

Rapping Postmemory, Sampling the Archive: Reimagining 17 October 1961

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Over 50 years have passed since the 17 October 1961 massacre and, though the event has gained wider recognition, it still occupies a tenuous place in French history. Scholars have turned to fictional literary and filmic representations of the massacre that have appeared since the 1980s, but have largely overlooked its commemoration in music. In this essay, the author analyses two works: French rapper Médine's song '17 octobre' (2006), which reimagines the massacre from the perspective of a witness who dies, and an Internet montage video (2008) which sets Médine's song to archival and non-archival video clips. Both the song and montage highlight the limits of official historical discourse through a variety of practices, including manipulating perspective, sampling and putting 17 October into dialogue with other obscured histories. The historical and historiographical work these texts accomplish illustrates the potential of such media to construct a postmemorial archive that blurs boundaries between archive and fiction, creative works and history.

Plus de 50 ans se sont écoulés depuis le massacre du 17 octobre 1961 et, même si récemment il a été reconnu de manière plus officielle, ce massacre occupe néanmoins toujours une faible place dans l'Histoire de la France. Des chercheurs se sont bien penchés sur ses représentations littéraires et filmiques (représentations apparues elles-mêmes seulement depuis les années 1980), mais ils ont largement ignoré sa commémoration dans le domaine musical. Dans cet article, l'auteur entend analyser deux œuvres: la chanson « 17 octobre » (2006) du rappeur Médine qui narre le massacre du point de vue d'un témoin qui meurt, et un montage Internet (2008) qui reprend la chanson de Médine en l'illustrant par des images d'archives alternant avec celles d'un autre clip musical officiel de Médine. Ces deux artefacts soulignent en effet les limites du discours historique officiel en employant plusieurs stratégies, y compris en maniant le point de vue, en produisant différentes réalisations musicales et visuelles, et en mettant le 17 octobre en dialogue avec d'autres histoires marginalisées. Le travail historique et historiographique accompli par ces artefacts, illustre ainsi le potentiel de ces médias à construire un archive post-mémoriel brouillant les frontières entre archive et fiction, Histoire et œuvres fictionnelles.

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On the night of 17 October 1961, many of the approximately 30,000 Algerian men, women and children protesting a curfew enacted solely against Français musulmans d'Algérie were beaten and some killed under the orders of Paris's Police Chief Maurice Papon. When, on the massacre's 51st anniversary, French President François Hollande issued a statement that, 'le 17 octobre 1961, des Algériens qui manifestaient pour le droit à l'indépendance ont été tués lors d'une sanglante répression. La République reconnaît avec lucidité ces faits' (2012), he would become the first French head of state to recognise the massacre officially. Though Hollande's statement could be faulted for its brevity and imprecision—especially its passive construction that sidesteps guilt—his acknowledgement nevertheless began to redress the national amnesia he had critiqued one year prior (then as the Socialist Party presidential candidate). Several obstacles contribute to this historical occlusion—still widespread despite Hollande's 2012 statement. That Paris's police archives remained inaccessible to the public for almost 50 years, for instance, or that the earliest commemorations were local (Parisian) gestures rather than national ones, illustrates that the national stance on 17 October was one of deafening silence. In the private sphere, many individuals who participated in the protest still refuse to discuss this history, even with their own family members (House and MacMaster 2006, 324–325).

Since the 1980s, however, authors and artists have revived, transmitted, pluralised and subverted histories of 17 October in a variety of media.¹ For Anne Donadey, these works' capacity to reimagine the massacre from a variety of viewpoints positions them as essential 'alternative ways of learning about history' (2001, 49). Beyond revisiting historical discourse around 17 October, such works are also valuable because they interrogate the processes governing this discourse's creation and later evocation or silencing. Yet despite scholars' turn to such cultural works, one medium remains largely overlooked: music. Songs evoking 17 October date to the 1990s and transcend national (France, Algeria and Ireland) and musical (rap, folk, punk rock) frontiers.² In lieu of providing a brief overview of such songs, however, my goal in this essay is to analyse how artists use music to engage in historical—and even historiographical—discussions. To this end, I limit my inquiry to two interrelated works. The first, French rapper Médine's song '17 octobre', from his album *Table d'écoute* (2006), recounts the massacre through the eyes and voice of Ahmed, a fictional protagonist who flees the Algerian war only to die at the hands of French police on 17 October. The second, a montage video created by an individual using the pseudonym 'Larab' and uploaded to DailyMotion (a video-sharing website) in 2008, sets Médine's song, for which no official music video exists, to 'found footage'—both archival and music video clips.³ That both works were created in the larger context of the massacre's occlusion by individuals who could not have witnessed the event first-hand suggests that they offer insight into how the postmemorial generation—the term by which Marianne Hirsch (2008) referred to the children and grandchildren of those who experienced an event (the Jewish Holocaust, in her case)—mediates its own relationship to the event for which it has no active recall.

