

## Representations of the Algerian War of Independence



Philip Jones Griffiths / Magnum Photos

**French 502: Raison et Dérison I**  
**Tuesdays, 2-4:50 PM, THH 221**

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### Course description

The most violent and protracted decolonization struggle of the twentieth century, the Algerian war of independence (1954-1962) continues to be fought over in official, academic, artistic, and popular circles on both shores of the Mediterranean. In France, the contested legacy of the conflict variously described as a revolution, police operation, war, civil war, or simply “the events” has shaped debates about colonization, torture, immigration, Islam, democracy, and multiculturalism. In Algeria, it has fueled controversies about historiography, censorship, and state legitimacy and repression. While the Algerian war undeniably remains an iconic emblem of anticolonial resistance around the world, most famously captured in Gillo Pontecorvo’s film *The Battle of Algiers*, it also violently opposed FLN and MNA supporters, independence fighters and harkis, pro- and anti-French Algeria militants, among others, making it a civil conflict in more ways than one: between France and Algeria before these were discrete terms, and

between fellow Algerians and fellow French(wo)men. As many critics have noted, it was also a battle of ideas, fought through and in fiction and non-fiction books, films, memoirs, and essays. Far from being a fleeting if bloody episode of the recent past, the Algerian war is thus constitutive of both Fifth Republic France and contemporary Algeria, and a point of entry into French and Algerian literature, popular culture, and intellectual history.

Fifty years after Algerian independence, this seminar will revisit the ways in which the Algerian war has been represented in historical and political discourse, literature, and cinema, and the lasting ways in which it has shaped French and Algerian politics, culture, and civil society, as well as global emancipatory and imperialist discourses. Our focus will be on the various “imaginaires de guerre” that have been produced and projected through literature, film, historiography, and public debates in France and Algeria as well as the Arab World and the U.S., focusing on the tensions between mythic or dominant representations and revisionist narratives of the war. The seminar will gravitate around several key questions: to what extent was colonial Algeria, and its war of liberation, exceptional or exemplary in the context of French colonial rule? How does the Algerian war continue to structure political and social life in both France and Algeria? How do literature and film complement or contest the historical record? How have they shaped the popular imagination of the war? Central to our discussions will be the necessary, if fraught, relationship binding France and Algeria, and the ways in which each nation haunts the other in both concrete and abstract ways, giving ironic resonance to the colonial mantra “L’Algérie, c’est la France” half a century after its demise.

Discussions will be held in English in order to facilitate attendance of non-French/CSLC graduate students. Students who are not in French/CSLC may elect to read materials in English when available. Students are also encouraged to read texts in the original Arabic when relevant. In addition to vigorous participation, class requirements consist of two oral presentations on assigned texts (10-15 minutes each) and one final research paper (15-20 pages.)

### **Texts for purchase at the USC Bookstore**

Alleg, Henri. *La question*. ISBN 2707320625  
Benmalek, Anouar. *Le rapt*. ISBN: 2707301752  
Djebar, Assia. *L’amour, la fantasia*. ISBN: 2253151270  
Etcherelli, Claire. *Élise ou la vraie vie*. ISBN: 2070369390  
Fanon, Frantz. *Les damnés de la terre*. ISBN: 2707138533  
Genet, Jean. *Les paravents*. ISBN 2070373096  
Sebbar, Leila. *La Seine était rouge*. ISBN: 9782742785575

Please allow enough time if purchasing online as international deliveries can take up to one month.

All other texts will be made available via USC Library Reserves (ARES) or distributed in class. Films will be available at the reserves desk at Leavey and are to be viewed before class.

### **Composition of final grade**

Participation	10%
First presentation	20%
Second presentation	20%
Final paper	50%

### **Students with Disabilities**

Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability is required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP. Please be sure the letter is delivered to me as early in the semester as possible. DSP is located in STU 301 and is open 8:30 a.m.–5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. The phone number for DSP is (213) 740-0776.

### **Academic Integrity**

USC seeks to maintain an optimal learning environment. General principles of academic honesty include the concept of respect for the intellectual property of others, the expectation that individual work will be submitted unless otherwise allowed by an instructor, and the obligations both to protect one's own academic work from misuse by others as well as to avoid using another's work as one's own. All students are expected to understand and abide by these principles. *Scampus*, the Student Guidebook, contains the Student Conduct Code in Section 11.00, while the recommended sanctions are located in Appendix A: <http://www.usc.edu/dept/publications/SCAMPUS/gov/>. Students will be referred to the Office of Student Judicial Affairs and Community Standards for further review, should there be any suspicion of academic dishonesty. The Review process can be found at: <http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/SJACS/>.

### **Seminar meetings**

Week 1 – August 28  
Introduction

Week 2 – September 4  
Frantz Fanon, *Les damnés de la terre* (chapters 1 and 4)

Week 3 – September 11  
Mouloud Feraoun, *Journal* (excerpts)  
Albert Camus, *Actuelles III* (excerpts), “L’hôte”  
Jean-Paul Sartre, *Préface aux Damnés de la terre*

Week 4 – September 18

Benjamin Stora, *La gangrène et l'oubli* (part 2)

Tahar Ouetar, *L'as*

Rachid Boudjedra, *Le démantèlement* (chapter 7)

Guest speaker: Laurie Brand

Week 5 – September 25

Fanon, *Les damnés de la terre* (chapter 5)

Anouar Benmalek, *Le rapt*

Guest speaker: Anouar Benmalek

Week 6 – October 2

Assia Djebar, *L'amour, la fantasia*

Hélène Cixous, "Letter to Zohra Drif"

Film: Gillo Pontecorvo, *La bataille d'Alger*

Week 7 – October 9

Frantz Fanon, "L'Algérie se dévoile"

Assia Djebar, *L'amour, la fantasia*

Film: Djebar, *La Nouba des femmes du Mont Chenoua*

Week 8 – October 16

Leila Sebbar, *La Seine était rouge*

Mohamed Rouabhi, *Requiem Opus 61*

Film: Jacques Panijel, *Octobre à Paris*

Guest speaker: Lia Brozgal

Week 9 – October 23

Jacques Rancière, "The Cause of the Other"

Kristen Ross, *May '68 and Its Afterlives* (chapter 1)

Film: Chris Marker, *Le joli mai*

Week 10 – October 30

Claire Etcherelli, *Elise ou la vraie vie*

Film: Alain Resnais, *Muriel*

Week 11 – November 6

Kristen Ross, *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies* (chapter 3)

Jean-Paul Sartre, *Situations V* (excerpts)

Henri Alleg, *La question*

Week 12 – November 13

Todd Shepard, *The Invention of Decolonization* (intro)

Étienne Balibar, "One Nation or Two"

Film: Jean-Luc Godard, *Le petit soldat*

Week 13 – November 20

Kateb Yacine, “Le cadavre encerclé”

Film: Youssef Chahine, *Gamilah*

Week 14 – November 27

Jean Genet, *Les paravents*

Week 15 – December 4

Michael Rothberg, “Between Auschwitz and Algeria”

Alexis Jenni, *L’art français de la guerre* (first and last chapters)

December 10: final research paper due