And Paris Saw Them: An Examination of Elie Kagan's Photographs of the Paris Massacre of October 17, 1961

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by

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ABSTRACT

History is not a single, homogenous account of the past. It is instead characterized by multiple, often conflicting narratives on which different social groups base their identities. By examining a series of Elie Kagan’s photographs of the October 17 massacre of Algerian demonstrators in Paris, this thesis looks to determine the role of these photographs in French and Algerian collective memory of the event. It also addresses issues surrounding compassion fatigue in the modern image culture and the effects of drawing photographic parallels between modern atrocity and the Holocaust.
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A series of three photographs from the collection begins on pg. 49. Each is followed by a brief photographic analysis.
Introduction

“Aucun Parisien, sauf les membres des réseaux de soutien, ne peut se douter de ce qui va se passer. La police elle-même ne le découvre que le 17 à midi, en interpellant des manifestants qui se sont trompés d’heure. Trop tard : le soir elle réprimera les 30 000 Algériens qui vont converger vers Paris ; elle ne les empêchera pas d’exister. »

On the night of October 17, 1961, tens of thousands of Algerians poured into Paris out of the various suburbs and bidonvilles to protest the recent imposition of a curfew on Parisian Algerians by Maurice Papon, then Prefect of the Parisian police forces. They poured from the metro stations at Opéra, Concorde, and Étoile; the train stations of Saint-Lazare, Gare du Nord, and Gare de l’Est; and from the pont de Neuilly. Clapping their hands and shouting slogans, Algerians, women and men of various ages, took to the streets of Paris in this peaceful demonstration organized by the Front de Libération Nationale.

What began, however, as a peaceful call for recognition and dignity ended in a massacre. Motivated by false reports of violence against units of the compagnies républicaines de sécurité and discretion granted by Maurice Papon, French police forces used any means, excessively violent or otherwise, to restore order. Demonstrators were beaten, shot, and thrown into the Seine. By the end of the night, 11,538 demonstrators were arrested and subsequently interned at the palais des Sports, the Parc des

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1 Tristan 47
2 Tristan 49-51
Expositions, the stade de Coubertin, and the identification center at Vincennes.³ Though the total number of deaths is difficult to establish, the most likely estimates are somewhere between two hundred and four hundred. The government’s official count the day after the demonstration was three: two Algerian protestors and one Frenchman.⁴ Though many photos were taken during the course of the evening, very few capture the character of the events of that night. An Associated Press photographer, Joseph Babout, had his camera destroyed as he was beaten by police while attempting to photograph the repression.⁵ Because of police seizures of photographers’ film and the overall confusion of the demonstration, the only photographs that communicate the brutality of October 17 were those taken by Elie Kagan, a freelance reporter working for the communist newspaper L’Humanité.

This thesis provides an analysis of the role of photography in society. It examines the medium’s truth-weight and symbolic force through discussing the issues of compassion fatigue in modern image culture and references to the Holocaust in the coverage of modern atrocity. The analysis will focus on how Elie Kagan’s photographs of the October 17 massacre affect the complex collective memory and the formation of French and Algerian identity.

Kagan adds forty or so photographs to the first-hand accounts of demonstrators and journalists who witnessed the violence of October 17.⁶ His foray into the night of violence began on the boulevard Bonne-Nouvelle, when he noticed the assembly of a

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³ Nordman and Vidal
⁴ Einaudi 215
⁵ Einaudi 221
⁶ Einaudi and Kagan 31
“population brune, inhabituelle.” Like other journalists, he had been informed of the coming demonstrations. Kagan watched as the violence that was to break out all over Paris manifested itself in front of him. Algerians were pursued and beaten as they attempted to find refuge any place they could, including the main office of *L’Humanité*. The gates were closed on them, an irony and an affront that Kagan would never forget. \(^7\)

Kagan took the first of his photos at the metro station *Concorde*, showing groups of Algerians, rounded up, hands on their heads, standing with their faces to the back wall of the platform. His camera would never fully capture the violence that would eventually occur there, though it did manage to clearly juxtapose the station’s nameplate and the events occurring just below.

At his next stop, the metro station *Solférino*, Kagan would have his first close encounter with the bodily horror of the repression. He took a photo of an Algerian man grimacing and holding his shoulder, having been shot. Others showed demonstrators, beaten and bloody, desperately trying to board subway cars to escape the police pursuit. Additionally, he captured the image of a young Frenchman aiding the demonstrators to flee by buying and distributing packets of metro tickets. This was in sharp contrast to the curt reproach of the RATP official who informed Kagan that taking photos on the metro platform was prohibited. Kagan responded in his personal style: « Et ce n’est pas interdit de tuer les gens ? Vous ne faites même pas un geste de sollicitude, de lui essuyer le sang

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\(^7\) Einaudi and Kagan 12  
\(^8\) Einaudi and Kagan 12
Kagan exited the station and saw the rue de Lille packed with French police forces. Hiding in a public urinal to avoid detection, he found himself so scared and shocked that he doused his head in the running water to refresh himself. Afterward, he returned to the Concorde station to pick up his scooter, and it was here that he met René Dazy, a journalist from Libération. The two men, consumed by the shock of what each had witnessed, mounted Kagan’s Vespa and headed toward the Neuilly bridge.  

René Dazy left to write his account of the night in an article, leaving Kagan to take photos of the buses requisitioned by police prefect Maurice Papon that would transport the influx of arrested Algerians as police brought them from different areas of the city. It was only through quick thinking that Kagan was able to keep these photos. He discreetly threw his film from the bridge onto the road below before police were able to search him. Having found nothing, they released him, and he was able to recover it.  

Hearing of shots fired in Nanterre, Kagan took his scooter to the rue des Pâquerettes, where he took what could be considered the most horrific of his photos of the demonstration. The demonstrators had since left the area, though he saw the remnants of the brutal repression in the form of several wounded and dead Algerians. He snapped a few photos of them before helping an American journalist, who had arrived on the scene,
to take one severely wounded man to the hospital in Nanterre. Kagan would never know the wounded man’s fate.\textsuperscript{12}

Over the course of the next few days, Kagan visited the internment center at the sports complex at the \textit{porte de Versailles} and the hospital at Nanterre. On the 20\textsuperscript{th} of October, he again photographed a demonstration, conducted by Algerian women and children calling for the release of detainees. Kagan was arrested and detained for two hours. Though racial tension was evident, the event did not approach the horror of the night of October 17.\textsuperscript{13}

\textsuperscript{12} Einaudi and Kagan 18
\textsuperscript{13} Einaudi and Kagan 20
Collective Memory

“The creation and maintenance of a collective or historical memory is a dynamic social and psychological process. It involves the ongoing talking and thinking about the event by the affected members of the society or culture. This interaction process is critical to the organization and assimilation of the event in the form of a collective narrative.”

The term collective memory was created as an alternative to the assumptions of laboratory-based memory research that considered memory to be a highly individual phenomenon, and placed very little emphasis on context or interaction. The French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs and the Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky hypothesized that memories developed following a different pattern.

