

# Archivaria

The Journal of the Association of Canadian Archivists

## “Silence in the Archives”

France, the Algerian War, and National Identity

MAIA S. HIRSCHLER

*Archivaria* 99 (Spring 2025), pp. 6-33

---

### **Cite this article:**

Hirschler, Maia S. “Silence in the Archives: France, the Algerian War, and National Identity.” *Archivaria* 99 (Spring 2025): 6-33.

<https://archivaria.ca/index.php/archivaria/article/view/14017>

# Silence in the Archives

## France, the Algerian War, and National Identity

MAIA S. HIRSCHLER

---

**ABSTRACT** In 2021, French President Emmanuel Macron announced that the French government would make classified archives about the Algerian War accessible 15 years ahead of schedule, in an effort to improve Franco-Algerian relations. The announcement, which came after decades of requests that the archives be returned to Algeria, seemed to be a good-faith effort to address France’s difficult heritage with respect to the Algerian War (1954–1962) – particularly the widespread use of torture and the “disappearing” of dissidents during the war. The Algerian War has always occupied a contentious place in French history, having been largely left out of history textbooks and referred to as a war only after 1999. By opening the archives ahead of schedule, Macron seemed to commit the French government to healing generational wounds and improving relations with Algeria. The declassification of Algerian archives led the status of the Algerian War and, as a result, that of Algerian immigrants in contemporary France, to become major talking points for candidates on the right and on the left during the 2022 presidential election. While the opening of the archives appears to have done away with the archival silence that has shrouded the history of the war, this article will argue that France and its political actors have selectively lifted archival silence to privilege certain narratives and continue to silence others.

---

**RÉSUMÉ** En 2021, le président de la France Emmanuel Macron a annoncé que le gouvernement français allait rendre accessibles les archives classifiées de la guerre d'Algérie 15 ans en avance sur le calendrier, dans le but d'améliorer les relations franco-algériennes. Cette annonce, qui fait suite à des décennies de demande de restitution des archives à l'Algérie, semblait être un effort de bonne foi pour remédier au difficile héritage de la France en ce qui concerne la guerre d'Algérie (1954–1962), en particulier l'utilisation généralisée de la torture et la « disparition » de dissident.e.s durant la guerre. La guerre d'Algérie a toujours occupé une place controversée dans l'histoire de la France, ayant été largement exclue des manuels d'histoire et qualifiée de guerre seulement après 1999. En rendant les archives accessibles en avance sur le calendrier, Macron semblait engager le gouvernement français à panser les blessures générationnelles et à améliorer les relations avec l'Algérie. La déclassification des archives algériennes a fait du statut de la guerre d'Algérie et, par conséquent, de celui des immigrant.e.s algérien.ne.s se trouvant en France, un sujet de discussion majeur pour les candidat.e.s de droite et de gauche lors de l'élection présidentielle de 2022. Alors que l'accès aux archives semble avoir mis fin au silence archivistique qui a occulté l'histoire de la guerre, cet article soutiendra que la France et ses acteurs politiques ont sélectivement levé le silence archivistique pour privilégier certains récits et continuer d'en étouffer d'autres.

## Introduction

On March 9, 2021, French President Emmanuel Macron announced the acceleration of the declassification of certain archives about the Algerian War (1954–1962).<sup>1</sup> The gesture, Macron claimed, was an effort to “reconcile memories” and “look history in the face.”<sup>2</sup> The announcement followed the French government’s April 2020 decision to open archives relating to the *disparus* (disappeared) of the Algerian War and to acknowledge the torture of Algerian dissidents during the war.<sup>3</sup> Macron’s announcement was particularly surprising given the decades-long Franco-Algerian dispute about ownership of the archives as well as France’s strict statutes about declassification of archives, particularly those concerning sensitive subject matters, including the actions of Pétain’s Vichy government during the Second World War and of the French government during the Algerian War. In announcing the declassification of the archives, Macron followed the recommendations of a January 2021 report on questions of memory about colonization and the Algerian War, which he had commissioned from historian Benjamin Stora in July 2020 in an effort to “reconcile the French and Algerian peoples,” according to an Elysée press release.<sup>4</sup> Two subsequent declarations, on December 22, 2021, and on August 25, 2022, reiterated the French government’s commitment to historical truth and archival access. The December 22 announcement promised “access to all citizens to ‘public archives produced in

1 Constant Méheut, “France Eases Access, a Little, to Its Secrets,” *New York Times*, March 9, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/03/09/world/europe/france-declassification-algerian-war-archives.html>.

2 Le Monde avec AFP, “Emmanuel Macron décide de faciliter la déclassification des archives de la guerre d’Algérie” [Emmanuel Macron decides to simplify declassification of the Algerian War archives], *Le Monde*, March 9, 2021, [https://www.lemonde.fr/politique/article/2021/03/09/emmanuel-macron-decide-de-faciliter-la-declassification-des-archives-de-la-guerre-d-algerie\\_6072475\\_823448.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/politique/article/2021/03/09/emmanuel-macron-decide-de-faciliter-la-declassification-des-archives-de-la-guerre-d-algerie_6072475_823448.html). Unless otherwise noted, all translations from French are my own.

3 Le Parisien avec AFP, “La France ouvre des archives sur les disparus de la guerre d’Algérie” [France opens archives about the disappeared of the Algerian War], *Le Parisien*, April 14, 2020, <https://www.leparisien.fr/politique/la-france-ouvre-des-archives-sur-les-disparus-de-la-guerre-d-algerie-14-04-2020-8299638.php>.

4 Benjamin Stora, *Les questions mémorielles portant sur la colonisation et la guerre d’Algérie* ([Paris]: Présidence de la République, 2021), <https://www.vie-publique.fr/files/rapport/pdf/278186.pdf>; Le Monde avec AFP, “Emmanuel Macron confie à l’historien Benjamin Stora une mission sur ‘la mémoire de la colonisation et de la guerre d’Algérie’” [Emmanuel Macron gives historian Benjamin Stora a mission on the “memory of colonization and of the Algerian War”], *Le Monde*, July 24, 2020, [https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2020/07/24/emmanuel-macron-confie-a-l-historien-benjamin-stora-une-mission-sur-la-memoire-de-la-colonisation-et-de-la-guerre-d-algerie\\_6047236\\_3212.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2020/07/24/emmanuel-macron-confie-a-l-historien-benjamin-stora-une-mission-sur-la-memoire-de-la-colonisation-et-de-la-guerre-d-algerie_6047236_3212.html).

the context of affairs relative to cases and acts committed in connection with the war in Algeria,” including those in the National Archives and in archives in overseas territories, police department archives, the Ministry of War, and the Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs.<sup>5</sup>

Macron’s announcements seemed to represent a break from the ways in which France had historically addressed its difficult heritage, which Sharon Macdonald defines as “a past that is recognised as meaningful in the present but that is also contested and awkward for public reconciliation with a positive, self-affirming contemporary identity.”<sup>6</sup> Difficult heritage “threatens to break through into the present in disruptive ways, opening up social divisions, perhaps by playing into imagined, even nightmarish, futures.”<sup>7</sup> France has long used archival silence as a means of negotiating its difficult heritage and maintaining its reputation on the world stage. Archives pertaining to the actions of Vichy officials and Nazi collaborators remained classified until the late 1990s, and even after the statute of limitations on classification had expired, many remained accessible only by special request.

The declassification of the archives is part of Macron’s broader project to heal the enduring wounds of the Algerian War and to unite a country that is increasingly divided along national, political, and ethnic lines. Macron is the first French president born after the events of the Algerian War; the first to acknowledge the October 1961 massacre of Algerians by the Paris police; the first to acknowledge the French army’s use of torture during the war; and the first to ask forgiveness for the treatment of the *harkis*, Algerians who fought for the French army during the war.<sup>8</sup> Macron’s forthrightness about the events of the war and the French presence in Algeria predates his presidency: on a visit to Algeria

5 Marc André, “L’accès aux documents liés à la guerre d’Algérie est toujours aussi difficile” [Accessing documents about the Algerian War is still difficult], *Le Monde*, November 14, 2022, [https://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2022/11/14/-acces-aux-documents-lies-a-la-guerre-d-algerie-est-toujours-aussi-difficile\\_6149728\\_3232.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2022/11/14/-acces-aux-documents-lies-a-la-guerre-d-algerie-est-toujours-aussi-difficile_6149728_3232.html); République française, “Arrêté du 22 décembre 2021 portant ouverture d’archives relatives à la guerre d’Algérie” [Decree of December 22, 2021, about opening of archives about the Algerian War], République française, December 22, 2021, <https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/jorf/id/JORFTEXT000044546979>.

