

REVIEW ARTICLE

Creating the ‘Suspect’: New Works on Policing France

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Deborah Bauer, *Marianne Is Watching: Intelligence, Counterintelligence, and the Origins of the French Surveillance State* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2021).

Jennifer Anne Boittin, *Undesirable: Passionate Mobility and Women’s Defiance of French Colonial Policing, 1919–1952* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2022).

Rachida Brahim, *La race tue deux fois : Une Histoire des crimes racistes en France (1970–2000)* (Paris: Editions Syllepse, 2020).

Samuel Kalman, *Law, Order, and Empire: Policing and Crime in Colonial Algeria, 1870–1954* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2024).

Chris Millington, *The Invention of Terrorism in France, 1904–1939* (Redwood City: Stanford University Press, 2023).

Amit Prakash, *Empire on the Seine: The Policing of North Africans in Paris, 1925–1975* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022).

Critiques of police brutality and dire warnings about public safety are a seemingly inescapable topic of controversy today, saturating headlines and political campaigns all over the world. In 2020, the murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis prompted huge protests across the United States, with activists denouncing yet another episode of excessive police violence against a Black man. As Covid-19 lockdowns kept people tethered to their homes, protests echoed globally, affirming solidarity in the value of Black lives and critiques of police violence. In Europe, marchers filled the streets everywhere from the United Kingdom to Poland, and, notably for this essay, in France. France, of course, did not need an American example to reckon with police misconduct. Since at least the 1970s, French activists have been calling attention to the way that police violence is directed disproportionately at economically marginalised *banlieues* and socially marginalised immigrant populations. In 2018, French citizens witnessed the brutal policing of the *gilets jaunes*, a populist movement that criticised economic inequality and President Macron’s neoliberal policies. With horror, they read stories of protestors battered by police batons, grenades, and tear gas, losing hands and eyes in the fray. More recently, in June 2023, the police murder of Nahel Merzouk in Nanterre, following a routine traffic stop, reopened old wounds. ‘Who, exactly, do the police serve?’, protestors asked. Certainly not Nahel.

Contemporary discussions about the role of police in society have brought new and urgent questions to the historical study of crime, surveillance, and policing. In French Studies, scholars have charted the history of the police in France since its origins in seventeenth century Paris, looking at how a service created by Louis XIV, an absolutist monarch, shifted over time to become a key

republican institution.¹ This literature tends to narrate how police services arced towards professionalisation and justice, even as Marxist scholars critiqued the policing of leftist political groups.² A vast number of historical works on France address the police more obliquely, using police sources to unpack histories of anti-colonial activism, feminist militancy, mobility and migration, or everyday life. In the last decade, an important body of scholarship has begun to explore the policing of colonial subjects across France and its empire, showing how surveillance services upheld colonial domination.³ Rather than documenting the evolution of an egalitarian police, scholars of empire have shown how the French police could be used as a tool of repression for ‘deviant’ colonial populations.

The works under review in this essay continue to problematise scholarship on French policing by focusing on different institutions, diverse geographies, gendered histories, and the imbrication of imperial logics within French policing. All these authors offer us insight on how the French state and police actors defined who was ‘suspect’. This category of the suspect could be weaponised to control mobility, morality, political ideology, or national identity and proved malleable in the face of changing French politics. Though covering different topics and time periods, each scholar in their own way asks how police and surveillance services mobilised the category of ‘the suspect’ and pushes readers to connect this historical process of defining the other to current debates on citizenship, inclusion, and French identity.

Deborah Bauer’s *Marianne Is Watching* follows the broader pattern of French policing studies in its institutional emphasis, though she traces the evolution of an institution that is often overlooked – intelligence services. Bauer locates the origins of French intelligence in the chaotic period between the Franco-Prussian War and the First World War. This timeframe, she points out, is ironic in that French intelligence services developed principally in times of peace, rather than war, targeting ambiguously suspect individuals rather than declared formal enemies. Bauer also notes the haphazard and relatively early development of these services in France, compared to peers like the United States, the United Kingdom, or Prussia (pp. 10–11). The aims and enemies of French intelligence officers shifted over time, in response to the whims of governmental changes and the priority of individual leaders. Bauer explores both the history of services developed to track down foreign agents and the professionalisation of French spies, sent on missions to potential enemy neighbours like Prussia. These forms of intelligence gathering are distinct from more traditional policework focused on public order, interpersonal violence, or property crimes. Despite this, however, Bauer also shows how policing spies could become tangled up in other types of policing, and she explores the complicated overlap of police and military services in the responsibility for tracking suspected foreign agents.

