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Cathy Lisa Schneider, *Police Power and Race Riots: Urban Unrest in Paris and New York*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014. 304 pp. Notes, index, and acknowledgements. \$29.95 U.S. (pb). ISBN 978-0-8122-2390-3.

Review by Leïla Ennaïli, Central Michigan University

Cathy Lisa Schneider's book *Police Power and Race Riots: Urban Unrest in Paris and New York* is a reminder that comparative studies are valuable to understand complex phenomena. Her goal is an ambitious one; to build, through a comparison between France and the USA, a model explaining how riots are triggered. The author privileges an approach that puts the police at the heart of the mechanism. This well-documented, 255 page study is easy to read, it effectively engages with previous related studies on the topic, and includes useful and detailed accounts of riots that took place in New York and Paris. Schneider's analysis will appeal to a wide variety of scholars and graduate students.[1] While each chapter could stand on its own, the reader would greatly benefit from reading the entire book, the point of which is a comparison across time and space. The author provides enough context to allow non-specialists to engage with her arguments. Comparing riots across time and national/local contexts is a real challenge that the author takes up through four dense, chronological chapters. Chapters one and three are focused on New York and cover the 1920-2010 period; chapters two and four deal with Paris across that same time frame. Alternating between the two cities allows the author to fully describe the specificity of each case study but it, at times, erases the explicit threads of the comparison. The study is successful in extracting overarching principles to understand the role of the police in triggering riots. This book is part of a current and much needed academic body of work on the police in large Western cities, one of them being the acclaimed *Enforcing Order: An Ethnography of Urban Policing* (2013) by Didier Fassin, which Schneider refers to and builds upon.[2]

Schneider starts her introduction by highlighting similarities between the 1960s New York riots and the ones that took place in the Paris *banlieues* in 2005. She then clearly states three main questions that underlie the analysis: "1) why police behaved similarly with very different minorities in very different contexts; 2) why riots erupted in Paris and New York half a century and an ocean apart; 3) why riots did not erupt in New York in the 1990s, when a white mayor held power and wielded it through a nearly all-white police force, or in Marseille in 2005" (p. 34). Answers to these questions are to be found throughout the book, but one would have welcomed more explicit references to these questions as well as synthesizing answers linking the pairs of chapters together. The author proceeds from the aforementioned questions to an extensive literature review that helps the reader understand the shortcomings and strengths of existing studies and situate her work in the broader academic debate. Police violence is a necessary element for a riot to happen, but not all violent police acts result in riots. Echoing the epigraph at the beginning of the introduction, the author makes a statement on page four that the following chapters further develop and illustrate: "Riots are the last resort for those who find all other paths to justice blocked" (p. 4). These "other paths" include social movements and the justice system. The major strength of Schneider's work resides in its methodology, which weaves together a variety of viewpoints, including those of the police and minority communities, and an emphasis on macro rather than micro processes. The multiplicity of viewpoints results from "fifteen years of intermittent ethnographic and participant

observation in New York and greater Paris” (p. 34). Schneider’s analysis examines “boundary activation” (p. 22)—a concept borrowed from Charles Tilly—which refers to “those rare, singular moments when all social interactions revolve around a single us/them boundary” (p. 25). The introduction also includes a discussion on the key term “riot.”

The first two chapters—one devoted to New York, the other to Paris—examine how racial boundaries were controlled by the police from 1920 to 1993. During the Great Depression, opposing forces were at play in racial boundary control. Whereas the Communists sought to transcend racial lines in New York in order to create a unified working class, the police in conjunction with federal housing and veteran related policies acted to reinforce separation. With this historical background, Schneider establishes continuity between the 1920s and the 1960s. Major changes in the demographics of some neighborhoods in New York, the development of gangs and drug trafficking, as well as police violence explain the riots of 1964 and 1967. Schneider argues that the development of black and Puerto Rican activism in the aftermath of these riots channeled anger resulting from police violence and thus prevented more riots from occurring. However, such activism was only short-lived and the 1977 blackout riot “occurred when radical politics were in decline” (p. 71). Towards the end of the first chapter, Schneider engages with the argument that mass incarceration is responsible for a decline in riots since the 1980s. Using the counter-example of Los Angeles, she shows that there is no correlation between the two and that mass incarceration has instead deeply eroded the network seeking to promote a path to justice through the legal system. It also eroded the relationships between minorities and the police. Chapter one ends with a question: why did New Yorkers not riot in the aftermath of police violence during the tenure of Mayor Giuliani, who did not seek to appease racial tensions and was a staunch supporter of the police.

