



ABDELKADER STATUE

Amboise, France

47.413572555751756, 0.9827804704938478



Image by DhiaEddineBen10 via Wikimedia Commons CC BY-SA 4.0

Executive Summary

Inspired by historian Benjamin Stora's recommendations on French-Algerian reconciliation regarding their tumultuous shared colonial history, the Amboise town council, backed by the Elysée Palace, commissioned a sculpture to commemorate Emir Abdelkader, an anti-colonial fighter who was imprisoned in the city during the nineteenth century. He later moved to Syria, where he was awarded France's highest medal, the Legion of Honour, for his efforts in protecting Christian minorities from sectarian violence. The sculpture was vandalised the night before the scheduled inauguration on February 5 2022. It is worth noting that this took place amidst a highly charged presidential campaigning season, with far-right, xenophobic and Islamophobic rhetoric rampant among many right-wing candidates. This case study demonstrates the interaction of domestic French and international politics, with moves towards official French acknowledgement of France's colonial abuses at once improving relations between France and Algeria whilst provoking political criticism at home, particularly from right-wing politicians.

Introduction

In 2020, French President Emmanuel Macron commissioned the historian Benjamin Stora to find ways to heal painful memories of the Algerian War of Independence and of French colonial rule in Algeria.¹ Stora produced his final report, with 22 recommendations, on January 20 2021.² His recommendations included the creation of a 'Memory and Truth' commission to promote joint Franco-Algerian memorial initiatives, composed of different people engaged in Franco-Algerian dialogue; investigating the possibility of moving Harkis (Algerians who fought as auxiliaries for the French during the War of Independence) and their children between France and Algeria, and the creation of a committee to institute a freely accessible historical archive shared by the two countries. Another recommendation was the construction of a structure in effigy of the Emir Abdelkader, an Algerian military leader and Islamic scholar who led a rebellion against French colonial rule in 1830 and was then imprisoned in the French town of Amboise between 1848 and 1852.³ The sculpture was designed by the French artist Michel Audiard and was inaugurated on the 60th anniversary of Algerian independence on February 5 2022, in Amboise, ten days after it had been placed there.⁴

However, just hours before the inauguration, the sculpture was vandalised. The attack took place during the 2022 presidential campaign, in which some of the leading right-wing contenders criticised Islam, immigration and repentance for France's colonial past. Though no one claimed responsibility for the attack, the perception among French and Algerian authorities, as well as attendees of the sculpture's inauguration on February 5, was that it was motivated by cultural intolerance and ignorance of France's colonial history. Despite the attack, the inauguration of the sculpture served to improve diplomatic relations between France and Algeria, which had previously deteriorated in October 2021 due to remarks made by the French president, Emmanuel Macron, about Algeria. Therefore, This case study illustrates the need for authorities in former colonial powers to balance repentance to improve relations with its former colonies by avoiding the alienation of substantial portions of the domestic voter base.

Background

Colonial Algeria, 1830-1962

Algeria was under French colonial rule for 132 years, from 1830 until 1962, when Algeria won the War of Independence from France. A leading figure of the Algerian resistance against French colonial rule in the nineteenth century was the Emir Abdelkader, who was elected as Amir-al-Mu'minin, or supreme Islamic leader, of the western tribes of Algeria in 1832 and led many Algerians in resisting the French occupying forces until his eventual surrender in 1847 to the French Governor-General of Algeria. Following his surrender, Abdelkader was

¹ BBC News, "Emir Abdelkader: French sculpture of Algerian hero vandalised", *BBC News*, February 5, 2022.

² Le Monde, "France-Algérie: les 22 recommandations du rapport Stora", *Le Monde*, January 20, 2021.

³ Ibid; Al Jazeera, "Sculpture of Algerian hero vandalised in France", *Al Jazeera*, February 5, 2022.