According to them, the experience of interacting with others affects how people remember events. When forming individual memories, people are compelled to define them in terms of other people. For example, personal experiences, even those that occur in complete solitude, are still defined and recalled using language – a mechanism of communication and interaction. After the event, society continues to have a considerable

14 Pennebaker and Banasik 4
influence on how events are recalled or commemorated. Though the human brain is designed to chemically record discrete bits of information, what people generally consider to be memory, such as the narrative of one’s past, is more often the result of collective agreements and commemoration of the past rather than direct experience.

The analysis leads Halbwachs to one of his most important conclusions, as Paez et al. state: “Specifically, the function of socially shared images of the past is to allow the group to foster social cohesion, to develop and defend social identification, and to justify current attitudes and needs.” Not only do these collectively constructed recollections provide the underpinnings of individual identity, they also give identity to and justify the needs of different social groups and organizations.

Recent work on collective memory has developed in three key areas of analysis: how recollections of the past are manipulated to serve the needs of certain social groups; the factors that influence an event’s retention in collective memory; and how an event’s repression or its particular horror affect its place in collective memory.
Photography: Its Power and Limits

A photograph’s relationship with the public has two levels, two sources of its so-called power. The first is that of truth value, i.e., the confidence that the photograph depicts an event that actually occurred and that the depiction has not been tampered with.\(^{18}\) According to Sontag, “a photograph passes for incontrovertible proof that a given thing happened.”\(^{19}\)

By virtue of its mechanical process, photography gives the viewer the ability to see. Packets of light bounce from an object, travel through the lens, and land on a patina of photosensitive gel that (barring light leakage and breakdown in the mechanism) renders an exact image of the subject. Barbie Zelizer writes that “from the mid-1800s onward, the photograph’s technical and mimetic qualities established it as a successful tool for gathering empirical evidence. Photography became lodged in the imagination as a vessel of accuracy, authenticity, verisimilitude, and truth.”\(^{20}\) Paintings and drawings imitate the act of seeing, with oils and pastels tricking the mind and imitating the act of seeing through, in Sontag’s phrase, a “narrowly selective interpretation.”\(^{21}\) Photography, in contrast, \textit{is} the act of seeing. For Roland Barthes, “the photograph has something

\(^{18}\) Zelizer 8
\(^{19}\) Sontag, On Photography, 5
\(^{20}\) Zelizer 9
\(^{21}\) Sontag, On Photography, 6
tautological about it: a pipe, here, is always and intractably a pipe. It is as if the photograph always carries its referent with itself. .”

Taking this marriage of subject to photograph to the extreme, some suggest that looking at a photograph is tantamount to witnessing it firsthand. The beads of light that emanate from a photograph are identical to those that were reflected off the subject itself. This vision stems from our almost religious trust in the camera’s ability to show a genuine image of the event. The machine cannot lie. No prejudices skewer its perception. Nothing compels it to judge. The lens itself is a totally objective witness, which a human being could never hope to be.

However, although the photograph begins as a product of the dispassionate camera, it finishes under the gaze of any number of examiners, each with his or her own prejudices and passions. The original patterns of light and shadow still exist on the paper, but as they are examined they are bent by human experiences, preconceptions, contexts, needs, and wants. The picture is bound to the referent; the experience of seeing is bound to the viewer. Additionally, there is another type of human intervention, because the camera is simply a tool used by a photographer. Certain choices made by the photographer can affect how the photograph represents a given subject or situation.

Looking is arguably the most basic mode of perception. Thomas Aquinas called it the “noblest and most trustworthy of the senses.” Seeing is believing, usually. But photographic “evidence” of the Loch Ness monster has been floating around for years (albeit in various degrees of blurriness) yet few would say that Nessie’s existence has

22 Barthes 5 (emphasis mine)
23 Barthes 9
been definitively proven. Today, inexpensive and widely used computer programs allow undetectable photographic manipulation. Despite the “tautological” mystique that surrounds the photographic process, photography’s truth value is not entirely unassailable. Even before digital manipulation, when confronted in court with the photographs of the October 17 massacre, Maurice Papon replied that the photographs had been doctored.\textsuperscript{24} Thus, although for most people, photographs show what has been, the image is always subject to an interpretation that is affected by information extraneous to that provided in the photograph.

The second level of a photograph’s power is its symbolic force. Photographs refer to an instant, but the image goes on to be part of a larger, complex “interpretive framework.”\textsuperscript{25} They are put out into the world, their symbolic meaning largely in the hands of those who will see them. Beliefs, prejudices and contemporary agendas hold sway. At this level, the focus shifts from what the photograph represents to how a viewer is likely to interpret it. We should not ask: “What do these photographs authenticate? But: How were they articulated in and how did they articulate an argument? Whose was this argument? How was it validated? Who spoke it? To whom? Under what conditions? To what ends? With what effects?”\textsuperscript{26}

A prime example of this symbolic power is that held by the photographs taken at the liberation of various concentration camps at the end of World War Two. The range and explicitness of representation combined with the sheer number of photos displayed

\textsuperscript{24} Einaudi and Kagan 29
\textsuperscript{25} Zelizer 9
\textsuperscript{26} Zelizer 10
turned them into symbols, with “captions that told of a generalized phenomena rather than of specific events – a mass burial, a shower, a survivor.”

For men and women of the Allied nations, the photographs did not simply depict the suffering and death of specific Holocaust victims. They represented genocidal suffering and death as ideas in general, as well as a justification for the sacrifice and the need for perpetual vigilance against the reoccurrence of such atrocity.

Kagan’s photographs have taken on a similar status for historians of the massacre. Though they are relatively few when compared to photos of the liberation of the camps, they have in many ways come to represent much of the violent, racially motivated repression of Algerian workers in France during the later years of the war. For example, Elie Kagan would never know the name of the wounded man on the rue des Pâquerettes whom he and an American journalist helped to the hospital. It was only in February of 2000, a year after Kagan’s death, that a man, Mohamed Bennehar, approached Jean-Luc Einaudi to inform him that the man was in fact his uncle, Abdelkader Bennehar. His name was on a list of the dead at a departmental morgue in Nanterre, where his body was brought on October 18, 1961. Yet before this identification, the photograph essentially had no subject. Few knew this man’s name; therefore, the picture has maintained a symbolic force as a synecdoche for the event as a whole.

The symbolic force of Kagan’s photographs is also maintained through republication and the use of the photographs out of their original limited-circulation, journalistic context. They have accompanied much of the writing dedicated to exposing

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27 Zelizer 14
28 Kagan and Einaudi 29
the true nature of the massacre and the subsequent repression of information, including Paulette Péju’s *Ratonnades à Paris*; Anne Tristan’s *Le Silence du fleuve*; and Jean-Luc Einaudi’s *La Bataille de Paris*. Thus, the photos are not only a symbol of the horror of the event itself, but also of the larger purpose of resisting forgetfulness and undoing the government-sanctioned erasure of information about France’s tumultuous relationship with its former colony.

Unfortunately, these traits, truth-value and symbolic force -- which give photography its unique influence -- can also be a source of weakness. A photograph represents a subject and communicates through verisimilitude: it shows “what-has-been.”²⁹ The problem is that a photograph stops there. With no knowledge of the context on the part of the examiner, the photograph is relatively impotent. “Like all artifacts spirited away from their original surroundings, photographs mean next to nothing on their own.”³⁰ A photograph can shock a viewer so much that it makes her or him wish to know more (or look away), but the fact remains that it only has the power to communicate a single instant.

