

General Introduction

As darkness fell on the evening of 17 October 1961 Parisians queuing for cinemas, seated in cafés, or strolling the central boulevards were astonished by the unprecedented sight of tens of thousands of Algerian demonstrators marching in disciplined rank through the heart of the capital in protest against police repression. The surprise of bystanders arose from a number of causes: by the autumn of 1961 France had been engaged for seven years in a violent colonial war to crush the Algerian struggle for independence, yet here was the ‘enemy’, the supporters and militants of the Front de libération nationale (FLN), defiantly demonstrating en masse in the streets of the capital. Secondly, throughout the war the 180,000 Algerian migrants in the Paris region lived in squalid lodging houses and shanty-towns, ‘ghettoized’ or enclave zones in the industrial suburbs that were isolated from the chic boulevards of the centre and in which the inhabitants remained largely invisible to most Parisians. A key objective of the FLN organizers was, through an ‘invasion’ of the city centre by three massive columns, to break the spatial segregation imposed on the immigrant workers, a segregation that had been reinforced by violent police repression and, since 5 October, by a discriminatory night-time curfew imposed uniquely on Algerian workers. Through a total mobilization of the Algerian community, a pacific demonstration which included women, children, and the elderly, the FLN intended to dramatically show the media and international opinion its uncontested popular support base as the unique voice of Algerian nationalism and reinforce the position of its leadership which was currently engaged in negotiations for independence with de Gaulle’s government.

As the three columns converged through the rain on the central area, closely marshalled by FLN militants, the predominant feeling among the demonstrators was one of quiet pride and even euphoria that at long last they could publicly affirm their solidarity and identity as Algerians after many years of extreme police repression, isolation, and humiliation. Although there was trepidation when confronted with the heavily armed ranks of riot police, few imagined the violence with which the security forces would unleash a wave of murderous attacks, the bloodiest act of state repression of street protest in Western Europe in modern history.¹

¹ If we leave aside situations of insurrection, revolution, or civil war in Europe, the number of instances in modern history when state forces have fired on and killed political street demonstrators has been relatively limited, but for comparison the following can be noted: Champ de Mars, Paris, 17 July 1791, the National Guard killed 50 demonstrators; Peterloo, Manchester, 16 August 1819, 11 killed; right-wing riot outside Paris parliament, 6 February 1934, 15 killed; 14 July 1953 demonstration, Paris, 7 killed; ‘Bloody Sunday’ in Londonderry, 30 January 1972, British troops killed 14. On *Kristallnacht*, 9 November 1938, although not a demonstration, Nazi gangs killed 91 Jews in

This study asks three central questions. First, why did such extreme violence take place within a European capital towards the end of a long colonial war when the opposing sides were moving to the negotiating table? Second, how was it possible that such a dramatic event in the streets of the capital could be virtually erased from public visibility in France for several decades? Third, how and why did the memories of 17 October come to occupy a key place in public debate from the 1980s?

THE GENERAL HISTORICAL CONTEXT

To approach the first of these questions we look briefly at the wider context of the Algerian War of Independence.² At the end of the Second World War, after over a century of French colonial occupation, the governments of the Fourth Republic and the dominant European settler elites in Algeria turned their backs on the opportunity to carry out significant reforms that would have offered a degree of political, social, and economic integration to the indigenous people, a population of some nine million which was subjected to racial domination and exploitation by a white minority of one million. Instead these European settlers (*pieds-noirs*) opted for a policy of reinforcing their privileged position by a system of electoral fraud, legal repression, and military ‘containment’, and—almost inevitably—created the conditions for the spread of pro-independence nationalism among the mass of poor and illiterate Algerian peasants, urban labourers, and migrant workers. When the war for independence began with the insurrection of 1 November 1954 the government response was not, as in Morocco and Tunisia, to move towards a negotiated political resolution that allowed a relatively peaceful transition to independence, but rather to opt for military repression that embroiled France in one of the most protracted and bloodiest wars of decolonization. In many instances the post-1945 withdrawal of European states from empire was relatively ordered but where there were large white settler communities, rejecting the nationalist threat of ‘the coffin or the suitcase’, Europeans were fully prepared to engage in brutal repression in order to defend entrenched racial hegemony (Kenya, Algeria, Southern Rhodesia, Angola, Mozambique, South Africa).³ The tragedy in Algeria

Germany. Global massacres in colonial or authoritarian regimes are legion, e.g. at Amritsar, 13 April 1919, British troops killed 379 Indian nationalists; at the Mexico Olympics in 1968, some 267 students were killed; and an estimated 155 at Tiananmen Square in 1989.

² There is a vast literature on the Algerian War, but for a recent overview see Sylvie Thénault, *Histoire de la guerre d'indépendance algérienne* (Paris: Flammarion, 2005); Benjamin Stora, *Algeria 1830–2000: A Short History* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002).

³ John Springhall, *Decolonization since 1945: The Collapse of European Overseas Empires* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), ch. 6. The ‘Mau Mau’ war in Kenya showed some remarkable similarities with Algeria; see David Anderson, *Histories of the Hanged: Britain's Dirty War in Kenya and the End of Empire* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2005); Caroline Elkins, *Britain's Gulag: The Brutal End of Empire in Kenya* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2005).

was that the Socialist government of Guy Mollet, giving in to right-wing settler demonstrations in February 1956, swung firmly behind an armed 'solution' and on 16 March passed through Parliament a Special Powers Act that enabled it to surrender both civilian and military authority to the generals. This created a dangerous situation in which the army was able to achieve considerable autonomy from Paris and to engage, virtually unchecked, in a massive scale of violence against the civilian population (aerial bombardment with napalm, destruction of villages, mass internment, systematic torture, summary execution, massacre), but also to establish a political power base that could be used to threaten the national government.

The generals in Algeria attempted a military-settler coup on three occasions, only the first of which, the events of 13 May 1958, was successful. Situated at a mid-way point in the eight years of war, the 13 May marked an important watershed since it led to the immediate collapse of the Fourth Republic, brought General de Gaulle back to power, and created the constitutional and political system of the current Fifth Republic. The key events with which this book is concerned, the violent repression of 17 October 1961, took place under the authority of the Gaullist regime, and in streets and squares directly under the walls of the presidential Élysée Palace, the prime minister's residence, the various ministries, as well as the National Assembly and Senate. To explain these events we need to understand the overall policies and intentions of de Gaulle during the second half of the War of Independence (May 1958 to March 1962).