In the first section of the book, Bauer charts the origins of intelligence services in police services of the *ancien régime* and military institutions like the Arab Bureaus in Algeria, but begins her analysis in earnest during the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian War. After French defeat, public opinion was convinced that lack of intelligence had been central to that defeat and this certainty led to the

¹ For example: Jean-Marc Berlière and René Lévy, *Histoire des polices de France: de l’Ancien Régime à nos jours* (Paris: Nouveau Monde, 2011); Jean-Marc Berlière, *Le monde des polices en France: XIXe-XXe siècles* (Paris: Editions Complexe, 1996); Vincent Milliot et al., *Histoire des Polices en France: des guerres de religion à nos jours* (Paris: Belin, 2020).

² On policing anarchism in nineteenth century France: John Merriman, *Ballad of the Anarchist Bandits: The Crime Spree that Grippped Belle Époque Paris* (New York: Bold Type Books, 2017). On policing communism: Frédéric Charpier, *Les RG et le Parti communiste: un combat sans merci dans la guerre froide* (Paris: Plon, 2000). On Vichy policing of the French resistance and communism: Simon Kitson, *Police and Politics in Marseille Police & Politics in Marseille, 1936–1945* (Leiden: Brill, 2014); Jean-Marc Berlière and Laurent Chabrun, *Les policiers français sous l’Occupation: d’après les archives inédites de l’épuration* (Paris: Perrin, 2001).

³ For example: Emmanuel Blanchard, *La Police Parisienne et Les Algériens, 1944–1962* (Paris: Nouveau Monde, 2011); Kathleen Keller, *Colonial Suspects: Suspicion, Imperial Rule, and Colonial Society in Interwar French West Africa* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2018); Clifford Rosenberg, *Policing Paris: The Origins of Modern Immigration Control between the Wars* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2018); Martin Thomas, *Violence and Colonial Order: Police, Workers and Protest in the European Colonial Empires, 1918–1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

reorganisation of intelligence services in the French military. Throughout the book, intelligence operatives focused primarily on the threat posed by the German Empire, especially in the wake of the French defeat. Branching out from the metropole, however, Bauer also argues that intelligence was essential to France's imperial missions in Morocco and Tunisia in the late nineteenth century, showing the spidery reach of French intelligence and the 'boomerang' of colonial intelligence practices that came back to the metropole.⁴

The last four chapters are structured around the impacts of an 1886 law criminalising espionage, the first of its kind created in peacetime. The law helped feed a 'spy mania' that had French citizens on the lookout for suspicious behaviour. Yet the vague definition of espionage it offered left open questions about what constituted a spy. Trying to sell the plans for a secret new gun or being *hired* as a spy, for example, did not count as offenses in the 1886 law. Moreover, the law attached only weak punishment to convictions. As the 1886 law set the framework for what a spy was, French intelligence services developed tools to identify foreign agents, including the creation of the infamous Carnet B system that built an archive of 'suspect' foreigners. As intelligence services broadened their mandate and popular press outlets stoked the flames of 'spy mania', the French public came to accept both spies and counterespionage as a necessity.

Bauer weaves together institutional and cultural history in her examination of the public acceptance of intelligence services. In chapter seven, for example, Bauer outlines the coverage of espionage in the French press and literature, arguing that these cultural products helped to unite France against 'common enemies' like foreigners, Jews, and 'the new woman', all of whom were at times labelled as spies. As Bauer shows, determinations of who was a spy often had more to do with the policing of morality than service to a foreign government. These socio-cultural definitions of spying also led to what Bauer describes as a Foucauldian self-disciplining in the French public. Fear of provoking a lawsuit under the 1886 law, for example, led some newspapers to practise self-censorship and avoid reporting details that might be considered sensitive 'national secrets'.

Although Bauer argues that the military eventually carved out a more exclusive role in intelligence, her examples also show an unclear mixing of police and military intelligence efforts, with police regularly drawn into counterespionage efforts. This mix of military and police efforts in pursuit of a common goal offers an interesting challenge to police historiography, which has often focused on delineating the difference between police and military. The Carnet B system, for example, was developed and used by police officers, not just military intelligence services. To that end, this history of intelligence contributes meaningfully to an understanding of French policing even as Bauer herself is mostly focused on military history.

Ultimately, Bauer argues that intelligence services were not an inevitable part of a democracy, and indeed stood counter to France's professed values of transparency in republican governance. Yet over time, French citizens and the French government reached a consensus that spies represented an existential threat to the republic. It was this fear of silent spies that drove the creation of a formal military apparatus of intelligence and counterintelligence services. Bauer asserts that the introduction of these services ultimately did more harm than good, inventing the need for a 'security state' that has endured ever since. This argument about negative consequences could have been more convincingly incorporated throughout the book. Still, *Marianne is Watching* offers an important reminder of what the republic gave up in prioritising 'security' over civil rights. As the French intelligence services came of age during the First World War, no one questioned the need for these services anymore. Intelligence permeated both military and police operations in France permanently, continuing to figure into what some scholars have described as the 'surveillance state' built in France following the 2015 Charlie Hebdo terrorist attacks.