This limit has several consequences. It can lead to the outright dismissal of atrocity photos by an uninformed viewer: “The most literal adjective that could be applied to them is *arresting*. We are seized by them.”³¹ A viewer sees a photograph, recognizes it as tragic, but files it away because with no knowledge of the context, he or

²⁹ Barthes 76
³⁰ Taylor 16
³¹ Berger 289
she is unable to place it in a larger narrative. Sontag writes: “Photographs cannot create a moral position, but they can reinforce one – and can build a nascent one.”

Additionally, because photographs lack an ability to communicate their own context, the conclusions that viewers ultimately draw from them are equally affected by the proximity of the latter to news stories, captions, or other photographs. Captions are powerful because of their close association with photographs.

William Sontay remarks: “One picture is worth a thousand words. Yes, but only if you look at the picture and say or think the thousand words.” Sayoran’s comment highlights the fact that even though it is the nature of photography to show an isolated instance, viewers are still compelled to use language to contextualize an image. This is because photographs, as Jefferson Hunter writes, enjoy an “entanglement with actuality.”

Thus, because viewers know that there is a story to be told, and because language alone can specify “a photograph’s relation to localities, time, individual identity, and the other categories of human understanding,” the need to understand the meaning of photographs invites the contribution of a caption, and these words are in many ways granted the same trust and truth-telling power common to photographs.

Although a well-written caption can often serve the dual purpose of contextualizing and encouraging a deeper understanding, it can also hijack a photograph’s meaning and completely destroy its relationship to the truth. John Taylor imagines a chilling example: “A caption under photographs of the Holocaust describing

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32 Sontag, On Photography, 17
33 Hunter 6
34 Hunter 6
the event as ‘efficient and good’ can be imagined, and it could have currency among neo-fascists and those who deny the Holocaust.”

Nothing in Kagan’s photographs of October 17 (apart from the fact that the violence that they depict has been corroborated by years of study) inherently prevents them from being viewed in much the same way. A photograph of Algerian workers being arrested and placed on busses could either be “a despicable instance of racist, state-sanctioned violence” or “French police forces bravely and dutifully defusing an explosive situation by arresting members of the violent, rioting mob.” Indeed, “there is nothing inherent in photographs as indices of what-has-been that determines their meaning, and nothing in documentary as a mode which prevents it from becoming part of the cultural fantasies of victors.”

Thus, photography’s verisimilitude is not inviolable, but is often shaded by both its distance from a context and its strong associations with language. The truth inherent in a photo is always changed by a viewer’s beliefs or political agendas. The truth of Kagan’s photos was certainly not convincing to Maurice Papon, who during his defamation suit against Jean-Luc Einaudi dismissed the whole of Kagan’s photos as having been doctored or edited: “Je n’y crois pas, c’est du montage. . .”

A photograph’s becoming a symbol can be a source of weakness as well. In the modern era, the Holocaust has become the standard by which all other atrocities are measured (if one can measure evil in such a way). Despots are referred to as “new Hitlers” or exhibiting “Hitlerian tendencies.” The word holocaust is uncapitalized.

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35 Taylor 38
36 Taylor 38
37 Einaudi and Kagan 29
38 Zelizer 216
of the legacies of the world’s most terrible tragedy was a whole new vocabulary for discussing tragedy in general.

The photographs of the liberation also engendered a visual vocabulary much in the same way. Piles of corpses, sunken-eyed prisoners, bodies lined up in trenches: photographs of modern atrocity use these cues to signal the presence of genocide.

Some argue that these associations can be an effective tool of communication for reporters. An association with the Holocaust is a means of defining an event as “genocide” and inspiring those who view it to take action: “This is genocide. We’ve shown you the signs of it. You know that something has to be done.” Unfortunately, this is not often the case. Zelizer writes that “while the continual references keep atrocity in the public imagination, they also abandon it there. Employing familiar terms in so many new contexts of barbarism flattens the original term’s resonance and denies the complexity of the events to which it refers.”

When the Holocaust is used as a reference point for modern atrocity, it is reduced to simply that: a moral measuring stick stripped of references to the intricacies of its context. The evil perpetrated becomes, like a proven mathematical axiom, a foregone conclusion that does not demand a deeper understanding. This phenomenon is especially true for photographs that recall Holocaust. It is used an as interpretive anchor, as editors and photographers use its visual vocabulary to draw a parallel between images of contemporary atrocity and images of atrocity during the Holocaust. The Holocaust photo elicits the desired response, but it functions primarily as a reference point.

\textsuperscript{39} Zelizer 205
During the murder investigation in *Murder in Memoriam*, the events of October 17 become secondary to events of the Deportation in much the same way. By the end of the novel, questions about the Occupation take center stage while 1961 goes unmentioned.

In addition to dampening the impact of the Holocaust, this use of Holocaust photography may also squelch our motivation to take action against contemporary atrocity. Zelizer writes that “the images provided long ago – on the killing fields of World War II – offer a context that undermines the events that it contextualizes. Our helplessness toward these more contemporary atrocities may thereby derive from our sense that we already know what they look like.” Images of contemporary atrocity are not understood. Parallels are drawn and connections are made to the Holocaust, but in the end the photographs are simply acknowledged and processed without motivating viewers to understand or act. What is the extent, then, of this type of reduction of the impact? Is it purely an effect of the number of images published? Or is it a product of the way in which they are used?

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40 Zelizer 226
“I cried when I took this picture”: The Photographer as Witness

To break the myth of the camera’s impartiality requires recognizing that the act of taking a picture always involves a witness, the photographer. While it is true that some machines can take photographs and even compose and target a subject in a way that is esthetically pleasing, there is still an inextricably human factor. Photography is, after all, considered to be a craft. A surveillance camera takes picture, but in the end they are often less impressive than amateur photos taken with simple 35mm cameras. This is because in addition to being entangled with actuality, photographs are the products of an act of witnessing. Not only did the event occur, but a witness experienced it.

Didier Daeninckx’s 1984 novel, Murder in Memoriam, is the story of two murders whose police investigation reveals the violence of October 17 as well as tragic aspects of France’s collaborationist past. Certain historical figures are represented as characters, including Elie Kagan. Instead of a freelance photojournalist, he is shown as a jaded police photographer named Marc Rosner. Rosner says during an interview for Inspector Cadin’s investigation, “For my own part I did the job I was supposed to do there, one eye glued to the viewfinder.”\footnote{Daeninckx 78} This is strikingly similar to Kagan’s mantra for the evening: “I’m just doing my job.”
He goes on to offer his insight into the act of photographing versus the act of witnessing:

You don’t really see what’s happening, just light, crowds, framing. The photographer isn’t a witness; it’s his film that plays the role. The moment you press the button, you fix an image without knowing what it contains. . . It’s possible that I photographed your man’s murder, but what’s certain is that I didn’t see it. 42

This is a valid and important idea. From one perspective, Marc Rosner is correct in saying that he didn’t see the man’s murder for what it was. When a photographer takes a photograph, he sees but does not necessarily understand. A deeper understanding of the historical significance of photographs may only be possible for the actors who were the subject of these photographs, or those who experienced the events that the photographs show. It is a clear illustration of the previously mentioned idea that the viewer’s experience determines a photograph’s place in the larger narrative.