6 Sharon Macdonald, *Difficult Heritage: Negotiating the Nazi Past in Nuremberg and Beyond* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2009), 1, digital file.

7 Macdonald, *Difficult Heritage*, 1.

8 Roger Cohen, “In Algeria, Macron Seeks to Reshape a Traumatic Relationship with France,” *New York Times*, August 29, 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/08/29/world/africa/algeria-france-emmanuel-macron.html>.

during his first presidential campaign in 2017, he declared that colonization was “barbaric” and “a crime against humanity.” “Colonization,” he said, “is part of French history. It is a part of that past that we must confront by also apologizing to those whom we have harmed.”<sup>9</sup> His commissioning of Benjamin Stora, arguably the leading French historian of the Algerian War, to write a report on how to properly memorialize the events of the war represented another instance of Macron’s commitment to Franco-French and Franco-Algerian reconciliation.

However, on closer inspection, Macron’s position on Algeria, the Algerian War, and their associated archives is an example of deft political manoeuvring: he casts himself, France, and his government as progressive entities committed to improving Franco-Algerian relations and to atoning for the horrors of colonization and of the Algerian War, while his government reclassifies documents and restricts access to historical sources. Under the veneer of increased archival access lies the reality of a convoluted web of legal contradictions and logistical obstacles that impede historical work and allow France to continue to control its image and shape collective memory of the war, both in France and in Algeria. France’s new archival openness is in fact another form of archival silence – one marked by deception that makes it far more pernicious by making it far harder to name and eradicate. This article will explore the ways in which France, and Macron’s government in particular, have exploited archival silence to their own political ends while building and maintaining a façade of archival openness. I begin with an overview of the Algerian War, its consequences, and the place it occupies in French collective memory. I follow with a definition of archival silence and its effects on collective memory and a summary of Macron’s public opinions on Algeria and the war. Finally, I examine the disconnect between Macron’s public-facing policies and the realities of archival access in France. I close with an examination of the possibilities of using an *anarchive* of the war to counter official archival silences.

9 Le Monde avec AFP, “En Algérie, Macron qualifie la colonisation de ‘crime contre l’humanité,’ tollé à droite” [In Algeria, Macron calls colonization a “crime against humanity,” outcry on the right], *Le Monde*, February 15, 2017, [https://www.lemonde.fr/election-presidentielle-2017/article/2017/02/15/macron-qualifie-la-colonisation-de-crime-contre-l-humanite-tolle-a-droite-et-au-front-national\\_5080331\\_4854003.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/election-presidentielle-2017/article/2017/02/15/macron-qualifie-la-colonisation-de-crime-contre-l-humanite-tolle-a-droite-et-au-front-national_5080331_4854003.html).

## Algeria, another Franco-French Civil War

Although France was embroiled in several decolonial wars throughout the 1940s, '50s, and '60s, the Algerian War was particularly destructive and violent. The eight-year war ended 130 years of French rule in Algeria and left 1.2 million dead. It also ended France's Fourth Republic (1946–1958) and brought General Charles de Gaulle back to power to resolve the crisis. The war was particularly devastating because of Algeria's legal status, which differentiated it from other colonized territories in the French empire, and because of the place Algeria occupied in France's imaginary and in its notions of nationhood. Unlike Tunisia and Morocco, which were territories, or protectorates, Algeria was the only North African colony that was made up of *départements* of France.<sup>10</sup> In 1954, the first year of the war, Minister of the Interior François Mitterrand, who would become France's president in 1981, declared to the National Assembly that "Algeria is France. And who among us would hesitate to employ all means to preserve France?"<sup>11</sup> Algeria was also central to France's conception of itself as a post-war nation. De Gaulle had declared the Provisional Government of the French Republic in Algiers, rejecting the Vichy government, and Algeria was thus a symbol of France's moral fibre and refusal to submit to Nazism. Further, Algeria was proof of France's continued imperial power. In other words, France's nationhood and sovereignty were inextricably tied to Algeria.<sup>12</sup>

In a France that was just beginning to heal from the divisions of the Second World War, the conflict in Algeria splintered French society across new lines.

10 Jo McCormack, *Collective Memory: France and the Algerian War (1954–1962)* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2010), 8. Few of the French colonies were *départements*: Guyana, Martinique, la Réunion, and Guadeloupe did not become *départements* until 1946. New Caledonia is a *sui generis* collectivity, which means that it is neither a *département*, a region, nor a territory. Indochina (Vietnam), where there was a war for independence between 1946 and 1954, was a collection of colonies and protectorates. See République française, "Lois," *Journal officiel de la République française*, March 20, 1946, 2294, PDF; Lucas Sarafian, "Quel est le statut de la Nouvelle-Calédonie?" [What is the status of New Caledonia?], *Le journal du dimanche*, March 4, 2023, <https://www.lejdd.fr/societe/quel-est-le-statut-de-la-nouvelle-caledonie-133269>; and Larousse, s.v. "Indochine française," accessed August 18, 2024, [https://www.larousse.fr/encyclopedie/autre-region/Indochine\\_fran%c3%a7aise/124939](https://www.larousse.fr/encyclopedie/autre-region/Indochine_fran%c3%a7aise/124939).

11 Sylvie Thénault, "L'Algérie, c'était la France," in *Algérie: Des 'événements' à la guerre – idées reçues sur la guerre d'indépendance algérienne* (Paris: Le cavalier bleu éditions, 2012), 121.

12 Todd Shepard, "'Of Sovereignty': Disputed Archives, 'Wholly Modern' Archives, and the Post-Decolonization French and Algerian Republics, 1962–2012," *American Historical Review* 120, no. 3 (2015): 869–83, 880, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26577261>.

The Algerian War was France's second civil war in a decade, following the Franco-French conflict during the Nazi occupation of France, which pitted the Vichy government against de Gaulle's Free French forces and Resistance fighters against collaborators. After the 1944 purges, during which those who had collaborated with the Nazis were punished, imprisoned, exiled, or executed, France's new government, the Fourth Republic, worked quickly to heal national wounds and reunify the country. Mass amnesties and the reintegration of Vichy politicians into civil service helped paper over the unpleasant legacy of the occupation. Similarly, by declaring Vichy an illegitimate government and affirming that Free France had ensured the country's continued legal status, survival, and victory, de Gaulle skilfully elided the difficulties of the war years.

The conflict in Algeria divided French society anew. Former Resistance fighters, once united in the fight against Nazism, now fought each other: some joined the pro-French Algeria Organisation de l'armée secrète (OAS), and others, seeing their own fight for France's freedom mirrored in the Algerian independence movement, joined the war on the Algerian side. *Porteurs de valises*, French citizens who supported the Algerian independence movement, the Front de libération nationale (FLN), faced off against the French police on the mainland.<sup>13</sup> Collaborators and Resistance fighters suddenly found themselves on the same side; French society, on the mainland and in Algeria, found itself split along political, racial, and philosophical lines.<sup>14</sup>

Algerians also found themselves divided, with many fighting with the FLN for independence, while about 150,000 Algerians, known as *harkis*, fought for the French.<sup>15</sup> The conflict was not restricted to Algerian soil: fighting broke out in Paris and included a police-led massacre of pro-Algeria protesters on October 17, 1961, which left as many as 200 dead.<sup>16</sup> The official end of the war, with the signing of the Evian Accords on March 18, 1962, did not mark the end of the conflict. OAS-led attacks continued on Algerian soil, as did retaliation from FLN forces. The war's division continued after the peace accords: on

13 McCormack, *Collective Memory*, 28.

14 Henry Rouso, *Le syndrome de Vichy, (1944–1987)*. (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1987), 94.

15 Henry Rouso, "Les raisins verts de la guerre d'Algérie," in *La guerre d'Algérie (1954–1962)*, ed. Yves Michaud (Paris: Odile Jacob, 2004), 5.

16 Constant Méheut, "Macron Commemorates 1961 Paris Police Killing of Algerian Protesters," *New York Times*, October 16, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/10/16/world/europe/paris-police-algerians-macron.html>.

March 26, French forces put down an OAS-led rebellion, firing at those with whom they had fought beside just weeks prior.<sup>17</sup> Around a million *piets-noir* (French citizens born or residing in Algeria) were repatriated to the mainland, where they faced the derision of their fellow citizens. The post-war conflicts were not limited to Franco-French clashes: FLN forces repeatedly attacked the *harkis*, forcing many to flee to mainland France, where they were placed into resettlement camps and largely abandoned and ignored by the French government for whom they had fought.<sup>18</sup>

### **“Un passé qui ne passe pas”: France and the Collective Memory of the Algerian War**

France’s reluctance to acknowledge the treatment of the *harkis* signals how wartime divisions have continued to define post-colonial France, such that the memory and heritage of the Algerian War are under nearly constant public and political relitigation and renegotiation. The legacy of the Algerian War remains far more contentious than that of Vichy France. Although the French government did not recognize its role in or responsibility for the destruction of France’s Jewish community until 1995, today – with the exception of some on the far right, including former presidential candidate Eric Zemmour – the majority of French citizens disavow the actions of the Vichy government. And while France can emphasize the Resistance and the Free French forces to occlude the less-glorious aspects of the Second World War, this is not the case with the Algerian War, where the multiple social fractures and the legacies of torture and colonialism leave little to be proud of.<sup>19</sup> In addition, the memory of Vichy is lived largely through historical commemorations, while the events of the war are peripheral to the lived experiences of post-war generations.

