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Jim House and Neil MacMaster, *Paris 1961: Algerians, State Terror, and Memory* Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2006. 375pp. Bibliographical references and index. £60.00 UK (hb). ISBN-13: 978-0-19-924725-7.

Review by Sarah Howard, Christ's College, University of Cambridge

Jim House and Neil MacMaster are the first British historians to produce a major work on the contested events surrounding the brutal suppression of an Algerian demonstration in Paris on the night of 17 October 1961. Since 1954, French security forces had been pitted against the armed combatants of the Algerian *Front de Libération Nationale* (FLN) in a struggle which resonated throughout the entire Franco-Algerian space. By October 1961, the Algerian provisional government was moving towards the final negotiations with France that would lead to the Evian Accords of March 1962. Both to demonstrate its uncontested support base as the unique voice of Algerian nationalism and reinforce its leadership, the FLN organized a Parisian protest against police repression and the discriminatory night-time curfew that had been imposed uniquely upon the French capital's Algerian workers since 5 October. As evening fell on 17 October, three columns of 30,000 Algerian demonstrators, including women, children and the elderly, slowly made their way from meeting points in the west, south and north of the city into the heart of the French capital. The demonstrators had been given strict instructions that no weapons were to be carried. Police reactions were ferocious; over 14,000 people were arrested at the demonstration and on the following day. An official communiqué detailed two Algerian deaths, but eyewitness accounts, social welfare groups and some press reports suggested that the Paris police had exacted a far greater toll amongst demonstrators.

What happened that night continues to be a subject of immense controversy. Historians agree on the scale of events and the extreme level of violence. Yet, as House and MacMaster demonstrate, there have been major differences regarding the numbers of Algerian casualties, the role of the FLN and Paris police and the reliability of official archives.

Jim House and Neil MacMaster take a pioneering approach to these contested events. Their fascinating study discusses 17 October 1961 in terms of its two interlocking layers of meaning, both as an event and as the site of complex memorial processes. They innovate by expanding the timeframe around the infamous demonstration in several ways. The first part of the book (by Neil MacMaster) focuses on the events of 17 October and the preceding period, together with an exposition of the evolution of FLN strategies and Paris policing techniques. MacMaster is the first historian to contextualize these events within a background of French colonial attitudes, systems of governance and control. In a chapter that will certainly become required reading for historians of this period, he demonstrates how much the policing of Paris owed to counter insurgency measures and psychological warfare tactics developed in French North Africa and adapted by Maurice Papon, the city's prefect of police from March 1958. The second section of the book (by Jim House) examines 17 October 1961 as a site of contested memories. His elegant analysis explores why such dramatic incidents in the capital's streets were virtually erased from public visibility for several decades, the ways that the events began to occupy a key place in public debate from the 1980s and their continual reverberation in contemporary France.

In part one, Neil MacMaster describes the important role played by metropolitan France, particularly

Paris, during the Algerian War. During the eight years of war about 80 percent of the Algerian Provisional government's (GPRA) total budget was funded from metropolitan France. After Algiers, the French capital represented the second largest urban concentration of Algerians with a population of 180,000, largely migrant workers, by 1961. Paris was crucial for the funds raised by its migrant community under a system in which every Algerian was required to pay the FLN a monthly sum based on earning capacity. The French capital also provided a training ground for the formation of FLN cadres and leaders. MacMaster identifies the FLN decision to open a 'second front' inside France in August 1958 as a vital stage in the war. Attacking police and strategic targets, the 'second front' tied down French military forces. It also meant that Paris became a key arena because of the propaganda value of attacks carried out in the prestigious capital.

Until 1958, the Paris police had struggled in the face of the Algerian independence movement. However, in response to a growing FLN threat and increasingly dangerous police discontent, a new Prefect of Police, Maurice Papon, was appointed in March 1958. Papon applied the extensive experience of population control, census and counter insurgency operations developed in a career that had taken him from Vichy France, where he was Secretary to the Prefect of Aquitaine, to post-war Morocco and Algeria. Papon's system for the control and repression of Paris's Algerian population aimed to meet the challenge of the FLN, destroy its counter state and disrupt the organization's operations and fundraising. For MacMaster and House, the ruthlessness of police operations, relative invisibility of the Algerian population and endemic racism, led inexorably to the events of 17 October 1961.