Still, there remains an immediate connection between the photographer and his photographs. The photographer Arthur Fellig, better known as Weegee, was famous for producing film noir style images of the harsh side of life in New York City, most notably in tenements and the Bowery. In one series, he photographed the reactions of the tenants of a burning tenement house. In one of his photographs, Mrs. Henrietta Torres and her daughter Ada watch as another daughter and a son die in a fire on December 15, 1939.

42 Daeninckx 78
Weegee wrote into the caption: “I cried when I took this picture.” It is important not to underestimate the connection between an artist and his environment. As Barth says in his commentary on Weegee:

We do not remember for long the what of events, unless accompanied by the how and the why in understandable human terms. To give us this, the journalist must also become an artist, bringing his understanding to life, his sensitivity and above all, his own participation in what he is experiencing to a high point of focus, sharpening its essential reality.

Though Kagan was not involved directly in the struggle for the recognition of Algerian independence, he did consider himself a combatant for those whom society marginalized. He was an advocate for the other, an attitude which no doubt had roots in his persecution as a child during the Occupation. He did escape deportation, but this experience of otherness would stay with him throughout his life and forever bind him to the plight of those he was photographing. He is described in a memoir written with Patrick Rotman as “an engaged photographer, advocate of the Third World, leftist to the core, he would cast his lens across the hopelessness of an epoch fraught with lost illusions.”

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43 Barth 121
44 Barth 11
45 Kagan and Rotman 16
On October 17, as he sped through the city, harassed by police, the duress under which he took his photographs likely played a large role in determining what images he chose to capture. Certain tragic events escaped his lens. Had he been given the opportunity to take photographs of the police force’s drowning Algerians in the Seine, he would have. The drownings remain, however, a cruelty of that night for which no visual evidence exists.

Even under duress, however, a photographer still makes fundamental choices about the content and composition of his photographs. Although Marc Rosner is correct in saying that as the shutter clicks a deeper understanding eludes the photographer, one ought not to disregard completely the influence of experience and personality. The photographer chooses the context, subject, angle and composition. These choices, when skillfully made, often elevate photographs to the level of high art, and the photographer to the level of artist.

But these choices, in addition to determining the artistic value of a photo, also affect the information that a photograph gives about a historical narrative. In his thoughts on history and forgetting, Paul Ricoeur writes that “if one cannot recall everything, neither can one recount everything. The idea of an exhaustive narrative is a performatively impossible idea. The narrative necessarily contains a selective dimension.”46 When constructing a narrative, one chooses facts based on their salience and their capacity to show the character of the event as a whole. Photographs are chosen in much the same way: for impact and their capacity to represent an event or idea. Since a

46 Ricoeur 448
photographer’s experience and personality affect these choices, it’s important to recognize that photographs are never entirely objective. Though photographers may not do it on purpose, the very act of photographing an event as it unfolds involves a type of value judgment similar to that made by a historian.

It is in this way that the work of the historian and the photographer interweave. The historian chooses the information that deserves a place in our narrative, whereas the photographer chooses what images will become documents and evidence. Similar to Ricoeur’s conception of history as a selective forgetting, Kagan’s photographic narrative involves a selective exclusion of some events for the sake of recording others.

The meaning of an individual photograph is fragile in that it can be interpreted differently by different viewers, and so a photographic narrative of an event tends to reduce a complicated human experience to a series of isolated images, chosen by photographers for one reason or another. Ricoeur again warns that “a devious form of forgetting is at work here, resulting from stripping the social actors of their original power to recount their actions themselves.”

47 The demonstrators in the photographs are more than martyrs to a cause. They are more than the representations that the photographs reduce them to. It is useful here to compare the historical impact of the photos to the revelations provided by Jean-Luc Einaudi in La Bataille de Paris, which relies heavily on eyewitness testimony. The photographs show a series of isolated incidents carrying no clue as to the context. The written testimony tends to humanize the story and show the complexity of individual narratives.

47 Ricoeur 448
Sontag calls photography “essentially an act of non-intervention,”\(^{48}\) a sentiment echoed somewhat by Kagan when he said that he was simply doing his job when taking the photographs of the October 17 demonstrations. Still, much in the way that preconceptions and opinions determine how photographs are viewed, these aspects also affect a photographer’s selection of images. And as we have seen, this exclusion of certain images for the sake of others is the essence of the work of the historian. Once again, the human influence in photography begins to break down the myth of absolute objectivity and verisimilitude.

\(^{48}\) Sontag, On Photography, 11
Compassion fatigue: The photos of October 17 in modern image culture

It is not difficult to believe that journalistic photography has lost the power that it showed in depicting the liberation of the concentration camps and bearing witness to the horror that occurred there. According to Sontag, “the quality of feeling, including moral outrage, that people can muster in response to photographs of the oppressed, the exploited, the starving, and the massacred also depends on the degree of their familiarity with these images.” Western viewers are no doubt very familiar with these images, because cable news networks bombard audiences with photographs of faraway suffering and foreign wars. Extreme violence is tolerated and often actively sought in many forms of popular entertainment. The capacity of a photograph to make a person an immediate witness to an event is perhaps its greatest strength, but does its misuse erode this ability, or worse, desensitize the public to horrific events? If this happens, how does the desensitization to visual shock affect the place in collective memory of horrific, historical photographs that were once perceived to be inviolably real and objective records of the past?

The term “public,” however, is a problematic generalization. Although many criticize an image-hungry, morally inert culture that has developed in the increasingly consumptive Western world, those living in developing countries are not subject to the

49 Sontag, On Photography, 19
overabundance of visual imagery disseminated by mass print media and cable news networks.

Limiting the analysis to a homogenous, Western viewing public often leads to the conclusion that this glut of images has literally divorced the viewing public from its reality. The media do not show anything real, but rather they simulate and advertise reality. A society of spectacle replaces actual experience, and all things must be interesting in order to exist. This is a conclusion based on convincing rhetoric, and evidence of the phenomenon is so ubiquitous as to be oppressive.

Still, Sontag points out that this perspective “universalizes the viewing habits of a small, educated population living in the rich part of the world, where news has been converted into entertainment. . .” To say that a viewing public is not sensitive to the ravages of war because it has never experienced it is to deny the existence of those populations for whom “violence on television” is simply “violence” and, as Sontag writes, “are far from inured to what they see on television. They do not have the luxury of patronizing reality.”

But is it true that photographs have a so-called “analgesic” effects that numbs viewers to the shock of atrocity? Other factors may play a greater role in lessening response to atrocities in general.

Perhaps this surfeit of images is not as extreme as it seems. One impediment to an unfettered diffusion of horrible images is the restraint exercised by editors to protect a

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50 Taylor 21
51 Sontag 110
52 Sontag 111
reading or viewing public that would rather not be disturbed. Self-censorship has reduced the modern presentation of images in the media to what Taylor calls “polite speech.” Despite the popular perception of the modern media as a purveyor of pictures appealing to a viewer’s prurient desires, editors generally mete out images that are just shocking enough to give a taste of the horror, but never so shocking as to make a viewer stop looking or change the channel.

