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Lethal Provocation: The Constantine Murders and the Politics of French Algeria. By Joshua Cole. Cornell University Press, 2019. xii + 317 pp. \$37.95.

It is relatively rare to find scholarly books that successfully cater to the broad spectrum of the general public, undergraduates *and* experts, but *Lethal Provocation* is one such book. Part detective story, part socio-cultural case study, it will likely generate curiosity from non-specialists all the while being on the cutting edge of ongoing scholarship about colonial Algeria and 1930s anti-Semitism. The book is, however, more concerned with facts than with theory, and the lack of conceptual framework will leave some scholars dissatisfied—in particular those looking for a theorization of the Constantine riots through the lens of sectarian violence.

Joshua Cole opens his book acknowledging the multiple angles from which one can tell the story of the 1934 Constantine uprisings during which 25 Jews and 3 Muslims died. On the one hand, all actors in the conflict were French nationals on French soil. On the other, the altercation falls across clearly-defined ethno-religious lines. Neither narrative reveals the full picture, so instead, he puts the conflict into historical and legal context. Cole traces back the roots of this violence to the 1870 Crémieux decree granting Jews French citizenship but excluding Muslims. To fully opt into Frenchness, this latter group had to renounce its “Muslimness” in the eyes of the law, which only 25% of Muslims had done by 1940 (28). As French subjects, Algerians who refused to be naturalized fell in the category of “*indigènes*” (“natives”). Under Vichy after 1940, Jews would also eventually be stripped of their citizen privileges, but this postdates the Constantine conflict. This legal history survey helps Cole explore aspects of the riots that previous investigations may have overlooked.

In addition to looking at both sides of the story, Cole ties them together with the clues he gathered about the political scene of rising fascism across France. What connects the case’s multiple narrative threads is the complexing figure of Mohamed el-Maadi, a fascist Muslim soldier who professed his anti-Semitism and his French pride by advocating for a kind of *Latinité* in reverse: The French and the Muslims, he would claim, share a common destiny and origin across the Mediterranean Sea. The main movement of the book is this zooming out of the situation in Constantine to look at the broader networks of hate throughout the 1930s in order to argue that the riot did not only happen “there” (in Algeria), but also “here” (in France).

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Switching between a street-level view with descriptions of the crimes committed and an aerial view of growing extremism from Europe to Algeria provides an immersive and comprehensive dive into the period. The first two parts establish a solid historiographic base about imperial conquest and colonial law for Cole to develop his main hypothesis that the 1934 riots (detailed in part 3 of the book) and politically organized agitators like el-Maadi (part 4) are closely connected, meaning that this Algerian tragedy was no random escalation of violence. Cole arrives at an original suggestion as to why anti-Semitic Muslims like el-Maadi joined right-wing groups in the first place: he explains that they were claiming for themselves a sense of belonging to the French national community (80). Evidence of el-Maadi's direct involvement in Constantine is not ascertained clearly, but Cole's conclusion still breaks new ground in how we look at Arab-Jewish relations in colonial Algeria: for him, it is Muslims' "existential homelessness" (245) in a democratically disproportionate society that helps explain the fascist proclivity of extremists like el-Maadi. Looking at "fanaticism" and "lone-wolf" narratives is insufficient, and the author urges us to think systemically instead.

To crack this cold case, Cole drew from a wealth of sources and perspectives, but the dominant methodology is social history. Tables and censuses accompany his prose as appendices. His nineteenth-century expertise provides a helpful background in the first two parts. The last two rely on archives like police reports, articles, posters, signs and works of propaganda, letters and testimonies recounting the riots, as well as hospital records. He quotes passages from journals like the *Écho d'Alger*, the *Dépêche de Constantine*, Rabah Zenati's *La Voix indigène*, Henri Lautier's anti-Semitic paper *L'Éclair*, and el-Maadi's outlet *Er Rachid* as well as his own racist pamphlet. He went to the Musée d'Art et d'Histoire du Judaïsme in Paris, where some photographs are replicated and shown in the middle of the book as an intermission. He also obtained police information about el-Maadi that had not previously been publicized. The list of names of the victims at the end helps navigate the dense and intricate events in parts 3 and 4. Even though chapters are unconventionally brief for a monograph, it remains challenging to keep track of Cole's points and descriptions in the latter part of the book. A background on Vichy Fascism is not provided, and this might exclude certain readers from fully grasping the significance of el-Maadi as a character in the story.

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Cole does however build upon a growing historiography of Jewish-Arab relations in the French Empire, notably the 2015 book *The Burdens of Brotherhood* by Ethan Katz whom Cole acknowledges as a great help and resource for his research. Katz's work raises similar questions as Cole's; both deal with issues of identity within Jewish and Muslim communities. However, Katz's monograph differs in having a broader scope: he goes in detail about Jews and Muslims from all over the Maghreb settling in Paris and Strasbourg in the 1950s and '60s. In that sense, Cole's work stands out as a unique blend of a macro-politics outlook with a micro-history focus. This combination is valuable in my opinion—it might inspire other scholars to also look at specific colonial instances of sectarian violence in light of French republican universalism as a cultural hegemony.

To reiterate, Cole's work is interesting to a diverse audience of laymen and academics. I do wish nonetheless that he would have swapped his investigation voice for a theorizing one some of the time. References to theorists like Fanon, Gramsci or Foucault seem deliberately omitted to keep the book concrete, but going more in-depth about how we can conceptualize this case of French metropolitan politics affecting the lives of colonial subjects would have been helpful to understand this event more globally. Cole does not seem interested in conceptualizing how el-Maadi internalized colonial imperialism, and he makes a point of keeping his argument very pragmatic. *Lethal Provocation* does not serve as a theoretical template to easily extrapolate to other ethno-religious tensions outside of the French empire or in the contemporary nation state. Considering the current tensions and echoes with the past violence he describes, I wish he had better defined what he means by violence. The term "terrorism" hangs on the lips of the reader throughout the book without ever coming up. I also wish he had addressed the further applications of his work in his conclusion. Scholars and students looking at Palestine, for instance, will not find many tools in this book they can easily re-use, although his emphasis on the need to look at political ramifications beyond the simplistic Arab and Jew "circle of violence" narrative is a central take-away point. Above all else, what this book offers is a strong contribution for researchers looking at the effects of Frenchness, which he repeatedly calls "a moving target."

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