The transition to chapter two is rather abrupt, which reflects the high degree of difference existing between the New York and Paris contexts. Whereas the first chapter analyzed multiple occurrences of riots in New York through a mostly local lens, the second chapter is focused on how racial boundaries were created during French colonial times and why riots did not occur. The national lens adopted for chapter two includes the discussion of major events in the history of French colonialism and immigration. Following Didier Fassin, the author seeks to establish a clear continuity between both. Schneider traces how French colonial history has lastingly cemented racial boundaries in the metropole. Two elements are emphasized: the second-class citizenship of Muslims in colonial France and the creation of a special police brigade in charge of dealing with the *indigènes*. The chapter also provides a history of French police through colonial times and in relation to Vichy France. This historical background is crucial to understanding how the Paris police dealt with the *Français Musulmans d’Algérie* who became Algerians after independence. Parallel to chapter one, Schneider addresses housing conditions for immigrants in Paris. The October 17, 1961 demonstration and the ensuing bloody repression did not trigger riots but substantially affected relations between the police and Algerians. Schneider mentions the power of the FLN over Algerians in Paris as the main reason why riots did not occur. Similarly, the kidnapping of Ben Barka did not cause a riot either. Although “immigrants played a minimal role” (p. 117) in the 1968 riots Schneider includes these events for two reasons: 1) they were a blueprint for later riots; 2) it allows her to point out the blind spot of leftist movements that failed to advocate for immigrants’ rights. As activism developed among the second generation in the 1980s with the *Marche des Beurs*, France also saw the rise of the extreme right as well as more and more stringent immigration laws. Schneider briefly analyzes the 1990s riots in the suburbs of Lyon and Paris and insists, just like she did in the introduction, that material deprivation was not the main cause but that police violence was instead to blame. A series of violent police actions in the 1990s and early 2000s, which did not spark riots, resulted in charges being brought against the police officers involved and their eventual dismissal.

Chapter three starts with Giuliani’s 1993 mayoral campaign, which heavily relied on racial fears to appeal to voters thereby activating racial boundaries. In spite of a seemingly more volatile context created by Giuliani (zero-tolerance policing and stop-and-frisk leading to a deterioration of relations with the police), no riots occurred. Schneider explains that increased access to the justice system and more organizing efforts in minority communities were factors that prevented riots from happening. The chapter then takes

on a different form and moves toward an account of interviews with police officers, community organizers, and parents of police homicide victims. The testimonies are powerful insofar as they allow the author to escape Manichean views and go beyond the dehumanizing effects of data analysis alone. Schneider talked to a variety of police officers who have differing views on police violence ranging from racist stereotypes to imperfect training and finally mere bad luck. Activists interviewed by the author explain how they came to develop protest marches and legal actions, be they collective or individual, to challenge racial profiling, police violence, and discrimination. Parents of police homicide victims recount how they were helped by local organizations and settled their cases with the city. Many express true faith in the justice system in spite of the process being long and exhausting, but the chapter ends on a rather pessimistic note when a parent wonders how court settlements can effectively change structural issues. What emerges out of these accounts from multiple viewpoints is a deep disconnect between the police and those they are supposed to serve.