Even in the Western world, economic impediments also prevent a full diffusion of some photographic evidence. Taylor points out that “the surfeit [of photography] disguises the economic organization of information and its technologies which advance new and profitable ways of restricting access to information and makes it an ever-more scarce commodity.” He cites the quest of Jean Heller, a journalist who wanted to see the only two independent satellite pictures used as evidence of the Iraqi military build-up before the first Gulf War and paid over 3,200 dollars to acquire them.

Do those photographs that finally reach the viewing public numb their reaction to pain and suffering? According to John Keane, the answer is not clear, and there is considerable evidence that “the crying of those who have been violated, sometimes – or often – triggers questions about responsibility among those who see or hear the grief of those who cry. Why and to what extent such a conversion process takes place remains something of an enigma to social scientists, and to publics at large. Empathy with the violated happens, but why and when and for how long remains utterly unpredictable.”

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53 Taylor 20
54 Taylor 19
55 Keane 182
It is also important not to confuse analgesia with incapacity to act. Simply because the seemingly endless stream of atrocity images has not engendered a massive response from the West does not mean that viewers do not feel. The hypothesis that photographs erode a moral response is so tempting because in many ways it allows viewers to avoid responsibility through a sort of self-victimization: “As a well-fed citizen of a stable, Western nation, I am overwhelmed by all of this. How can I do anything when I’m overcome by the scope of the horror and destruction? I feel strangely exonerated.” From this point of view, photographs themselves do not break down moral sense, instead they simply discourage a viewer to the point of inaction. As Sontag writes, “the ubiquity of those photographs, and those horrors, cannot help but nourish belief in the inevitability of tragedy in the benighted or backward – that is, poor – parts of the world.”56 These photographs remind us that the world is a horrible place, but without enough additional information about context or a means to respond, they have little effect. John Berger writes that photographs

extort the maximum concern [but] are discontinuous with all other moments. They exist by themselves. The reader who has been arrested by the photograph may tend to feel this discontinuity as his own personal moral inadequacy. And as soon as this happens even his sense of shock is dispersed. [The atrocity behind the

56 Sontag 71
image is] effectively depoliticized. The picture becomes the evidence of the general human condition. It accuses nobody and everybody.\textsuperscript{57}

Berger’s idea emphasizes the fact that photographs are, by their nature, divorced from their context and “exist by themselves.” But does this quality mean that looking at photographs necessarily erodes our ability to feel compassion? It is uncertain whether people of the West would be any more compelled to act if they had complete narratives. If images of poverty and atrocity are enough to convince them that tragedy is overwhelming and inevitable, a more intimate knowledge of the context and causes of that tragedy would not necessarily compel them to act.

Zelizer suggests that habituation may indeed be “entrenched as the default response to atrocity” and makes the argument that photography actually causes a normalization of atrocity, where witnessing without response is the standard reaction.\textsuperscript{58} She cites three main causes: diminished truth value, diminished political mandate, and diminished moral need.

While Zelizer does not argue that truth-value has been completely removed from photography, she points out the effect of technological advances and “alternatives to photographic truth facilitated by retouching, cropping, montage, setup, and collage.”\textsuperscript{59} More important to our current analysis, however, is the effect that cultural changes have on truth-value. Zelizer continues:

\textsuperscript{57} Berger 289
\textsuperscript{58} Zelizer 226
\textsuperscript{59} Zelizer 214
As images become more complex and multimediated, their truth-value is communicated in configurations that allow us to see less. . . Images in some cases become deceptively ambivalent, communicating contradictory messages about their ability to replicate slices of reality and their ability to aggressively reconstruct it, often to the point of fabrication. . . The ability to capitalize on the photograph’s truth-value for different aims makes it easier to move beyond the simple photographic authentication of a real-life event.  

In an analysis on “Technological Habituation,” the author’s focus on the various uses and manipulations of the truth-weight of a photograph, instead of on the manipulation of the photograph itself, is very telling. Although the public’s understanding that photographs can be convincingly retouched does diminish the “near automatic force” of truth, an even greater factor is how this truth-weight is presented, embraced, ignored, or exploited according to the needs of a certain institution.

These institutions, most notably governments, often contribute to a “Political Habituation” as a reaction to images of atrocity because of their “failure to mandate more recent atrocities to be seen as politically important.” Until now, the West’s reaction to atrocity has often been limited to the choice of military intervention or doing nothing. There exist all over the world instances of horror in countries where this type of intervention is not politically or logistically feasible. Photographs of these horrors thus do

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60 Zelizer 215
61 Zelizer 216
not support any particular political action. This prompts “official ambivalence about mandating which events can and will be seen.”

The media contribute to this problem in two ways. First, as political authorities are quick to point out, there is great difficulty in reporting on areas of the world where atrocity most often takes place. Logistical, safety and financial constraints thus play a role in determining which atrocities are actually shown in images to the public at large. Secondly, along the same lines, the organization of mass-media coverage tends to focus primarily on one story at a time, thus “the attention to atrocity has had much to do with which atrocities elsewhere simultaneously demanded public attention.”

Finally, there is a diminished moral need to see atrocities. The knowledge of the sheer number of atrocities combined with feelings of helplessness engenders a moral resignation among viewers. Graphic images of death and suffering in Somalia “produced claims of yellow journalism, protests that they upset family sanctity, and a recognition of their limited strategic usefulness.” In the case of the 1988 bombing of Pan Am flight 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland, published images usually showed the carnage and mangled corpses from a great distance. Once again, because of editors’ need to consider the sensibilities of their readers, shocking photographs are passed over in favor of more tolerable photographs: another form of “polite speech.”

The commonality among many of these arguments is that analgesia has more to do with publication and social context than with something inherent in photography.

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62 Zelizer 216
63 Zelizer 217
64 Zelizer 219
itself. While it is true that uncontextualized photographs do not provide a full understanding of an event, it is clear that the current practices in the news media do not encourage a deeper understanding of any event, whether there are photographs or not. If the news media were to provide more in-depth analysis of atrocities, or if the viewing public demanded such analysis, one might see a different role for photographs. Instead of witnessing taking the place of action as a normal response to photographs, they could at once inform us of the existence of tragedy and inspire action, but only if they constitute one source of information in a greater network that provides a context for the event.

Taylor writes: “Forgetfulness is not the fault of photography but of those who choose not to respond to shameful incidents, or refuse to acknowledge their existence.”

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65 Taylor 25
The Photos of October 17, 1961 in French Collective Memory

Elie Kagan’s photographs are thus quite ineffectual if viewed out of context. They are simply images of pain and suffering, and like other photographs of violence or atrocity, they must be contextualized if they are to inspire a viewer to take a strong moral position on the events of October 17. However, as explained earlier, photographs can be attached to any number of narratives or contexts, depending on the predisposition of the viewer and the way in which the photographs are presented.

It is impossible to make any sweeping statements about the effects of these photographs on the collective memory of October 17. The signing of the Evian Accords and the drama of Charonne became the dominant historical events of the mid-60s. The former was the agreement ending the Algerian War and granting independence to Algeria. The latter was an anti-fascist demonstration at the Charonne metro station during which eight French leftists were killed by police. Nourished by government silence, the forgetfulness about the massacre persisted from the 1960s until the 1980s, a twenty-year period during which certain facts were never given their rightful place in French collective memory.