Historians continue to be divided over the interpretation of de Gaulle's Algerian policy and the General's penchant for secrecy and delphic ambiguity makes it possible to sustain cogent but diametrically opposed theories. The view most widely accepted among French historians is that de Gaulle, prior to or at the moment of returning to power, believed that some form of independence was inevitable and that it was in the best interest of France to disengage from this colonial quagmire in order to redirect its energies and resources towards continental Europe, economic modernization within the framework of the European Economic Community, and the formation of a modern defence force armed with an independent nuclear deterrent. However, it is argued, de Gaulle had to proceed down this road with extreme caution if he was not to be toppled by a settler-army alliance that controlled formidable political and armed forces. The General used consummate skill to re-establish control over the Algerian administration, placing his own men (Delouvrier, Joxe, Morin) in the key posts, and gradually isolating and removing from Algeria the most politically dangerous of the generals (Massu, Salan, Challe). A crucial political watershed was reached when de Gaulle, in his radio speech of 16 September 1959, opened the prospect of self-determination, and through 1960-1 he undertook a number of conciliatory steps towards the FLN that prepared the way for negotiation by restraining the most brutal army

practices (torture, summary execution), emptying the internment camps, and calling for a unilateral ceasefire.⁴

However, this predominant interpretation sits ill with other aspects of the war and, in particular, why de Gaulle's government countenanced massive violent repression on its own doorstep in October 1961. This contradiction can be resolved, and a more cogent understanding of the events in Paris be achieved, through a quite opposite interpretation of Gaullist policy. De Gaulle's record in Algeria, it can be argued, far from achieving a skilled disengagement, was one of deepening and prolonged military violence that lasted nearly four years, longer than under the maligned Fourth Republic, and one of overall failure.⁵ He escalated a brutal military offensive under General Challe during 1959–60 and this, along with the huge investment and attempt at economic modernization under the Constantine Plan announced in October 1958, indicated an ambition to hold on to the colony. Even after de Gaulle bowed towards self-determination in November 1959, he and Michel Debré, his right-wing prime minister who was a fervent advocate of *Algérie française*, refused to negotiate with the Algerian Provisional Government (Gouvernement provisoire de la République algérienne, GPRA) or to recognize the FLN as the exclusive representative of the Algerian people. Until as late as September 1961, in spite of the referendum of 8 January, which provided resounding support for Algerian autonomy, and the negotiations at Evian (20 May to 13 June) and Lugin (20 to 28 July), de Gaulle and Debré prolonged the war unnecessarily and clung on to the illusion that they could outflank the FLN, come to terms with far more compliant and moderate Algerian representatives, and retain French economic and strategic interests, including control of the Saharan oilfields and nuclear test sites.

De Gaulle tried to destabilize the FLN during 1961 by secretly establishing a 'Third Force' Algerian political movement, a puppet or quisling body with which he could then pretend to do business, and by publicizing plans for an apartheid or Israeli-style division of the colony into 'white' and 'Arab' zones. The General was responsible for a dysfunctional regime that during 1961 contributed to a highly unstable and chaotic situation which saw a major army revolt in April 1961, continuing execution by guillotine of FLN militants, a growing wave of bombings and assassinations by the terrorist Organisation armée secrète (OAS), panic among the settlers and *harki* combatants,⁶ and an attempt by both sides to strengthen their negotiating hand by intensifying military action after 10 August 1961.

It is within this context of chaos and violence in the final stages of the Algerian War that the massacre of 17 October 1961 is to be understood. De Gaulle, far from maintaining a masterly control over the levers of power, went through bouts

⁴ For a balanced summary of this position see Thénault, *Histoire de la guerre*, 188–204.

⁵ For a cogent exposition of this interpretation see Irwin M. Wall, *France, the United States and the Algerian War* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 2001).

⁶ The *harkis* were native armed units under French military command.

of depression at the growing realization that Algeria was slipping from French grasp, and undermined coherent government policy by using Louis Joxe, Minister for Algerian Affairs, to bypass his own prime minister on key decisions. De Gaulle also allowed Debré and other 'ultras' like Roger Frey and Maurice Papon free rein to engage in aggressive actions against the FLN.⁷ Hubert Beuve-Méry, editor of *Le Monde*, noted, in the context of the extremely violent repression unleashed by Papon in late 1961, that de Gaulle had continued to tolerate 'in high level posts, even within his immediate entourage, men who have betrayed or sabotaged his political position'. He had removed Edmond Michelet, judged as 'completely faithful to his ideas, only to replace him by M. Chenot, who was more docile and receptive to the orders of M. Debré'.⁸ Against this background, army and police massacres of Algerian protesters continued unabated in Algeria: during the popular urban demonstrations of 10–11 December 1960 the security forces shot and killed over 100 unarmed civilians and a similar number again on 5 July 1961. A 'few more' in Paris would appear to have been of little concern to de Gaulle, who was no liberal humanist and had in 1945 presided over a government that massacred many thousands of Algerians in the north Constantinois region. The brutal repression of the unarmed and peaceful demonstration of 17 October was one among many acts of state violence as the colonial regime disintegrated: what distinguished the event was its location in the capital, the heart of empire, rather than in the streets of Algerian cities.

Viewing the events of 1961 from the opposite side, that of the FLN Fédération de France, it can be argued that the Algerian nationalists contributed a further element of instability to a volatile situation. By 1958 the FLN, after a bloody civil war, had largely eradicated from the Paris region its political opponents in the Mouvement national algérien (MNA) and established a sophisticated organizational control over the emigrant community. In principle, the leadership of the FLN in Tunisia commanded a centralized and authoritarian pyramidal structure that dictated policy at the lowest levels, but in reality the organization was constantly torn by complex internal factional struggles. The crisis of deepening state repression in Paris during the summer of 1961 can be in part attributed to a revolt of Paris militants against orders for a quasi-ceasefire and by a sustained campaign of assassination of police officers. The leaders of the French Federation in Cologne re-established control with some difficulty, but one means of achieving this was through the organization of the demonstration of 17 October which, it was hoped, would provide a powerful expression of cohesion. However, the Federation decision to demonstrate was in turn in defiance of the Provisional Government (GPRA) and may have been part of a bid to assert its own popular

⁷ Maurice Faivre, *Conflits d'autorités durant la guerre d'Algérie* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2004), 50–60, based on research in the archives of Michel Debré.

⁸ Centre d'histoire de l'Europe du vingtième siècle (CHEVS), Paris, Fonds H. Beuve-Méry, Box 141, letter to Jean Bruzel, 28 Dec. 1961. Unless indicated otherwise, all translations are the authors' own.

support-base in view of the imminent post-independence struggle for power. Newly opened police and army archives are not only of interest for the light which they throw on the nature of state repression in Paris, but equally for the insight they provide into the internal and clandestine decision-making processes of the FLN as it reacted to this challenge.⁹

THE CURRENT HISTORICAL DEBATE

The historian, when moving on from the wider framework of the Algerian War to focus on the specific detail of 17 October, faces a complex of issues relating to both source material and interpretation. One way of introducing this field is through a brief historiographical survey of the key books and investigations that appeared in two phases between 1985 and 2005.

