Historiography

Although the opening of the archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs after a 30-year lock-up enabled some new historical research on the war, including Jean-Charles Jauffret's book, La Guerre d'Algérie par les documents (The Algerian War According to the Documents), many remain inaccessible.[106] The recognition in 1999 by the National Assembly, permitted the Algerian War, at last, to enter the syllabi of French schools. In France, the war was known as "la guerre sans nom" ("the war without a name") while it was being fought as the government variously described the war as the "Algerian events", the "Algerian problem" and the "Algerian dispute"; the mission of the French Army was "ensuring security", "maintaining order" and "pacification", but was never described as fighting a war; while the FLN were referred to as "criminals", "bandits", "outlaws", "terrorists" and "fellagha" (a derogatory Arabic word meaning "road-cutters", but which was popularly mistranslated as "throat-cutters"-a reference to the FLN"s favorite method of execution, namely making people wear the "Kabylian smile" by cutting their throats, pulling their tongues out and leaving them to bleed to death).[107] After reports of the widespread use of torture by French forces started to reach France in 1956–57, the war become commonly known as "la sale guerre" ("the dirty war"), a term that is still used today, and which reflects the very negative memory of the war in France.[107]:145

As the war was officially a "police action", for decades no monuments were built to honor the about 25,000 French soldiers killed in the war while the Defense Ministry refused to classify veterans as veterans until the 1970s.[54]:219 When a monument to the Unknown Soldier of the Algerian War was erected in 1977, the French President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing in his dedication speech refused to use the words war or Algeria, instead using the phrase "the unknown soldier of North Africa".[54]:219 A national monument to the French war dead was not built until 1996, and even then spoke only of those killed fighting in "Afrique du nord" and was located in a decrepit area of

Paris rarely visited by tourists, as if to hide the monument.[54]:226 Further adding to the silence were the vested interests of French politicians. François Mitterrand, the Socialist president 1981–95 had been the Interior Minister 1954–55 and the Justice Minister 1955–57 during which time he had been deeply involved in the repression of the FLN, and it was only after Mitterrand's death in 1996 that Socialists started to become willing to talk about the war, and even then remaining very guarded about Mitterrand's role.[54]:232 Likewise, de Gaulle had promised in the Evian accords that the pieds-noirs could remain in Algeria, but after independence, the FLN had freely violated the accords, leading to the entire pied-noir population fleeing to France, usually with only the clothes they were wearing as they had lost everything they had in Algeria.[54]:232 For Gaullists, this was not exactly a shining moment to cherish.[54]:232

In English, British and American historians tended to see the FLN as freedom fighters with the French being condemned as imperialists.[108] One of the first books about the war in English, A Scattering of Dust by American journalist Herb Greer depicted the Algerian struggle for independence in a very sympathetic way.[108]:220–1 Most work in English done in the 1960s and 1970s, usually the work of left-wing scholars, focused on explaining the FLN as a part of a generational change in Algerian nationalism and depicted the war as either a reaction to intolerable racist oppression and/or an attempt by peasantry impoverished by French policies to improve their lot.[108]:222–5 One of the few military histories of the war was The Algerian Insurrection by a retired British Army officer Edgar O'Ballance who wrote with frank admiration for French tactics in Algeria, seeing the FLN as a terrorist group that needed to be suppressed and concluded that the tactics that won the war militarily lost the war politically.[108]:225–6

In 1977, the British historian Alistair Horne published A Savage War of Peace, which is generally regarded as the leading book written on the subject in English, though written from a French perspective rather the Algerian.[108]:226 After 15 years, Horne was not concerned about right or

wrong, but with cause and effect.[108]:217–35 A Francophile who lived in Paris at the time of the war, Horne had condemned the Suez war and the French bombing of the Tunisian village of Sakiet Sidi Youssef in 1958, arguing that the inflexibility of the FLN had won Algeria independence and created a sense of Algerian national identity, leading to rule by authoritarian, but "progressive" FLN regime.[108]:217–35 The American journalist Adam Shatz wrote: "Not surprisingly, the best single survey of the war is by an English journalist, Alistair Horne, whose masterful A Savage War of Peace, published in 1977, still has no equal in French."[63]

