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Algeria/France

17 October 1961- fighting for the recognition of a state crime

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Sixty years after the police massacres of Algerians in Paris on 17 October 1961, it is remarkable to have to recall the causes and consequences, the perpetrators and the various reasons that have long favoured the concealment of this state crime. This situation sheds light on how this crime was first obliterated by the denial and lies forged by the public authorities to respond to the accusations made by some contemporaries, and then minimized by various discursive strategies characterized by the pusillanimity of the French authorities and the main political formations of the left.

"Organized lynching"

A classic situation, in truth, when the state commits this type of crime where racist dispositions and practices are conjoined, and "methods of mass terror" that violate the democratic principles this state claims to embody. First "established in Algiers by General Massu", among others, these methods "were transplanted to Paris" by "the torturers of Mr. Papon". [1] "The Seine" testifies to this since it "carries drowned people who evoke Colonel Bigeard's shrimps, the drowned of the Bay of Algiers". The raids carried out by the police and the "Palais des sports", where thousands of demonstrators were held in atrocious conditions and sometimes killed with rifle butts, are reminiscent of the "Vel d'hiv" of 1942. [2] Similarly at the Parc des Expositions where the police continued to wield batons and blackjacks against the internees, long left without care or food. Identified as "ringleaders", some were summarily executed as police officials acknowledge.

These quotes are taken from the November 1961 issue of *Vérité-Liberté*, a clandestine newspaper founded in 1960 with the aim of disseminating information affected by censorship on the Algerian war. We learn a lot about these massacres and about the knowledge that some contemporaries had of them. This is evidenced, in particular, by the "final remarks" written by the historian Pierre Vidal-Naquet. A member of the editorial board, he notes that while the violence committed by the police in October was not new, it is nevertheless characterized by its "magnitude". So, he does not hesitate to describe them as a "massacre" by recalling that since "the summer of 1961", it "is almost certain that several hundred Algerians have disappeared in the Paris region". For its part, the magazine *Les Temps Modernes* denounced the "raids of harkis", the "organized lynching" of Algerians and, on 17 October, the "cops" unleashed by "the prefect who orders, the minister who authorizes" and the "government that covers the despicable unleashing of racism". [3]

Techniques of Counter-Revolutionary War

This racism is also denounced by the "Appeal to the French People" drafted by the French Federation of the Front de Libération Nationale (FLN), dated 18 October. As proof, the "special curfew" imposed since 5 October on Algerians alone by Maurice Papon, who "is preparing for a new battle of Algiers", "monster sweeps" and "the shedding of blood". [4] Finally, to further emphasize the scandalous nature of the massacres, Paul Thibaud notes: "On the demonstrations, on the mass character, on the calm, the dignity, the 'non-violence' of the participants, everything has been said... From *l'Humanité* to *Le Figaro*, from *Le Monde* to *France-Soir*, all "confirm it: the demonstrators were disciplined, peaceful; ...no weapons were found on the Algerians". [5]

Crime and state racism, crime against humanity more precisely, in the view of the lawyer, the late Nicole Dreyfus,

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since the acts perpetrated in the capital in this month of October 1961 were prepared and then implemented by the police prefecture with the approval of the government and the Prime Minister, Michel Debré. In accordance with article 212-1 of the Penal Code, which defines this type of crime, it is indeed a concerted plan carried out on political and racial grounds against civilians, victims of torture, summary executions and enforced disappearances. [6] Finally, state terrorism, used to break the Parisian organization of the FLN and strike against the Algerians who supported the nationalist organization. For the editors of *Vérité-Liberté* and *Les Temps Modernes*, there is no doubt that techniques from the counter-revolutionary war led by France in Algeria were imported into mainland France.

Mobilized for several decades, the heirs of colonial and postcolonial immigration, today joined by more than a hundred signatories of the Appeal of the Unitary Collective, bringing together many political parties, trade unions and associations, demand that the state crimes of 17 October 1961 be finally recognized, the archives relating to them opened to the greatest number and a real memorial site erected in the capital so that no one ignores the wrongs suffered by those who, at the risk of their lives and freedom, courageously demonstrated to defend their dignity and the right of peoples to self-determination.

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[1] Maurice Papon was a high-ranking civil servant and police chief, notably in Paris at this time. In 1998, Papon was convicted of crimes against humanity for his role in organizing the deportations of Jews during the Second World War. [Wikipedia](#).

[2] "Vel d'hiv" was a mass arrest of foreign Jewish families by French police and gendarmes at the behest of the German authorities, that took place in Paris on 16 and 17 July 1942. According to records of the Préfecture de Police, 13,152 Jews were arrested, including more than 4,000 children. [Wikipedia](#).

[3] *Vérité-Liberté*, No. 13, November 1961, pp. 1 and 7. The article from *Les Temps Modernes* is reproduced in the same issue.

[4] "Appel au peuple français", Front de libération nationale, Fédération de France, p. 1.

[5] *Vérité-Liberté*, op. cit., p. 7. [*L'Humanité* is the newspaper of the French Communist Party, *Le Figaro* of the French right, *Le Monde* of the liberal bourgeoisie, *France Soir* a popular paper. *IVP*].

[6] Thanks to magistrate Louis Joinet, an international convention, which entered into force on 23 December 2010 makes enforced disappearance a crime against humanity. Three years later, the Penal Code adopted this - art. 212-1.