⁴ Le Figaro, "À Amboise, la sculpture en hommage au héros algérien Abdelkader vandalisée avant son inauguration", *Le Figaro*, February 5, 2022.

imprisoned in the French town of Amboise until his release in October 1852. In 1855, he moved to Damascus, Syria, where he lived until his death in 1883. In Damascus, he became friendly with French and British intellectuals, such as Jane Digby and Richard and Isabel Burton. During the 1860s, he also saved thousands of Christians from a campaign launched against them by the Druze, another religious group in Syria, winning him admirers in France as well as in Algeria.⁵

Algeria remained a colony of France until 1962, when independence fighters won the War of Independence against France. During the Algerian War, which lasted from 1954 to 1962, up to 1.5 million Algerians are estimated to have died as French forces repressed Algerian resistance, especially the ‘mujahideen’ who fought for independence from France.⁶ Admittedly, French historians and Algerian authorities dispute the death toll during the war, the former estimating the number to have been approximately 500,000, the latter up to 1.5 million.⁷ Of particular note are the torture methods used by French forces in Algeria to suppress the independence movement, which remain undisputed. Victims of systematic French torture included Maurice Audin, an Algerian communist party member and independence activist, who disappeared in 1957.⁸ The use of torture by French authorities has been corroborated by the testimonies of Algerians such as Zohra Drif, an independence fighter, who in 2022 explained to *Al Jazeera* that she and other Algerians had been ‘conscious of the methods [of torture] used by the French, what they would do to stop [Algerian fighters] and how they would treat us.’⁹

Equally noteworthy is the fact that French governments, after the war, covered up the practice of torture. This includes facts concerning the death of Ali Boumendjel, an Algerian independence fighter: his death was registered as suicide until 2000, when the former head of the French intelligence during the Battle of Algiers, Paul Aussaresses, confessed to ordering Boumendjel’s murder and disguising it as suicide.¹⁰ Only in 2018 did the French government formally acknowledge the use of torture by French authorities in Algeria. On September 13, Emmanuel Macron announced that in 1957, independence activist Maurice Audin ‘died from torture stemming from the system instigated while Algeria was a part of France.’¹¹ As such, official French acknowledgement of colonial-era abuses against Algerians is still relatively recent.

Another feature of the Algerian War of Independence was the post-war treatment of the 200,000 Harkis —Algerians who fought on the French side during the war — by both French and Algerian authorities.¹² Despite promises to protect them after the French defeat in the war, many Algerian Harki soldiers were left to be massacred for being traitors in independent Algeria, whilst those who made it to France ended up in dangerous refugee camps.¹³ More

⁵ Mussa Acher., “Emir Abdelkader, a controversial figure in the Algerian resistance”, *State.fr*, February 14, 2022.

⁶ Bendimerad, Rym and Sabeg, Roqiya., “Algeria’s war for independence: 60 years on”, *Al Jazeera*, July 5, 2022.

⁷ DW, “France’s Macron looks to ‘future’ on Algeria trip”, *DW*, August 26, 2022.

⁸ Rym Bendimerad and Roqiya Sabeg., “Algeria’s war for independence: 60 years on”, *Al Jazeera*, July 5, 2022.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Al Jazeera*, “France admits torture during Algeria’s war of independence”, *Al Jazeera*, September 13, 2018.

¹² DW, “Macron apologizes to Algerian Harki fighters”, *DW*, September 20, 2021.

¹³ *Ibid.*

recently, French authorities have acknowledged France's neglect of their responsibilities to the Harkis. In 2016, then-French president François Hollande accepted the 'responsibilities of French governments in the abandonment of the Harkis' and in 2021, Emmanuel Macron made a speech at the Elysee Palace asking Harkis for 'forgiveness' and acknowledging that France had 'failed in its duty towards the Harkis, their wives, their children.'¹⁴ However, some Harki organisations have said that apologies do not go far enough and in 2021, many wrote to Macron, saying: 'We hope that you will be the one to end 60 years of a certain hypocrisy by which the abandoning of the Harkis is recognised in speeches, but not in the law.'¹⁵