By contrast, the Algerian War is “at the core of domestic politics.”<sup>20</sup> Over the past decade, debates around the so-called “great replacement” theory, the

17 Sylvie Thénault, “La guerre d’indépendance algérienne: Mémoires françaises” [The Algerian war of independence: French memories], *Historiens et géographes*, no. 425 (April 2014): 75–90, 85, PDF.

18 Thénault, “La guerre d’indépendance algérienne,” 80.

19 McCormack, *Collective Memory*, 16.

20 Cohen, “In Algeria, Macron Seeks to Reshape a Traumatic Relationship with France.”

migrant crisis, colonial nostalgia, and Islamophobia have made the memory of the Algerian War central to current debates. Millions of French citizens and residents have direct connections to the events in Algeria: the descendants of the *pieds-noirs*, still resentful about having had to abandon their homes in Algeria; the *harkis* and their descendants, who feel as though they belong neither to France nor to Algeria and who sued the French government for crimes against humanity in 2001;<sup>21</sup> millions of immigrants from Algeria – the largest single nationality group within France’s immigrant population – who face the rise of Islamophobia in France; and former French soldiers and members of the OAS, who are still resentful and critical of decolonization.<sup>22</sup> Henry Rousso first used the phrase “un passé qui ne passe pas” (a past that will not pass) to describe the legacy of Vichy France; Jo McCormack suggests that same description be applied to the legacy of the Algerian War.<sup>23</sup>

In fact, the fractures of the Algerian War are so lasting that they may preclude the development of a collective memory of the war. “Immigrant groups,” who have “long been denied a place in the French collective memory,” face off against *pieds-noirs*, who have tried to create a version of history that glorifies France’s colonial past.<sup>24</sup> The divisions run so deep that there is no consensus for a date to commemorate the war: Some argue for March 18, the anniversary of the signing of the Evian Accords. Others have proposed October 17, to acknowledge the Paris massacre. Those on the right and far right have placed more emphasis on December 5, a day that honours those who died for France during the Algerian War.<sup>25</sup> In his 2021 report, Benjamin Stora warned of the danger of a “communitarization of memory” as a result of deep-seated national and cultural divisions.<sup>26</sup>

21 Le Monde, “Des *harkis* déposent une plainte pour crimes contre l’humanité,” *Le Monde*, August 30, 2001, [https://www.lemonde.fr/archives/article/2001/08/30/des-harkis-deposent-une-plainte-pour-crimes-contre-l-humanite\\_218312\\_1819218.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/archives/article/2001/08/30/des-harkis-deposent-une-plainte-pour-crimes-contre-l-humanite_218312_1819218.html).

22 McCormack, *Collective Memory*, 2.

23 McCormack, *Collective Memory*, 8. See also Eric Conan and Henry Rousso, *Vichy, un passé qui ne passe pas* (Paris: Fayard, 1994).

24 Huang Yanghong, “‘Les lieux de mémoire’ and Pierre Nora’s Writing of French National History,” *Chinese Studies in History* 53, no. 2 (2020): 150–70, 153, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00094633.2020.1735845>.

25 Thénault, “La guerre d’indépendance algérienne,” 84–85.

26 Stora, *Les questions mémorielles portant sur la colonisation et la guerre d’Algérie*, 7.

## Archival Silence and Historical Control

Michel-Rolph Trouillot identifies silence as a byproduct of the historical process. “Silences,” he writes, “enter the process of historical production at four crucial moments: the moment of fact creation (the making of *sources*); the moment of fact assembly (the making of *archives*); the moment of fact retrieval (the making of *narratives*); and the moment of retrospective significance (the making of *history* in the final instance).”<sup>27</sup> Trouillot further notes that

the presences and absences embodied in sources (artifacts and bodies that turn an event into fact) or archives (facts collected, thematized, and processed as documents and monuments) are neither neutral or natural. They are created. . . . By silence, I mean an active and transitive process. . . . One engages in the practice of silencing. Mentions and silences are thus active, dialectical counterparts of which history is the synthesis.<sup>28</sup>

Archival silence is a particular kind of historical silence, which can be accidental, as a result of fire or flooding, or intentional. The most obvious kinds of archival silence involve the loss of archival materials as well as their destruction. In other cases, documents may be misplaced, filed incorrectly, or deemed unworthy of preservation. Governments and armed forces have often used archival silence as a means to erase evidence of crimes and other forms of wrongdoing: the British famously tried to destroy archives that documented state-sponsored massacres during the Mau Mau uprising in the 1950s and 1960s.<sup>29</sup> Archival silence is very frequently the product of tyrannical or dictatorial regimes that have vested interests in silencing dissent. During the war in Iraq, beginning in 2003, US forces went so far as to *produce* an archive that would justify their actions and obscure the realities of the war by deciding to “embed journalists with the military,” with the result that “independent reporting on warfare” was silenced

<sup>27</sup> Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1995), 26, PDF.

<sup>28</sup> Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*, 48.

<sup>29</sup> Shepard, “Of Sovereignty,” 869. There was also destruction of Algerian archives in the waning moments of the war, as noted later in this article. See also Shepard, 872.

(independent journalists came under attack from both the US and Iraqi sides and were frequently killed).<sup>30</sup>

Archival silence may also be logistical: Michael Moss and David Thomas argue that, while digitization has helped preserve many documents, it also silences documents that are accessible only to those who can visit repositories in person.<sup>31</sup> Dividing archives among holding entities can also lead to silencing. Different “species of archives – governmental, institutional, written, oral, crowd-sourced” – may hold different historical weights and validities, so that certain voices are privileged over others.<sup>32</sup> The places where archives are held may give more importance to certain documents than to others; for example, national archives have more prestige and historical weight than personal archives or archives held at smaller institutions.<sup>33</sup> Other archival silences stem from changes in format, as when material that was meant to be spoken or performed is transcribed as text.<sup>34</sup> Byzantine access procedures (e.g., having to file multiple forms and make appointments) can lead to a kind of passive archival silence, where documents are not consulted because gaining access is too labour intensive. Some voices, like those of children and adolescents, may also be absent from the archive. The papers of controversial and ill-regarded political figures, like Indira Gandhi, may be sealed to prevent discord and to protect the legacies of the leaders in question.<sup>35</sup>

Colonization and archival silence have always been entangled. As Michael Piggott notes, “as a silencing force, colonisation has few equals.”<sup>36</sup> In his study of archival silence and Indigenous peoples and convicts in Australia, Piggott identifies several modes of archival silence: “self-censoring and lack of access . . . exclusion via definition (indigenous ‘story-telling’ archives), privacy motivated

30 Michael Moss and David Thomas, “Filling the Gaps,” in *Archival Silences: Missing, Lost and, Uncreated Archives*, ed. Michael S. Moss and David Thomas (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2021), 226–41, 227–28, PDF.

31 Michael Moss and David Thomas, “Theorising the Silences,” in Moss and Thomas, *Archival Silences*, 10–25, 18.

32 Swapan Chakravorty, “Silenced Archives and Archived Voices: Archival Resources for a History of Post-Independence India,” in Moss and Thomas, *Archival Silences*, 168–85, 168.

33 Elizabeth Yale, “The History of Archives: The State of the Discipline,” *Book History* 18, no. 1 (2015): 332–59, 338, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43956377>.