Like Bauer, Chris Millington's *The Invention of Terrorism* focuses on the policing of political enemies. *The Invention of Terrorism*, however, builds on established literatures of political policing

⁴ On the 'imperial boomerang': Julian Go, *Policing Empires: Militarization, Race, and the Imperial Boomerang in Britain and the US* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023).

by producing not an institutional study of policing terrorists, but rather a cultural history of the idea of 'terrorism' itself, a term laden with shifting political meanings. Millington moves the reader skilfully through this shapeshifting term, from 'the Terror' of the French Revolution to the reappropriation of the word to describe anti-tsarist revolutionaries before the First World War. Millington argues that in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, French observers saw terrorism as a tool of specific political movements, with press sources using the words nihilism, anarchism, and terrorism essentially interchangeably. The First World War then introduced the idea of German 'terror', a formal enemy whose actions mimicked, in the eyes of the French press, the blind violence of the individual terrorist. The book concludes with a brief nod towards the twisting meanings of terrorism under Vichy. The authoritarian Vichy government regularly called the actions of Resistance *maquis* fighters 'terrorism'. Yet to the Resistance, their targeted attacks on infrastructure and Vichy leadership were not terrorism but legitimate acts of war against an illegitimate government. In these twists and turns in meaning, Millington points out that terrorism is always, to an extent, created in the eye of the beholder. Who gets to say what is an act of terror? And when do they lose that right?

At the heart of debates over terrorism, as with the spies Bauer discusses, is the identification of an 'un-French' population. Prior to the First World War, the French officials and journalists Millington cites persistently rejected the idea of a French terrorist. Terrorists, the logic went, could only come from outside of France. Ironically, even under Vichy, when many of the supposed terrorists were undeniably French citizens, both Vichy and the French Resistance continued to emphasise the influence of foreign powers. This xenophobic idea of terror produced what Millington describes as 'racial assumptions in French attitudes to terrorism' (p. 105). An act of violence that would be impossible for a 'rational' Frenchman would, these racial attitudes went, be logical to the mind of a Russian anarchist. In this formulation, France was not a producer of terrorism but rather its constant victim, a target of 'hostile powers' (p. 174).

Although the police feature in the investigation and prevention of terrorism, Millington also reminds the reader that it was not only state actors who contributed to shifting ideas of 'the terrorist'. Millington begins each chapter with a specific, spectacular story of 'terror' that grabbed the headlines in France, choosing one emblematic case for each period he discusses. In grounding his history of an idea in specific cases and people, Millington at once roots the idea of terrorism in local and historical contexts, and also allows us to see the role of the media in the invention of terrorism. The French *fait divers* delighted in recounting terrorist plots, revelling in the 'exotic' political beliefs and national origins of accused terrorists. This attention to the role of media, apparent also in Bauer's work on spies, is vital for our study of policing more broadly, attuning us to how popular ideas of criminality or deviance can influence police practice. If the police looked for Russian or German 'terrorists', they did so in part because of *fait divers* that reproduced these tropes. The press coverage of the dangerous outsider, stories of terrorists lurking in German or Russian immigrant homes, fed xenophobic ideas of the political suspect. Fears of terrorism, like spy mania, helped to justify intelligence services and invasive political policing, despite the contradictions these institutions might hold in a democratic society.

Millington's book is intentionally measured, a careful critique of neither terrorism as such, nor the police targeting of it. In a contemporary world where 'terrorism' carries heavy political baggage, especially in France, this refusal to engage in polemics can be useful. Millington also offers a justification for not venturing into imperial history in his tracing of terror. Colonial officials simply did not use this word to describe colonial violence enacted by the French upon local populations, nor did they use it to label Indigenous resistance to French rule, at least not until the 1950s. Still, the book does leave the reader wondering how the contemporary meaning of 'terror' and the profile of the terrorist, so radically different today, connects to the history traced by Millington. Where does religion and religious 'fanaticism' fit into these early imaginaries? How did the xenophobic othering move to a more explicitly racialised one?

If empire is intentionally left in brackets, Millington engages in an important analysis of gender. Both men and women could be terrorists, but the French press assigned them specific, distinct roles in the imaginary of terrorism. Men were the ring leaders, political purists with fringe ideologies.