Recent Franco-Algerian Relations

France's colonial legacy in Algeria has long been central to modern Franco-Algerian relations. On July 4, 2020, in an interview with news channel *France 24*, Algerian President Abdelmadjid Tebboune said that Algeria had already received 'half-apologies' from France and that the 'next step is needed,' arguing that an apology would 'make it possible to cool tensions and create a calmer atmosphere for economic and cultural relations,' including for over six million Algerians living in France.¹⁶ These comments followed a global resurgence of calls for a re-examination of the legacy of colonialism after the murder of an African American man, George Floyd, by a white police officer in May 2020 in Minneapolis, Minnesota.¹⁷

In July of the same year, as part of this global reckoning with colonial legacies, Paris returned the remains of 24 Algerian resistance fighters to Algeria.¹⁸ On July 5, the skulls of the fighters were laid to rest during a ceremony at El Alia cemetery, alongside the bodies of Algerian resistance heroes such as the Emir Abdelkader.¹⁹ This event was recognised by Algerian President Abdelmadjid Tebboune as an opportunity to improve relations between France and Algeria and to 'go further in the appeasement process,' though conditional upon an official apology from France for its colonial-era abuses against Algeria.²⁰

However, diplomatic relations between France and Algeria deteriorated sharply at the start of October 2021 after comments made by President Macron. French newspaper *Le Monde* reported that, in a meeting with French Algerian descendants of the Harkis, Macron had claimed that Algeria's 'political-military system' was rewriting history and fostering 'hatred towards France.'²¹ These comments came only a month after the French government decided to reduce visa quotas for citizens of Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia, which had prompted the Algerian foreign ministry to summon French Ambassador François Gouyette and hand him a 'formal protest' against the French decision.²² The Algerian government responded to Macron's 'inadmissible' comments, which it said represented an 'intolerable affront' to

¹⁴ France 24, "Macron apologises for French treatment of Algerian Harki fighters", *France 24*, September 20, 2021.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Al Jazeera, "Algeria seeks apology from France over colonial past: President", *Al Jazeera*, July 5, 2020.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Al Jazeera, "Algeria buries remains of anti-colonial fighters after 150 years", *Al Jazeera*, July 5, 2020.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Al Jazeera, "Algeria seeks apology from France over colonial past: President", *Al Jazeera*, July 5, 2020.

²¹ Bendimerad, Rym and Sabeg, Roqiya., "Algeria's war for independence: 60 years on", *Al Jazeera*, July 5, 2022.

²² Al Jazeera, "Algeria summons French envoy over visa restriction plan", *Al Jazeera*, September 29, 2021.

Algerians who died fighting French colonialism, by withdrawing its ambassador from France on October 2 and banning French military planes from its airspace the following day.²³ Algerian President Abdelmedjid Tebboune then boycotted a major summit in November in Paris, stating that his country would 'not take the first step' to repair ties between the two nations.²⁴

In December 2021, the French government announced that it would soon make public the most highly classified parts of its national archives about the Algerian War of Independence, during which hundreds of thousands of Algerians were killed and French forces and their proxies tortured opponents.²⁵ Benjamin Stora, a leading French historian of Algeria, told Reuters news agency that this decision will reveal 'which people were under surveillance, followed, arrested' and the 'whole chain leading up to repressive measures.' The French Culture Minister's remarks that France has 'things to rebuild with Algeria' and that they can 'only be rebuilt on truth' indicates the pertinence of this move for the restoration of diplomatic relations between France and Algeria.²⁶

Benjamin Stora's recommendation for the construction of a sculpture commemorating Emir Abdelkader, and its unveiling on the 60th anniversary of Algerian independence in 2022 was first presented to Emmanuel Macron on January 20, 2021. However, the diplomatic significance of this proposal increased with the deterioration of relations between France and Algeria in late 2021. It is therefore significant that Algeria's ambassador to France, Mohamed Antar Daoud, was in attendance at the unveiling of the sculpture commemorating Emir Abdelkader in Amboise on February 5 2022, marking the event as a sign of improving diplomatic relations between the two countries.²⁷

History of the Contestation

French political background

The act of vandalism against the sculpture of Emir Abdelkader on February 5, 2022, took place in the lead-up to the French 2022 presidential election, during which prominent candidates were Marine le Pen of *Le Rassemblement National* and Eric Zemmour of *Reconquête!*, whose views have been characterised as 'far-right' by *Al Jazeera*, *BBC News* and *France 24* throughout 2021.²⁸ Zemmour's Islamophobic statements include his claim that Muslims are 'colonising' French neighbourhoods and that Islam is a religion of 'terrorism.'²⁹ He has also said that unaccompanied migrant children from Africa and the Middle East are all killers, rapists and thieves and that 'jihadists were considered to be good Muslims by all

²³ Al Jazeera, "Algeria demands France's 'total respect': President", October 10, 2021.