34 Moss and Thomas, “Theorising the Silences,” 11.

35 Chakravorty, “Silenced Archives,” 168.

36 Michael Piggott, “What Are Silences? The Australian Example,” in Moss and Thomas, *Archival Silences*, 26–53, 28.

destruction . . . lack of interest and overwhelming smothering interest.”<sup>37</sup> Colonizers wiped out entire Indigenous communities and, by extension, silenced their history. More generally, “disease, frontier violence, loss of lands, welfare, missionaries, discrimination and assimilationist policies all undermined the living archive.”<sup>38</sup> As Penny van Toorn notes, “embodied and emplaced” knowledge – knowledge that “is stored in people’s minds” – has historically held little or no value for Western archivists.<sup>39</sup> At its most extreme, archival silencing in the context of colonialism can be “nothing short of industrial-scale cultural cleansing,” as when “Australia’s population census returns for an entire century” were destroyed during a fire in September 1882.<sup>40</sup> In continuing to control colonial archives, as France has with Algeria, former colonizers are able to shape the histories of the countries they once ruled: “silences are, in part, the manifestation of the actions of the powerful in denying the marginal access to archives,” and they have “a significant impact on the ability of the marginal groups to form social memory and history.”<sup>41</sup> Lia Brozgal has argued that archival silence is an extension of colonial violence, describing it as “the epistemological violence of the repression of knowledge.”<sup>42</sup>

## Macron and Algeria: Breaking Generational Silences

France has always used official and political silence to shape the collective memory of the war and to mask the more unsavoury parts of its history. The war was not referred to as such until June of 1999, when the National Assembly voted to officially recognize the conflict in Algeria as a war, rather than “law

<sup>37</sup> Piggott, 39.

<sup>38</sup> Piggott, 27–28.

<sup>39</sup> Penny van Toorn, “Indigenous Texts and Narratives,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Australian Literature*, ed. Elizabeth Webby (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 19–49, 19, PDF.

<sup>40</sup> Piggott, “What Are Silences?,” 32.

<sup>41</sup> Rodney G.S. Carter, “Of Things Said and Unsaid: Power, Archival Silences, and Power in Silence,” *Archivaria* 61 (Spring 2006): 215–33, 215, <https://archivaria.ca/index.php/archivaria/article/view/12541>.

<sup>42</sup> Lia Brozgal, “In the Absence of the Archive (Paris, October 17, 1961),” *South Central Review* 31, no. 1 (2014): 34–54, 36, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26410800>.

enforcement” or “peace-keeping operations.”<sup>43</sup> Unsurprisingly, the conflict in Algeria has often been described as “the war without a name.”<sup>44</sup> While the 1999 law may be dismissed as a formality – a government finally acknowledging and codifying the language of the general public – France’s semantic manoeuvring was a shrewd political and historical strategy. Acknowledging that the conflict in Algeria had in fact been a war meant finally recognizing Algeria’s independent status: a country cannot declare war against its own citizens.

Throughout his presidency, Macron has repeatedly acknowledged wartime events and crimes that his predecessors had carefully minimized. As noted above, he condemned colonization during his 2017 campaign. In 2018, he recognized that mathematician Maurice Audin had been murdered by French forces during the war and also recognized the widespread use of torture.<sup>45</sup> In 2021, he asked the *harkis* for forgiveness for their post-war treatment.<sup>46</sup> In January 2022, Macron apologized for the suffering of the exiled *pieds-noirs*, declaring that “the 1962 exodus is a tragic page of our national history” and that the *pieds-noirs* “were not welcomed with the affection that every French citizen deserves.”<sup>47</sup> Macron’s recognition of France’s wartime actions and crimes has been criticized by his own ministers, including former Prime Minister Jean Castex,<sup>48</sup> who complained that “we are supposed to auto-flagellate ourselves, regret colonization, and who knows what else!” as well as by members of the right and far

43 Benjamin Stora, “La guerre d’Algérie dans les mémoires françaises: Violence d’une mémoire de revanche,” *L’esprit créateur* 43, no. 1 (2003): 7–31, 27, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26288662>.

44 McCormack, *Collective Memory*, 15.

45 Stora, *Les questions mémorielles portant sur la colonisation et la guerre d’Algérie*, 2.

46 Mustapha Kessous, “Emmanuel Macron demande ‘pardon’ aux *harkis* en reconnaissant leur ‘singularité dans l’histoire de France” [Emmanuel Macron asks for the *Harkis*’ forgiveness, acknowledging their “unique status in French history”], *Le Monde*, September 21, 2021, [https://www.lemonde.fr/politique/article/2021/09/21/emmanuel-macron-demande-pardon-aux-harkis-en-reconnaissant-leur-singularite-dans-l-histoire-de-france\\_6095391\\_823448.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/politique/article/2021/09/21/emmanuel-macron-demande-pardon-aux-harkis-en-reconnaissant-leur-singularite-dans-l-histoire-de-france_6095391_823448.html).

47 Le Monde avec AFP, “Guerre d’Algérie: Emmanuel Macron fait un geste envers les *pieds-noirs* en reconnaissant deux ‘massacres’ commis à Alger et à Oran en 1962” [Algerian War: Emmanuel Macron makes a gesture towards the *pieds-noirs* by acknowledging two “massacres” in Algiers and Oran in 1962], *Le Monde*, January 26, 2022, [https://www.lemonde.fr/politique/article/2022/01/26/guerre-d-algerie-emmanuel-macron-fait-un-geste-envers-les-pieds-noirs-en-reconnaissant-deux-massacres-commis-a-alger-et-a-oran-en-1962\\_6111105\\_823448.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/politique/article/2022/01/26/guerre-d-algerie-emmanuel-macron-fait-un-geste-envers-les-pieds-noirs-en-reconnaissant-deux-massacres-commis-a-alger-et-a-oran-en-1962_6111105_823448.html).

48 Jean Castex was prime minister from July 3, 2020, to May 16, 2022.

right, including presidential candidates Eric Zemmour and Marine Le Pen.<sup>49</sup> By breaking decades-long taboos around the Algerian War, Macron has crafted an image of a progressive president, committed to historical truth and reparations and, more importantly, committed to creating a collective memory that will unite immigrants with citizens, Algerians with French, and the far right with the far left.

Over the course of late 2021 and early 2022, however, Macron has gradually amended and qualified his stance on the Algerian War and on France's role during the conflict. While he promised reparations to the *harkis*, he has made no mention of reparations for the pro-Algeria victims of the war. As one Algerian citizen declared, "the families of Jews deported during World War II got financial reparations. We expect and await the same thing so that France knows that war has a cost."<sup>50</sup> After the publication of the Stora report, Macron's official policy with regard to the Algerian War has become one of "recognition" and "truth" rather than of "repentance"<sup>51</sup> – a stance which is much closer to extremist Eric Zemmour's declaration that, if elected president, he would treat Algeria "with respect but without repentance."<sup>52</sup> On September 30, 2021, Macron criticized Algeria's "politico-military system" and accused Algeria of "mortgaging history" for its own advantage. He has even gone so far as to wonder, during a 2021 meeting with young people descended from FLN fighters, *harkis*, and OAS

49 Frédéric Bobin, "Guerre d'Algérie: le kaléidoscope mémoriel d'Emmanuel Macron" [Algerian War: Emmanuel Macron's kaleidoscope of memory], *Le Monde*, March 17, 2022, [https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2022/03/17/guerre-d-algerie-le-kaleidoscope-memoriel-d-emmanuel-macron\\_6117999\\_3212.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2022/03/17/guerre-d-algerie-le-kaleidoscope-memoriel-d-emmanuel-macron_6117999_3212.html).

50 Safia Ayache, "Mémoire franco-algérienne: À Alger, l'opinion demande une réparation à l'écart des récupérations officielles" [Franco-Algerian memory: In Algiers, public opinion asks for reparations beyond official recognition], *Le Monde*, January 21, 2021, [https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2021/01/21/memoire-franco-algerienne-a-alger-l-opinion-demande-une-reparation-a-l-ecart-des-recuperations-officielles\\_6067063\\_3212.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2021/01/21/memoire-franco-algerienne-a-alger-l-opinion-demande-une-reparation-a-l-ecart-des-recuperations-officielles_6067063_3212.html).

51 Le Monde avec AFP, "Guerre d'Algérie: Emmanuel Macron récuse toute 'repentance' et appelle à regarder le passé 'avec courage'" [Algerian War: Emmanuel Macron rejects any "repentance" and encourages looking at the past "with courage"], *Le Monde*, August 26, 2022, [https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2022/08/26/guerre-d-algerie-emmanuel-macron-recuse-toute-repentance-et-appelle-a-regarder-le-passe-avec-courage\\_6139106\\_3212.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2022/08/26/guerre-d-algerie-emmanuel-macron-recuse-toute-repentance-et-appelle-a-regarder-le-passe-avec-courage_6139106_3212.html).