A first phase (c.1985–96) was marked by a strict French government refusal, based on a law of 1979 that severely restricted access to archives, to allow historians to consult official police and judicial records relating to 17 October. This ban forced investigators to hunt around for every scrap of alternative information, from journalistic sources to oral testimony and private papers. The first significant book to appear in this period was Michel Levine's, *Les Ratonnades d'octobre: Un meurtre collectif à Paris en 1961*, published in 1985,¹⁰ which was based on contemporary tracts, newspapers, diaries, FLN archives, and interviews with numerous Algerian and French participants or observers. Levine, while concluding that the number of deaths would probably never be known, noted various estimates of 200 victims on 17 October. At this time there was still little public interest in the events and Levine was so disillusioned at the lack of response to his findings that he destroyed all his valuable research notes.

This was followed in 1986 by Ali Haroun's detailed history of the FLN in France, *La 7è Wilaya*.¹¹ Haroun was in an exceptional position to provide an insider account since in 1961 he had been a member of the five man Comité fédéral based in Germany that was in command of the entire FLN network in France and which had planned the demonstration of 17 October. Haroun was also able to interview former FLN militants and had access to his own private archive of FLN documents, including numerous reports drawn up by cadres on police violence and the numbers of dead and injured. Haroun concluded from these reports that approximately 200 Algerians had been killed during the events, while a further 2,300 received serious injuries. However, his chapter on

⁹ See the ground-breaking work of Gilbert Meynier, *Histoire intérieure du FLN, 1954–1962* (Paris: Fayard, 2002); and for 17 October specifically, Neil MacMaster and Jim House, 'La Fédération de France du FLN et l'organisation du 17 octobre 1961', *Vingtième siècle: Revue d'histoire*, 83 (July–Sept. 2004), 145–60.

¹⁰ Michel Levine, *Les Ratonnades d'octobre: Un meurtre collectif à Paris en 1961* (Paris: Ramsay, 1985).

¹¹ Ali Haroun, *La 7è Wilaya: La Guerre du FLN en France, 1954–1962* (Paris: Seuil, 1986).

'Octobre à Paris' was disappointing both in its brevity and for a rather uninformative interpretation that reflected Haroun's close proximity to the ideology of the ruling FLN party. For this he was severely taken to task by his political opponent, another former member of the FLN Comité fédéral, the historian Mohammed Harbi, who at the same time published in the journal *Sou'al* (1987) a number of invaluable FLN documents relating to the planning of 17 October.¹²

In 1988, the former Prefect (Head) of Police, Maurice Papon, who had directed police operations on the 17 October, published *Les Chevaux du pouvoir*¹³ in which he extolled his heroic role in smashing the FLN and repeated the dubious version of events that he had spun in October 1961. Papon claimed that no massacre had taken place, that FLN gunmen had fired at the police from the safety of the demonstration in order to provoke a bloodbath, and that his men had shown valiant self-discipline in containing a dangerous assault on the seat of government during which only two Algerians had died. Although Papon was able to refer to key documents in his private possession, reports identical to those later found by us in the archives of the Prefecture of Police, his selective use of this material, none of which was available to historians until after 1998, meant that his self-serving autobiography offered no new information or insights. Some critics viewed the book as an attempt to distract attention from the charges then being made against him for his role in deporting many Jews from Bordeaux to the gas chambers in 1942–4.

Finally, in 1991 Jean-Luc Einaudi published *La Bataille de Paris, 17 octobre 1961*, the single most ground-breaking and influential investigation of the events.¹⁴ Although Einaudi was denied access to government archives, he was able to unearth a considerable body of new material, partly through access to the archives of the FLN Fédération de France held by Ali Haroun but, most significantly, by a considerable number of interviews with both Algerian and French participants who provided graphic and detailed evidence of police violence. Einaudi, like Haroun, concluded that some 200 Algerians had died on 17 October, a figure that rapidly became an established fact in much of the French press and on the left. Although Einaudi was later to be subjected to criticism, most notably by the historian Jean-Paul Brunet, as a left-wing militant who grossly exaggerated state violence and arrived at inflated figures through a failure to subject his sources to critical assessment, *La Bataille de Paris* provided incontrovertible evidence of extreme levels of police repression. Einaudi's work also, unlike Levine's book six years earlier, seems to have appeared at a moment when public and media interest was more receptive and preceded a wave of further investigation including Anne Tristan's dossier of remarkable photographs, *Le Silence du*

¹² Mohammed Harbi (ed.), 'L'Algérie vingt-cinq ans après', *Sou'al: Revue quadrimestrielle*, 7 (Sept. 1987), 7–110.

¹³ Maurice Papon, *Les Chevaux du pouvoir: Le Préfet de police du général de Gaulle ouvre ses dossiers, 1958–1967* (Paris: Plon, 1988).

¹⁴ Jean-Luc Einaudi, *La Bataille de Paris, 17 octobre 1961* (Paris: Seuil, 1991).

fleuve (1991),¹⁵ and the powerful television documentary, *Une journée portée disparue* (1993).¹⁶

The situation towards the end of the first phase (1985–96) was that finally the barrier of silence surrounding the 17 October was being broken, and a significant body of ‘memory activists’ was beginning to take interest in this as a campaigning issue. However, most of the leading authors could be accused of producing accounts that were flawed by strong ideological and political bias, Haroun as the defender of an official FLN ‘line’, Papon in his role as head of the Paris police, and Einaudi as a left-wing militant. In addition, little of this production was by academic historians applying a critical methodology to test the veracity of evidence, and although some university researchers were beginning to show interest in the topic, most notably Sylvie Thénault in 1991 and Brigitte Gaiti in 1994,¹⁷ academic investigation was still hampered by the lack of access to state archives. Although the figure of 200 dead had received widespread currency, some doubt would continue to hover over this number and whether a ‘massacre’ had taken place in Paris as long as official papers remained closed.

This was to change dramatically with the opening of a second phase of historical investigation that began from the end of 1997. As the French media showed a growing interest in the events of 17 October, so there was also a demand for the opening of the state archives. A rapid shift in this direction occurred as a result of the high-profile trial of Maurice Papon (October 1997–April 1998) for crimes against humanity during the Second World War, during which the prosecution seized the opportunity to launch what the defence lawyers called the ‘trial within a trial’, an exposure of Papon’s repressive role as Paris Prefect of Police in 1961. The publicity surrounding the trial precipitated the Interior Minister, Jean-Pierre Chevènement, to announce on 17 October 1997, the thirty-sixth anniversary of the repression, the intention to open the state archives and the same day he instructed Dieudonné Mandelkern to head a commission to investigate and report on the police archives. However, it soon became apparent that the Socialist-led government was backtracking or acting in a secretive manner: the Mandelkern Report, discreetly released to the press in May 1998, was a disappointing document. Its members concluded, after only a few weeks’ investigation of the immense deposit, that estimates of several hundred deaths were wrong since at most only a few dozen Algerians had died in October 1961.¹⁸ Historians were

¹⁵ Anne Tristan, *Le Silence du fleuve: Ce crime que nous n’avons toujours pas nommé* (Paris: Au nom de la mémoire, 1991).