In a 1977 column published in The Times Literacy Supplement reviewing the book A Savage War of Peace by Alistair Horne, the Iraqi-born British historian Elie Kedourie vigorously attacked Horne as an apologist for terrorism, accusing him of engaging the "cosy pieties" of bien-pensants as Kedorie condemned those Western intellectuals who excused terrorism when committed by Third World revolutionaries.[108]:217–35 Kedourie claimed that far from a mass movement, the FLN were a small gang of murderous intellectuals who used brutally terroristic tactics against the French and any Muslim who was loyal to the French, whom the French had beaten back by 1959.[108]:217–235 Kedourie charged that de Gaulle had cynically sacrificed the colons and the harkis as Kedourie charged that de Gaulle had chosen to disregard his constitutional oath as president to protect all the French to ensure that "the French withdrew and handed over power to the only organized body of armed men who were on the scene-a civilized government thus acting for all the world like the votary of some Mao or Ho, in the barbarous belief that legitimacy comes from the power of the gun".[108]:227

Before the war, Algeria was a favored setting for French films with the British French professor Leslie Hill having written: "In the late 1920s and 1930s, for instance, North Africa provided film-makers in France with a ready fund of familiar images of the exotics, mingling, for instance, the languid eroticism of Arabian nights with the infinite and hazy vistas of the Sahara to create a

powerful confection of tragic heroism and passionate love".[107]:147 During the war itself, French censors banned the entire subject of the war.[107]:147–8 Since 1962 when film censorship relating to the war eased, French films dealing with the conflict have consistently portrayed the war as a set of conflicting memories and rival narratives (of which only some may be true, but which ones is left unclear) with most films dealing with the war taking a disjointed chronological structure where scenes before, during and after the war are juxtaposed out of sequence with one film critic referring to the cinematic Algeria as "an ambiguous world marked by the displacements and repetitions of dreams".[107]:142–58 The consistent message of French films dealing with the war is that something horrible happened, but just what happened, who was involved, and why being left unexplained.[107]:142–158 Though atrocities, especially torture by French forces are acknowledged, the French soldiers who fought in Algeria were and are always portrayed in French cinema as the "lost soldiers", tragic victims of the war who are more deserving of sympathy than the FLN people they tortured (almost invariably portrayed as vicious, psychopathic terrorists) – an approach to the war that has raised anger in Algeria.[107]:151–6

From time to time, the memory of the Algerian War surfaced in France. In 1987, when SS-Hauptsturmführer Klaus Barbie, the "Butcher of Lyon" was brought to trial for crimes against humanity, graffiti appeared on the walls of the banlieues (the slum districts in which most Algerian immigrants in France live in) reading: "Barbie in France! When will Massu be in Algeria!".[54]:230 Barbie's lawyer Jacques Vergès adopted a tu quoque defense, asking the judges "is a crime against humanity is to be defined as only one of Nazis against the Jews or if it applies to more seriously crimes...the crimes of imperialists against people struggling for their independence?", going on to say there was nothing his client did against the French Resistance that was not done by "certain French officers in Algeria" whom Vergès noted could not be prosecuted because of de Gaulle's amnesty of 1962.[54]:230 In 1997, when Maurice Papon, a career French civil servant was brought to trial for crimes against humanity for sending 1, 600 Jews from Bordeaux to be killed at Auschwitz

in 1942, it emerged over the course of the trial that on 17 October 1961 Papon had organized a massacre of between 100 and 200 Algerians in central Paris, which was the first time that most of the French had heard of the massacre.[54]:231 The revelation that hundreds of people had been killed by the Paris Sûreté was a great shock in France and led to uncomfortable questions being raised about what had happened during the Algerian War.[54]:231 The American historian William Cohen wrote that the Papon trial "sharpened the focus" on the Algerian War, it not provide "clarity" as Papon's role as a civil servant under Vichy led to misleading conclusions in France that it was former collaborators who were responsible for the terror in Algeria, when in fact most of the men responsible like Guy Mollet, General Marcel Bigeard, Robert Lacoste, General Jacques Massu and Jacques Soustelle had all been résistants in World War Two, which was a fact that many French historians found very unpalatable.[54]:231

