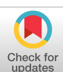
Lethal Provocation: The Constantine Murders and the Politics of French Algeria Joshua Cole (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2019). Pp. 317. $37.95 cloth. ISBN: 9781501739446

Joshua Schreier, Department of History, Vassar College, Poughkeepsie, NY, USA (joschreier@vassar.edu)

Joshua Cole's *Lethal Provocation* is an exceptionally researched, dazzlingly detailed, and multilayered account of several days of violence in the city of Constantine, Algeria, in August 1934 that left twenty-eight people dead. Cole emphasizes how politics has shaped, and perhaps continues to shape, how historians narrate the ethnically charged incidents under discussion. They could, he notes, be told as an unambiguously French story, given that the fighting was between French people, on French soil, and it was fundamentally about access to or influence over French institutions. Yet it has often been told as a story of "Muslim" anti-Jewish violence in *Algeria*. The problem for Cole "is that words like "Muslim," "Jewish," "Algerian" and "French" are both "necessary and too resonant." They threaten to "make sense, but too much of it." Cole's eminently laudable project is to make these categories make *less* sense—or at least to show that any sense they do make is inevitably contingent. By placing this question "at the heart of this book (p.4)," *Lethal Provocation* sets out to revisit the violence in Constantine fruitfully untethered to a tenacious yet distorting unit of analysis: the supposedly immutable, self-explanatory, and often clashing religiously defined communities of the non-West.

Lethal Provocation is a demanding read, with an introduction, fourteen chapters organized into four distinct parts, and a conclusion. Part 1 recounts the history of colonial Algeria with a focus on how French rule cultivated and organized a racial hierarchy consisting of European settlers; native Jews who, from 1870, enjoyed full French citizenship; and largely disenfranchised Muslims, whose faith earned them a special "personal status" incompatible with French citizenship. This hierarchy was curious; being born Muslim in French territory meant one was a "French subject," yet possessed fewer rights than white European foreigners. Meanwhile, even though Jews had full rights, settlers' tenacious hatred of them as "indigenous" or "usurpers" had, by the late 19th century, turned anti-Semitism into a particular language to express attachment to (or inclusion in) the French polity. Part 2 traces how the 1919 Jonnart Law that modestly expanded Algeria's Muslim electorate, coupled with the rise of fascism in Europe, created new political fault lines—and a new volatility—in interwar Algeria. Given the laws limiting the Muslim electorate and, by extension, the power of their elected officials, Muslim leaders turned to public associations to try to secure political relevance. Part 3 provides a blow-by-blow account of the provocations, rumors, and events that led up to and characterized the anti-Jewish violence on 4 and 5 August 1934, underlining how it was an expression of a distinctly French colonial, social, and political context. Part 4 analyzes the investigations of the violence. Here, Cole suggests that officials charged with investigating the incidents and charging the suspects manipulated evidence to present the violence as a self-explanatory articulation of immutable racial and religious hostilities between Jews and Muslims, rather than a product of the French colonial order or the rise of far-right politics. Even more shocking is that French officials buried evidence that Mohamed al-Maadi, a French soldier, right-wing nationalist, and future SS officer of mixed French and Muslim heritage, was instrumental in orchestrating most of the actual murders. These sections, building on a vast archival base drawn heavily from the collections at the Archives d'Outre Mer, offer a rich array of stories that bring colonial Constantine's interwar social order to life.

Over the course of these chapters, Cole successfully presents the putatively Muslim violence against Jews in August 1934 as a *French colonial* product. French laws, after all, ensured



https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020743822000800 Published online by Cambridge University Press

that social and political inclusion was both scarce and racialized. Muslims were largely non-citizens, and even as anti-Jewish expression had become a form of patriotic discourse, naturalized Jews remained a significant proportion of the urban electorate, allowing them to exercise political influence many thought them unentitled to. In practical terms, this meant that in Constantine Mayor Emile Morinaud, who began his career during the Dreyfus affair trying to keep Jews out of public schools, had come to rely on an alliance including anti-reformist white settlers and Jewish officials such as the conservative World War I veteran Henri Lellouche. Despite Jews having full political rights, agitation targeting them as unpatriotic, foreign, exploitative, and dishonest served as a claim for French inclusion—among both settlers *and* colonized Muslims.

In 1919, however, the Jonnart Law created a new Muslim electoral constituency, challenging this political dynamic. Even though the "reform" actually narrowed the pathway to citizenship for Muslim Algerians, it did grant a circumscribed right to vote in local elections to roughly 425,000 Algerian Muslims, amounting to about 43 percent of the adult male population. Given that they could never obtain a majority, Muslim officials turned to organizing political associations whose large public profile might give them a voice. From this emerged the Fédération des élus musulmans in 1927, and the rise of one of its most outspoken members, Mohammed Saleh Bendjelloul. The object of a good deal of the book's attention, Bendjelloul was a member of the second generation of "Young Algerians" dedicated to the anticolonial platform of securing rights and representation for Muslims while hewing closely to a patriotic republican discourse. *Lethal Provocation* presents this new Muslim political mobilization for political inclusion as part of a potentially destabilizing political realignment.