²⁴ Al Jazeera, "Sculpture of Algerian hero vandalised in France", *Al Jazeera*, February 5, 2022; Al Jazeera, "Algeria recalls envoy to France after 'inadmissible interference'", *Al Jazeera*, October 3, 2021.

²⁵ Al Jazeera, "France to open classified Algerian war archives", *Al Jazeera*, December 11, 2021.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Al Jazeera, "Sculpture of Algerian hero vandalised in France", *Al Jazeera*, February 5, 2022

²⁸ Alexander Durie., "Zemmour: French Jews slam far-right Jewish presidential hopeful", *Al Jazeera*, December 22, 2021; El-Faizy, Monique., "Éric Zemmour: The far-right pundit who threatens to outflank Le Pen", *France 24*, September 13, 2021; BBC News, "Eric Zemmour: Far-right French presidential candidate grabbed at rally", *BBC News*, December 6, 2021.

²⁹ Durie, Alexander., "Zemmour: French Jews slam far-right Jewish presidential hopeful", *Al Jazeera*, December 22, 2021.

Muslims.³⁰ The presidential campaign of 2022 was therefore dominated by harsh rhetoric on immigration, especially from Africa, and on Islam, particularly on the right-wing political spectrum.³¹

Equally, French president Emmanuel Macron, who is Honorary President and Founder of the centrist *Renaissance* political party (since September 2022), previously known as *La République En Marche!*, has caused controversy with remarks which were deemed by some to be inadequate in tackling Islamophobia, xenophobia and France's colonial legacy.³² On January 20, 2021, for instance, Macron's office said that there would be 'no repentance or apologies' for the French occupation of Algeria or the War of Independence, instead stating that Macron would take part in 'symbolic acts' aimed at promoting reconciliation.³³ Though Macron has gone further than previous French presidents in recognising French colonial abuses in Algeria, including his February 2017 comments that France's colonisation of Algeria was a 'crime against humanity,' his relative hesitancy in issuing an official French apology may have been informed by the right-wing criticism he faced when he made the February 2017 comments.³⁴ For instance, Florian Philippot, vice-president of the far-right National Front party, called on Macron via tweet to 'Stop this constant repentance!', whilst Conservative then-presidential candidate François Fillon, called Macron's 'hatred of our history [...] undignified for a presidential candidate.'³⁵ Moreover, since 2017, Macron has also engaged in some arguably anti-Islam rhetoric, particularly when promoting French secularism. On October 2 2020, for instance, when Macron announced a new government bill in December strengthening a 1905 law that officially separated church and state in France, he declared that 'Islam is a religion that is in crisis all over the world today.'³⁶ Macron's comments provoked a backlash from some French Muslim activists, such as Yasser Louati, who tweeted that Macron had 'emboldened the far right, anti-Muslim leftists and threatened the lives of Muslim students' by his comments.³⁷ As such, anti-Muslim rhetoric as well as a degree of hesitancy in apologising for France's colonial past, both relevant for Algerians, is visible across the political spectrum in France, both on the right-wing and centre-ground.

The Immediate Political Backdrop To Attack

Nevertheless, more immediately before the attack, prominent criticism against the sculpture was issued by figures of right-wing politics. On February 1 2022, Gilbert Collard, a former member of the far-right 'Rassemblement National' party, asked when a statue of the 'duc d'Aumale,' French Governor-General of Algeria in the mid-nineteenth century, to whom the Emir Abdelkader surrendered, would be installed in Algiers.³⁸

³⁰ El-Faizy, Monique., "Éric Zemmour: The far-right pundit who threatens to outflank Le Pen", *France 24*, September 13, 2021.