Despite obvious differences in media, three characteristics define how both works reimagine 17 October. First, both stage a struggle between official history and personal memories to interrogate how the former often drowns out the latter. Second, both evoke other marginalised histories within their larger discussion of 17 October. This gesture suggests the efficacy of multidirectional memorial dialogues—to borrow Michael Rothberg’s (2009) term—in exploring not only other instances of racial violence worldwide, but also larger historical processes responsible for how such histories are commemorated. Finally, each work samples audiovisual material, an act that illustrates how the media themselves can participate in larger discussions regarding historical evidence, such as which sources are sampled and when. Using these three strategies, each work challenges official historical discourse’s claims to authority and completeness and asserts the postmemorial generation’s authority to construct its own archive, including the types of evidence it deploys.

History in Lyrical Perspective

Born in Le Havre in 1983, Médine could not have witnessed the violent police repression first-hand; nevertheless, ‘17 octobre’ narrates the massacre from the perspective of a victim who will ultimately perish at the hands of police. The twin commitment to political activism and to investigating the personal side of marginalised histories so prominent in ‘17 octobre’ permeates all of Médine’s works, including those from his early days as part of La Boussole, a Havrais hip-hop group. Aside from ‘17 octobre’, nowhere is Médine’s engagement with minoritised histories more evident than in a recurring series entitled ‘Enfant du destin’, which spans his solo career discography (2004–13). Currently composed of five songs on four different albums, each instalment recounts the history of a child caught in a conflict zone; for instance, the first two, both found on Médine’s first solo album entitled *11 septembre, récit du 11ème jour* (2004), tell of a Vietnamese girl whose father is killed by an American soldier during the Vietnam war (‘Enfant du destin [Sou Han]’), and of a young boy living occupied Palestine, who becomes the victim of a suicide bomber (‘Enfant du destin [David]’), respectively.⁴ The same type of historical work this series undertakes—namely, resuscitating histories often overlooked in their national contexts, positing fictional works as an important site through which such histories are negotiated (see especially ‘Enfant du destin [Kounta Kinté]’) and probing the relationship between official historical discourse and personal memories—characterises Médine’s larger corpus.

As Médine has underscored in interviews, his music’s engagement with history stems in part from his Franco-Algerian heritage:

Je pars de mon ignorance. Je suis francoalgérien et j’ai dû bricoler cette histoire. Tantôt j’étais tiré vers le côté très idéaliste de ma famille concernant l’Algérie, ou diabolisateur qui faisait du Français l’ennemi par excellence. Et de l’autre côté, j’avais la France qui essayait de se justifier, qu’on pouvait retenir des choses positives de la colonisation. J’avais deux sons de cloche. J’ai dû faire le tri moi-même à 30 ans, me

rendre en Algérie, faire un travail de lectures, de rencontres. Un travail que l'Éducation nationale aurait dû faire pour éviter que nous soyons dans des postures schizo-phrènes aujourd'hui. (Bocandé 2013)

Within this larger 'schizophrenic' context of Franco-Algerian history, as Médine puts it, 17 October 1961 occupies an even more tenuous status. Establishing even the most basic of 'historical facts' about the massacre, epitomised by the decades-long controversy regarding the number of victims who perished as a result of the police actions, has shrouded accounts of the event in suspicion.⁵ In dissecting how Médine's song '17 octobre' crafts its narrative, my analysis will examine the song's lyrics, musical composition, sampling practices and vocal delivery.

Rather than trying to reconcile the tension between official history and personal memories, Médine's song compounds it through narrative shifts between first and third person that both precede and follow Ahmed's description of the massacre in '17 octobre'. These shifts rehearse the tension between 'objective' historical discourse and supposedly subjective, personal memories—a struggle the former often wins. Such shifts also privilege and simultaneously interrogate the figure of the witness, a role that, as Marianne Hirsch and Leo Spitzer (2009) have illustrated, occupies a central but contentious place in Memory Studies. By providing testimony that cannot, *a priori*, be included in the archive—that of a witness who perishes during the event—Médine's song underscores (and subsequently transcends) the limits of historical discourse.

Though its title suggests that the song's main focus will be 17 October, the first two verses use first-person perspective ('Voici mon parcours Ahmed, fils de Mohammed') to position the massacre as just one point of Ahmed's larger story—a story that includes the daily violence of the Algerian war, his journey to France and the discrimination he faces at the hands of French officials. Two perspective shifts separate these introductory verses from Ahmed's account of the massacre. First, following the announcement of a curfew against Algerians ('le journal de la veille titrait / "Couvre-feu recommandé pour les immigrés"'), the lyrics abandon Ahmed's individual perspective and instead adopt a collective one ('nous'). At this point, the discordant, staccato violin string tracks echo the lyrics' increasingly forceful tone, indicated by imperatives. Such musical and lyrical shifts re-enact the fluid dynamics of passing from individual to collective memory.