52 Eric Zemmour, "Éric Zemmour: '60 ans après, je mettrai fin aux privilèges migratoires de l'Algérie'" [Eric Zemmour: "60 Years Later, I Will Put an End to Algeria's Migrant Privileges"], *Le Figaro*, March 19, 2022, <https://www.lefigaro.fr/vox/politique/eric-zemmour-60-ans-apres-je-mettrai-fin-aux-privileges-migratoires-de-l-algerie-20220319>.

fighters, whether “an Algerian nation existed before colonization.”<sup>53</sup>

## Archival Silence, Algeria, and France

Archives and archival access have been central issues in disputes over how the Algerian War should be remembered in France and Algeria, particularly as both countries tried to (re)establish their nationhood and sovereignty in the years immediately after the war. As Todd Shepard notes, archives are of vital importance to a nation’s conception of itself as such, since “through their existence and the ways in which they function, they help constitute a state insofar as their workings offer proof that it is an emanation of its people, a nation state.”<sup>54</sup> Derrida noted the relationship between archives, archival control, and power: “There is no political power without control of the archive. . . . Effective democratization can always be measured by this essential criterion: the participation in and the access to the archive, its constitution, and its interpretation.”<sup>55</sup> Similarly, according to Rodney G.S. Carter, Derrida also argues that the archive is “a place of violence” and that “only those voices that conform to the ideals of those in power are allowed into the archive.”<sup>56</sup>

Even before the signing of the Evian Accords and the official end of the conflict, control of archives was vital for the creation of an independent Algeria. France repeatedly argued that Algeria had never existed as an independent nation, even prior to the 1830 conquest, because it had always belonged to an empire: Roman, Ottoman, and French.<sup>57</sup> It is telling that the Evian Accords described Algerian sovereignty as “created” rather than “restored.”<sup>58</sup> For the FLN, access to the archives was a key strategy to cementing Algeria’s place on

53 Mustapha Kessous, “En France aussi, la guerre d’Algérie est une rente mémorielle” [In France, the memory of the Algerian War is also mortgaged], *Le Monde*, December 11, 2021, [https://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2021/12/11/en-france-aussi-la-guerre-d-algerie-est-une-rente-memorielle\\_6105636\\_3232.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2021/12/11/en-france-aussi-la-guerre-d-algerie-est-une-rente-memorielle_6105636_3232.html).

54 Shepard, “Of Sovereignty,” 870.

55 Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 4, PDF.

56 Carter, “Of Things Said and Unsaid,” 219.

57 Shepard, “Of Sovereignty,” 877.

58 Shepard, 878.

the world stage and securing its legitimacy as an independent country.<sup>59</sup> In the immediate aftermath of the Evian Accords, pro-French Algeria forces moved quickly to destroy evidence of wrongdoing: the head of the regional archives in Algeria burned several crates of documents, and the OAS bombed the regional archives building and the library of the University of Algiers. Further, General Louis Le Puloch, chief of staff of the French army, ordered the destruction of “certain documents that . . . if one-sidedly exploited, could be deleterious to the interests of France.”<sup>60</sup>

The June 1999 law that recognized the Algerian conflict as a war reignited arguments about the *contentieux* (dispute) over ownership of archives created in and pertaining to Algeria. While the 1983 *Vienna Convention on Succession of States in Respect of State Property, Archives and Debts*, which France has not signed, asserts that archives belong to the territory in which they were created, France has claimed that archives created in Algeria in fact belong to France, since Algeria was France at the time of their creation.<sup>61</sup> France’s refusal to return the archives and to sign the Vienna Convention is a rejection of the concept of provenance in place, which, according to J.J. Ghaddar, “posits that archives removed by colonizers and through colonial violences from a place should be returned to that place.”<sup>62</sup> The *contentieux* is likely a result of Algeria’s status as a former département of France; archives produced in other parts of the French colonial empire, like French West Africa (AOF), never went back to France, nor were they requested.<sup>63</sup> Before Macron’s announcements about easing access to archives pertaining to the Algerian War, France had maintained a strict level of archival silence. In 1981, as France tried to rebuild ties with Algeria, then-French President Valéry Giscard d’Estaing emphasized that the Algerian archives

<sup>59</sup> Shepard, 880–81.

<sup>60</sup> Shepard, 872. French translated by Todd Shepard.

<sup>61</sup> Shepard, 873. As J.J. Ghaddar notes, the Vienna Convention has never come into force because of a lack of signatures.

<sup>62</sup> J.J. Ghaddar, “Provenance in Place: Crafting the Vienna Convention for Global Decolonization and Archival Repatriation,” in *Disputed Archival Heritage*, ed. James Lowry (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2023), 49–86, 51, PDF. Ghaddar argues that the Vienna Convention was created by “Third World actors . . . to compel the repatriation of archives and records from western imperial states” Ghaddar, 50.

<sup>63</sup> Jennifer Sessions, “A Delocalized Colonial Archive: Finding Algeria in French Court Records,” *Quaderni Storici* 56, no. 2 (2021): 407–38, 412, PDF.

belonged to France and refused to return them.<sup>64</sup> As statutes of limitation on declassification began to expire, France quickly moved to reclassify the archives as *secret défense* – that is, tied to the protection and national security interests of France.

Macron's public commitment to opening the archives and lifting archival silence has been a cornerstone of his progressive politics with regard to Algeria. Archival access was one of Benjamin Stora's key recommendations and the one most frequently referenced in headlines about the report. Each of Macron's announcements about the Algerian War archives has come with a promise to increase ease of access by doing away with much of the red tape and many of the administrative procedures that have been hallmarks of French bureaucracy. After the March 2021 announcement, authorities were supposed to be able to declassify entire boxes of archives, rather than declassifying documents one at a time.<sup>65</sup> In opening the archives, Macron has tried to create a collective memory that can encompass all of the groups who have a stake in the legacy and history of the war. During the September 2021 meeting with youth descended from Algerian War veterans, Macron said, "I was struck, these last few years, to see how much the memories of the Algerian War were the matrix of a large part of our national traumas. Some people's suffering has been silenced, and those memories are considered irreconcilable. I believe the opposite."<sup>66</sup>

While Macron's walking back of his pro-Algeria stance seems to be in direct contradiction to his decision to open the archives, the two actually work in tandem to support Macron's political career. His recognition of the *harkis* and his concurrent opening of the archives are efforts to court voters from both the right and the left: the *harkis* and their descendants, who number around 500,000; the *piets-noirs* and their descendants, who tend to vote conservatively; and those in favour of opening the archives, who tend to vote more liberally. When Macron asked for the *harkis*'s forgiveness in the run-up to the 2022 election, Marine Le Pen, Macron's rival in the final rounds of the 2017 and 2022 presidential

64 Shepard, "Of Sovereignty," 875.

65 Méheut, "France Eases Access, a Little, to Its Secrets."

66 Mustapha Kessous, "Le dialogue inédit entre Emmanuel Macron et les 'petits-enfants' de la guerre d'Algérie" [The unprecedented dialogue between Emmanuel Macron and the "grandchildren" of the Algerian War], *Le Monde*, October 2, 2021, [https://www.lemonde.fr/politique/article/2021/10/02/vous-etes-une-projection-de-la-france-emmanuel-macron-s-adresse-aux-petits-enfants-de-la-guerre-d-algerie\\_6096830\\_823448.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/politique/article/2021/10/02/vous-etes-une-projection-de-la-france-emmanuel-macron-s-adresse-aux-petits-enfants-de-la-guerre-d-algerie_6096830_823448.html).

elections, accused Macron of “electoral generosity,” and Valérie Boyer, a senator from the right-leaning party Les Républicains, commented, “It is unfortunate that one had to wait for him to be a presidential candidate to hear propositions that had been rejected over the past few years when they had come from the right.”<sup>67</sup> Since Macron’s party lost its absolute majority in the National Assembly in the June 2022 elections, courting members of the right has become increasingly important to its ability to pass legislation. But Macron has also courted the left by making overtures to dual citizens of Algeria and France, claiming that France is “lucky to have them” and that “their identity is a positive addition to French citizenry.”<sup>68</sup> Maintaining a positive relationship with Algeria is especially vital for Macron’s political survival, given the current economic crisis in France, since Algeria is the most important African market for French-exported goods.<sup>69</sup>

The announcements about the opening and declassification of the Algerian War archives have been framed to present these decisions as coming from Macron himself. The Elysée press release for the March 2021 declassification announcement firmly centred Macron, stating that “the President of the Republic has heard the demands of the academic community. . . . The Head of State has thus taken the decision to allow archives to immediately begin declassifying documents designated as secrets related to national defence.” The press release also claimed, “It is the role of the State to articulate in a balanced fashion freedom of access to archives and the just protection of the highest interests of the Nation through secrecy related to national defence.”<sup>70</sup> The December 2021 announcement about

67 Jérémie Lamothe, “‘Arrière-pensée électorale,’ mots justes’ . . . Les réactions aux annonces d’Emmanuel Macron sur les *harkis*” [“Electoral ulterior motives,” “the right thing to say” . . . Reactions to Emmanuel Macron’s announcements on the *Harkis*], *Le Monde*, September 20, 2021, [https://www.lemonde.fr/politique/article/2021/09/20/arriere-pensee-electorale-mots-justes-les-reactions-aux-annonces-d-emmanuel-macron-sur-les-harkis\\_6095348\\_823448.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/politique/article/2021/09/20/arriere-pensee-electorale-mots-justes-les-reactions-aux-annonces-d-emmanuel-macron-sur-les-harkis_6095348_823448.html).