³¹ Al Jazeera, "Sculpture of Algerian hero vandalised in France", *Al Jazeera*, February 5, 2022.

³² Goar, Mathieu., "Renaissance, un nouveau parti pour réactiver le "dépassement" macroniste", *Le Monde*, September 18, 2022.

³³ Al Jazeera, "Macron rules out official apology for colonial abuses in Algeria", *Al Jazeera*, January 20, 2021.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ France 24, "French presidential hopeful Macron calls colonisation a 'crime against humanity'", *France 24*, February 16, 2017.

³⁶ Al Jazeera, "Macron says Islam 'in crisis', prompting backlash from Muslims", *Al Jazeera*, October 2, 2020.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ Gilbert Collard, [@GilbertCollard], "Samedi, à Amboise, une statue de l'émir Abdelkader, adversaire historique de la France" [Tweet]. *Twitter*. Feb 1, 2022.

The perception of many French politicians, Algerian politicians and the French public was that the attack on the sculpture had been fuelled and motivated by anti-immigrant, racist and Islamophobic rhetoric. The mayor of Amboise, Thierry Boutard, declared the attack as 'unspeakable,' especially on a 'day of harmony and unity.'³⁹ French President Emmanuel Macron also issued a statement: 'Let us remember what unites us. The Republic will not erase any trace or name from its history. It will not forget any of its works. It will not tear down any statues.' Historian Benjamin Stora likewise decried the attack as a sign of ignorance towards history, saying, 'Those who committed this act know nothing about French history.'⁴⁰

Algeria's ambassador to France, Mohamed Antar Daoud, condemned the vandalism as an act of 'unspeakable baseness' and reaffirmed that 'there is momentum and a desire on both sides to move forwards,' suggesting that the attack may have been intended to disrupt the process of diplomatic reconciliation underway between Algeria and France.⁴¹ The possible role of anti-immigrant and anti-Islam rhetoric in provoking the act of vandalism was also noted by one attendant of the inauguration of the sculpture on February 5 2022, Ouassila Soum, a 37-year-old French woman of Algerian background.⁴² Soum noted that the vandalism left her 'with a knot in her stomach' and yet that 'it's not surprising with the rhetoric of hate and the nauseating current atmosphere' in France.⁴³ The sculpture's artist, Michel Audiard, noted what he deemed to be the 'premeditated' nature of the attack, describing how the vandals must have had to 'cut' and 'twist' the metal of the sculpture, implying that this was no mere act of casual vandalism but an attack with some intent behind it.⁴⁴ It is nevertheless important to stress that the French police did not identify any particular individual or group, motivated by racial or religious hatred or otherwise, as being behind the attack.

Decision-Making Process

The act of vandalism took place just hours before the sculpture's inauguration on February 5 2022. The sculpture had been placed there ten days previously.⁴⁵ However, the mayor of Amboise, Thierry Boutard, decided to go ahead with the inauguration ceremony that day despite his 'indignation' at the 'unspeakable' attack.⁴⁶ Gendarmerie Squadron Chief Hughes Loyez informed *AFP* on February 5 that the municipal police had noted the damage, which affected the bottom half of the sculpture, at around 8:00 am on the morning of February 5 and that nobody had taken responsibility for the attack.⁴⁷

On February 5, Thierry Boutard also noted that the sculpture would be 'restored and remade,' whilst the sculpture's artist, Michel Audiard, estimated that it would take one month for it to

³⁹ BBC News, "Emir Abdelkader: French sculpture of Algerian hero vandalised", *BBC News*, February 5, 2022.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ Al Jazeera, "Sculpture of Algerian hero vandalised in France", *Al Jazeera*, February 5, 2022.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ Le Figaro, "À Amboise, la sculpture en hommage au héros algérien Abdelkader vandalisée avant son inauguration", *Le Figaro*, February 5, 2022.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ Al Jazeera, "Sculpture of Algerian hero vandalised in France", *Al Jazeera*, February 5, 2022.