They were characterised as perhaps insane, as insatiable, certainly as foreign. Women, however, fit into different moulds. The figure of the mysterious blonde accomplice appeared across cases and decades, a trope that titillated readers with an almost romantic view of individuals willing to die for a cause – or for their man. These women, in media portrayals, were sometimes Frenchwomen ‘seduced’ by foreign ideologies or foreign *femmes fatales* who joined romantic partners in a political cause. Women terrorists, in media portrayals, were pawns. The press gleefully exposed their willingness to have multiple partners or otherwise break with norms of the docile housewife. In portraying anarchist women in this way, as Millington points out, French media also rewrote the very real role of these women in organising, planning, and carrying out acts of political violence.

This attention to gender is also evident in Jennifer Boittin’s recent monograph, *Undesirable*. With engrossing storytelling, Boittin explores the lives of individual women traveling through the French Empire from 1919 to 1952, examining how their movement was constrained and policed and highlighting the defiance of women who nonetheless chose to move. Boittin frames the book through what she terms ‘passionate mobility’, defined as ‘expressing or affected by intense feeling while pursuing mobility’ (p. 5). In her exploration of mobility, Boittin roams from cases of ‘madness’, examples of forced immobility, the experience of voyage, stories of interracial or cross-colonial relationships, and sagas of revenge and repatriation. Her research, focused on French West Africa and Indochina, draws on multiple archives in France, Senegal, and Vietnam. Boittin explicitly studies the movement of French women, although her definition of ‘French’ is expansive, including women who had different claims and relationships to a French identity. This broad definition allows Boittin to explore a diverse array of women, from journalists like Andrée Viollis, activists like Denise Moran Savineau, authors like Margurite Duras and Lucie Cousturier, and educators like Germaine Le Goff, to more unknown working-class women romantically involved with colonial men and colonised women navigating French bureaucracy.

Her chapters move thematically, looking at mobility and immobility, the experience of travel, French identity, gendered violence, and intimate relationships. The book pulls from memoirs, novels, colonial reports, personal letters, and photojournalism. Her attention to popular photography as a source, rather than simply a visual aid, is a compelling example of how to write the history of women whose lives appear only in fragmentary moments in official archives. She interrogates, for example, the self-presentation of a nameless Vietnamese woman, captured by surrealist photographer Eli Lotar (pp. 119–20). Boittin’s speculation on this woman’s clothing, her expression, her place in the crowded scene brings the reader emotionally in her story, even as the archive refuses to give more information about her life. Boittin’s minute attention to this and other individual stories pulls the reader into cases that examine women’s relationship to the colonial state. A woman denouncing her employer’s abuse, a mother hoping to reunite with the father of her child, a journalist uncovering scandals of torture, young women gaining (or being denied) access to French education, women involved in or accused of being involved in sex work – these are only a few examples of the stories brought together in *Undesirable*. The book flows easily between micro-scale anecdotes and macro-theorisations of politics, law, colonial policy, and surveillance.

At times, however, the framework of ‘passionate mobility’ falters. Boittin describes the relationship between passion and mobility as women ‘conveying, reacting to, and deploying emotions in the course of, or in the cause of, physical or socioeconomic mobility’ (p. 5). Yet not all the cases in the book seem to fit this framing. Chapter four’s exploration of violence, for example, is an important examination of how gendered identities could impact women’s ability to resist or protest different forms of state and interpersonal violence. The connection to passionate mobility, however, is less clear. Similarly, the stories of African women studying at the Ecole Normale Supérieure in Senegal in chapter three does not evidently relate to the themes of mobility or passion. Nonetheless, it is clear why Boittin included these women, their reflections on white women and their own relationship to ‘Frenchness’ a fascinating glimpse into the realities of colonial society. If the analytical framework can feel stretched thin, it does not negate the book’s powerful exploration of gender and empire. It is a valuable addition, and corrective, to the small scholarship on gender and empire that has tended to examine white women

principally in their role as champions of imperial rule. While some of the women in Boittin's book certainly fit this category, she also shows a more complex and dynamic set of relationships between French women and French imperial ambitions.

Although the book names colonial policing in the title, the 'police' as such mostly appear as a source, the archival repository through which Boittin obtains such rich histories of women in empire. The police, as an institution or practice, is less the point than the remarkable agency and defiance of the women whose lives Boittin captures. Perhaps Boittin's most notable contribution to police studies, then, is her exploration of the category of the 'suspect' or, as she terms it, the 'undesirable', a term perhaps chosen as a foil to the idea of desire embedded in 'passionate mobility' but also a reflection of the language of colonial officials. Colonial bureaucrats constantly fretted over the threat that 'undesirable' women posed to imperial order. As they tried to restrict women's movement, French officials imposed ideas of morality, French identity, and whiteness onto the women they interacted with. Being 'undesirable' could be about defying gender norms, loving the wrong person, being involved in pseudo-criminal or political activity, or simply refusing to comply with the domination of colonial officials. As Boittin points out, 'As they debated undesirables, officials revealed the colonial order as a house of cards' (p. 51). What did it say about the robustness of the French Empire if French officials judged unruly women to be an existential threat to colonial rule? This fear of the 'undesirable' woman reveals, Boittin demonstrates, the fragility of the imperial order itself.