Although the book offers a detailed and accurate description of Paris policing during this period, in some ways it is rather neglectful of the FLN's role in ratcheting up tensions. The authors state that it was Paris policing that "drove people into the arms of the FLN" (p. 29). Yet, a cursory study of FLN tactics during this period seems to suggest that the organization itself left Algerians with little choice. As their book explains, the FLN had gradually constructed an internally policed "counter state" in which every individual could be identified and located (p. 64). The organization systemised an extreme level of violence against those Algerians who refused to pay their FLN dues and those it defined as political opponents or traitors. The authors could perhaps offer more detail on the brutal and hegemonic control that the FLN exercised over the Algerian population. They do not dwell upon the FLN's tactics in their discussion of the vicious civil war in which the organization liquidated its political opponents, Messali Hadj's *Mouvement National Algérien* (MNA) (p.5 and pp. 63-6). Throughout the period, internecine violence spiralled with assaults on individuals, attacks in cafés and hotels, kidnappings and summary executions. As Mohammed Harbi has claimed, brutal punishments, mutilation of the victim's corpse and executions preceded by extreme torture, relied upon symbolism intended to intimidate the Algerian population in ways that were every bit as effective as "technical and impersonal" police methods.[1] MacMaster and House are silent on the number of Algerians killed in internecine strife. Benjamin Stora, Guy Pervillé and Robert Ageron cite official figures suggesting that of the 4,300 metropolitan deaths due to terrorism until March 1962, 4,055 were Algerians.[2] Raymond Muelle uses similar sources to point out that there were 10,223 recorded attacks on Algerians between January 1956 and January 1962.[3] It seems likely that a high proportion of those attacked, injured and killed were victims of other Algerians.

Neither do the authors consider the extent to which the FLN manipulated the Algerian population, knowingly placing it in a dangerous situation on 17 October 1961. The demonstrators, obliged to participate under threat of "serious sanctions" (p. 114), were given strict instructions that no weapons were to be carried. Yet, the FLN understood the extremely tense state of the police following a wave of assassinations. The organization must have expected a violent reaction. Indeed, it carefully arranged for European eyewitnesses to be present at key points of the demonstration. House and MacMaster might therefore have considered the extent to which this peaceful demonstration was a deliberate spark to a powder keg of police resentment that the FLN knew had been building throughout the preceding months.

Until the late 1990s state archives relating to the period remained closed. In spite of this, several books appeared on the events, most notably *La Bataille de Paris, 17 Octobre 1961* (1991) by journalist and former Maoist militant, Jean-Luc Einaudi.[4] It is perhaps striking that Einaudi's study appeared at a highly convenient time for then Algerian Minister of Human Rights, Ali Haroun, a former member of the five man Comité Fédéral that had commanded the entire FLN network in France and which planned the demonstration in October 1961. Indeed, Einaudi's book bears a striking resemblance to a brochure published in December 1961 by the GPRA's Ministry of Information (a copy of which can be seen in the police archives) entitled "Les manifestations algériennes d'octobre 1961 et la repression colonialiste en France." [5] Using eyewitness accounts and FLN sources, Einaudi described extreme police violence towards demonstrators, claiming that well over 200 people were killed by the police in the period surrounding 17 October. Einaudi, unable to subject his sources to critical assessment, continually lobbied for access to the police archives.

As the authors describe, the events of 17 October 1961 were brought to wider public attention in 1997-8 with the trial of Maurice Papon for crimes against humanity committed during the Second World War. The trial also exposed Papon's repressive role as Paris Prefect of Police in 1961. It became clear that whilst the state archives remained closed, the events of the period, particularly the numbers of Algerian dead, would remain a subject of intense speculation. In October 1997, the French Interior Ministry announced its intention to open the state archives and named a commission under Dieudonné Mandelkern to investigate and report on the police archives. The French Justice Ministry established a further commission in June 1998, under Jean Geronimi, to investigate the judicial archives. During the same period, three historians were granted full access to the relevant archives. Only Jean-Paul Brunet, a professor of history at Paris's Ecole Normale Supérieure, actually went on to consult these archives.