⁴⁷ Le Figaro, "À Amboise, la sculpture en hommage au héros algérien Abdelkader vandalisée avant son inauguration", *Le Figaro*, February 5, 2022.

be remade.⁴⁸ Despite the attack, there has not been significant disagreement over whether to keep the sculpture in situ. The event saw considerable consensus across Algerian and French government officials, visible in the tone of reconciliation dominating both Macron's and Ambassador Daoud's responses to the attack, the former issuing a plea to 'remember what unites us' and the latter an acknowledgement that 'there is momentum and a desire on both sides to move forwards.'⁴⁹

A commitment to examining France's colonial legacy in Algeria remains prominent in the joint endeavours of the two countries governments. On August 25 2022, President Macron embarked on a three-day visit to Algeria, where he met with President Tebboune.⁵⁰ On the visit, Macron said:

We have a complex, painful past. And it has at times prevented us from looking at the future. [...] We did not choose this past, we inherited it. It's a block, we have to look at it and recognize it, but we have a responsibility, it's to build our own future for ourselves and our children.⁵¹

The French president also announced the establishment of a joint committee with historians from both France and Algeria to study the archives of the colonial period. This may resolve existing divergence between French historians and Algerian authorities over such issues as the death toll in the 1954-62 War of Independence.⁵²

President Tebboune then welcomed the 'encouraging results' of Macron's visit and said that there were 'promising prospects for improving the special partnership that binds us.'⁵³ Whilst colonial legacies were among the most important issues discussed by the two leaders, other issues discussed were stability in neighbouring Libya, terror threats in the Sahel region in North Africa, as well as boosting Algerian gas deliveries to Europe in the wake of the shortfall caused by Russia's invasion of Ukraine.⁵⁴

Admittedly, 2023 has seen various points of diplomatic tension between the countries' governments. In February, French authorities helped Algerian-French journalist and political activist Amira Bouraoui to escape extradition from Tunisia to Algeria, where she faced a prison sentence due to a 2020 charge of 'offending Islam' and insulting the Algerian president.⁵⁵ Despite her extradition to Algeria, the French decision to allow Bouraoui to enter France led the Algerian government to recall its ambassador from France. At the end of March, however, Macron and Tebboune agreed to avoid 'regrettable misunderstandings' by telephone, and Algeria allowed its ambassador to France to resume their duties.⁵⁶ There has also been continued cooperation between the two governments on combating militant Islam in the

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ RFI, "French police investigate vandalism of Algerian military hero sculpture", *RFI*, February 6, 2022.

⁵⁰ DW, "France's Macron looks to 'future' on Algeria trip", *DW*, August 26, 2022.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Kersten Knipp., "France-Algeria relations: Colonial past still dominates ties", *DW*, June 4, 2023.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

Sahel region and importing Algerian natural gas to France.⁵⁷

Given the growing cooperation between France and Algeria on a range of geopolitical issues in Europe and North Africa, it remains critical for the two countries' governments to continue reconciling with France's colonial legacy. French and Algerian authorities' largely defiant, united responses to the vandalism faced by the sculpture of Emir Abdelkader in February 2022 demonstrate the relative lack of diplomatic fallout from the violent contestation.

In France, however, France's colonial legacy remains a deeply politically divisive issue, borne out in the objection of French right-wing politicians to the institution of the Emir Abdelkader sculpture, as well as Macron's continued refusal to issue an official apology for French colonial-era abuses in Algeria, which President Tebboune has demanded.⁵⁸ Therefore, it remains important for the French government to continue improving diplomatic relations with Algeria whilst avoiding political controversy in France.

Summary and Conclusions

The sculpture of the Emir Abdelkader in Amboise was vandalised on February 5 2022, just hours before its inauguration, which went ahead regardless and was attended by the Mayor of Amboise and the Algerian Ambassador to France. The sculpture was intended to commemorate the nineteenth-century Algerian independence fighter, Emir Abdelkader. Abdelkader led many Algerians in resisting French colonial rule from 1832 until 1847, when he surrendered to the French Governor-General of Algeria. He was imprisoned in Amboise until 1852 and spent the rest of his life in Syria. The erection of this sculpture was one of the proposals put forward by the French historian of Algeria, Benjamin Stora, in a report commissioned by and presented to the French President, Emmanuel Macron, in January 2021.

