

Samuel Kalman, *Law, Order, and Empire: Policing and Crime in Colonial Algeria, 1870–1954* (Cornell University Press, 2024), 261 pp.

Reviewed by
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The fact that Franco-Algerian history between the 1830 expedition to Algiers and the 1954–1962 war of independence was full of oppression and violence is now well known and increasingly recognized even in French public history culture. However, the role played by the police has been less researched, and so the comprehensive study by Samuel Kalman, professor at the Catholic St. Francis Xavier University in Nova Scotia, Canada, and author of two books on French colonial fascism and the extreme right in interwar France, is most welcome. He clarifies the fundamental differences between policing in the metropolis and in the colony: “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. Officers and gendarmes waged a constant struggle against escalating banditry, the assault and murder of settlers, and nationalist politics – anticolonial violence that rejected French rule” (p. 2).

This general characterization shows few discontinuities. Along the chosen chronology, it reveals escalation through an expansion to initially barely populated areas with Arab and Kabyle communities

and an intensification of violent measures, from mass arrests to torture to mass executions. Policing in the colonial context had nothing to do with the ideas of regular police work and associated justice that were gradually implemented in France (of course, not without the reform-driving power of high-profile scandals). The police, who were supposed to secure and expand the racial superiority of the settlers, were endowed with far greater powers in the colony, enjoying a huge apparatus of informants and experts at their disposal. This network was supposed to secure the advantage of having knowledge about the conditions in the colony. Martin Thomas calls this the “intelligence state,” with the help of which the colonizers sought to master the growing confusion after 1914 (cf. *Empires of Intelligence*, Berkeley 2008). New police techniques developed in the metropole were quickly applied in Algeria as well, but due to the refusal by the Arab and Kabyle majority population to accept French rule, this was consistently combined with a barely restrained colonial use of force.

Kalman concentrates on the years from 1870 onwards, but he emphasizes in advance that the tradition of colonial policing goes back to the 1830s and, with the growing number of French settlers, increasingly replaced the late Ottoman tradition of a decentralized organization of security. The number of gendarmes grew in parallel with the settler movement, and they initially concentrated on the cities, streets, and centres of colonization, where the number of settler-farmers was above average, while in the other areas, especially rural Oran, there were initially only sporadic opportunities for control. This

changed step by step after the formation of the departments of Alger, Constantine, and Oran, resulting in the purely military rule over the colony being replaced by a civilian administration, which, however, continued to rely heavily on the army.

Kalman devotes his first chapter to a concise overview of the organization and financing of the various forces involved in policing after 1870. The following chapter traces a high point of resistance to colonial control by the French, namely the banditry in the Constantinois during World War I. During this period, efforts to avoid conscription into the French army merged with the first nationalist efforts at anti-colonialism, leading to a series of attacks against the administration and the property of the settlers. Kalman is able to show impressively how, in this moment of crisis framed as “crime wave,” all the patterns of justification and use of violence were already evident, which were to remain effective right into the war of independence, during which they were merely intensified. The author shows this in detail in chapter 3, which is dedicated to the challenges of public order and the police system during World War II. In the following chapter, he examines the (dominant) continuities and (less striking) discontinuities between the Vichy regime and France’s postwar government in order to finally present the confrontation of the police apparatus with the Parti du peuple algérien in the decade before the war of independence. This leads to a brief description of the period from 1954 onwards and the instrumentalization of the police for the increasingly desperate and therefore particularly brutal suppression of the independence movement. Ultimately, this escalation seems inevitable, as

France refused any kind of negotiated decolonization or the Algerian elites’ access to representation, participation, and power, often by means of unlimited violence.

The traces of this strategic mistake can still be seen in the recent past in both Algeria and France. For Samuel Kalman, even the latest attempts by the high-level historical commission headed by Benjamin Stora as well as President Macron’s apologies for individual crimes are not enough to overcome the burden of memories of colonial oppression. Kalman’s book is a stirring example of the potential historiography has to help acknowledge, and thereby perhaps alleviate, the pain that stems from this past through the unsparing and clearly formulated presentation of the past.

Leigh Gardner, *Sovereignty without Power: Liberia in the Age of Empires, 1822–1980* (Cambridge University Press, 2023), 340 pp.

Reviewed by
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Liberian historiography has not benefited from a large number of studies applying the kind of in-depth historical analysis that provides a complex understanding of the actions and reactions of different (not static) social groups in this part of the world as an integral part of African and global history.[1] Rather strictly nationalist and otherwise parochial considerations have dominated the scholarly agenda. In the 1980s