As MacMaster and House demonstrate, early exploration of the archives produced a confused picture of casualty figures. Published discreetly in May 1998, the Mandelkern Commission's report on the police archives suggested that a few dozen Algerians had died on 17 October 1961. The Geronimi Commission's report on the judicial archives confirmed a surge in Algerian deaths during September and October 1961, and related about forty-eight deaths to 17-18 October. In September 1999, Jean-Paul Brunet published *Police contre FLN*. The book represented the first historical investigation of the 17-18 October and the policing of Paris during the period, based on the highly sensitive police and judicial archives. Brunet numbered the deaths on the 17-18 October 1961 at about thirty. He also moderated the view of Papon and his police by suggesting that the FLN had contributed to growing police tensions and anti-Algerian racism through its almost daily terrorist attacks upon the police.[6] More recently, Linda Amiri has used FLN archives and official police archives to detail both policing strategies and FLN tactics. Her 2004 work *La Bataille de France*, also refers to the mounting pressure within the Paris police in the run-up to 17 October, estimating that about 130 Algerians were killed by police during the months of September and October.[7]

House and MacMaster claim that they want to escape from what they term "the on-going over-preoccupation with 'head counts' and the statistics of death", rightly asserting that it obscures "the wider significance of the event" (p.13). However, they cannot and do not attempt to avoid the inexorable logic of historical inquiry into an event that they claim represents "the bloodiest act of state repression of street protest in Western Europe in modern history" (p.1). The veracity of this statement must turn upon their assessment of casualty figures and unsurprisingly these represent a central element of the book.

MacMaster offers an important clarification of the debate surrounding casualty figures. As he points out, previous commentators have sown confusion by failing to state clearly whether the statistics of death they employ relate strictly to the night of 17 October, to the whole series of demonstrations and strikes that occurred between 17-20 October, or to an even longer time scale. MacMaster therefore

suggests that Algerian deaths should be analyzed within an entire month of increasing violence and parallel policing operations as both sides, moving towards the negotiating table, keenly tried to maintain a position of strength. He contends that, during the months of September and October, "well over 120 Algerians were murdered by the police in the Paris region" (p. 167). Yet, MacMaster also maintains the impossibility of establishing a conclusive figure. Official registers did not record all deaths and disappearances; many Algerians might have been buried clandestinely. MacMaster suggests that a considerable number of bodies could have been carried unnoticed downriver to Rouen, particularly those thrown into the Seine as police clashed with demonstrators on the Pont de Neuilly and Pont de Clichy (p. 165). This marks a clear disagreement with Jean-Paul Brunet for whom any such corpses would have been discovered at the Suresnes lock.[8] As MacMaster rightly asserts, bodies could not have been recovered at Suresnes--it is in fact *up river* from the bridges. However, rather surprisingly, MacMaster fails to explore the implications of the further six locks and weirs before Rouen (Chatou, Bouvival, Andréssy, Méricourt, Notre Dame de la Garenne and Poses Amfreville) all of which lay *downriver* from Suresnes.

As the debate over casualty figures demonstrates, the opening of the official archives has certainly not revealed any "smoking gun" documents concerning state crime, nor has it clarified many of the controversies that surround the period. The authors accept Jean-Paul Brunet's argument that the archives could not have been culled because of bureaucratic tendencies to spread documents through various administrations (p. 11). Yet their book constantly questions the reliability of the official archives, arguing that "the historian would seem to be faced with the impossible task of trying to uncover the truth through police archives that were falsified in their very constitution" (p. 107). Whilst one must certainly be aware of the methodological problems in dealing with official archives relating to this period, the authors' statement seems to imply that historians might expect to uncover a single 'truth' (whatever that might mean) in a particular set of archives. Surely historians recognize that all their sources are tainted with subjectivity--this is precisely what makes them interesting and valuable.

The authors rightly recognize that any investigation into this period requires cautious use of a variety of sources. They suggest that their interdisciplinary approach has involved research into a wide range of sources, in addition to photographs, films, tracts, testimonies and literature (p. 13). Whilst such diverse sources certainly inform Jim House's section on memory, they are less evident in Neil MacMaster's work on the events. In fact MacMaster's chapters make extensive use of the official police archives. He relies upon secondary literature, particularly Einaudi, for his references to the Archives du Parquet de la Seine and does not refer directly to the archives of the Police Judiciaire. An apparent failure to consult the FLN archives is particularly surprising given that the authors reproach Jean-Paul Brunet for entirely neglecting "the rich body of evidence provided by FLN archives" (p. 13). The authors also make substantial claims about the importance of oral testimony and again admonish Jean-Paul Brunet, this time for his failure to use it (p. 13). Yet, despite a useful discussion of an archival transcript from Raoul Letard, an officer on 17 October, and interviews with two eyewitnesses, MacMaster's work on the FLN counter state, police crisis and terror together with the chapter dealing with demonstration itself (chapters 2-4) makes very little direct use of primary oral testimony. Most of the 'oral testimony' in the crucial chapter on the demonstrations has been quoted either from contemporary newspapers or from secondary sources, particularly Jean-Luc Einaudi (for example, pp. 118-22 and pp. 130-6). MacMaster notes the importance of establishing a critical methodology for oral testimony; it would have been helpful for him to describe how it operates in relation to secondary sources.