¹⁶ Directed and produced by Philip Brooks and Alan Hayling, this film was first shown in the UK on 13 July 1992 on Channel 4 as *Secret History: Drowning by Bullets*, and on 2 March 1993 on France-3 as *Une journée portée disparue*.

¹⁷ Sylvie Thénault, ‘La Manifestation des Algériens à Paris le 17 octobre 1961 et sa répression’, mémoire de maîtrise (Université de Paris-X, 1991); Brigitte Gaiti, ‘Les Ratés de l’histoire: Une manifestation sans suites: le 17 octobre 1961 à Paris’, *Sociétés contemporaines*, 18–19 (1994), 11–37.

¹⁸ ‘Rapport sur les archives de la préfecture de police relatives à la manifestation organisée par le FLN le 17 octobre 1961’ (6 Jan. 1998), hereafter Mandelkern Report. The diffusion of the Mandelkern Report was severely restricted.

still not allowed to check this new official version of the events through direct access to the original documents, except for three hand-picked historians, including Jean-Paul Brunet, who were quietly given exceptional access to the total archive by the Prefect of Police on 26 May 1998.¹⁹ A week later on 3 June the Justice Minister, Élisabeth Guigou, established a further commission under Jean Geronimi to investigate and report on the judicial archives,²⁰ and this confirmed a massive surge in Algerian deaths during September to October 1961, with about 48 of these specifically related to 17–18 October.

Again Brunet was placed on a fast track to privileged access to the legal archives by special permission (*dérogation*) granted on 29 March 1999 and in September 1999 he rushed into print with *Police contre FLN*,²¹ the first investigation of 17 October to be based on the highly sensitive police and judicial archives. Brunet, a Sorbonne professor of history who claimed to bring a rigorous research methodology to bear on the complex data, would appear to have had the first and last word in reaching his conclusion that Algerian deaths numbered about thirty. However, there was considerable scepticism towards Brunet's findings, and there was a touch of bad faith in his detailed attack on the 'amateurish' and flawed nature of Einaudi's research by reference to state archives to which only he had gained privileged access.

When in 1998 the authors of this book carried out research on the 17 October for a chapter in Kenneth Mouré and Martin Alexander's *Crisis and Renewal in France*²² it was at the time of the Papon trial which marked an explosion of interest in the events of 17 October which were becoming highly mediatized and politicized. In February 1999 Papon, then beginning a ten-year prison sentence, launched a libel action against Einaudi for claiming in *Le Monde* that the police had carried out a 'massacre' acting under the Prefect's orders. The action once again brought a stream of key witnesses to the events of 17 October into court and the full glare of media attention. The government's apparent bad faith was further revealed by disciplinary procedures taken against two senior archivists, Brigitte Lainé and Philippe Grand, for acting as witnesses in the Einaudi trial. By now the repression in Paris was the subject of an intense media debate, with an endless stream of articles and revelations. On the 19 October 1999 a number of trade union, human rights, and political organizations launched a campaigning group,

¹⁹ The other two historians, Jean-Marc Berlière and Denis Peschanski, appear to have been granted *dérogations*, which they did not actively utilize, to give the impression of openness. Einaudi, who had been requesting such access since the 1980s, remained locked out until Dec. 2000. On the basis of this archival access, Einaudi then wrote *Octobre à Paris: Un massacre à Paris* (Paris: Fayard, 2001).

²⁰ 'Rapport de mission: Recensement des archives judiciaires relatives à la manifestation organisée par le FLN le 17 octobre 1961' (5 May 1999), hereafter Geronimi Report.

²¹ Jean-Paul Brunet, *Police contre FLN: Le Drame d'octobre 1961* (Paris: Flammarion, 1999).

²² Jim House and Neil MacMaster, "Une journée portée disparue": The Paris Massacre of 1961 and Memory', in Kenneth Mouré and Martin S. Alexander (eds.), *Crisis and Renewal in France, 1918–1962* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2002), 267–90.

the association *Le 17 octobre 1961 contre l'oubli*, which through various publications and a website began to collect witness statements and evidence on the October massacre.²³

During the last decade the controversial question of the scale of repression in 1961 has become increasingly politicized, one key component in the wider politics of memory concerning the Algerian War, and on the need for French society and the state to acknowledge and come to terms with the crimes committed in the bloody war of decolonization, from 'disappearances' to systematic torture and mass killings.²⁴ The Papon trial of 1997–8 marked a watershed: on the one hand this last of the great state trials for French crimes against the Jews significantly laid to rest what the French historian Henry Rousso has called the 'Vichy syndrome'.²⁵ After the Liberation the humiliation of French defeat and occupation by the Germans in 1940 was salved by mythical versions of the heroic Resistance led by the national saviour de Gaulle. This quasi-official consensus was shattered by Marcel Ophul's documentary *The Sorrow and the Pity* (1971) and by the American historian Robert Paxton in *Vichy France* (1972)²⁶ which revealed significant levels of collaborationism and active French involvement in the Final Solution. Since the Dreyfus Affair in the 1890s, French political culture has divided along class, religious, and left/right ideological lines by reference to radically different interpretations of the past, forming competing myths of national identity. It took about two decades for French society to play out the 'Vichy Syndrome' and to come to terms with governmental responsibility and involvement in the Jewish Holocaust. But while the trial of Maurice Papon marked a kind of closure it simultaneously opened the door to an 'Algerian syndrome', and a new preoccupation with truth work (*travail de vérité*) on the nature of colonial repression and violence.²⁷

Within this broader field of debate, the current ideological civil war (*guerre franco-française*) on the interpretation of the Algerian War and of colonialism, the 17 October 1961 has become a particularly potent symbol, a contested site as to the reality of state violence. Battle-lines are currently drawn between two blocks: on the one hand are those positioned on the 'left' (activists of Maghrebi descent commonly known as *Beurs*, former FLN militants, anti-racists, French wartime supporters of the FLN or *porteurs de valises*, Trotskyists and Communists), who in

²³ On the Association see Olivier Le Cour Grandmaison (ed.), *Le 17 octobre 1961: Un crime d'état à Paris* (Paris: La Dispute, 2001), 254–63, and Internet <<http://17octobre1961.free.fr>>.

²⁴ See esp. Gilles Manceron and Hassan Remaoun, *D'une rive à l'autre: La Guerre d'Algérie de la mémoire à l'histoire* (Paris: Syros, 1993); Benjamin Stora, *La Gangrène et l'oubli: La Mémoire de la guerre d'Algérie* (Paris: La Découverte, 1992).