Like Boittin, Samuel Kalman centres his history of policing firmly within the French Empire. While Boittin takes Indochina and French West Africa as her examples, Kalman's *Law, Order, and Empire* focuses singularly on Algeria. Kalman's concentration on empire, as he explains, illustrates the unique imperatives of colonial policing: 'Unlike the metropolitan variant, imperial policing was never a simple matter of law enforcement; instead, it engaged in the defense of racial hegemony and imperial rule' (p. 2). Although many scholars have written histories of Algeria using police sources, Kalman is among the first to write directly *about* the Algerian police.⁵ Kalman argues, compellingly, that the Algerian police focused primarily on protecting Europeans, downplaying or ignoring crimes with native Algerians as victims. This too, distinguished the Algerian police according to Kalman, in that police were more concerned with enforcing racial boundaries and preventing potential rebellion than they were with investigating crimes against Algerians. This implicit understanding of policing as *primarily* about crime in the metropolitan context misrepresents much of the literature on European and 'Western' policing, which documents that policework is always more about social control than solving crimes.⁶ However, Kalman's extensive research in both French and Algerian archives does prove that crime was certainly not foremost in the minds of the colonial police, unless it was a crime that police officials interpreted as a threat to French dominance.

Throughout the book, Kalman shows that police encounters with Algerians focused on what police understood as crimes of anti-colonial resistance. Kalman weaves a broad range of behaviours into this category of resistance, including violence against white settlers, banditry, soccer hooliganism, arms smuggling, petty delinquency, and participation in nationalist politics. Even the timeframe of the book hints at the political focus, beginning with the era of Kabyle rebellions in the 1870s and concluding with the dawning of the Algerian War of Independence in 1954. Kalman starts with an overview of the structure and demographics of colonial policing in Algeria. Chapters two and three then look at what Kalman describes as 'anti-colonial crime', investigating how acts of petty crime, banditry, smuggling, and physical assaults on European settlers or French state agents fit into an arc of anti-colonial resistance in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Affirming Millington's framing, Kalman notes how police in this period described Algerian crime as evidence of worrying anti-French sentiments, though never labelling it 'terrorism'. The next chapter then looks at the impact of the Second

⁵ The exceptions include a chapter on the Algerian gendarmerie in Martin Thomas's *Violence and Colonial Order* and a comparative article by myself: Danielle Beaujon, 'The Algerian Enemy within Policing the Black Market in Marseille and Algiers, 1939–1950', *French Historical Studies* 47, no. 2 (2024): 289–318.

⁶ To give just one example: Alex Vitale, *The End of Policing* (New York: Verso, 2021).

World War and Vichy rule on colonial policing. Kalman, whose previous work has explored far-right extremism in Algeria, asserts that Algerian politics changed little with the arrival of Vichy but argues that the police reforms Vichy carried out left a lasting legacy of 'xenophobia and brute force ... particularly with regard to the Arab and Kabyle populations' (p. 147). *Law, Order, and Empire* is at its best in the final chapter, where Kalman analyses the incredibly repressive policing of the nationalist *Mouvement pour le Triomphe des Libertés Démocratiques* (MTLD) and *Parti du Peuple Algérien* (PPA) in Algeria.

At times, the line between resistance and crime can be hazy. Kalman suggests, convincingly, that brawls at soccer matches gave Algerians a space to express their rage over the inequalities of colonialism. Banditry, too, could be an act of resistance, a Robin Hood stealing from the empire to feed the oppressed. Yet just because French police often interpreted crimes as political resistance did not mean that other motivations did not exist. In seeing politics everywhere, Kalman at times seems to conflate very different categories of crime, for example, placing cattle raiders in the same frame of analysis as mass riots over military drafts in chapter two. If all fit into the French model of 'bandit', it can feel too neat to assign these actions to the same motives and glosses a longer history of cattle raiding in the region. This analysis may reflect how police officers interpreted crimes, but it also filters colonial society through European voices. Not all crime committed by Algerians had to be self-consciously anti-colonial, even if some of it certainly was.

Law, Order, and Empire offers a particularly rich history of the Constantine region and its rural districts, and understandably so, as the densest archival sources on policing in Algeria are from precisely this colonial *département*. Future research could add to Kalman's overarching analysis by incorporating more local perspectives. Just as the policing of Paris, Lyon, Marseille, and rural French villages differed in the metropole, so too did the dynamics of imperial dominance in Constantine and Algiers, in the city and in the countryside. The political emphasis of the book means we also sometimes lose the more human level of policing, moments when interpersonal conflict or local politics influenced the experience of colonial policing. This granular analysis is not Kalman's project, however, and he is successful in demonstrating the themes of imperial policing that threaded throughout Algeria. As Kalman shows, colonial policing reinforced the boundaries of imperial racial hierarchies. In the eyes of the police, resistance was a crime and Algerians were objects of surveillance, not a population to serve.