The authors' criticism of Jean-Paul Brunet borders on the obsessive. Several of the attacks have already been detailed, but Brunet is also condemned for "bad faith" (p. 9) and his "rush to get into print" (p. 12). In their dismissal of Brunet's uncritical approach to the "systematic and almost universal process of falsification [that] was deployed in the preparation of the documents and files relating to the Algerian deaths[.]" (p. 12), the authors overlook the occasions when his book discusses the problematic nature of the archives.[9] At the same time, Jean-Luc Einaudi, is "in part absolved in his less rigorous use of

sources: many cases that he ascribes, without firm evidence to police violence most probably were" (p. 164). When dealing with such brutal and controversial events, "probably" is simply not good enough. The authors' tedious focus on tired disputes between Jean-Luc Einaudi and Jean-Paul Brunet distracts from the excellent recent work of young historians like Linda Amiri, Emmanuel Blanchard and Rémy Valat. Their work is cited, but hardly discussed. 10]

It is also perhaps worth pointing out several errors in the text. The senior SAS/SAU officers who planned the SAT were Roger Cunibile, Hippolyte Berenguier and *Henri Pillot* not *Louis Parent* (p. 70). The FLN's breaching of the informal ceasefire of 5 June to 15 August 1961 in fact occurred on 9 August 1961, not 15 August as the authors suggest (p. 89).

There can be no doubt that Neil MacMaster and Jim House have produced a fascinating and important work on October 1961. Their innovative approach to the background and legacy of the period is beyond reproach and offers a host of new perspectives. However, as this book demonstrates, after nearly half a century, these events remain as divisive, complex and difficult as ever.

## NOTES

[1] Mohammed Harbi, "La guerre d'Algérie et l'opinion française" in Jean-Pierre Rioux, ed., *La guerre d'Algérie et les Français*, (Paris: Fayard, 1990), pp. 47-48.

[2] Benjamin Stora, *Ils venaient d'Algérie. L'immigration algérienne en France, 1912-92* (Paris: Fayard, 1992), pp. 206-7. Charles-Robert Ageron, "Les Français devant la guerre civile algérienne", in Jean-Pierre Rioux, *La Guerre d'Algérie et les Français* (Paris: Fayard, 1990), p. 55. Guy Pervillé, "La guerre d'Algérie: combien de morts" in Mohammed Harbi and Benjamin Stora (eds), *La Guerre d'Algérie* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 2004), p. 703.

[3] Raymond Muelle, *7 ans de guerre en France 1954-62. Quand le FLN frappait le métropole* (Monaco: éditions du Patrimoine, 1994), annexe 2, p. 303.

[4] Jean-Luc Einaudi, *La bataille de Paris 17 Octobre 1961* (Paris: Seuil, 1991).

[5] Archives de la prefecture de police de Paris. H1B35. "Les manifestations algériennes d'octobre 1961 et la répression colonialiste en France." Brochure published by the GPRA's Ministry of Information, Dec. 1961.

[6] Jean-Paul Brunet, *Police contre FLN. Le drame d'octobre 1961* (Paris: Flammarion, 1999).

[7] Linda Amiri, *La bataille de France. La guerre d'Algérie en métropole* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 2004).

[8] Brunet, *Police contre FLN*, p. 191.

[9] *Ibid.*, pp, 119-20, 125, 129, 154.

[10] Linda Amiri, *La bataille de France. La guerre d'Algérie en métropole* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 2004); Emmanuel Blanchard, "Police judiciaire et pratiques d'exception pendant la guerre d'Algérie," *Vingtième siècle*, 90 (2006): 61-72; Rémy Valat, "Un tournant de la 'Bataille de Paris': L'engagement de la Force de police auxiliaire (20 mars 1960)," *Outre-mer*, 91/342-3 (2004): 321-44; and Rémy Valat, *Les Calots Bleus. Une force de police auxiliaire pendant la guerre d'Algérie* (Paris, Michalon, forthcoming).

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