In 1992, the American John Ruedy published Modern Algeria: Origins and Development of a Nation.[108]:232–3 Ruedy wrote under French rule, the traditional social structure had been so completely destroyed that when the FLN launched its independence struggle in 1954, the only way of asserting one's interests was the law of the gun, which explains why the FLN was so violent not only in regards to its enemies, but also within the movement, forming the basis of an "alternative political culture" based on brute force that persists to this day.[108]:233

On 15 June 2000, Le Monde published an interview with Louisette Ighilahriz, a former FLN member who described in graphic detail her torture at the hands of the French Army and made the sensational claim that the war heroes General Jacques Massu and General Marcel Bigeard had personally been present when she being tortured for information.[54]:233 What made the interview very touching for many French people was that Ighilahriz was not demanding vengeance, but rather wished to express thanks to Dr. François Richaud, the army doctor who extended her much kindness and whom she believed saved her life by treating her every time she was tortured, asking if

it were possible for her to see Dr. Richaud one last time to thank him personally (Dr. Richaud it turned out had died in 1997).[54]:233 As Ighilahriz had been an attractive woman in her youth, university-educated, secular, fluent in French and fond of quoting Victor Hugo, and her duties in the FLN had been as an information courier, she made for a most sympathetic victim as she was a woman did not come across as Algerian.[54]:234 William Cohen commented had she been an uneducated man who had been involved in killings and was not coming forward to express thanks for a Frenchman, her story might not had resonated the same way.[54]:234 The Ighiahriz case led to a public letter signed by 12 people who been involved in the war to President Chirac asking that October 31 be made a public day of remembrance for victims of torture in Algeria.[54]:234 In response to the Ighilahriz case, General Paul Aussaresses gave an interview on 23 November 2000 in which he candidly admitted to ordering torture and extrajudicial executions, stating he had personally executed 24 fellagha, which he argued were justified as torture and extrajudicial executions were the only way to defeat the FLN.[54]:235 In May 2001, General Aussaresses published his memoirs Services spéciaux Algérie 1955–1957, in which presented a detailed account of torture and extrajudicial killings in the name of the republic which he wrote were all done under orders from Paris, confirming what had been long suspected.[54]:239 As a result of these interviews and Aussaresses's book, the Algerian War was finally extensively discussed by the French media who had ignored the subject as much as possible for decades, through no consensus emerged about how to best remember the war.[54]:235 Adding to the interest was the decision by one war veteran Georges Fogel to come forward to confirm that he had seen Ighiahriz and many others tortured in 1957 while the politician and war veteran Jean Marie Faure decided in February 2001 to release extracts from the diary he kept at the time showing "acts of sadism and horror" he had witnessed.[54]:235 The French historian Pierre Vidal-Naquet called this a moment of "catharsis" that was "explainable only in near-French terms: it is the return of the repressed".[54]:235–6

In 2002, Une Vie Debout: Mémoires Politiques by Mohammed Harbi, a former advisor to Ben Bella

was published in which Harbi wrote: "Because they [the FLN leaders] weren't supported at the moment of their arrival on the scene by a real and dynamic popular movement, they took power of the movement by force and they maintained it by force. Convinced that they had to act with resolution in order to protect themselves against their enemies, they deliberately chose an authoritarian path."[63]

The Algerian War remains a contentious event today. According to historian Benjamin Stora, one of the leading historians on the Algerian war, memories concerning the war remain fragmented, with no common ground to speak of:

There is no such thing as a history of the Algerian War; there is just a multitude of histories and personal paths through it. Everyone involved considers that they lived through it in their own way, and any attempt to understand the Algerian War globally is immediately rejected by protagonists.[109]