68 Kessous, “En France aussi, la guerre d’Algérie est une rente mémorielle.”

69 Didier Monciaud, “Le ‘rapport Stora’: Un premier débat sur les enjeux mémoriels,” *Cahiers d’histoire. Revue d’histoire critique*, no. 149 (July 1, 2021): 137–61, <https://doi.org/10.4000/chrhc.16509>.

70 Elysée, “Le Président a entendu les demandes de la communauté universitaire pour que soit facilité l’accès aux archives classifiées de plus de cinquante ans.” [The president has heard the demands of the university community to facilitate access to archives classified for more than fifty years], Elysée, March 9, 2021, <https://www.elysee.fr/emmanuel-macron/2021/03/09/le-president-a-entendu-les-demandes-de-la-communaute-universitaire-pour-que-soit-facilite-lacces-aux-archives-classifiees-de-plus-de-cinquante-ans>. It is unclear where Macron derives this authority over the archives; there is nothing in the 2008 law on archives that ascribes such power to the president, nor is there anything in the Constitution that grants the president such latitude over the archives.

the opening of the archives came from an *arrêté* – a ministerial order or decree – so not directly from Macron but from his administration.<sup>71</sup>

## **Instruction générale interministérielle (IGI) n° 1300 and the Illusion of Archival Access**

As a result of several legislative and logistical factors, the opening of the Algerian War archives is much less progressive than it would initially seem. Indeed, Macron's supposedly liberal 2021 announcements were met with skepticism by prominent historians. In response to the March 2021 announcement, historian Raphaëlle Branche, whose doctoral dissertation was one of the first to investigate the use of torture during the war, said on public radio, "This [decision] should not change very many things, it's a minimal decision, to decide to stamp cartons rather than individual sheets of paper; what is really a problem for us is the very fact of stamping something 'secret': the value of the secret has long since disappeared."<sup>72</sup> On a broader level, the right to free access to archives has been enshrined in French law since 1789 and 1794, with the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the law of 7 messidor II (June 25, 1794), the latter of which declared that "any citizen will be able to ask for, in any depository, at given dates and times, access to all documents contained within."<sup>73</sup> In addition, France has very clear laws on how long classification may last: per the 2008 law on archives, documents relating to commercial and industrial secrets are sealed for 25 years and documents with personal information are typically sealed for 50 years.<sup>74</sup> Since the Algerian War ended in 1962, many of these archives would have been

71 République française, "Arrêté du 22 décembre 2021 portant ouverture d'archives relatives à la guerre d'Algérie."

72 Radio France, "Déclassification des archives de la guerre d'Algérie: 'Ça ne devrait pas changer grand chose'" [Declassification of Algerian War archives: "This shouldn't really change things"], Radio France, March 10, 2021, <https://www.radiofrance.fr/franceinter/podcasts/l-invite-de-6h20/declassification-des-archives-de-la-guerre-d-algerie-ca-ne-devrait-pas-changer-grand-chose-7969832>.

73 Gouvernement français, "Par la loi du 7 messidor, an II, libre accès des Archives nationales aux citoyens" [Law of 7 messidor, year II, free access to National Archives for citizens], Gouvernement français, accessed June 20, 2017, <https://www.gouvernement.fr/partage/9253-par-la-loi-du-7-messidor-an-ii-centralisation-des-archives-de-la-nation-et-leur-libre-acces-aux>.

74 Anne Fauquembergue, "Accès aux archives 'secret-défense' de plus de cinquante ans: 'Toute la machine est enrayée,'" Radio France, February 12, 2021, <https://www.radiofrance.fr/franceculture/acces-aux-archives-secret-defense-de-plus-de-cinquante-ans-toute-la-machine-est-enrayee-1713287>.

accessible by 2012 at the latest – long before Macron made any announcements about archives, Algerian or otherwise. The 2008 law on archives significantly reduced access to documents by changing the legal definition of public archives. Per the 2008 law, public archives are only those produced in the context of public service, not those produced by public companies; the status of parliamentary archives is decided on a case-by-case basis.<sup>75</sup> This ontological shift has enabled the government to cherry-pick for release specific archival material: for example, archives pertaining only to the *disparus* of the war and not those pertaining to torture. The 2018 announcement about the opening of the *disparus* archives came with a caveat: “A general dispensation, whose details will be determined by governmental decrees, after identifying available sources, will make free and accessible all state archives on this matter.”<sup>76</sup>

More problematic is the contradiction between the 2008 law and IGI 1300 (interministerial general ordinance 1300) on archival access. According to the 2008 law, any secret documents must be made available to the public 50 years after the date of their creation, but the 2011 instruction requires that any files marked *secret défense* (top secret, or related to national security) must first be formally declassified.<sup>77</sup> IGI 1300 differs from previous ordinances by explicitly addressing access to and transmission of *secret-défense* documents. Before 2011, all *secret-défense* documents were transferred to the Archives nationales after the requisite 50 years had elapsed. Although the declassified *secret-défense* documents may not have been available through the Archives nationales website, any citizen was able to request and view them in person. IGI 1300 is based on an obscure article in the *Code pénal* (Criminal Code), rather than in the *Code du patrimoine* (Heritage Code), which governs all matters of archives and archival access. Because it leans on the *Code pénal*, IGI 1300 enables the government to make decisions regarding access to any document, even those for which the statute of limitations has expired.<sup>78</sup>

75 Marie Cornu, “Faut-il réviser le droit des archives?” [Does the right to archival access need to be revised?], *Pouvoirs* 153, no. 2 (2015): 49–62, 57, <https://doi.org/10.3917/pouv.153.0049>.

76 Gilles Manceron and Fabrice Riceputi, “L’Accès aux archives de la guerre d’Algérie: Macron contre Castex?” [Access to the Algerian War archives: Macron versus Castex?], *Mediapart*, November 29, 2020, <https://blogs.mediapart.fr/1000autres/blog/291120/laces-aux-archives-de-la-guerre-dalgerie-macron-contre-castex>.

77 Méheut, “France Eases Access, a Little, to Its Secrets.”

78 Chloé Ripert, “Guerre d’Algérie, occupation . . . Les historiens bataillent contre l’extension du ‘secret-défense’” [Algerian War, occupation . . . Historians fight against the extension of “secret-defence”], *Ouest-France*, February

The sudden application of IGI 1300 seems to be linked to the Algerian War archives. Lawyer Noé Wagener has argued that the 2011 instruction came about as the French government realized that the 50-year classification period for documents relating to the war was set to expire.<sup>79</sup> In a January 2021 case that pitted the collective *Accès aux archives publiques* (Access to Public Archives) against the state, the magistrate explicitly stated that the procedure “seemed to have been invented . . . in 2010, when the government realized that the Algerian War archives were going to become public domain.”<sup>80</sup> Initially, only the National Archives followed IGI 1300. In 2020, when a new version of the ordinance was published, the General Secretariat for Defence and National Security insisted that this version be followed for its own archives, many of which relate to the most contentious aspects of the Algerian War, including torture and the October 1961 massacre. As a result, thousands of documents were resealed. In many cases, historians lost access to documents that had been part of the historical record since the 1990s. Fabrice Riceputi told the *New York Times* that a secret document about the use of torture during the war, which he had been able to consult freely in 2019 and which had been cited on multiple occasions, had been reclassified. Similarly, Raphaëlle Branche reported that lack of access to documents had forced many of her students to change their dissertation topics.<sup>81</sup>

The requirement to officially declassify documents is, as Wagener has argued, an “intellectual construction . . . which came out of nowhere at the beginning of the 2010s, without any legislative input, but which has managed to impose itself . . . among authorities like the Ministry of Culture or the Commission on Document Access as something so obvious as to not warrant any discussion.”<sup>82</sup> The Stora report openly criticized the “abusive overuse” of the practice of labelling thousands of documents *secret défense*, arguing that the consequence was “an absurd complexification and an unprecedented restriction of access

4, 2021, <https://www.ouest-france.fr/culture/histoire/guerre-d-algerie-occupation-les-historiens-bataillent-contre-l-extension-du-secret-defense-7142499>.

79 L’histoire, “Archives: le coup de force de l’été” [Archives: This summer’s power struggle], *L’histoire*, September 10, 2021, <https://www.lhistoire.fr/archives-le-coup-de-force-de-l%E2%80%99%C3%A9t%C3%A9>.