The second shift comes in the scene that follows—a meeting between police and protesters on Pont Saint-Michel—a transformation that embodies the transition from personal memory to historical discourse. At this point, the lyrics adopt a third-person perspective, listing the massacre's precipitating events with detached indifference: 'Les camps s'observent et se dévisagent / Un silence de mort s'installe entre les deux rivages / Puis, une voix se lève, scande "À bas le couvre-feu", / et ouvre le feu'. Two dramatic musical changes at this point heighten the lyrics' force. First, just before Médine raps these lines, all instrumental tracks except for the piano arpeggios and sparse percussion sounds fade away, while Médine's vocals shift in timbre from emotionally

charged to stoic. Second, audio samples of a woman's voice crying out, a muffled crowd's response and gunfire played alongside the lyrics recreate the event's soundscape, lending an aura of authenticity and immediacy to the scene. Overall, these musical and lyrical shifts align this scene with historical discourse's claims to objectivity. The lyrics' depiction of the clash as a meeting between two nameless, faceless collectivities parallels how many of the massacre's official commemorations such as Hollande's 2012 statement or the plaque on the Pont Saint-Michel, which reads 'à la mémoire des nombreux Algériens tués lors de la sanglante répression de la manifestation pacifique du 17 octobre 1961', do the same.

Combating this impersonality, then, is precisely the work that '17 octobre' accomplishes; in fact, immediately following the standoff between police and Algerians described above, the song abruptly returns to Ahmed's intimate first-person perspective to describe his own assassination in graphic detail. For instance, he chronicles how 'une dizaine de matraques viennent me défoncer le crâne / Et mes os craquent sous mon anorak / Ma bouche s'éclate bien sur le trottoir' and later how the officers 's'assurent de ma mort frappant ma tête sur la corniche / ... / Dans la chute violemment ma nuque a touché la bordure'. The alliterated 'k' sound ('matraques', 'craquent', 'anorak') accentuates the cruelty of this scene, while the proliferation of body parts ('crâne', 'os', 'bouche', 'tête' and 'nuque') repersonalises this history. In so doing, the song combats historical de-personalising gestures such as when, immediately following the massacre, as House has shown, police attempted to render the victims anonymous by 'removing distinguishing papers and belongings' (2001, 358; see also House and MacMaster 2006, 127–162). Moreover, details from Ahmed's physical surroundings ('trottoir', 'corniche' and 'bordure') erect landmarks accessible to audience members in a landscape that otherwise contains few reminders of 17 October.⁶

Immediately after Ahmed utters his final words—significantly, those that cannot be captured in the archive: 'mon cadavre sera repêché dans les environs de Rouen'—the impersonal perspective returns and imposes its own narrative on the same scene. The gruesome detail found in Ahmed's testimony disappears, and the third-person perspective de-dramatises the violence and dehumanises the victims: 'D'étranges nénuphars flottent sur la Seine / Séquence long-métrage, les yeux plongés dans la scène. / Dégât des eaux pour les gens des human zoos / Déshumanisés les basanés ne font pas de vieux os'. In her study of rapper MC Solaar's 'La Concubine de l'hémoglobine' (1994), Mireille Rosello (2000) illustrates how Solaar uses a similar strategy when he references Arthur Rimbaud's poem *Le Dormeur du val* (1870). Whereas Rimbaud's poem delicately gestures toward revealing the soldier is dead, Solaar's song unambiguously exposes this fact in its first verse: 'Le dormeur du val ne dort pas / Il est mort et son corps est rigide et froid'. Just as Solaar's song negates the emphasis Rimbaud places on the soldier's humanity, the combination of irony and clichés—likening the victims' suffering to 'dégât des eaux' (an expression only applied to inanimate objects) and suggesting that their deaths are merely a fact of 'dying

young’—in Médine’s ‘17 octobre’ apes official historical discourse’s tendency to reduce highly individualised suffering to banal platitudes.

Yet these lines also illustrate how Médine’s song appropriates French symbols to reinscribe Algerians into the nation’s history. On its surface the song’s reference to Rouen seems both pragmatic and historically accurate; reports following the massacre suggested that approximately 150 bodies were retrieved from the Seine between Paris and Rouen.⁷ Taken alongside one of the song’s earlier lines, however, which likens Ahmed’s drowning to being burned at the stake—‘Liquide poignardant tous mes orifices, / le fleuve glacial un bûcher chaud pour mon sacrifice’—this evocation of Rouen, the site where Joan of Arc was burned at the stake, inflects Ahmed’s tragic death with the weight of national martyrdom. Additionally, that Médine transforms the Algerians’ bodies floating under the bridge into water lilies recalls paintings from Monet’s painting *Le Bassin aux nymphéas, harmonie verte* (1899) from his water lilies series, which depicts water lilies floating on the Seine as it passes under a bridge at Giverny. By drawing these intertextual connections between such emblematic historical and cultural figures and Ahmed, who embodies the marginalised history of 17 October, Médine’s song reaffirms this event’s centrality in France’s national narrative.

Overall, the lyrics’ narrative shifts expose and subsequently critique how certain legitimised forms of historical discourse can drown out victims’ personal memories. Yet the song does not suggest that this phenomenon is limited to 17 October. In fact, the lyrics’ allusions to four transnational histories explore larger processes affecting how minority histories are situated within larger national archives.