Even though Stora has counted 3,000 publications in French on the Algerian war, there still is no work produced by French and Algerian authors cooperating with one another. Even though, according to Stora, there can "no longer be talk about a 'war without a name', a number of problems remain, especially the absence of sites in France to commemorate" the war. Furthermore, conflicts have arisen on an exact commemoration date to end the war. Although many sources as well as the French state place it on 19 March 1962, the Evian agreements, others point out that the massacres of harkis and the kidnapping of pieds-noirs took place afterwards. Stora further points out, "The phase of memorial reconciliation between the two sides of the sea is still a long way off."[109] This was evidenced by the National Assembly's creation of the law on colonialism on 23 February 2005, which asserted that colonialism had overall been "positive."

Alongside a heated debate in France, the February 23, 2005, law had the effect of jeopardizing the treaty of friendship that President Jacques Chirac was supposed to sign with President Abdelaziz Bouteflika—a treaty no longer on the agenda. Following this controversial law, Bouteflika has talked about a cultural genocide, particularly referring to the 1945 Sétif massacre. Chirac finally had the law repealed through a complex institutional mechanism.

Another matter concerns the teaching of the war, as well as of colonialism and decolonization, in particular in French secondary schools.[110] Hence, there is only one reference to racism in a French textbook, one published by Bréal publishers for terminales students (those passing their baccalauréat). Thus, many are not surprised that the first to speak about the October 17, 1961, massacre were music bands, including, but not only, hip-hop bands such as the famous Suprême NTM ("les Arabes dans la Seine") or politically engaged La Rumeur. Indeed, the Algerian War is not even the subject of a specific chapter in textbook for terminales[106] Henceforth, Benjamin Stora stated:

As Algerians do not appear in an "indigenous" condition, and their sub-citizens status, as the history of nationalist movement, is never evoked as their being one of great figures of the resistance, such as Messali Hadj and Ferhat Abbas. They neither emerge nor are being given attention. No one is explaining to students what colonization has been. We have prevented students from understanding why the decolonization took place.[106]

In metropolitan France in 1963, 43% of French Algerians lived in bidonvilles (shanty towns).[111] Thus, Azouz Begag, the delegate Minister for Equal Opportunities, wrote an autobiographic novel, Le Gone du Chaâba, about his experiences while living in a bidonville in the outskirts of Lyon. It is impossible to understand the third-generation of Algerian immigrants to France without recalling this bicultural experience. An official parliamentary report on the "prevention of criminality", commanded

by then Interior Minister Villepin and made by member of parliament Jacques-Alain Bénisti, claimed that "Multilingualism (bilinguisme) was a factor of criminality." (sic[112]). Following outcries, the definitive version of the Bénisti report finally made multilingualism an asset rather than a fault.[113]

After having denied its use for 40 years, the French state has finally recognized its history of torture; although, there was never an official proclamation about it. General Paul Aussaresses was sentenced following his justification of the use of torture for "apology of war crimes." But, as it did during wartime, the French state claimed torture were isolated acts, instead of admitting its responsibility for the frequent use of torture to break the insurgents' morale and not, as Aussaresses has claimed, to "save lives" by gaining short-term information which would stop "terrorists".[114] The state now claims that torture was a regrettable aberration due to the context of the exceptionally savage war. But academic research has proven both theses false. "Torture in Algeria was engraved in the colonial act; it is a 'normal' illustration of an abnormal system", wrote Nicolas Bancel, Pascal Blanchard and Sandrine Lemaire, who discuss the phenomena of "human zoos."[115] From the enfumades (smoking parlors) of the Darha caves in 1844 by Pélissier to the 1945 riots in Sétif, Guelma, and Kherrata, the repression in Algeria has used the same methods. Following the Sétif massacres, other riots against the European presence occurred in Guelma, Batna, Biskra, and Kherrata; they resulted in 103 deaths among the pieds-noirs. The suppression of these riots officially saw 1,500 other deaths, but N. Bancel, P. Blanchard and S. Lemaire estimate the number to be between 6,000 and 8,000.[116]