesy of BeauxArts.





Figure 28. Dalila Dalléas Bouzar, Soléman, 2015, Oil on canvas, 120 x 100 cm. Accessed from <http://www.daliladalleas.com/>.

There it was – her picture. Yes, with all its green and blues, its lines running up and across, its attempt at something. It would be hung in the attics, she thought; it would be destroyed. But what did that matter? she asked herself, taking up her brush again. She looked at the steps; they were empty; she looked at her canvas; it was blurred. With a sudden intensity, as if she saw it clear for a second, she drew a line there, in the centre. It was done; it was finished. Yes, she thought, laying down her brush in extreme fatigue, I have had my vision.

- Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*