Musical Historiography

The lyrics allude to four other histories that also occupy tenuous places within national narratives: the Jewish Holocaust, the Charonne massacre, France’s ethnographic expositions (also referred to as ‘human zoos’) and lynchings in the United States. In other contexts, attempts to draw connections between disparate violent histories and massacres have prompted scholars to ask whether the usefulness of such connections outweighs the potential risk of transcending historical and geographical specificities. Nicki Hitchcott (2008), for instance, has demonstrated how early comparisons between the Rwandan genocide and the Holocaust were met with criticisms of Eurocentrism. Scholars have also cautioned that such evocations might invite comparisons culminating in an escalating ‘memory competition’. In fact, such claims could be made about evoking Charonne—the police repression of a protest against Organisation de l’armée secrète activities and for peace in Algeria on 8 February 1962, during which nine French men and women were killed—in the context of 17 October. Whereas more victims perished during the latter, the former received much more media attention.⁸ One might therefore argue that, given these inequities, including a reference to Charonne in a song largely discussing the dehumanisation and obfuscation of the 17 October massacre amounts to memory competition.

In Médine's song, however, such a competitive tone is absent. Other cultural projects commemorating massacres have similarly rejected such competitive impulses; as Hitchcott has illustrated, works produced during the 1998 Fest'Africa project, during which 10 African authors (though many have been long-time residents of Europe) were brought to Rwanda to produce a text commemorating the genocide constructively foster 'global memory work' (2008, 158) by engaging in transnational, transhistorical and even transcultural comparisons. Applying Rothberg's multi-directional memory—a concept 'meant to draw attention to the dynamic transfers that take place between diverse places and diverse times during the act of remembrance' (2009, 11)—to Médine's song illustrates how such allusions to other marginalised histories open up productive dialogues that both comment upon the historiography of 17 October specifically and also reflect more generally on memorial processes (including in creative works) through which the postmemorial generation commemorates them. For Hirsch and Spitzer, this broadening of the field of memory 'does not in any sense aim to diminish or relativize the experiences and suffering of European Holocaust survivors, [but rather] mak[es] room for additional, local, regional, national and trans-national, testimonies about slavery, colonialism, genocide and subordination' (2009, 165). The song's final lines, 'Devoir de mémoire, grandissant / Jezzaire'—which pair a phrase often associated with Holocaust memorial projects ('devoir de mémoire') with the specificity of Algeria ('Jezzaire')—stress the productive nature of such transnational memorial inquiries.

Two of the song's allusions—Ahmed's indirect reference to the Holocaust in his description of the prison-like train car that transports him from Marseilles to Paris ('embarquement quai 7, voiture 6, wagon fourrière') and his explicit reference to Charonne ('quatre mois plus tard on ratonne à Charonne')—both chart a much darker history of massacres and deportations in France and also meditate on the meta-history of 17 October in France. Although 17 October received limited press coverage during the 1980s and was reimagined in fictional works prior to the late 1990s, it was not until Maurice Papon was brought to trial in October 1997 for his involvement in the deportation of Jews from Bordeaux that it would begin to receive widespread public attention. During Papon's highly publicised trial for crimes against humanity (for which he was found guilty), Jean-Luc Einaudi boldly asserted that 'en octobre 1961, il y eut à Paris un massacre perpétré par des forces de police agissant sous les ordres de Maurice Papon' (1998). In what came to be known as the 'trial within a trial', Papon brought libel charges against Einaudi (who was later acquitted). Following both trials, the media repeatedly referenced Papon's involvement in all three histories (the Jewish deportation, 17 October and Charonne), linking them together in the collective consciousness.⁹ By evoking these histories through which 17 October came into French public consciousness, Médine's song performs the event's historiography.

This song later evokes two additional marginalised histories: France's ethnographic exhibitions (also termed 'human zoos') and lynchings in the United States. Because these two histories—unlike Charonne and the Holocaust—are not often associated with 17 October, referencing them in '17 octobre' goes beyond simply charting the

massacre's meta-history and instead opens up discussions on the place such marginalised histories occupy within national, and even transnational, frameworks. The song's ironic description of the massacre's victims floating in the Seine ('dégât des eaux pour les gens des human zoos'), for instance, conjures up images of ethnographic exhibitions—fairs during which 'Others' were displayed for a European viewing public (see Bancel et al. 2002). Though Médine's listener might automatically assume that 'les gens des human zoos' refers to the Algerians (that is, those who might have been put on display at such 'human zoos'), a closer look at the line reveals its ambiguity. In fact, one can also read this same phrase as referring to the French; in the eyes of the French ('pour les gens des human zoos'), the Algerians' suffering on 17 October is no more serious than water damage ('dégât des eaux'). This line's ambiguity thus demands that the listener grapple with lyrical multivalence that cannot easily be resolved—an act that mimics reconciling competing, incomplete or even cryptic historical accounts.