Amit Prakash follows some of the same themes of colonial control into the metropole in *Empire on the Seine*. The book unpacks the intense, and often brutal, surveillance of North African colonial migrants in Paris from the interwar period through to the first decades of the post-colonial period. Prakash frames his exploration of policing North Africans in Paris through the present. In discussions of the French empire, he argues, some contemporary French politicians seek to minimise the evils of the colonial past, instead focusing on the 'friendly ghosts' of empire by insisting on the supposed positive legacies of industrial development and education (p. 4). And yet, Prakash insists, the history of empire is deeply embedded in metropolitan life and in the urban history of Paris. This framing of Paris as imperial is not necessarily new,⁷ nor is Prakash's focus on the brigades that surveilled North Africans in Paris in the period between the First World War and decolonisation.⁸ Prakash does, however, push the timeline of studies of North African surveillance in Paris, examining a history of post-colonial policing that demonstrates the continuities of 'colonial' tactics after the end of formal empire.

⁷ Prakash, indeed, cites an array of scholars who have explored the history of colonial migration in Paris, including: Jennifer Boittin, *Colonial Metropolis: The Urban Grounds of Anti-Imperialism and Feminism in Interwar Paris* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2010); Philippe Dewitte, *Les mouvements nègres en France, 1919-1939* (Paris: Harmattan, 1985); Michael Goebel, *Anti-Imperial Metropolis: Interwar Paris and the Seeds of Third World Nationalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015); Gary Wilder, *The French Imperial Nation-State: Negritude & Colonial Humanism between the Two World Wars* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

⁸ For example: Blanchard, *La Police Parisienne et Les Algériens*; Rosenberg, *Policing Paris*.

Prakash charts a deeply contextualised history of policing, rooting the reader in the French conquest of Algeria, French police bureaucracy, and Algerian nationalism. He begins with the development of specialised services in the Paris prefecture that were designed to track North Africans, like the *Brigade Nord-Africaine* (BNA) police brigade and the *Service de Surveillance et de Protection des Indigènes Nord-africains* (SSPINA) social aid services. In his middle chapters, Prakash zooms in on the policing of North Africans in Paris's Goutte d'Or neighbourhood. In this North African migrant enclave, Prakash argues that the police lumped 'petty crime and political organizing alike under the rubric of the activities of a criminal, suspect population' (p. 82), paralleling arguments made by Kalman about colonial Algeria. This overlap of crime and political activism, in police understanding, empowered an invasive police presence in North Africans' lives. Police in the Goutte d'Or justified raids and harassment through a narrative of crime control, even as the tactics really served a distinctly political purpose of repressing Algerian nationalism. Prakash then examines policing during the Algerian War of Independence, charting the rise of infamous police prefect Maurice Papon and the torture and violence deployed by French police during the decolonial conflict. He also points out the police work carried out by social aid organisations like the *Service d'Assistance Technique aux Français Musulmans d'Algérie* (SAT-FMA) during the war. This emphasis on welfare is carried through in the final chapters, where Prakash examines how urban development and housing policy, too, aided French surveillance goals. Throughout these eras, the police conception of North Africans as criminal and infantile, a danger to the French public, proved remarkably durable, with violent consequences.

Like Kalman, Prakash is principally interested in a history of political policing, linking the trends in police surveillance to the development of Algerian nationalist politics. This framing is natural, given that police themselves obsessed over the political potential of Algerian colonial migrants. But focusing on politics and decolonisation does leave out a more wholistic vision of colonial policing in the metropole, as not all North African migrants actively participated in anti-colonial politics. In framing the book around 'ghosts of empire', Prakash also sells short the novelty of his work, including his emphasis on space. In anchoring his analysis in the Goutte d'Or, Prakash hints at the development of a 'hotspot' style of policing *avant la lettre*, a spatial targeting that resonates with the AI-fuelled predictive policing models of today. These spatial dynamics shine through most in chapters three and four. Prakash also makes an imperative, and underemphasised, contribution to policing studies in his insistence that we question exactly who we mean when we talk about policing. By the final chapters of the book, the police, as an institution, have all but dropped out and Prakash instead turns to surveillance efforts carried out by housing officials, welfare workers, and urban planners. This expanded definition of 'police' reimagines how we might frame studies of surveillance, in France and beyond.