²⁵ Henry Rousso, *Le Syndrome de Vichy de 1944 à nos jours* (Paris: Seuil, 1990)—first published 1987.

²⁶ Robert O. Paxton, *Vichy France: Old Guard and New Order, 1940–1944* (New York: Knopf, 1972).

²⁷ Neil MacMaster, 'The Torture Controversy (1998–2002): Towards a "New History" of the Algerian War?', *Modern and Contemporary France*, 10/4 (2002), 449–59.

campaigning for the official recognition of a ‘massacre’ on 17 October seek out witness testimony and the secrets of government archives to prove that hundreds of Algerians died or disappeared on that night. In opposition to this are various conservative interests (former Gaullist ministers, retired generals, police officials, right-wing *pieds-noirs*) which deny that any such bloody repression took place and maintain that the few Algerian deaths recorded were a consequence of a legitimate defensive reaction of police officers responding to terrorist gunfire.

As so often in contemporary political ‘memorial battles’ over the existence of past acts of genocide or mass murder, from the Jewish Holocaust, to the Armenian Massacre, the Khmer Rouge genocide or the ‘Rape of Nanking’, one side tries to add weight to the scale of atrocity by proving the statistics of butchery, a maximum number of deaths, while for varying reasons opponents seek to minimize the numbers. In the well-known case of the Holocaust, revisionists have resorted to a range of strategies of denial or subversion that have required rebuttal by the most meticulous and microscopic examination of historical sources and their critical interpretation.²⁸ For the Algerian War as a whole, the numbers of deaths and their category (FLN or French combatants, Algerian or French civilian populations) continues to be a political bone of contention.²⁹

At an early stage in the research for this book, the authors gained special and unrestricted access to the H Series, the entire archive of the Prefecture of Police (APP) for the Algerian War period, an immense volume of documents (some two hundred cartons) that at the time Rémy Valat was still cataloguing. Many journalists and political activists had eagerly anticipated that these archives, which the state and police had for so long been reluctant to disclose, would contain highly incriminating evidence of police atrocities, a kind of ‘smoking gun’. However, the archives, far from offering ready answers, by their sheer volume and complexity present the historian with a difficult task of investigation and interpretation. The historian Jean-Paul Brunet notes that there are two obvious questions to answer in relation to these archives, have they been culled of incriminating documents and are they a reliable source?³⁰

On the first point, a close acquaintance with the archives shows that it is unlikely that any significant expurgation of incriminating texts has taken place. Given the bureaucratic tendency of the police to type multiple copies of every document that can be located in different services of the Prefecture or the archives of various ministries, weeding of materials would have been very difficult or would have left a trace. It can be noted, for example, that the archive contains many documents that are highly damning for the Prefecture, and Papon’s secret report on 17 October to the Prime Minister, which the Mandelkern Commission had reported as missing, can be readily located. Some archives, such as those of

²⁸ Richard J. Evans, *Telling Lies about Hitler: The Holocaust, History and the David Irving Trial* (London: Verso, 2002).

²⁹ For a good summary see Thénault, *Histoire de la guerre*, 264–8.

³⁰ Brunet, *Police contre FLN*, 18.

the river police that recovered bodies from the Seine, seem to have been lost or destroyed, but it is improbable that this was the result of a deliberate act of concealment or that this source would have added much to the overall picture. The historian Jean-Marc Berlière has remarked that many journalists and anti-colonial militants have suffered from a neo-positivist delusion that somewhere, buried within secret archives, are ‘smoking gun’ documents that will reveal all about state crime.³¹ Each time that important archives like that of the Prefecture of Police have been opened, activists—instead of subjecting these sources to painstaking historical investigation—have been disappointed and rushed ahead to campaign for the opening of further secret deposits that must contain the mythical prize.

Far more significant is Brunet’s second question: it can hardly be expected that police perpetrators of criminal violence, of calculated killings and torture, would be so naïve as to leave a written record of such acts and, as is known from the army in Algeria, commands relating to such repression were usually conveyed verbally and in a coded language. Historians of the police know that services skilled in presenting prosecution evidence that will hold up to cross-examination in a court of law have all-too-frequently developed sophisticated methods for the falsification of written evidence. Brunet notes, quite correctly, that the archives are of great interest to the historian since many of the documents were for internal use and reveal a surprising amount of reliable information on the concealed workings of the Prefecture apparatus. But in our opinion Brunet goes too far in accepting the fundamental ‘good faith’ and integrity of the senior officers and administrators,³² and hence tends to overlook the extent to which a systematic and almost universal process of falsification was deployed in the preparation of the documents and files relating to Algerian deaths. The historian would seem to be faced with an impenetrable thicket of deception, but one answer to this is to subject the dossiers to careful critical scrutiny—a standard methodology in all academic historical research—and in some very telling instances this does reveal how the written record was carefully and systematically falsified so as to conceal police killings.

A further line of approach is to avoid an over-dependence on police archives and to carry out research into as many different sources as possible so as to reconstruct events from the written and verbal evidence of different or opposing actors, carefully sifting out contradictions or establishing concordances. A major

³¹ Jean-Marc Berlière, ‘Archives de police/historiens policés?’, *Revue d’histoire moderne et contemporaine*, 48/4b, (supplement 2001), 57–68.

³² e.g. Brunet finds the evidence of the former Army Minister Pierre Messmer convincing since ‘he is an honest gentleman and a trustworthy witness’, while the existence of Algerian mass graves is impossible, ‘since France is a democratic country which respects freedom of expression’, see *Police contre FLN*, 232–3; his *Charonne: Lumières sur une tragédie* (Paris: Flammarion, 2003), 26, notes that autopsy reports at the Paris police morgue (IML) must be true because carried out by reputable senior doctors. Overall Brunet shows a faith in the veracity of state officials that he is not prepared to extend to Algerian or oppositional French witnesses.

criticism that has been made of Brunet is that he has relied almost uniquely on evidence from ‘one side’, police or state archives and interviews with former police officers, and entirely neglected the rich body of evidence provided by the FLN archives or the oral testimony of Algerians or French supporters of the FLN (*porteurs de valises*).³³ Brunet for example, in his rush to get into print, has failed to make use of the eighty handwritten and detailed Algerian eyewitness accounts of 17 October that were readily available in the police archives following their seizure on 9 November 1961. He also tends to infer that oral history constitutes a lesser order of ‘truth’ than the written document, although this type of source simply requires its own well-recognized methodology. Indeed, for this kind of event, the close correlation of oral and documentary sources produces the richest and most interesting interpretations. This is why our interdisciplinary approach, involving political science and sociology (sociology of memory, and of migration) as well as political and social history, has been to carry out research into as wide a range of sources as possible, involving work in many different archive centres. In addition, we have studied photographs, films, tracts, testimonies, and literature. While making no claim to being exhaustive, or of course in any way definitive, our long immersion in the archives as well as extensive reading of newspapers, contemporary theses, memoirs, and other secondary sources has provided us with a solid base from which to navigate our way round the shoals surrounding these controversial events.