This connection between 17 October and human zoos underscored in Médine's '17 octobre' anticipates a scandal regarding human zoos in France that would break just five years after *Table d'écoute* was released. As part of its 2011 Année de l'Outre-Mer, the French overseas ministry invited groups from France's overseas territories to share cultural objects (dance, art, clothing etc.) at an event called the Jardin d'Outre-Mer. The Jardin d'Outre-Mer's planning committee selected Paris's Jardin d'Acclimatation for the 2011 event—the very spot where, 80 years prior, a human zoo had displayed individuals from these same overseas territories (notably Kanak from New Caledonia) as 'cannibals'. Though vocal criticisms (see Bancel 2011) would not convince officials to change the venue, they would prompt France's Minister of Overseas Territories, Marie-Luce Penchard, to launch an inquiry into the history of human zoos in France. On 7 April 2011 (just one day before the Jardin d'Outre-Mer's scheduled opening), Penchard called on France's CPMHE (Comité pour la mémoire et l'histoire de l'esclavage) to investigate how the French government could 'reconnaître ces mémoires et cette histoire, de leur donner leur juste place dans l'Histoire de la France, sans aucunement occulter le passé et instruire de procès' (qtd. in CPMHE 2011, 5, my emphasis). Accusations of 'concurrence victimaire' regarding this event's history permeate Penchard's diction. What, for instance, is any memory's or history's 'juste place' in the history of France? Where does one draw the line between 'instruire' and 'instruire de procès'? How would recognising the history of human zoos 'occlude the past'? That such concerns are raised in the case of these histories in particular exposes the suspicion and defensiveness with which 'minority' histories are regarded in France—a stance that has similarly impacted 17 October.

Finally, by evoking lynchings in the United States in a song about 17 October, Médine's song opens up such discussions on a transnational scale. The chorus's first line ('d'étranges nénuphars flottent sur la Seine') calls to mind the poignant concluding line to the first verse of 'Strange Fruit', a song performed most famously by Billie Holiday in 1939.¹⁰ The lyrics offer a chilling description of lynching victims—a topic rarely evoked at the time in the United States: 'Southern trees bear strange fruit, / Blood on the leaves and blood at the root, / Black body swinging in

the Southern breeze, / Strange fruit hanging from the poplar trees' (Allan 1940). Of course, such an allusion seems apt given that both 17 October and lynchings in the United States were racially motivated and that neither was widely discussed in its respective national context. In addition to these similarities, that '17 octobre' evokes this parallel through a reference to another creative work, rather than explicitly naming lynchings, underscores such works' capacity as alternative venues for exploring history.

By privileging the voice that is absent from official archives (the victim who perishes) and by asserting multidirectional memorial connections to other massacres, Médine's song highlights and transcends the limits of historical discourse. The listeners become witnesses—not just to Ahmed's story, but also to its silencing and transformation. In the absence of official histories and traditional modes of transfer and, given the police archive's inaccessibility, Médine's song—an artistic gesture—becomes the site through which the postmemorial generation not only contests the pretences of official historical discourse but also constructs its own archive. In fact, this argument is woven directly into the musical fabric of '17 octobre' through a musical practice known as sampling. By sampling creative works rather than archival sources—just like the lyrical homage to 'Strange Fruit'—'17 octobre' calls into question the nature of evidence often deployed in crafting official historical discourse.¹¹

Sampling the Past in '17 octobre'

In his introduction to *Les Lieux de mémoire*, Pierre Nora proposes that modern memory is 'd'abord une mémoire à la différence de l'autre, archivistique. Elle s'appuie tout entière sur le plus précis de la trace, le plus matériel du vestige, le plus concret de l'enregistrement, le plus visible de l'image' (1984, xxvi). For Hirsch, such traces, particularly photographs, serve a special function for the postmemorial generation because

[m]ore than oral or written narratives, photographic images that survive massive devastation and outlive their subjects and owners function as ghostly revenants from an irretrievably lost past world. They enable us, in the present, not only to see and to touch that past but also to try to reanimate it by undoing the finality of the photographic 'take'. (2008, 115)

Following Hirsch's analysis of photographs, my examination of '17 octobre' posits audio samples as evidence which, when deployed, lays bare the postmemorial generation's mediated connection to the event.¹²

In hip-hop, sampling—or incorporating previously recorded audio clips into one's own musical creation—serves an archival purpose (Demers 2003; Rose 1994). Sampling, of course, is not limited to the American context; early French hip-hop artists such as IAM use samples from a variety of provenances, including North African instruments, movie soundtracks and even film dialogues (Jacono 2002, 27; Prévos 2002; Silverstein 2002, 60–61). Though sampling did not originate with

hip-hop, it has always been an integral element of the genre (Schloss 2004, 2). Many early American hip-hop deejays sampled recognisable tracks (primarily instrumental) from genres such as soul and funk, to a variety of ends. For Tricia Rose (1994), such lyrical and musical intertextualities are means to authenticate one's voice as an artist. Over time, certain tracks and artists were sampled more frequently, resulting in a canonisation—or archive—of sorts. In fact, as Andrew Bartlett has succinctly described it, 'Sampling in hip hop is not collaboration in any familiar sense of that term. It is a high-tech and highly selective archiving, bringing into dialogue by virtue of even the most slight representation ... any range of "voices"' (1994, 647). A corollary practice to sampling, known as 'sleuthing'—the act of attempting to uncover and identify sampled tracks in hip-hop (or other) songs—similarly elicits obvious parallels with archival and intertextual research.¹³