The legacies of the racialised policing described by Kalman in Algeria and Prakash in Paris are evident in the haunting work of Rachida Brahim, *La race tue deux fois*. The evocative title references what Brahim sees as the double death of racial violence, 'physically because of the blow given and psychologically following the verdicts pronounced' (p. 137).⁹ Brahim traces both racist violence and anti-racism laws in France from the 1970s to early 2000s, centring two questions: What mechanisms create racist crimes? And why did French legislators fail to take racism seriously as a motive for violence? Brahim divides 'racial violence' into three categories – ideological, situational, and disciplinary. Ideological violence includes violence directed at symbols of North Africans' presence in France, like embassies and immigration organisations, or at North Africans with no other situational explanation (e.g. '*ratonnades*'). Situational violence, she argues, was interpersonal conflict provoked by an inherent fear of North Africans, a metaphorical or literal defense of their possessions by a self-declared French person. It is in her discussion of disciplinary violence that Brahim most clearly addresses policing. Disciplinary violence, she contends, is wielded by state representatives, most often police, who seek to 'normalise' a population seen as deviant (p. 63). Disciplinary violence could include the killings of North Africans who fled from police, deaths in police custody, or other examples of

⁹ The original reads: 'physiquement en raison du coup porté et psychiquement suit aux verdicts prononcés'.

violence labeled as ‘legitimate’ by the state. In this tri-fold analysis, Brahim places police violence in a wider context of vigilante violence, demonstrating that the French state and police were part of larger currents of hatred and death that threatened the lives of North African migrants in France.

In a chronology structured by incidents of racist violence and developments in French law from 1972 to 2003, Brahim moves between the reactions and testimonies of families, survivors, and activists, and an analysis of French immigration, housing, and anti-hate crime legislation. Brahim draws out specific examples of racial violence, beginning with the ‘*ratonnades*’ in Marseille in 1973 after an Algerian man killed a bus driver. Moving beyond singular incidents, however, she situates spectacular violence like this within a longer scope of violence directed against North Africans in France. The second section of the book then moves to a history of how France attempted to govern racialised subjects, examining housing and immigration law and media discourses about ‘*banlieue* youth’. She also looks at how activists in France spoke out against racial violence, pointing out the impunity of those who enacted violence against North Africans. Finally, in her last chapters, Brahim brings her analysis to universalism in French law, showing how universalist logics prevent those facing violence and discrimination in France from asserting the particularity of the aggressions they face. In this dual approach of legal and ethnographic work, Brahim insists that we must understand everyday acts of racist violence within a legal framework that structures racial difference and excuses racial violence.

Throughout her discussion of racial violence in France, Brahim is attentive to the memories and oral histories of interlocutors whose families lived through the violence, an ethnographic methodology most clearly incorporated in chapters one and five. This approach allows us to access personal memories of fear, violence, or othering that would leave no trace in a formal archive. She recounts, for example, the experience of a young woman who remembers losing an uncle to a racially motivated murder, only to have the French police mock and belittle her father when he went to them for help. ‘For my father, a human being, his own brother, was dead, but for them [the police] it was nothing more than a dog’ (p. 31).¹⁰ Brahim pairs this moving ethnographic archive with analysis of legislative measures that, she argues, built racism into French immigration law, urban planning, and anti-racism laws. When France introduced laws against hate crimes in 1972, legislators refused to recognise the true causes and scope of the problem of racial violence in France, making it all but impossible to use the laws to prosecute cases of racial violence.

Brahim is explicit and damning in her exploration of structural racism in France, insisting that it is through this lens that we must understand the pain of past violence and the continued affront of inadequate legal recourse. As she reminds us, ‘Racism, because it depends on the tool of social stratification that is race, is inherently a State affair. It is a personal injury as much as it is a public matter’ (p. 136).¹¹ Brahim is not primarily concerned with police or policing in her analysis. Nonetheless, her work is imperative for our broader conversation about policing because of her insistence on a sociological understanding of race and racism in France. This claim remains unfortunately controversial in French politics and academia, where analytical work on race is too often denigrated as an irrelevant American import or an example of *wokisme* gone too far.¹² In using the framework of structural racism to analyse anti-racist laws and legal institutions, Brahim builds a new foundation for work on French policing that centres the profound influence of race on state violence.

Together, these monographs bring exciting perspectives to French historiography and, more broadly, to our understanding of policing in Europe and its imperial possessions. Methodologically, they reframe approaches to policing. Brahim, for example, pairs ethnographic interviews with granular legal analysis. Bauer, Boittin, and Millington all mix archival records with fictional or media sources,

¹⁰ The original reads: ‘Pour mon père, un être humain, son propre frère, était mort, mais pour eux ce n’était qu’un chien.’

¹¹ The original reads: ‘Le racisme puisqu’il dépend de l’outil de stratification sociale qu’est la race, est forcément une affaire d’Etat. Il est une blessure personnelle autant qu’une affaire publique.’