Faced with the often conflicting and charged interpretations of 17 October, as well as access to a vast body of largely uncharted archival sources, the authors took an early decision as to how they could shape their overall project. We felt, without wishing to avoid the issue, that the ongoing over-preoccupation with ‘head counts’ and the statistics of death was obscuring the wider significance of the event which is of considerable historical interest and importance.³⁴ This was why we decided to abandon an initial working title ‘Paris Massacre’ for ‘Paris 1961’, since the term ‘massacre’ tended to suggest a single, explosive event in one time and place rather than, as is argued in the book, a longer cycle of violence and killings spread over weeks if not months. The term ‘massacre’ also threatened to divert discussion into an unprofitable semantic quarrel over definition that would perpetuate the numbers debate. We therefore argue that the hotly contested issue of numbers can be most satisfactorily resolved by an alternative approach to the evidence.

An equally complex, linked issue that our research has revealed is the extent to which the term ‘17 October 1961’ is widely used with quite different, but

³³ Brunet claimed that he had not interviewed any Algerians since Einaudi had probably told them not to cooperate with him (*Charonne*, 61).

³⁴ Sylvie Thénault also emphasizes the dangers of an impoverishment of historical enquiry by a militant agenda restricted to the issues of numbers and the responsibility of Papon: ‘Le Fantôme du secret autour du 17 octobre 1961’, *Matériaux pour l’histoire de notre temps*, 56 (April–June 2000), 70–6.

unexplained, meanings: most frequently relating to the events of that date, but also to a longer time-scale (the demonstrations of 17 to 20 October or the dramatic phase in police repression during September and October 1961 analysed in Part I), as well as the date serving as a wider symbol of processes of colonial and state violence, racism, and occultation. Historians often have to confront problems of definition where, due to convention, a particular date in history (e.g. 14 July 1789; 13 May 1958; 9/11) refers to both a specific moment as well as to a longer and deeper crisis. This conventional usage of symbolic time may in some instances carry no difficulties, but in relation to the events of 1961 in Paris has created, and continues to create, ambiguity, confusion, and even critical misinterpretation. For example (see Chapter 6), media statements of the kind that ‘two hundred Algerians were massacred on 17 October 1961’ may be widely understood to mean that such fatalities occurred literally within twenty-four hours while others understand this to mean a longer, but indeterminate phase of killings. Researchers since the 1980s have slowly become aware of the wider time-scale of violence in the autumn of 1961, and the deeper causalities at work, but this more sophisticated analysis continues to be blunted by a failure to clarify terminology and the different meanings of ‘17 October 1961’ being deployed. On occasions an *implicit* knowledge of this issue can be detected, as in the shift between Einaudi’s first study of 1991, *La Bataille de Paris: 17 octobre 1961*, and his second book in 2001, *Octobre 1961: Un massacre à Paris*, but ambiguities remain in the body of Einaudi’s second text.

As stated, the revised choice of title *Paris 1961* partly signals the need for a longer time-scale in our attempt to escape from the reification of ‘17 October’, but within the body of the textual analysis an ideal solution would be to deploy a more precise terminology. In reality, this has not always been possible since the term ‘17 October 1961’ has now become generalized, so embedded within media and political debates that it cannot be dislodged. However, while there can be no ready solution, the most important matter is that historians be aware of the issue and constantly address it. In this study, we have tried to be as explicit as possible and address these complex issues where relevant. Chapter 6 therefore examines debates over the numbers and time sequence of police killings of Algerians, and Chapters 11 and 12 analyse similar tensions and problems within subsequent memorial discourses on 17 October. For purposes of clarity, our own specific analysis addresses the issues of dates and terms throughout, where relevant, by looking at the specific contexts in which the terms are used. To summarize thus far, our main concern has therefore been to move beyond this narrow focus on the date 17 October 1961 by providing a wider contextualization of the repression and this has resulted in a two-part structure to the book, each with its own introductory section, and an authorial division of labour.

One of the authors, Neil MacMaster, during his research for an earlier book on the history of Algerian migration to France, had become interested in the way in which specialist policing units had as early as the inter-war period imported

colonial techniques into Paris in order to gather intelligence on the Algerian nationalist movement.³⁵ It seemed highly likely, as it did to some contemporaries, that the peculiar ferocity and forms of police repression could be explained by this colonialist background. The newly opened archives of the Prefecture of Police proved to be rich in materials on the close linkages between surveillance in Algeria and Morocco and police operations in the slums and shanty towns of Paris. Part I argues that the extraordinary levels of police violence reached in October 1961 can be best understood as the culmination of a long cycle of colonial repression and the introduction of forms of state terror, which would normally be circumscribed to military theatres of operation in North Africa, into the metropolitan capital. The massacre is not viewed as a one-off event, a momentary but bloody loss of police control in the heat of the moment, but rather as the apex of a long phase of brutal repression that was organized at the highest levels of the French state.

FROM EVENT TO MEMORY

Just as Part I ‘stretches’ the event by going backwards to understand the genealogy of repression, so Part II ‘stretches’ the event by returning to the pre-17 October context to better understand the levels of protests after 17 October, the forms these took, and study for whom, and why, the repression would constitute a memorable event. The complex way in which the parties of the left, trade unions, student, and opposition movements responded to the events must be understood in relation to the long-term political evolution of these movements, their position on the question of Algerian independence, and their embedded patterns of reactions to state repression of Algerian nationalism. The analysis then looks ahead, to examine the subsequent months during which 17 October, for a wide variety of reasons, largely disappeared from public visibility in France, despite the fact that immediately following this violent repression the Gaullist government was faced with a significant challenge from the media, trade unionists, anti-war campaigners, and limited sections of the public. Building on Jim House’s interest in the history of anti-racism, social memories, and post-colonial migration,³⁶ Part II explains how and why such a remarkable apparent disappearance could occur and then, after two decades, give way to a process of memory recovery, commemoration, and demands for symbolic reparations. These two key research questions, linking event and memory, are therefore not discrete. Political developments, and power relations during the period 1961–2 in particular, informed the way in which all participants in the events of 17 October view(ed) this past in the reconfigured context of post-colonial France and Algeria.

³⁵ Neil MacMaster, *Colonial Migrants and Racism: Algerians in France, 1900–62* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997), 153–71, 196–7.

³⁶ Jim House, ‘Antiracism and Antiracist Discourse in France from 1900 to the Present Day’, Ph.D. thesis (University of Leeds, 1997).