Médine's '17 octobre' includes samples at two moments: the first comes at 2:08, when the listener hears what sounds like an archival recording of Maurice Papon declaring, 'je ne laisserai pas les tueurs du FLN faire la loi dans Paris. À partir de maintenant, pour un coup reçu vous en rendrez dix'. The second sample, audible between 3:11 and 3:22, roughly corresponds to the actions described in the song's scene (analysed above) when Algerian protesters and police clash on the Pont Saint-Michel. Though both samples sound like archival recordings, in reality they come from Alain Tasma's fictional film *Nuit noire: 17 octobre 1961* (2005). That '17 octobre' samples Tasma's film is significant for three main reasons. First, hip-hop artists often sample other musical works to lend authority to their own voice as artists. Sampling another hip-hop artist, thus, would authenticate Médine's voice as a mediator, rather than Ahmed's voice as a witness (albeit in this fictional narrative). Refusing to sample another hip-hop work, thus, reaffirms the right of the witness who perishes (Ahmed) to speak on his own behalf. Second, by sampling this fictional, creative work, Médine's '17 octobre' repositions *Nuit noire* as an authoritative document to be cited—a gesture that asserts the postmemorial generation's right to define the types of evidence it draws upon. Finally, incorporating samples lays bare the constructed nature of discourse contained within the song—a gesture that mimics the construction of historical discourse and encourages the listener to approach such official histories with scepticism.¹⁴

In his analysis of Leïla Sebbar's novel on 17 October, *La Seine était rouge*, Jonathan Lewis (2012) draws on James Young's formulation of 'collected memory' (1993, xi) to argue that Sebbar brings together multiple histories and memories, displaying them in the space of the text, while resisting homogenising narratives. Through its sampling practices, '17 octobre' similarly collects and displays multiple sources of evidence. Likewise, an Internet montage video set to Médine's song, to which I now turn my attention, juxtaposes shots from another of Médine's music videos, 'Boulevard Vincent Auriol', with archival footage and still photographs depicting Algerians' lives in France. Doing so exhibits the types of evidence often drawn on in constructing historical narratives and calls into question the authority and authenticity of the archive.

Historical Mediation: 17 October in Larab's Montage Video

Since it was uploaded to DailyMotion in 2008, Larab's montage video (five minutes and twelve seconds in length) has been viewed more than 44,000 times and 'liked' more than 2000 times.¹⁵ The montage draws its images from three main sources of visual material: clips from archival films taken from France's Institut national de l'audiovisuel depicting Algerians' life in France as well as the events that transpired on the night of the massacre, Élie Kagan's famous still photographs¹⁶ taken on 17 October and clips from the official music video to Médine's 'Boulevard Vincent Auriol', also released on the album *Table d'écoute*. Aside from a brief introduction that presents images from the night of the massacre before the lyrics evoke it, the archival images roughly correspond to Ahmed's story told in the lyrics. For instance, footage of immigrants on a boat and in a French *bidonville* accompanies Ahmed's description of his decision to leave Algeria and his life in Nanterre, respectively. Such correspondence between the oral narrative and the silent, anonymous images encourages identification between Ahmed and the individuals on the screen.

As I have illustrated, the song '17 octobre' affirms Ahmed's right to tell his own story in the face of dehumanising official discourse. The montage video, however, complicates the sharp division between historical discourse and personal memory by interweaving factual and fictional, individual and collective elements. Using archival footage to narrate Ahmed's story (or, conversely, using Médine's song to narrate the archival images) rests upon traditional understandings of 'the moving image archive as a site for storage and historical inquiry' (Horwatt 2009, 86). At the same time, however, this montage, like the digital remixes Eli Horwatt studies, effectively 'reveal and subvert historical engineering by appropriating the very weapons of ideological control, revising them to reflect the traumatic and repressive realities of their creation' (86). Furthermore, such an intervention also underscores how access to histories—particularly for the individuals that did not experience them first-hand—are, as Hirsh has posited, 'not actually mediated by recall but by imaginative investment, projection, and creation' (2008, 107). Though they are objectively more 'factual' than Ahmed's fictional narrative, because the archival films literally cannot speak for themselves, they require the viewer to produce his or her own meaning for the images. At a time when, as Hirsch and Spitzer have demonstrated, '[t]he figure of the muted, traumatized survivor' (2009, 164) occupies a central place in Memory Studies, coupling such footage with Ahmed's imagined testimony, thus, both highlights the limits of archival footage and affirms the importance of creative works in participating in historical processes.

Archival footage, however, only comprises two-thirds of the montage's images; the others come from Médine's official music video to his song 'Boulevard Vincent Auriol'. Like '17 octobre', 'Boulevard Vincent Auriol' uses first-person perspective to recount another tragedy that occurred on French soil: a fire that broke out in one of Paris's state-owned subsidised apartment buildings in the 13th *arrondissement* on the night of 25–26 August 2005 that killed 17 (of which 14 were children). Though agencies

acknowledged that the building, which primarily housed many of the Malians who participated in the *sans-papiers* protests in 1992, required substantial repairs, lack of funding and space to temporarily house the residents caused them to be delayed indefinitely. The fire, thus, shed new light on France's immigration history and the conditions in which many immigrants and their families live. Just as Médine's allusions to other marginalised histories reflect on historiographical processes, this visual allusion establishes a multidirectional memorial dialogue between 17 October and the Boulevard Vincent Auriol fire that is further supported in the content and form of the song 'Boulevard Vincent Auriol'. Not only is 'Boulevard Vincent Auriol', like '17 octobre', told from the perspective of the witness who perishes, but this song, too, also samples official news reports to blur the boundaries between fictional and historical representations of the event.¹⁷ By including visual accompaniment to another song that itself calls into question the neat division between history, personal memory and fiction, the montage ultimately reaffirms the latter's critical interventions in memorial processes.