Although Cole sees no evidence that Bendjelloul trafficked in anti-Semitic rhetoric, he allows that Bendjelloul's limited options for securing political relevance might have made him hesitant to distance himself from displays of anti-Jewish anger among potential constituents. In fact, witnesses heard rioters calling out "*vive la France*" as they attacked Jewish businesses, possibly echoing European settlers' understanding of anti-Jewish expression as a form of patriotism. By this telling, the spread of misery among rural Muslims, Jews' (relative) social mobility fostered by legal equality, the resultant social divide between the groups, the intensification of a preexisting European anti-Semitic rhetoric, and the potential for political realignment thanks to the new Muslim electorate all contributed to an environment where many Muslims were susceptible to a "lethal provocation" against Jews (one of those being false rumors of the murder of Bendjelloul himself). Cole's study provides a more sophisticated explanation for anti-Jewish violence than treatments adopting what one might call a historical Muslim–Jewish relations lens.

But, as the dust jacket accurately proclaims, *Lethal Provocation* is "part murder mystery, part social history of political violence." This actually describes a tension in the book. The above paragraphs outline how the book traces and explains the ethno-political dynamics of the 1934 violence, but this description is somewhat compromised by the author's second goal: gradually revealing evidence of an official cover-up of Mohamed el-Maadi's central role in the killings. This gradual reveal, focused on the crimes of a limited number of far-right conspirators, is sometimes at odds with the upfront transparency required by a thesis-driven, explanatory history of a broad-based social phenomenon. The result is that following Cole's important arguments is sometimes a bit harder than it should be.

Finally, although the book's framing of the story as a French history of violence does some valuable work, it also cuts out a potential Arab Middle East/North Africa side of the story. The book mentions Bendjelloul's famous relative-by-marriage, the reformist shaykh Abdelhamid Ben Badis, but we hear little about what he was publishing in the pages of *al-Shihab,* his influential Arabic-language journal. Yet *al-Shihab* covered the events in Constantine in some detail. And this coverage, as recent work by Arthur Asseraf has noted, shared space with news of the Mashriq and beyond, bringing the attention of Constantine's (Muslim) readers to Jews, Zionism, Britain, and the deteriorating situation

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020743822000800 Published online by Cambridge University Press

in Palestine. Ben Badis's journal actually suggested that British and French colonialism had transformed Jews (whose historical roots and belonging in North Africa and the Middle East were not at issue) into colonists in Palestine and Algeria. Although engagement with these sources might not have challenged the book's central arguments, it could have shed light on how colonialism in Palestine also helped set the stage for the provocations in Constantine, and more broadly how understandings of "Jews" were changing in Algeria due to developments in the wider Middle East/North Africa region. Such are the pitfalls of fixing Algerian history within its French colonial borders.

Lethal Provocation's rich detail, countless vignettes, and multiple narrative arcs require some effort to follow, and its regular unpacking of complicating factors presented as challenges to putatively more evident interpretations occasionally occlude its explanatory force. Nevertheless, Cole's book is unquestionably a tremendous accomplishment. Indeed, it is a model of how French historians interested in empire might rethink incidents of interethnic tension, disaggregate supposedly self-evident "religious" categories, and highlight the central role of the French imperial republic in reifying racial cleavages and planting the seeds of violence.

doi:10.1017/S0020743822000800

Screen Shots: State Violence on Camera in Israel and Palestine. Rebecca L. Stein (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2021). Pp. 248. $85.00 cloth, $26.00 paper. ISBN: 9781503614970

Alejandro I. Paz, Department of Anthropology, University of Toronto, Toronto, Canada (alejandro.paz@utoronto.ca)

In May 2022, the longtime Palestinian reporter for *Al Jazeera*, Shireen Abu Aqleh, was killed by an Israeli soldier. Rebecca Stein could have predicted everything that followed. Although the Israeli military would admit responsibility months later, in the immediate aftermath a military spokesperson said about Abu Aqleh and her colleagues, "They're armed with cameras, if you'll permit me to say so" (*Times of Israel*, 12 May 2022). Meanwhile, the video of Abu Aqleh and her team under fire circulated widely, as did official Israeli talking points about other possible shooters. These images and talking points initiated yet another round in the contest to control the media coverage, what the Israeli military calls "another war zone" (quoted in Stein, 136). From their point of view, the State of Israel's legitimacy is at stake in the circulation of these images, and so the producers of critical images can be treated as "dangerous" targets (39, 51). For the state's critics, like the Israeli human rights NGO B'Tselem, such images represent a possible means of prodding an increasingly unmoved and hostile Israeli news audience (114–120). Given these high stakes, the history of these images is vital to understanding how the visual field of the violence of the Israeli settler–colonial project is mediated through changing technologies.

Here then is the importance of Rebecca Stein's new book, *Screen Shots*. It provides us with a systematic look at the histories—the shorter term of digital technologies and the longer term that preceded it—of this visual field. This is not to say that Stein has written a history per se; rather this is an ethnographic analysis of changing technologies with exacting attention to historical process. *Screen Shots* examines in detail adoption of photographic technologies (the camera, the photograph, the video) by Israel's highly militarized social

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020743822000800 Published online by Cambridge University Press