¹² For example: Philippe Forest, ‘La querelle du woke’, *Etudes* 9 (2023): 43–54; Anne Toulouse, *Wokisme: La France sera-t-elle contaminée?* (Paris: Editions du Rocher, 2022); Thomas Williams, ‘The French Are in a Panic Over le Wokisme’, *The Atlantic*, 4 Feb. 2023; ‘Le “wokisme”, déconstruction d’une obsession française’, *Le Monde*, 23 June 2023; ‘Wokisme: le phénomène qui gagne du terrain en France’, *L’Express*, 25 Jan. 2022.

drawing out the circulation between literary, journalistic, and government conventions of gender, danger, and colonialism. In a historiography that often narrowly focuses on political repression, several of these books also ask us to take seriously the importance of race in the history of French policing. In particular, Prakash, Kalman and Brahim highlight the racialisation of North Africans in French colonial practice in their interpretation of violence and policing in both metropole and colony. Several of the monographs also illuminate new questions about gender, showing how ideas of the ‘dangerous’ woman help us to understand restricted mobility, in Boittin’s case, or terrorism, for Millington. The authors also implicitly reshape the boundaries of what we might consider ‘policing’, even if some of them might not frame themselves as scholars of police. The surveillance of spies, the restriction of mobility, vigilante and legal violence against racialised communities, and the repression of terrorism can all be understood, I argue, as part of police studies, even if they do not always involve the institution of the police. In Prakash’s case, he intentionally includes social aid and urban planning agencies under the heading of ‘police’. This broader view of policing complicates institutional histories of the police, in France and throughout Europe, offering new directions for the future of the field.

Throughout these six books, we can see how various state, police, and cultural actors shaped and defined the category of ‘the suspect’. The suspect is different in each monograph. Women travelling on their own or engaged in relationships with colonised men could be suspect, or as Boittin calls them, undesirable. Algerians, in metropolitan France and in Algeria, could be labelled suspect for demanding their civic rights, engaging in colonial politics, or participating in any number of social activities. Foreign citizens in France were constantly rendered as suspect, liable to be spies because of their foreign allegiances or terrorists because of their assumed proclivity for violent political action. The shifting nature of the suspect demonstrates the fluidity of the category itself. French administrators mobilised the fear of suspect populations to justify expansions of surveillance, in metropole and colony. As several of the authors remind us, the steady creep of the surveillance state, at least in part motivated by the need to control ‘suspects’, has important afterlives in contemporary France. Each of these authors show us the particular historical process behind labelling a population ‘suspect’ and in so doing, also remind us that these ‘suspects’ were not predetermined. Understanding how states label certain populations as threatening, building a common enemy for the in-group, remains paramount today.

With their different approaches, these works point to a revitalisation of the field, at a time when the study of policing itself has become all the more imperative. Though grounded in a French historiography, each of these authors also contribute to a wider exploration of criminality and surveillance. They speak to studies of policing throughout Europe that are critically examining the creation of contemporary ‘security states’ or grappling with colonial legacies in police practice, particularly in countries like France, Britain, and Belgium. Future research should continue, as some of these authors do, to knit together the history of empire and metropole when it comes to policing. Techniques of surveillance and repression were never developed in isolation, but rather were part of the circulation between civilian and military organisations, between metropolitan and colonial officials, and among different imperial powers. These flows of knowledge illuminate the webs of surveillance that underwrote state power in a French imperial nation-state held together by fraught claims of universalism.

It will be interesting to see, as the field of police studies diversifies and expands, whether French and Francophone scholarship will join in the abolitionist-oriented studies of policing central to the work in and on the United States and United Kingdom.¹³ Scholars of France have offered criticisms

¹³ To name just a few: Angela Davis et al., *Abolition. Feminism. Now* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2022); Adam Elliot-Cooper, *Black Resistance to British Policing* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2021); Garrett Felber, *Those Who Know Don’t Say: The Nation of Islam, the Black Freedom Movement, and the Carceral State* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2020); Mariame Kaba and Andrea J. Ritchie, *No More Police: A Case for Abolition* (New York: The New Press, 2022); Vitale, *The End of Policing*; Kristian Williams, *Our Enemies in Blue: Police and Power in America* (Boston: South End Press, 2007).

of specific police practices but have been reluctant to critique the legitimacy of policing institutions as a whole. This is also largely true in the activist landscape in France. If some activist organisations, like Collectif Matsuda, call openly for abolitionist ideologies, more mainstream movements, like Justice pour Adama, remain focused on reform or accountability for past violence. An approach that engages with Black feminist abolitionist scholarship, however, might shift how scholars and organisers think about the futures of policing in France. In writing about the past, future authors might also help us to rethink what is possible today.

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