Two of the montage's images neatly capture the main work both texts analysed in this essay (Médine's '17 octobre' and Larab's montage video) accomplish. In several segments from 'Boulevard Vincent Auriol' visually sampled in Larab's montage video, images of immigrant figures—one female and one male, both of which perform gestures evoking manual labour—are projected onto nondescript low-income housing projects. Though the 'Boulevard Vincent Auriol' video is shot in colour, the low-light and high-contrast dynamics of these segments in particular put them into visual dialogue with the black and white archival footage of Algerians in the mid-1900s with which they are juxtaposed in the montage. This lighting also complicates the act of discerning the manual labour the figures perform—a visual metaphor suggesting that immigrant communities' contributions pass unnoticed in France. In a broader sense, the viewer's difficulty in deciphering the spectral images parallels the act of reconstructing historical accounts based on incomplete or ambiguous narratives. Decoding these images requires the viewer to impose his or her own interpretation on the events, recalling how—just like Ahmed's beaten corpse is transformed into a water lily floating down the Seine river—historical discourse flattens the many personal memories, reducing an event to a single narrative. Just as Ahmed, in reality, would never be able to speak for himself following his death, so too do these mute, anonymous individuals (just like those in the archival footage) depend on other voices—and historical discourse—to tell their story. By projecting such images onto the low-income housing buildings—so ubiquitous in certain areas of Paris that they might constitute an easily overlooked 'background'—the video suggests that similar histories hiding just beneath the surface of Paris's landscape elude recognition. The video, like the song '17 octobre', urges its viewers to seek out such spectral histories.

Through perspectival shifts, sampling practices and multidirectional memorial allusions, Médine's '17 octobre' and the montage video both interrogate established historical processes and illustrate how the postmemorial generation negotiates its connection to the past. Weaving together fictionalised accounts with historical and

archival materials, the works studied here ultimately represent key components of what Lia Brozgal has termed 17 October's 'anarchive': 'a set of works that evince an archival function and that, together, produce an epistemological system in oppositional relationship to an official archive' (2014, 50). Released while Paris's police archives were still closed to the public—they would open in 2011—Médine's '17 octobre' and Larab's montage video ultimately interrogate the nature of historical knowledge. In an ironic twist, certain of these very institutionalised outlets of history now draw from these anarchival materials. The 2012 edition of the French *terminale* history textbook published by Fernand-Nathan, for instance, reprints abridged lyrics to Médine's '17 octobre' in a unit about the Algerian war. In addition to recognising such works' potential as a fecund site for exploring historical discourse, incorporating these anarchival materials into France's national history curriculum adds another layer of complexity to those discussions raised by the works themselves, particularly the institutionalisation of histories. Moreover, this move also foregrounds the exigency of rethinking cultural and historical literacies.

Finally, the larger digital contexts in which these works are produced, distributed and consumed (such as DailyMotion or YouTube) provide a fruitful point of departure for further theorising of larger historical processes. Brozgal contended that anarchival materials—Daeninckx's and Lallaoui's novels about 17 October, in her case—'counter the absence of the "official story" by pointing to the existence of the numerous rogue archives available to the historian, the researcher, the investigator, the reader' (2014, 49); similarly, as I have illustrated above, the two works' sampling practices lay bare their own constructed nature and point the audience toward other 'rogue archives'. But these works are also surrounded by larger digital paratexts which include viewer-contributed comments and links to other materials, video-sharing websites' 'suggested videos' features and reposts on social networking websites. As Jean Burgess and Joshua Green argued, video-sharing websites such as YouTube constitute 'a site of participatory culture' (2009, vii); I contend that the works' digital paratexts similarly constitute a site of 'participatory history' which makes legible the evolution of historical discourse itself. In the end, these digital networks of historical knowledge production and their relationship to the works disseminated through them inscribes yet another layer of complexity onto historical, archival and postmemorial discussions raised by the creative works themselves.

Notes

- [1] An incomplete list includes novels such as Didier Daeninckx's novel *Meurtres pour mémoire* (1984), Leïla Sebbar's *La Seine était rouge: Paris, octobre 1961* (1999) and Mehdi Lallaoui's *Une nuit d'octobre* (2001) and films such as Michael Haneke's *Caché* (2005), Alain Tasma's *Nuit noire* (2005) and Yasmina Adi's *Ici on noie les Algériens: 17 octobre 1961* (2012). For an overview of the fictional literary works, as well as a detailed analysis of Sebbar's *La Seine était rouge*, see Donadey (2001) and Rothberg (2009); for an insightful analysis of Daeninckx's and Lallaoui's novels in relation to the archive see Brozgal (2014).