80 Jérôme Hourdeaux, “Loi terrorisme et renseignement: une ‘nuit noire pour les archives’” [Terrorist laws and spying: A “dark night for archives”], *Mediapart*, July 1, 2021, <https://www.mediapart.fr/journal/france/010721/loi-terrorisme-et-renseignement-une-nuit-noire-pour-les-archives>.

81 Méheut, “France Eases Access, a Little, to Its Secrets.”

82 L’histoire, “Archives: le coup de force de l’été.”

to public archives covering the period of 1940–1970.”<sup>83</sup> The blanket application of the secret-défense label has led to situations that border on the absurd: Pétain’s menus during the Second World War and the French army’s orders of school supplies have both been labelled “top secret” and made inaccessible to the public.<sup>84</sup>

As a result of IGI 1300, several miles of documents have had to be examined, declassified, and stamped. The declassification procedure has led to an unintended form of archival destruction and silence, since the stamp and ink can permanently damage documents, making them unreadable.<sup>85</sup> The enormous amount of time required to declassify documents also means that archivists cannot organize and describe the contents of their archives, further hindering historical production.<sup>86</sup> And while Macron promised that documents would be easily accessible for family members, Kafkaesque rules have made this access almost impossible. Families have been denied access to documents because the people in question were minors at the time of the events or because others mentioned in the documents were minors, even though the events took place more than 60 years ago.<sup>87</sup> It is important to note that the rule about documents involving minors has not been applied to Second World War archives.<sup>88</sup> Although Prime Minister Jean Castex rejected archivists’ June 2020 demands for the repeal of sections of IGI 1300, the French Conseil d’Etat (State Council) relented in

83 Stora, *Les questions mémorielles portant sur la colonisation et la guerre d’Algérie*, 68–69.

84 Ripert, “Guerre d’Algérie, occupation.”

85 Marc-Olivier Baruch, Jean-Marc Berlière, Emmanuel Blanchard, Raphaëlle Branche, Pierre Journoud, Julie Le Gac, Chantal Metzger, Denis Peschanski, Henry Rouso, Anne Simonin, Fabrice Virgili, and Olivier Wieviorka, “Nous dénonçons une restriction sans précédent de l’accès aux archives contemporaines de la nation” [We denounce an unprecedented restriction of access to the nation’s contemporary archives], *Le Monde*, February 13, 2020, [https://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2020/02/13/nous-dennoncons-une-restriction-sans-precedent-de-l-acces-aux-archives-contemporaines-de-la-nation\\_6029398\\_3232.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2020/02/13/nous-dennoncons-une-restriction-sans-precedent-de-l-acces-aux-archives-contemporaines-de-la-nation_6029398_3232.html).

86 Fauquembergue, “Accès aux archives ‘secret-défense’ de plus de cinquante ans.”

87 As of August 2023, the prohibition about documents concerning minors has been lifted, but files that contain information about “the sexual lives of individuals” or “easily identifiable people involved in intelligence work” remain classified. See *Le Monde* avec AFP, “Guerre d’Algérie: la France assouplit plus encore l’accès à ses archives” [Algerian War: France gives even more access to its archives], *Le Monde*, August 27, 2023, [https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2023/08/27/guerre-d-algerie-la-france-assouplit-encore-l-acces-a-ses-archives\\_6186716\\_3212.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2023/08/27/guerre-d-algerie-la-france-assouplit-encore-l-acces-a-ses-archives_6186716_3212.html).

88 André, “L’accès aux documents liés à la guerre d’Algérie est toujours aussi difficile.”

July 2021, describing Castex's decision as "an abuse of power."<sup>89</sup> However, this declaration also came with fine print that continued to put archival access in the hands of the government: "Draft legislation for the reform of access to archives about national security is under discussion in Parliament."<sup>90</sup>

This complicated legal web has given the government wide latitude and control over France and Algeria's collective memory. The relationship between Algeria and France and official narratives around the war continue to shape how Algeria is perceived on the world stage. Lahouari Addi, emeritus professor at Sciences Po Lyon, notes that many foreign governments understand Algeria through France – that is, based on how France relates to Algeria and Algerian immigrants, how France presents Algeria in its collective memory.<sup>91</sup> Furthermore, France also shapes how Algeria sees and understands itself: "The great mass of archival sources now opening up in France necessarily reflect the French official mind."<sup>92</sup> Pierre Mansat, president of the Josette and Maurice Audin Association, succinctly commented that French archival policy "makes it impossible to write the history of our country [France]. It's as if the state made itself a research and dissertation supervisor, deciding what can be written or said."<sup>93</sup> In June 2021, mere months after Macron's announcement about declassification, the French Senate voted in favour of a law that would allow secret-défense documents to be released at the discretion of the holding entity once it had determined that the documents had "lost operational value," a vague turn of phrase that gives wide latitude to those deciding when documents are declassified.<sup>94</sup> This is particu-

89 Conseil d'Etat, "Base de jurisprudence, décision n° 444865," Conseil d'Etat, July 2, 2021, <https://www.conseil-etat.fr/fr/arianeweb/CE/decision/2021-07-02/444865>.

90 Conseil d'Etat, "L'accès aux archives 'secret-défense' doit être possible sans procédure préalable une fois expirés les délais légaux de non-communication" [Access to "top secret" archives must be possible without prior procedure once legal statutes of limitations have expired], Conseil d'Etat, July 2, 2021, <https://www.conseil-etat.fr/actualites/l-acces-aux-archives-secret-defense-doit-etre-possible-sans-procedure-prealable-une-fois-expires-les-delais-legaux-de-non-communication>.

91 Lahouari Addi, "Sur l'Algérie, Emmanuel Macron a dit publiquement ce que ses prédécesseurs disaient en privé" [On Algeria, Emmanuel Macron says publicly what his predecessors said in private], *Le Monde*, October 9, 2021, [https://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2021/10/09/sur-l-algerie-emmanuel-macron-a-dit-publiquement-ce-que-ses-predecesseurs-disaient-en-privé\\_6097715\\_3232.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2021/10/09/sur-l-algerie-emmanuel-macron-a-dit-publiquement-ce-que-ses-predecesseurs-disaient-en-privé_6097715_3232.html).

92 Neil MacMaster, "The Torture Controversy (1998–2002): Towards a 'New History' of the Algerian War?" *Modern & Contemporary France* 10, no. 4 (2002): 449–59, 457, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0963948022000029538>.

93 Chloé Ripert, "Guerre d'Algérie, occupation . . . Les historiens bataillent contre l'extension du 'secret-défense'"

94 Hourdeaux, "Loi terrorisme et renseignement."

larly problematic for archives held by institutions like the Ministry of Defence or the Paris police, who may prioritize protecting their public reputations over allowing citizens access to their own history.<sup>95</sup>

In addition, many of the proposals in Benjamin Stora's 2021 report only reify France's control of the archives and intensify archival silence. He notes that France has returned many archives to Algeria, but only those created prior to 1830 – before the French conquest of Algeria. The report also proposes that France extend visas to 10 doctoral students enrolled in Algerian universities so that they can carry out research in French archives.<sup>96</sup> France would thus be able to choose which Algerian historians have access to sensitive archival information. While Stora emphasizes that France must do away with declassification procedures, no concrete changes have occurred and, as historian Marc André wrote in a column in *Le Monde* in November 2022, only “a seasoned historian would be able to navigate the maze [of archival access procedures].”<sup>97</sup> Sylvie Thénault, one of the leading French historians of the Algerian War, has criticized Stora's proposal for a joint commission of Algerian and French historians, arguing that it oversimplifies the reality of historical production. Stora's proposal implies that there are only two conflicting bodies of collective memory: Algeria on one side and France on the other. The reality, as outlined above, is far more complicated. Stora's proposal makes no mention of dual citizens, and it ignores conflicts and differences of opinions among historians of the same country. “Sorting researchers and their work by nationality is nonsense,” Thénault writes. “It is an outdated and dangerous idea, because believing that nationality makes the historian is to imagine that he cannot produce anything other than a national narrative that would directly rebut that of historians from other countries.” She notes that “it is also outdated and dangerous because of the stated goal: a narrative that would serve as a ‘reconciliation’ of states and their leaders.”<sup>98</sup>

<sup>95</sup> André, “L'accès aux documents liés à la guerre d'Algérie est toujours aussi difficile.”

<sup>96</sup> Stora, *Les questions mémorielles portant sur la colonisation et la guerre d'Algérie*, 64, 68.

<sup>97</sup> André, “L'accès aux documents liés à la guerre d'Algérie est toujours aussi difficile.”