Hoping to keep the affair quiet, the Prime Minister Michel Debré refused to create an investigative committee requested by Gaston Deffer. The police prefecture

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66 Gastaut 20
67 Gastaut 29
prohibited a meeting “for peace, against violence and racism” set up by Jacque Madaule’s *Le Mouvement pour la Paix at la Mutualité* and Paulette Péju’s work, *Ratonnades à Paris*, was censured, as was Jacques Panijel’s film, *Octobre à Paris*, a few weeks later. 68

Thus, even with the photographs and the copious research published since the 1980s, reactions to the October 17 massacre are likely to be as diverse, ambiguous, and at times as self-contradictory as the memories of the whole Algeria-France colonial experience. According to Gastaut, “everyone remembers his own war, bit by bit, as a function of the group to which he originally belonged”69 -- an accurate statement, which also usefully summarizes the phenomenon of collective memory.

It is possible, however, to examine how different groups remember the massacre and the experience of the war in general. By doing so, we may see how these groups would assimilate different forms of evidence, including photographic records. After all, many of the motivations and undercurrents of the war itself were also present in the events of the Parisian massacre: “The events of the 17th of October show one of the issues of the war: an ‘operation to maintain order’ based on the racist ideas of a colonizing nation. They contributed to the formation of the French mentality toward immigration: xenophobic tendencies against Arabs and Algerians under the 5th Republic.”70

68 Gastaut 20
69 Gastaut 31 – “Chacun s’est souvenu de sa guerre, par bribes, en fonction de son groupe d’appartenance originel.”
70 Gastaut 18
For the French, “the memory of Algeria has not died even after more than four decades.”\textsuperscript{71} Since the signing of the Evian accords on March 19, 1962, the Algerian War has been and remains a dark period in French history. It merits this description not only because of the events that characterized the conflict -- torture and violent repression -- but also because of the reticence on the part of many French to confront and recognize the extent of these atrocities and their ramifications for French identity.

Gastaut cites two reactions among Parisians to the events of October 17. The first, understandably enough, was surprise. Unlike Elie Kagan, most had not been warned of the evening’s coming event. The second was the widespread opinion that the FLN (the primary body in the fight for independence from which came many political officials of the independent government) was responsible for the tragedy. It was claimed that increasing terrorist attacks against police forces had made such violence inevitable and necessary. Also, the group was accused of using the population of Algerian workers as pawns in a larger political game.\textsuperscript{72}

A Parisian who sees the FLN as a political and military threat and the driving force behind the events of October 17 could easily be convinced that the battered bodies shown in Kagan’s photographs were not the handiwork of the CRS, but rather of FLN thugs attempting to weed out dissent in their own ranks or fight rival organizations. The evidence, of course, proves that this was not the case. The testimony of numerous participants clearly shows that the violence was a result of the actions of French police. But this example shows that the photographs by themselves do not prove that the FLN

\textsuperscript{71} Singer 257
\textsuperscript{72} Gastaut 22
was not responsible. The photographs accuse no one in particular, and they only implicate French police forces when the eyewitness accounts fill in the rest of the narrative.

Among the French, the Algerian War touched many lives. In the early 1990s, more than ten percent of people living in France were directly involved in the events of the war: 3 million soldiers, 1 million repatriated pied-noirs, and more than 1 million Algerians and harkis. Barnette Singer asks: “How do ordinary Frenchmen recall or envisage the Algerian conflict? It depends on the generation.” On a flight to Paris, Singer asked a 30 year-old man for impressions of the 60s. He described a belle époque, citing women’s liberation and the Doors. “Conversely, for those roughly 60 and over Algerian memories can be serious indeed. The war of ideas is still inside many, as for those who endured the Nazi Occupation (often the same people).” Having suffered through years of defeat both at home and in the colonial realm in Indochina, many of the soldiers fighting in Algeria were fully imbued with the colonial ideal. Others “tended toward a new France of conveniences for all,” less concerned with maintaining France’s glorious colonial past than with encouraging domestic prosperity.

In the case of Parisians who were convinced that the FLN encouraged the violence of October 17, a willful ignorance of the facts was the predominating force in their reasoning. For others who were not so staunch in their opinion, it is still possible that they interpreted information to create a personal history of the period that was not

73 Gastaut 31
74 Singer 257
75 Singer 258
characterized by violence and defeat for France. Either stance affects how they interpret photographic evidence. In the case of the liberation of the concentration camps, the Allied nations were ready to wholeheartedly accept the truth-weight of the photographs because they believed them to justify the sacrifice that so many nations had made.

It is possible that the French are less likely to accept photographs that represent their own dark, colonial history. The inclination to find excuses and rationalizations for the violence becomes strong when one comes face to face with the shame of a massacre committed on French soil, in the heart of the capital of a nation that is supposed to have been founded on the protection of the rights of man. After all, according to Gastaut, “the massacres of October 17 are connected to a collective psychological release tainted by racism more so than to an act of military defense. French society, weakened and made nervous by seven years of conflict, expressed, through the acts of its police force, its discomfort and distress in confronting the Algerian question and took this out on Muslim workers in France.”^76

The content of the coverage of the event by the majority of French newspapers seems to support this view. While the rightist press lauded the actions of police forces as fulfilling their duty to “maintain order,” only a few leftist newspapers openly attacked the actions of the CRS and recognized the massacre for what it was.

As for the photographs, it is not surprising that their graphic representation of the violence was absent from the rightist press, but often used to accompany editorials in the leftist press. The first publication to use the photos was the October 26 issue of France.

^76 Gastaut 20
Observateur, a French weekly run by Claude Bourdet, a fierce opponent of colonial wars. They were published with the title: “You can’t ignore this anymore. . .”77 It is also important to note that coverage continued for several issues, and that in the November 9 issue editors juxtaposed an image of a young Algerian man languishing in a detainment center with a photo of a prisoner in a Nazi concentration camp. This type of comparison raises important questions about the tactic of referring to the Holocaust as a moral reference point, which occurred a great deal in editorializing about October 17 and the rounding up of Algerians for detainment in prison centers.

The photos were also published in the anticolonialist daily Témoignage Chrétien under the title “Le temps de Tartuffe.” In an editorial, Hervé Bourges demands an end to racial discrimination and even goes so far as to compare the treatment of Parisian Algerians to that of Jews forced into ghettos under Hitler, claiming that in ignoring the demonstrations, “our country Nazifies little by little.”78 The photos were also published in L’Express. France Nouvelle, a Communist weekly, published the particularly horrific photos taken at the Neuilly bridge. The student Communist monthly Le Clarté used the photos as well.

The victims had no help from the right, for obvious reasons. Even in light of the amount of vitriol directed by the leftist press toward the police forces, the solidarity between Algerian workers and the French left was less than robust. Although certain tenets of Marxist ideology did encourage the left to advocate independence for Algeria,

77 Einaudi and Kagan 20 – « Vous ne pouvez plus ignorer ça. . . »
78 Einaudi and Kagan 23 – « au moment où nous tournions le bouton de notre télévision, c’est que notre pays se « nazifie » peu à peu. »
its efforts were limited mainly to the pages of its publications. Still, “*Humanité* published a message from the CGT (*Confédération Générale du Travail*) that ‘called on member unions to organize protests and mass actions in business and town to denounce the violence of October 17.’”79 But for all of the rhetoric about struggle for the workers of the world, French labor movements were primarily nationalist and concerned with the rights of French workers. When eight French communists were killed during an anti-fascist rally at the *Charonne* metro station, the reaction dwarfed any that occurred in response to October 17.