Stemming from these observations, one key question has been to examine the diverse impact of the 17 October events and analyse why protest reactions following 17 October took the form and nature they did. Attempting to answer this question also involves a longer-term historical analysis of the 'social constructions of indifference'³⁷ towards the plight of Algerians within French society and the attendant marginalization of the various opposition groups who campaigned against state violence and for an end to the war. This approach arguably makes the reactions after 17 October 'readable' within a set of ongoing political tensions that require careful explanation. However, one problem is that historians have previously seldom focused on such issues, since, as we have just seen, they were often more concerned by the debate about the numbers of dead and the nature of the repressive apparatus.³⁸ The attitude of the mainstream left (or indeed wider metropolitan public opinion) in relation to repression has never been a central question for academic research.³⁹

The question of the scale and nature of responses to the 17 October killings begs the role of the French Communist Party (PCF) in its suburban Paris power bases. The PCF and the trade unions were the only organizations capable of encouraging, coordinating, and leading a mass response after 17 October, hence the attention paid to them in this study. However, the role of the PCF during the war continues to be extremely controversial. Already tense before the Algerian War, relations between Algerian nationalism and the mainstream (Communist and Socialist) left became more fraught during the war as the ascendancy of the FLN placed the left collectively in an awkward position, caught between professions of international solidarity on the one hand and the realities of French left-wing colonial nationalism on the other.⁴⁰ French anti-colonial activists who experienced or witnessed police repression on 17 October were often dissident Communists. These activists continue to express deep unhappiness and bitterness with the PCF (and the mainstream left more generally) that they view as having betrayed its internationalist goals.⁴¹

Just as the war was part of a narrative of decolonization, it occurred during the cold war that structured the French political landscape and which split the left into Communist and non-Communist poles, with further tensions within each pole and within each organization, resulting in a fragmentation of the left. These fissures rendered unitary action extremely problematical on questions other

³⁷ Ronald L. Cohen, 'Silencing Objections: Social Constructions of Indifference', *Journal of Human Rights*, 1/2 (June 2002), 187–206.

³⁸ Linda Amiri's recent work adopts a wider perspective, see *Les Fantômes du 17 octobre* (Paris: Éditions Mémoire-Génériques, 2001) and *La Bataille de France: La guerre d'Algérie en Métropole* (Paris: Laffont, 2004).

³⁹ See however Jean-Pierre Rioux (ed.), *La Guerre d'Algérie et les Français* (Paris: Fayard, 1993).

⁴⁰ See Danièle Joly, *The French Communist Party and the Algerian War* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1991).

⁴¹ See Martin Evans, *The Memory of Resistance: French Opposition to the Algerian War* (Oxford: Berg, 1997).

than a defence of the Republic under the banner of anti-fascism. The Algerian War in this respect merely reconfigures these inherited cold war tensions whose influences many historians of the war in metropolitan France arguably often underestimate. The registers of anti-fascism, anti-racism, and humanitarianism, and the theme of 'Peace' in Algeria (as opposed to 'Independence'), were constant fall-back solutions of the left during the period 1961–2 that either masked or displaced the political demands Algerians were making for independence.⁴² This landscape on the mainstream left further isolated the more radical anti-colonial groups, movements, and campaigns against state repression which were often themselves subject to internal division and ambivalence over FLN violence. It was in this context that the repressive policing system was able to develop, not unchallenged, but without those challenges causing Papon or the government serious worry until after 17 October.

These conflicts and tensions lead to bitter recriminations within the left following the 17 October violence. Some, more militant writing about 17 October may therefore have served—whether intentionally or not—to minimize the extent of protests following 17 October, caught in an approach that was almost as denunciatory toward the mainstream left as it was toward the French state. Within anti-colonial discourses, the mass response to the killings of eight (later nine) anti-fascist Communist activists or sympathizers by the police at the Charonne Métro station on 8 February 1962 serves as an important counterpoint to the much smaller scale responses after 17 October.⁴³ Part II also re-examines the transformations in the French political landscape during the intervening five-month period to better assess the extent to which Charonne reinforced the virtual disappearance in France from public visibility of the 17 October events.

Analysing such highly sensitive and polemical events necessitated attentive reading of the national and Paris region trade union archives of the Communist CGT (Confédération générale du travail) and moderate CFTC (Confédération française des travailleurs chrétiens). These sources provide much new evidence of the forms and nature of responses to repression before and after 17 October, as do the archives of humanitarian organizations such as the CIMADE (Comité inter-mouvements auprès des évacués). Material in the police archives meticulously records the work stoppages, meetings, petitions, protest letters, and other acts of micro-resistance by French people aware of anti-Algerian violence throughout the period. In addition, and of particular importance in gaining a 'deeper' understanding of the war, is the recourse to oral testimonies gleaned through semi-directive interviews with many actors of the time whose reflections help transmit the diverse lived experiences of the war. Interviewees included rank-and-file

⁴² See Laure Pitti, 'Ouvriers algériens à Renault-Billancourt de la guerre d'Algérie aux grèves d'OS des années 1970. Contribution à l'histoire sociale et politique des ouvriers étrangers en France', Ph.D. thesis (Université de Paris-VIII, 2002).

⁴³ See Étienne Balibar, *Les Frontières de la démocratie* (Paris: La Découverte, 1992), ch. 1 'De Charonne à Vitry' (first published 1981).

members of the French FLN Federation (FF-FLN), FLN cadres, members of French anti-war and anti-torture groups and humanitarian organizations, dissident Communists, and some French supporters of the FLN who witnessed or participated in the 17 October demonstrations.

As the focus shifts from the events to their complex memorial afterlives, Part II grounds the analysis of memory within the changing political, social, and cultural contexts since 1961, and probes the lengthy period during which the 'space' for public memories of the 17 October events remained highly constricted. Here, French official silence through negation, amnesty policy, and censorship, Communist championing of Charonne, and Algerian silencing—followed by the official commemorations of 17 October to fit the FLN's political agenda after 1968—all played their part in marginalizing those memories of 17 October that did exist.

However, taking the construction of silence as an object of study posed its own problems of sources. Evidence was highly dispersed, often in militant publications that were difficult to obtain. Until the 1980s, the war in its entirety attracted little academic attention in France, and very few oral history and immigration studies had been interested in examining Algerians' wartime experiences.⁴⁴ Analysts of 17 October, when they mentioned the period between 1961 and the partial resurgence of the early 1980s, deplored the earlier silence but did not seek to investigate its contours in any depth. Of particular complexity were the attitudes of Algerian former demonstrators on 17 October, almost all of whom retreated into a strategic silence for several decades due to the politically 'illegitimate' contexts in both Algeria and France to hear what they had to say. In addition to the activist and war memories, the specificities of migrant memories must also be addressed to understand the individual attitudes towards an often painful past, the complex links between individual and social memories, and, crucially, the conditions of possibility enabling or disabling public memory at given moments. Again, oral sources were important: Jim House interviewed former 17 October demonstrators and residents of shanty-towns, not only for their direct experiences of the October events, but more crucially in this context, as to the reasons for their own silence regarding 17 October during the period until the 1980s or 1990s. This allowed interviewees to objectify their own memorial strategies, and helped the historian comprehend the memorial dynamics within Algerian migrant families and networks in France, another area that few studies approached until recently.⁴⁵ Interviews with memory activists and researchers complemented this approach.