<sup>98</sup> Sylvie Thénault, “France-Algérie: ‘Les débats historiques ne se plient pas aux appartenances nationales’” [France-Algeria: “Historical debates do not conform to nationalities”], *Le Monde*, October 17, 2022, [https://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2022/10/17/france-algerie-les-debats-historiques-ne-se-plient-pas-aux-appartenances-nationales\\_6146097\\_3232.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2022/10/17/france-algerie-les-debats-historiques-ne-se-plient-pas-aux-appartenances-nationales_6146097_3232.html).

## Toward an Anarchive of the Algerian War: Countering Archival Silence

The disputes over the Algerian War archives are unlikely to be resolved in the near future, if ever. Tensions between France and Algeria are very high, and events like the Bataclan massacre in November 2015 and the murder of school-teacher Samuel Paty in October 2020 have led to an increase in Islamophobia. It is also unclear how much archival access can do to facilitate healing of the Algerian War's enduring wounds and to unite a country that grows more polarized with every election cycle. Jo McCormack notes that it is not "evident that work published by historians has yet been able to play a role of adjudicating . . . in the polemical 'memory battles' . . . that if anything seem to have worsened in recent years. . . . Advances in historiography do not seem either to have provided stronger 'social frames of memory' for family memory."<sup>99</sup>

Since the institutions managing archives are unlikely to change their practices, what are the possibilities for addressing archival silences? Alternative archives and alternative modes of archiving are likely the best practices for constructing a new history of the war and crafting a collective memory that is more inclusive. Drawing on Genevieve Carpio and Abigail De Kosnik, Moss and Thomas discuss "rebel and rogue archives." First, they define rebel archives as "community-based ones that collect material that normally falls outside the purview of conventional archives and which do not operate from brick and mortar buildings but in other, more informal settings"; similarly, "rogue archives operate outside established memory institutions. Their essential features are that they are digital and that they reject the selective traditions of conventional archives and attempt to be non-selective and universal."<sup>100</sup> At the core of the rebel archive are "novels, songs, photo albums, popular media, . . . and maps."<sup>101</sup> De Kosnik has coined the term *rogue archive* to refer to a new mode of archiving that is based entirely online. She argues that until the rise of the Internet, public collective memory had largely been shaped by the "domain of the state with its

<sup>99</sup> McCormack, *Collective Memory*, 33.

<sup>100</sup> Moss and Thomas, "Filling the Gaps," 231.

<sup>101</sup> Moss and Thomas, 232.

museums and archives.”<sup>102</sup> According to Moss and Thomas, De Kosnik identifies three categories of rogue archives: “universal archives . . . that try and collect everything, community archives and alternative digital archives that collect defined, non-mainstream genres of cultural material.”<sup>103</sup> Rogue archives reject histories that have been curated and crafted by authorities, whether the state or a small group of archivists.<sup>104</sup> The community archive – “a non-traditional archival collection specifically tied to a particular group” – is perhaps the most well-known manifestation of rogue archives and stands in opposition to existing power structures, particularly because it often captures the voices and memory of “marginalised and undervoiced segments of the population.”<sup>105</sup>

Lia Brozgal has traced the development of an *anarchive*, which she defines in her analysis of the October 1961 Paris police massacre as a “*rogue* collection of cultural texts.”<sup>106</sup> Derrida, who coined the term in *Archive Fever*, describes the anarchive as being associated with the death drive – as that which challenges the authority of the archive. He writes of “the violence of forgetting . . . the anarchive . . . the possibility of putting to death the very thing, whatever its name, which *carries the law in its tradition*: the archon of the archive . . . the subjectile, the substrate, and the subject of the law.”<sup>107</sup> For Brozgal’s purposes, “the anarchive is not located in any single text but rather designates a set of works that evince an archival function . . . produce an epistemological system in oppositional relationship to an official archive.”<sup>108</sup> It is telling that the media Brozgal identifies as parts of an anarchive – “novels, short stories, poetry, theatre, song, *bande dessinée* . . . fiction and documentary feature films, photographs, posters . . . performance”<sup>109</sup> – are those that the traditional archive has not valued and has often silenced. In fact, the anarchive is often the result of “a long period of

<sup>102</sup> Moss and Thomas, 233.

<sup>103</sup> Moss and Thomas, 233.

<sup>104</sup> Moss and Thomas, 233.

<sup>105</sup> Jeannette A. Bastian and Andrew Flinn, introduction to *Community Archives, Community Spaces: Heritage, Memory and Identity*, ed. Jeannette A. Bastian and Andrew Flinn (London: Facet Publishing, 2020), xx, PDF.

<sup>106</sup> Lia Nicole Brozgal, *Absent the Archive: Cultural Traces of a Massacre in Paris, 17 October 1961* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2020), 5 (emphasis added).

<sup>107</sup> Derrida, *Archive Fever*, 79.

<sup>108</sup> Brozgal, “In the Absence of the Archive,” 50.

<sup>109</sup> Brozgal, *Absent the Archive*, 31.

archival inaccessibility that produced a rogue form of historiography during a time of censure.”<sup>110</sup>

The past 20 years has seen the creation and concomitant recognition of an anarchic archive of the Algerian War. On September 15, 2018, a collective led by Fabrice Riceputi launched a website called [1000autres.org](http://1000autres.org) (1000others), which lists the names of disparus using documents Riceputi found in government archives. As a result of IGI 1300, many of those documents are no longer accessible. However, more than 300 families have shared testimony and documents with 1000autres, allowing for the development of an archive that centres the experiences of the formerly colonized and places the personal over the political.<sup>111</sup> Books like Alice Zeniter’s best-selling *L’Art de perdre*,<sup>112</sup> whose protagonist retraces the story of her grandfather, a *harki*, have moved lesser-known episodes of the war into the centre of the cultural conversation. The book won the Goncourt des Lycéens, the most prestigious youth literary prize in France. Works like films, novels, and music may have more power to shape collective memory than those produced in academia. While historians and archivists shape public opinion by sharing their research through mainstream media, cultural texts have a much broader and more immediate reach. Content that, as De Kosnik writes, “has never been, and would likely never be, contained in a traditional memory institution” places historical production in the hands of media users rather than in the hands of the government.<sup>113</sup>

The anarchic archive of the Algerian War would also increase historical access for those who do not speak French or do not have the resources to travel to or access archives. The emphasis that the Algerian government has placed on repatriating French colonial archives has given an outsized importance to documents that are not in Arabic in a country where only about a quarter of citizens speak or read French.<sup>114</sup> A world in which archives and archiving would “signify common-

<sup>110</sup> Brozgal, 313–14.

<sup>111</sup> Méheut, “France Eases Access, a Little, to Its Secrets.”

<sup>112</sup> See Alice Zeniter, *L’Art de perdre* (Paris: Flammarion, 2017).

<sup>113</sup> Abigail De Kosnik, *Rogue Archives: Digital Cultural Memory and Media Fandom* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2016), 2, 4, digital file.

<sup>114</sup> 20 Minutes avec agence, “Algérie: Le pays compte 11 millions de francophones” [Algeria: The country with 11 million French speakers], 20 Minutes, March 18, 2015, <https://www.20minutes.fr/societe/1565807-20150318-algerie-pays-compte-11-millions-francophones>.

ness, so that instead of locked rooms, the word ‘archives’ connotes websites that operate as information commons, and instead of the concealed workings of a rarified circle of experts, ‘archiving’ refers to acts of database design and maintenance that ‘anyone can do,’” would allow for a more expansive history, one that empowers those who have been silenced.<sup>115</sup>

Brozgal believes that “the anarchival cannot continue to exist as such once the gap it pointed up has been officially filled,” but has suggested that an “anarchival 2.0’ . . . will reconfigure itself to include works produced in the presence of the archive that nonetheless recognize the archive’s inherent incompleteness and continue to poke holes in totalizing notions of archival plenitude.”<sup>116</sup> In other words, when (or if?) the Algerian War archives become accessible, the anarchival as it currently stands will become obsolete. Other anarchivals – what Brozgal calls the “anarchival 2.0” – will take its place, shaping themselves in the silences that Trouillot identifies as an inevitable part of the historical process. This anarchival 2.0 will respond to a different set of silences than the first, continuing to challenge – and perhaps complete – the narratives offered by official archives. In France, however, where bureaucracy and political manoeuvring have widened that original gap, the current anarchival is more vital than ever.

---

**BIOGRAPHY** Maia S. Hirschler is a graduate student at Pratt Institute pursuing a dual master’s degree in library and information science and the history of art and design. Her research interests include archival silence, collective memory, material culture, and imagining new kinds of archives that centre knowledge and experiences beyond the authority of official archives. Her current research explores the representation of trauma in comics by women.

<sup>115</sup> De Kosnik, *Rogue Archives*, 3.

<sup>116</sup> Brozgal, *Absent the Archive*, 314.