The events of October 1961 and the other difficulties during the Algerian War were erased from the French national narrative of history through both the sealing of official records and a policy of amnesty for crimes committed during the war. It is clear how the sealing of records affects the work of the historian: he or she finds himself or herself unable to rely on official documents to evaluate the accuracy of certain narratives. Political authorities find themselves with more liberty in creating an “official” history.

Amnesty works against the historian in a roundabout way. Ostensibly, the goal of across-the-board amnesty is to restore civil order after a period of unrest. It is an arguably necessary end, considering that, in the case of the Algerian War, both sides were at one point or another guilty of various offenses: terrorism, torture, etc. Two decrees were passed to put into effect the amnesty as it was laid out in the Evian Accords. The law of June 17, 1966 essentially gave amnesty to members of the OAS (*Organisation Armée Secrète*), a group of militant officers and pieds-noirs bent on maintaining a French

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79 Einaudi 232
Algeria. It also gave amnesty to crimes committed in resisting this group. The law of July 31, 1968, gave amnesty to acts related to the “events in Algeria,” including those committed by the army during this period.80

France, like many other societies, needs this amnesia. Ricoeur says that all societies are born out of some type of violence: “there exists no historical community that has not been born out of a relation that can, without hesitation, best be likened to war.”81 The Fifth Republic, which claims to champion peace and democratic ideals, was born from the violence of a military coup in 1958. For the sake of legitimacy of the state and national unity, events like the 1958 putsch and the many tragedies of the Algerian War are targeted for selective forgetting and are deleted from dominant narrative.

If we accept the argument that amnesty may help a nation avoid civil unrest, forced forgetting does not heal the wounds left by a traumatic period. Instead it denies them, “inasmuch as stopping the trials amounts to extinguishing its testimonial expression and to saying that nothing has occurred.”82 It is here that amnesty crosses the boundary and becomes amnesia, because it forces forgetting by not pursuing the legal processes by which witnesses can testify. It is another example of the actors who experienced an event being stripped of their opportunity to recount history as it actually occurred; it is a reduction in complexity that sacrifices accuracy for the sake of presenting a mythical unity.

80 Stora 283
81 Ricoeur 79
82 Ricoeur 455
Stora has a similar analysis of the effects of amnesty on the memory of the war. He says that “what is repressed is not eliminated and always finds a way to express itself by alternate means.” He stresses the importance of the judicial process and how denying a confrontation through putting war criminals on trial means that the “tortures, crimes, and racial discrimination of the war are pardoned.”

Ricoeur points out the importance of working through the problems of the past in spite of the risk of damage to a national unity, and asks: “But is it not a defect in this imaginary unity that it erases from the official memory the examples of crimes likely to protect the future from the errors of the past and . . . condemns competing memories to an unhealthy underground existence?”

Thus, we see that the memory of the Algerian War for the French is sometimes contradictory, very complex, and is almost always emotionally charged. A French person’s reaction to Kagan’s photographs would likely have less to do with the content of the photograph than with the viewer’s relationship to the war. For historians critical of colonialism, the photos fill historical gaps and show what has been excluded from the dominant narrative. Combined with the first-hand testimony of many witnesses, they call the official history into question. Other French nationalist historians dismiss the photographic evidence, claiming that the photographs were manipulated or that the violence depicted was caused by infighting among Algerian political groups.

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83 Stora 283 – « ce qui est refoulé n’est pas éliminé, et trouve toujours à s’exprimer par des voies détournées. »
84 Stora 283
85 Ricoeur 455
This is consistent with Taylor’s argument that “the current vigilance against Holocaust revisionism and fascism shows that the struggle for the meaning of a war is never complete.” Even when confronted by an abundance of photographic and testimonial evidence that October 17 was a state-sanctioned massacre, some still refuse to change their minds. The tenacity of the dominant narrative, even when shaken alternative photographic evidence, shows once again to what degree prejudices can affect the interpretation of photographic evidence.

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86 Taylor 38
The massacre of 1961 has taken on an iconic status as part of Parisian Algerians’ struggle to have their existence recognized, (or as part of the struggle for Algerian independence, depending on whom you talk to). Although it did mark a climactic outburst of racist tension that had built up as a result of the war, it did not mark a lessening in racially motivated violence of French police forces against Algerians.

When we evaluate the attitudes of the children of these workers toward their forebears’ experience, it is important to remember that they were by no means strangers to police violence, because this was inflicted on people of Algerian descent living in the French cités (large, usually rent-controlled housing projects in the suburbs of large cities.)

During the 1970s, violence against immigrants was on the rise, fueled both by colonialist nostalgia, a resurgence of far-right activism and the economic downturn caused by the oil shocks. It culminated in the “murderous summer” of 1973, during which over fifty Algerian workers were attacked and fifteen killed in and around Marseilles. Then in the early 1980s violence was increasingly directed against the children of immigrant workers. Children were injured and killed as cité residents of European descent fired on them, using primarily .22-caliber rifles, which would become a political symbol used by anti-racists to denounce the attacks.

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87 Silverstein 159
More pertinent to our analysis were the attacks committed by police and security officers, usually charged with “protecting” supermarkets and train stations found in poorer areas. As in 1961, police and security officers whose tactics injured and killed Algerians were granted lesser sentences or acquitted based on a claim of legitimate defense. Silverstein writes: “As a result of such seemingly legitimated violence, second-generation Algerian youth came to understand the law enforcement and legal systems as prime forces of racism and inequality. . .”

Given that this police violence continued in the banlieues through 1980s, does the new generation of anti-racist activists consider the bloodied and beaten men and women in Kagan’s photographs to be martyrs for the cause of being integrated into French society?

This is unlikely. Although the pictures do represent violent, racially motivated, state-sponsored repression, the victims in the photographs were part of a different struggle, and thus are viewed in a different light by the new generation. The attacks during the été meurtrier have a different status because they were not endured as part of the struggle for independence. Who are the workers killed in Marseille? They were not martyrs who suffered for the sake of a new Algerian state, because independence had already been won. The men and women of 1961 were heroes, but the men killed in the summer of 1973 were victims of racist violence who belonged in the history of the continuing struggle against racism in contemporary France.

88 Silverstein 160
This does not mean, however, that there is absolute consensus on the role of October 17 in the struggle for Algerian independence. Although the government of the new independent Algeria, unlike the French one, did not want to obliterate all memory of the war, it did want to interpret history to show exaggerated unanimous support for the FLN. Stora writes: “Algeria cut out of its official, epic accounts the complicated history of the war and the role played by emigration. The principal leaders stemming from this emigration were stripped of political power from 1962. This obfuscation allowed the new government to place emphasis on the struggle that actually took place on Algerian soil. Immigrants were suspected of « Europeanization » and of contact with the French worker and leftist movements.”