Chapter four shifts back to the 2005 riots in the Paris suburbs that erupted after the deaths of two teenagers who, while being chased by the police, entered an electrical substation and were electrocuted. Schneider emphasizes the effect Sarkozy's rhetoric had on fueling the anger of rioters. After dismissing initial explanations from French scholars that highlighted the role of polygamous families, radical Islam, and high unemployment, Schneider insists on two aspects; 1) the initial violent police act is at the root of the riots and 2) most rioters were French first-time offenders. She then traces the development of securitarian discourse in French politics linking it to the major landmark of the 2002 presidential election and through Sarkozy's mandates (as *Ministre de l'Intérieur*, 2005-2007 and as President, 2007-2012). This chapter also includes accounts of interviews with French police officers as well as with *banlieue* inhabitants. Police officers complain about the high arrest quotas they have to fulfill (p. 191) and some choose the relatively easy target of illegal immigrants to comply. Retaliation against plaintiffs and racial profiling are widespread issues, as Schneider points out in the case of New York as well. Schneider also takes the time to explain how the French police is structured between *Gendarmerie* and *Police nationale*. She provides a useful overview of the different units from the BAC—"operat[ing] like a paramilitary unit outside the normal chain of command" (p. 196)—to the *Police de proximité*, a force without real power. Through the interviews with residents of *banlieues*, Schneider makes clear that they see continuity between current police violence and colonialism. A parallel is drawn with the racial tensions between Jews and Muslims in Sarcelles on one hand and tensions between Porto Ricans and Hasidim in New York on the other. The author insists that, in the French case, foreign policy played a role in the conflict but it was not a factor in the New York case. Chapter four concludes with a discussion of four reasons why no riots erupted in Marseille in 2005; 1) "More inclusive economic networks and spatial geography"; 2) "Incorporation and recognition of minority religious and neighborhood organizations"; 3) "Policing strategy that preferences social peace over violent enforcement of racial and spatial boundaries"; 4) "The role of the Mafia and a closely linked political machine" (p. 222).

The conclusion comes back to the consequences of mass incarceration and mentions the war on immigrants (p. 238) in the US as well as the reaction of the police to the Occupy movement. Schneider also draws bleak conclusions on Sarkozy's mandate. Moving forward to Hollande's presidency, she outlines the continuity in the use of securitarian discourse. The book ends with a call for "alternative policing strategies" (p. 254) that could mend the gap between the police and minority communities. Among the details noted in both the New York and the Paris chapters that can be teased out and further discussed, I would mention the impact of the militarization of police (pp. 84, 131) and the recurring description of the police as an "occupying force" (pp. 7, 19, 58, 83, 149, 182, 206). Schneider also mentions how "rumors" about particular interactions with the police can be instrumental in the spread of riots (pp. 12, 27, 43, 48, 56, 81, 122). In another example, chance seems to have played a role (the 1977 blackout riot resulted from an employee "turn[ing] the master key the wrong way" (p. 70). Any effective model seeking to explain riots should leave room for a certain degree of contingency. The role played by the media, mentioned occasionally by the author, and its coverage of police actions appear as another potential avenue to further explore boundary activation. Finally, one wonders if public statements by family members of victims change the nature of the public reaction to police violence. Because the book was published in

2014, one cannot but regret that it does not include a reflection on the recent wave of police brutality that has sparked uprisings and protests in many American cities starting in 2014 with Ferguson, Missouri after the death of Michael Brown. A New York Times article estimates that “1,000 or more people died at the hands of law enforcement officers acting in the line of duty” over the course of the year following M. Brown’s death.[3] There is no doubt that more chapters on police power and the resulting riots remain to be written. Schneider’s contribution provides a cogent basis for these future discussions.

NOTES

[1] French-speaking readers or French Studies specialists will notice recurrent spelling errors of various French names in chapters 2 and 4.

[2] Didier Fassin, *Enforcing Order: An Ethnography of Urban Policing* (Cambridge, UK and Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2013). First published in French as *La Force de l’ordre. Une anthropologie de la police des quartiers* (Paris: Seuil, 2011).

[3] Richard Pérez-Peña, “Fatal Police Shootings: Accounts Since Ferguson,” *New York Times*, Ap. 8, 2015.

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