⁴⁴ On the way in which immigration in France was seldom of interest to historians before the 1980s, see Gérard Noiriel, *Le Creuset français: Histoire de l'immigration XIX^e–XX^e siècle* (Paris: Seuil, 1988).

⁴⁵ David Lepoutre and Isabelle Cannoodt, *Souvenirs de familles immigrées* (Paris: Odile Jacob, 2005); Aïssa Kadri and Gérard Prévost (eds.), *Mémoires algériennes* (Paris: Syllepse, 2004). The Introduction to Part II contains a conceptual discussion on memory.

The third central question this study seeks to answer regards how and why the memories of 17 October reinvested French society from the 1980s onwards, often as part of the wider ‘memory battles’ over the Algerian War. One key explanatory factor lies with the concerns of activists of Algerian origin, many of whose parents demonstrated on 17 October. These descendants of Algerians often came across 17 October via the resilient counter-memories of French former anti-colonial activists rather than memory transmission within their own Algerian families. These newer generations of activists of Algerian descent then reinvested novel symbolic meanings in 17 October, having decided that the deliberate cultivation of memory was necessary in the face of the non-transmission within Algerian families, communities, and French society more widely. These activists drew analogies between the disturbing levels of racist violence and attitudes faced by Algerians in 1961 and what they experienced as members of racialized post-colonial groups in the 1980s and 1990s. Harnessing the case of 17 October to anti-racist campaigns and demands for justice, accountability, and the right to memory, these activists brought about a memorial reconfiguration of the events of 17 October.

Studying the conditions of possibility for the transmission and reception of such memories, alongside their content and shifting symbolic meanings, this analysis underlines the multi-generational aspects of the memories of 17 October, the Franco-Algerian spaces in which they operate, and their mobilization within social movements for symbolic justice. We know that the official concealment of abuses, precisely because it leaves open the question of their number, and hides official responsibility, perpetuates in victim groups a desire for truth and justice that may well resurface as different social, political, and cultural conditions enable greater openness, reflection, investigation, and campaigning. In turn, such campaigning and visibility provided a more sympathetic and reassuring framework in which Algerians and former French witnesses to 17 October and earlier state violence could speak out and, crucially, be believed. The analyst of these developments—in particular those of the 1990s—is faced not with a faint memorial trace that needs to be painstakingly recovered, as for the period 1961–80, but with a literal embarrassment of riches across printed sources, documentary, written and oral testimony and fiction, as memory work created significant momentum. This testifies to the remarkable way in which 17 October has moved from the outermost margins of the French political imaginary to come to occupy an important if not central role in discussions of post-colonial France. 17 October thus also represents an intriguing case study into counter-memories and their mobilization by racialized counter-cultures and their supporters.

However, as this Introduction has already indicated, the memories of 17 October have to be understood in relation to those of the Algerian War and how both Algerian and French societies have dealt—or have not dealt—with the war’s many other legacies. These debates often share a particular ‘grammar’ or ‘metalanguage’

of accusation, counter-accusation, assertion, and denial.⁴⁶ The war was not a simple conflict between the FLN and the French state: it was a conflict between the FLN, its supporters, and the French state; between the FLN and its rival the MNA; between *harkis* and FLN supporters; between the GPRA and elements of the Algerian nationalist armed forces, the ALN (Armée de libération nationale); between the OAS, the French state, and the French left. In addition, the war engendered many tensions between the PCF and the anti-colonialist and far left, and cut across many other families, groups, political parties, and institutions. Few, if any, of these tensions were resolved by the end of the war, and some only emerged or came to a head in 1962. This study therefore traces the formation of key aspects of the Franco-Algerian post-colonial condition and analyses its historical, cultural, and social dimensions experienced, in albeit highly differentiated ways, by all social and political actors, although perhaps by some more palpably than others.

The newer memory activism that had emerged regarding 17 October in the 1980s found itself within this wider polemical field. After 1962, various groups such as the *pieds-noirs*, feeling aggrieved at the French state's actions, formed highly structured, cohesive identities, as did, in their respective ways, the *Algérie française* lobby within a renascent far right, the *harkis* in the 1970s⁴⁷ and, later, the French conscript soldiers (*appelés*).⁴⁸ As is now often observed, the history of the memories of the Algerian War in France has remained that of an impossible collective memory at the French national level.⁴⁹ Only in 1999 did the French National Assembly officially recognize that a war situation had existed in Algeria. On the contrary, in Algeria, the problem, from the point of view of many within Algerian civil society, was not so much that the war/revolution was not discussed, but the way the ruling FLN mobilized it for political purposes.⁵⁰

These conflictual relationships with the past in both countries, because never resolved, have continued at a low level throughout the period since 1962, flaring at specific moments. The history of the emergence into the public sphere of the memories of 17 October 1961 in France is almost paradigmatic in this respect. Today 17 October has become a key symbol in a much broader battle in French society, a kind of 'Algeria syndrome', being waged over the recognition or occultation of France's historic role in one of the bloodiest of colonial wars.⁵¹ While the

⁴⁶ See Sandrine Lefranc, *Politiques du pardon* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 2002).

⁴⁷ On the *pieds-noirs*, see Clarisse Bueno, *Pieds-noirs de père en fils* (Paris: Balland, 2004). On the *harkis*, see Mohand Hamoumou, 'L'Histoire des harkis et Français musulmans: La Fin d'un tabou?', in Mohammed Harbi and Benjamin Stora (eds.), *La Guerre d'Algérie: 1954–2004, la fin de l'amnésie* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 2004).

⁴⁸ On former conscript soldiers, see Claire Mauss-Copeaux, *Appelés en Algérie: La Parole confisquée* (Paris: Hachette, 1998).

⁴⁹ Jean-Pierre Rioux, 'La Flamme et les bûchers', in Rioux (ed.), *La Guerre d'Algérie et les Français*.

⁵⁰ See Stora, *La Gangrène*.

⁵¹ See Henry Roussou, 'Les Raisins verts de la guerre d'Algérie', in Yves Michaud (ed.), *La Guerre d'Algérie (1954–1962)* (Paris: Odile Jacob, 2004), 127–51.

specific events of 17 October remain a central concern of the book, at the same time an exploration of the deeper roots of the massacre provide a point of entry into how the terminal crisis of colonialism was played out, rather unexpectedly, in the streets of a city that stands as a symbol of European enlightenment and civilization. Simultaneously, this book analyses how 17 October, after a lengthy period of relative silence, became established as one of those key historic events or moments in relation to which contemporary French society seeks to define its central values and identity.