Thus, a dual interpretation of October 17 is possible, depending on the needs of the present. In the first, one recognizes that the demonstrators were calling for national recognition, not for the sake of integrating into French society, but rather to separate from it. They were Algerians who understood that working in France was not a step toward becoming French, but rather a means to earn money to retire comfortably in the Algerian countryside.

The second interpretation focuses on holding a country supposedly dedicated to liberty, equality, and brotherhood accountable for violent crimes committed against its own citizens. In this case, the demonstrators suffered to claim their place within French society. Of the two, the latter is more in line with the needs of present day Maghrebi-French (the new generation of young Arabs born to the first generation of immigrants),

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89 Stora, Mémoires de communautés 34
90 Stora, Mémoires de communautés 37
who are not fighting to return to an Algerian homeland, but are rather struggling not to be despised in the country, France, in which they were born.

Much in the way that emigrated leaders of Algerian movements during the war had to compete against those who had led the fight on the home front, the Beur movement (which organized a series of anti-racism marches from 1983 to 1985) had to compete with the Amicale of Algerians in Europe and the National Union of Algerian Youth (UNJA), bodies which represented the Algerian government in France. The two latter organizations encouraged young Algerians to cultivate their Algerianness and tried to expose them to nationalist issues. Despite the considerable appeal of these issues to older generations, the Beur movement eventually rejected association with these groups, believing them to be somewhat irrelevant to the greater task of being included fully in French society. Silverstein writes that the marches “contributed to the elaboration of these youth as a generation-as-victim of racist violence and structural inequality. Under this persona, the second generation’s actions amounted to demands for equal inclusion in French political and civil societies.”  

According to Stora, “history weighs on the present,” and Halbwachs was undoubtedly right to argue that the present weighs on history. The new generation of Algerians working either to encourage Algerianness or assimilation into French society illustrates the complexity of questions of identity for people of Algerian descent. While it is clear that Kagan’s photos show the struggle for survival on the night of October 17, there is no way they can sufficiently represent the layered and contentious struggle for the

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91 Silverstein 161
meaning of the event or show the complexity of the motivations involved for different
groups of Algerians. They show either a reason for Algerians to reject the France that
murdered their ancestors or a record of the demand by the first generation of immigrants
to be recognized as French citizens.
Conclusion

Artists lamented the invention of the camera. They feared that the pictures produced by this infamous black box would replace high art because of their unprecedented accuracy of detail. From this accuracy grew an inviolable trust in the medium in modern journalism. For many, a photograph is proof. It shows what has been, what has been witnessed and experienced. However, as we have seen, photography does not necessarily deserve the position it is often accorded. To quote Fred Ritchin, “photography’s relationship with reality is as tenuous as that of any other medium. . . It constitutes a rich and variegated language, capable, like other languages, of subtlety, ambiguity, revelation, and distortion.”

This relationship with reality is fragile for two reasons. The first is that photographs reduce a subject, be it an object or a narrative, to a single image, which is by its nature decontextualized. Photographs rely on outside information – from captions, etc. – to place them into a larger context, since by virtue of the medium they do not carry one with them. Although this reduction does serve to make certain photographs more striking (in that they immediately confront a viewer with much of the visual information), the fact that they are separated from their context makes photographs open to any narrative that a viewer wishes to ascribe to them. Thus, the viewer has more influence on the meaning of a photograph than does the information in the photograph itself. Far from being an

92 Ritchin 1
objective source of information that anchors a single historical narrative, photographic evidence is swept up in the torrent of conflicting historical narratives.

The second reason comes from the tendency for atrocity photographs to take on a symbolic force. In modern journalism, images of the Holocaust are removed from their original context and used to draw parallels between different historical events and atrocities with a visual vocabulary defined in the 1930s and 1940s. This practice disregards the differences among past and present historical events and reduces both sets of images to moral reference points without encouraging deeper understanding. This type of use, among other traits and practices of modern media, may be contributing to the increasing ineffectiveness of photographic images to move Western audiences to action.

Considering the various feelings surrounding the French-Algerian colonial experience, it is not surprising, then, the degree to which the photos are embraced by some groups and rejected by others. For the French, it is a question of accepting the fact that state-sanctioned, racist violence played a large role in the early years of the Fifth Republic. For the new generations of Algerians living in France, it is a question of claiming credit for the struggle for independence and deciding whether to embrace a French or Algerian identity. And according to Halbwachs’ theory, the needs of this self-identification will affect their relationship with the past, and the ways in which they interpret Kagan’s photographs.

Perhaps the best function of photography is expressed in Einaudi’s analysis of Kagan’s photographs taken in Nanterre: “The dead that Elie Kagan saw in Nanterre, one of which he photographed, do not officially exist, like dozens of other. But his photo is
like a breach from which the truth will flow."\textsuperscript{93} Despite their weaknesses and susceptibility to manipulation and mutability of meaning, photographs still play an important role both in communicating the gravity of atrocity and assuring that it historical instances are not forgotten.

\textsuperscript{93} Kagan and Einaudi 19
At the Solférino metro station, the man who holds his shoulder was wounded by a bullet.
**Photograph 1:** Struck by a bullet at the metro station at Solférino, an unidentified Algerian man grimaces in pain as he supports himself on the back of a bench. This photograph was especially interesting for me because of the importance of the caption. I know very little about guns or the anatomy of the wounds that they cause. Since there is no blood or visible evidence that he is shot, I assumed that the pain in his shoulder was just the result of a blow from a police truncheon. After a bit of research, I now know that it is possible for the entrance wound from a small caliber bullet to bleed very little, possibly not at all through a thick jacket. However, my trust in the caption was what initially compelled me to believe that he is suffering from a bullet wound.
"Arriving in Nanterre, he hears bursts of gunfire. He hides his Vespa near the rue des Pâquerettes. He sees no protesters but only the wounded. On a low wall there is one dead, as well as others."
Photograph 2: The second photo is of Abelkader Bennehar, whose uncle identified him in the photograph to Jean-Luc Einaudi after Elie Kagan’s death. He is wounded and prostrate on the ground, bleeding profusely from the head. I chose this photo for two reasons. The first is the symbolism of form. He is lying in the form of a cross, which beyond its Christian associations, is also something of a universal human symbol for vulnerability. The second reason is the copious amount of blood, something that puts this photograph on a different plane than the first photograph. Kristeva writes that her own body fluids remind her of the closeness of death. Bleeding is a clear indication of injury. It is a confrontation with the acrid fluids that keep us from dying, and thus a confrontation with our own mortality.

94 Kristeva 3
The arrival at the hospital in Nanterre.
**Photograph 3:** I chose the third because of its republication on the cover of the 1991 edition of Jean-Luc Einaudi’s *La Bataille de Paris*. It again shows Abelkader Bennehar being helped into a wheelchair. He was transported to the hospital with the help of Elie Kagan and an American journalist. Like a similar photo found on the cover of *17 Octobre 1961*, Elie Kagan’s personal testimony, it has become an icon showing the individual in the photograph, but also symbolizing the need to rescue the memory of October 17 from obscurity. Bennehar is an individual in the photograph, but through the process of republication, he has come to symbolize all of the victims of the police brutality of October 17.
Bibliography