Whilst nobody claimed responsibility for the attack, criticism of the sculpture and of apologising for France's colonial legacy before its erection came primarily from right-wing politicians in France. The perception among French and Algerian authorities who commented on the attack was that it was motivated by ignorance of France and Algeria's joint history and the history of the Emir Abdelkader. French and Algerian government officials both condemned the attack, and joint attempts to address France's colonial legacy in Algeria have continued, showing an improvement in relations over this issue of diplomatic concern since relations deteriorated sharply in October 2021. This case study demonstrates the interaction of domestic and international politics, with moves towards official French acknowledgement of France's colonial abuses at once improving relations between France and Algeria whilst provoking political criticism at home, particularly from right-wing politicians.

Research contributed by Frederick Maud, and Thesia Thomas.

Last updated January 2025

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Al Jazeera, "Algeria seeks apology from France over colonial past: President", *Al Jazeera*, July 5, 2020.

References

- Acher, Mussa. "Emir Abdelkader, a controversial figure in the Algerian resistance," *Slate.fr*, February 14, 2022.
<https://www.slate.fr/story/223443/emir-abdelkader-amboise-statue-vandalisee-algerie-resistance-histoire-colonisation>.
- Al Jazeera. "France admits torture during Algeria's war of independence," *Al Jazeera*, September 13, 2018.
<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/9/13/france-admits-torture-during-algerias-war-of-independence>.
- Al Jazeera. "Algeria buries remains of anti-colonial fighters after 150 years," *Al Jazeera*, July 5, 2020.
<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/7/5/algeria-buries-remains-of-anti-colonial-fighters-after-150-years>.
- Al Jazeera. "Algeria seeks apology from France over colonial past: President," *Al Jazeera*, July 5, 2020.
<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/7/5/algeria-seeks-apology-from-france-over-colonial-past-president>.
- Al Jazeera. "Macron says Islam 'in crisis', prompting backlash from Muslims," *Al Jazeera*, October 2, 2020.
<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/10/2/macron-announces-new-plan-to-regulate-islam-in-france>.
- Al Jazeera. "Sculpture of Algerian hero vandalised in France," *Al Jazeera*, February 5, 2022.
<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/2/5/sculpture-of-algerian-hero-vandalised-in-france>.
- Al Jazeera. "Macron rules out official apology for colonial abuses in Algeria," *Al Jazeera*, January 20, 2021.
<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/1/20/macron-rules-out-official-apology-for-colonial-abuses-in-algeria>.
- Al Jazeera. "Algeria summons French envoy over visa restriction plan," *Al Jazeera*, September 29, 2021.
<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/9/29/algeria-summons-french-envoy-over-visa-restriction-plan>,
- Al Jazeera. "Algeria recalls envoy to France after 'inadmissible interference,'" *Al Jazeera*, October 3, 2021.
<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/10/3/algeria-blasts-french-leader-recalls-ambassador-from-france>.
- Al Jazeera. "Algeria demands France's 'total respect': President," October 10, 2021.
<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/10/10/algeria-demands-frances-total-respect-says-president>.