- [2] Among the songs in which the massacre is evoked, those that speak most extensively about it include ‘Paris, Oct. 61’ on La Tordue’s *Les Choses de rien* (1995); ‘Octobre 61’ on Brigada Flores Magon’s *Brigada Flores Magon* (2001); ‘Des Fleurs dans la Seine’ on La Varda’s *Les Chemins de l’errance* (2005). The French rap group La Rumeur, among others, also evokes this event in live performances.
- [3] As of January 2014, the montage video is available at http://www.dailymotion.com/video/x484ef_medine-17-octobre-1961_creation.
- [4] The next song in the series, entitled ‘Enfant du destin (Petit Cheval)’ released on Médine’s second solo album, *Jihad, le plus grand combat est contre soi-même* (2005), describes how a young Native American boy returns to his village to find his entire tribe massacred by white settlers. The series continued on Médine’s fourth album, *Arabian Panther* (2008), with ‘Enfant du destin (Kounta Kinté)’, which revisits the history of the main protagonist from Alex Haley’s *Roots* (1976). The fifth instalment, ‘Enfant du destin (Daoud)’, appearing on Médine’s most recent album, *Protest Song* (2013), returns to the same story as the ‘Enfant du destin (David)’—this time from the perspective of the suicide bomber that kills David.
- [5] Whereas conservative estimates such as that proposed by Jean-Paul Brunet in *Police contre FLN: Le drame du 17 octobre* (1999) suggest that a maximum of 31 lives were claimed during the massacre, more liberal estimates, such the one Jean-Luc Einaudi proposes in *La bataille de Paris: 17 octobre 1961* (1991), place the number of victims around 200. The governmental inquiry into the case, which culminated in the Mandelkern report, concluded that seven victims definitely perished at the hands of French police on the night of 17 October and that as many as 88 victims were possible, though a more likely estimate was a few dozen victims. See <http://www.ladocumentationfrancaise.fr/var/storage/rapports-publics/984000823/0000.pdf>.
- [6] House rightly cites the widespread and varied nature of the protest and its repression as fundamental obstacles to identifying one concrete locale as a memorial to 17 October (2001, 358). In 2001 Paris’s mayor Bertrand Delanoë inaugurated a plaque commemorating the massacre on the Pont Saint-Michel.
- [7] Though the Charonne massacre took place just four months after 17 October, it received much more media coverage at the time (House and MacMaster 2006, 247–252).
- [8] Journalist and *conseiller municipal* Claude Bourdet, for instance, demanded that Maurice Papon clarify whether or not the figure often repeated in print media—that ‘cent cinquante corps [ont été] retirés de la Seine entre Paris et Rouen’—was accurate and called for ‘une enquête de la police sur elle-même . . . avec la participation d’élus’ (1961, 6).
- [9] Both Daeninckx’s *Meurtres pour mémoire* and Sebbar’s *La Seine était rouge* underscore this connection.
- [10] Written by a Jewish New York high school teacher, Abel Meeropol (who often used the pseudonym Lewis Allan), following the lynching of two men and first published as ‘Bitter Fruit’ in 1936, ‘Strange Fruit’ has become known as one of the first and most important protest songs against the treatment of blacks in the pre-civil rights era in the United States. The song was originally released on the Commodore label in 1939. Credit for the song’s lyrics and music is often attributed to Holiday—owing in large part to the first edition of Holiday’s autobiography, *Lady Sings the Blues* (Holiday and Dufty 1956), where she asserted as much. William Dufty, the autobiography’s co-author, removed this assertion from the second edition, despite Holiday’s continued claims that she set it to music (Baker 2002, 56). For more information on the authorship battle see Margolick (2000).
- [11] Scholarly works in French use both the English term ‘sampling’ and the French one ‘échantillonnage’ to refer to this practice.
- [12] Both Nora and Hirsch later acknowledge that such audio and video recordings (or traces) are attributed an aura of authenticity, despite this problematic move.

- [13] In fact, entire websites such as the-breaks.com and kevinnottingham.com have been devoted to this practice, as Sarah Hankins has pointed out (2001, 197).
- [14] As Nancy Virtue (2011) has argued, such a strategy is also central to Michael Haneke's film *Caché* (2005), which 'mimick[s] the tricks of memory by repeatedly conflating, concealing and then revealing its own diegetic and extra-diegetic layers such that as viewers we are often uncertain as to whether we are witnessing firsthand the actions and events of the narrative or rather, a mediated representation of those events in the form of the anonymous videotapes' (287).
- [15] Larab's corpus of 36 videos is primarily composed of 'fan trailers', especially for Japanese manga comics and video games. The '17 octobre' montage video, however, remains Larab's most viewed.
- [16] Kagan's photographs of 17 October are housed in the Bibliothèque de documentation internationale contemporaine in Nanterre, but most are reprinted in Jean-Luc Einaudi and Élie Kagan's *17 octobre 1961* (2001).
- [17] 'Boulevard Vincent Auriol' samples a France 2 investigation into the overcrowded Boulevard Vincent Auriol housing development just months prior to the fire. The clip concludes with a foreboding conclusion: 'les habitants redoutent un incendie'. (See <http://www.ina.fr/video/2909724001007/archives-sur-l-immeuble-du-boulevard-auriol-video.html>.)

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