- Al Jazeera. "France to open classified Algerian war archives," *Al Jazeera*, December 11, 2021. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/12/11/france-to-open-classified-algerian-war-archives>.
- BBC News. "Eric Zemmour: Far-right French presidential candidate grabbed at rally," *BBC News*, December 6, 2021. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-59545455>.
- BBC News. "Emir Abdelkader: French sculpture of Algerian hero vandalised," *BBC News*, February 5, 2022. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-60273502>.
- Bendimerad, Rym and Sabeg, Roqiya. "Algeria's war for independence: 60 years on," *Al Jazeera*, July 5, 2022. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/7/5/algerias-road-to-independence-60-years-on>.
- Collard, Gilbert [@GilbertCollard]. "Samedi, à Amboise, une statue de l'émir Abdelkader, adversaire historique de la France" [Tweet]. *Twitter*. Feb 1, 2022. <https://twitter.com/GilbertCollard/status/1488495600362573834>.
- Durie, Alexander. "Zemmour: French Jews slam far-right Jewish presidential hopeful," *Al Jazeera*, December 22, 2021. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/12/22/french-jews-denounce-far-right-candidate-zemmour>.
- DW. "France's Macron looks to 'future' on Algeria trip," *DW*, August 26, 2022. <https://www.dw.com/en/frances-macron-visits-algeria-promises-new-era-in-bilateral-relations/a-62934069>.
- DW. "Macron apologizes to Algerian Harki fighters," *DW*, September 20, 2021. <https://www.dw.com/en/macron-seeks-absolution-from-algerian-harki-survivors/a-59239343>.
- El-Faizy, Monique. "Éric Zemmour: The far-right pundit who threatens to outflank Le Pen," *France 24*, September 13, 2021. <https://www.france24.com/en/france/20210913-%C3%A9ric-zemmour-the-far-right-pundit-who-threatens-to-outflank-le-pen>.
- Le Figaro. "À Amboise, la sculpture en hommage au héros algérien Abdelkader vandalisée avant son inauguration," *Le Figaro*, February 5, 2022. <https://www.lefigaro.fr/actualite-france/a-amboise-la-sculpture-en-hommage-au-heros-algerien-abdelkader-vandalisee-avant-son-inauguration-20220205>.
- France 24. "French presidential hopeful Macron calls colonisation a 'crime against humanity,'" *France 24*, February 16, 2017. <https://www.france24.com/en/20170216-france-presidential-hopeful-macron-describes-colonisation-algeria-crime-against-humanity>.
- France 24. "Macron apologises for French treatment of Algerian Harki fighters," *France 24*, September 20, 2021.
- Goar, Mathieu. "Renaissance, un nouveau parti pour réactiver le "dépassement" macroniste," *Le Monde*, September 18, 2022. https://www.lemonde.fr/politique/article/2022/09/18/renaissance-un-nouveau-parti-pour-reactiver-le-depassement-macroniste_6142086_823448.html.

- Knipp, Kersten. "France-Algeria relations: Colonial past still dominates ties," *DW*, June 4, 2023.
<https://www.dw.com/en/france-algeria-relations-colonial-past-still-dominates-ties/a-65817065>.
- Le Monde. "France-Algérie: les 22 recommandations du rapport Stora," *Le Monde*, January 20, 2021.
https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2021/01/20/france-algerie-les-22-recommandations-du-rapport-stora_6066931_3212.html.
- RFI. "French police investigate vandalism of Algerian military hero sculpture," *RFI*, February 6, 2022.

Figures

- DhiaEddineBen10, "Emir Abdelkader", *Wikimedia Commons*, January 6, 2016.
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Emir_Abelkader.jpg. (Cover Image)

About Contested Histories

Many contestations have been over memorials, street names, and other physical representations of historical legacies in public spaces in recent years. These contestations often reflect deeper societal tensions, whether triggered by political transitions, demographic shifts, inter-ethnic strife, or a growing awareness of unaddressed historical injustices.

Contested Histories is a multi-year initiative designed to identify principles, processes, and best practices for addressing these contestations at the community or municipal level and in the classroom. Conflicts about history, heritage, and memory are a global phenomenon. Although each case is different, comparative cases can indicate lessons learned and reflect best practices.

About IHJR at EuroClio

The Institute for Historical Justice and Reconciliation (IHJR) is a research centre at the European Association for History Educators (EuroClio) in The Hague, The Netherlands. The IHJR works with educational and public policy institutions to organise and sponsor historical discourse in pursuit of acknowledgement and the resolution of historical disputes in divided communities and societies.

Contact information

Paula O'Donohoe
Program Director

Contested Histories Initiative
contestedhistories.org

EuroClio
Bankplein 2,
2585CB The Hague,
The Netherlands
secretariat@euroclio.eu

To cite this publication:

The Contested Histories Initiative, "Abdelkader Statue in Amboise, France", *Contested Histories Case Study #438* (December 2024), retrieved from [link], [CC BY 4.0](#).

Contested Histories is funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are, however those of the authors only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them.

