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Unrequited Loyalty: The Harkis in Postcolonial France

The demographic and political questions posed by immigration have long challenged European historians to critically assess definitions of European identity and narratives of decolonization, however since 1989 a number of studies have emerged which focus more on cultural interactions and the lived experience of immigrants to France from her former colonies. Written in the wake of the headscarf affair in France, these works reflect the concerns of an era in which terrorism and radical Islam is perceived as the primary external threat to America and the West.

The primary result has been greater emphasis on immigration issues and the place of Muslims in French society and politics. Joan Scott, in *The Politics of the Veil*, examined how debates over the wearing of distinctive clothing by Muslim schoolgirls represent a complex combination of race, gender, class and nationalist factors at work in French society. Her work is a significant contribution to the ongoing discussion regarding intersections between Islam and French society. In another example, concentrating on the Algerians and the immigrant experience over multiple generations, Paul Silverstein offered a theoretically bold study of Algerian immigrant communities in the metropole in his 2006 book *Algeria in France: Transpolitics, Race, and Identity*. Central to his analysis is this term “transpolitics”, which Silverstein employed to mean the world of political connections between Algerians and between different North African immigrant groups in general. These connections question the utility of common geographic and religious based labels such as Algerians, North Africans or Muslims.

In this essay I examine a particular group of North African immigrants, the *harkis*: Algerians who served in the French military, police, or civil service during the period of the Algerian revolution. These included long serving veterans of the World Wars as well as young men seeking stable work. The harki experience is distinct, most immigrants to France from the Maghreb retain some sort of connection to their former home, and the exceptions have most often been due

to the immigrant's status as a religious or ethnic minority.¹ The Harkis are a unique group whose stories add nuance to an already complex web that defies state boundaries and attempts by French politicians to simplify immigration issues.

The Harkis have been received in France with a mixture of embarrassment and resentment. For the Left they represent those Algerians who accepted the protection of the colonial government and acted as the local enforcers of *Algerie c'est la France*. For the French Right, the Harkis are an embarrassing reminder of the failed colonial war as well a distinct counter to any characterization of immigrants as "anti-French". In addition, anti-immigrant suspicions are confounded by the Harkis' self-interest, for they have had little reason to support anti-Western sentiment abroad as they are viewed as traitors by the governments of the former colonies.

Here I present a brief history of the Harkis in order to show how this particular group contributes to a unique story to the postcolonial world. I conclude by discussing Harki immigrants in the context of shifting French regulations and the work of recent historians seeking new methods for understanding the relationship between immigration, Europe, and the former colonies. Native populations serving during colonial revolutions, the Vietnam War, and in current conflicts, such as Afghanistan and Sudan form sizable minorities in the regions where service to a foreign power has or will destabilize large groups of people based on military service or the association of a particular ethnic group with a foreign power. Like the Harkis, the relationship between these groups and both their original and adopted homelands are part of the story of transnational cultural development, but the condition of their immigration represents a distinct form of break with their homelands.

Colonization and Conflict

While the French military recruited soldiers from all colonies at various times, the Harkis are a specifically Algerian case. Their discrete situation arose from Algeria's unique relationship with France, which shaped the expansive and brutal war for independence that lasted from 1954–62. The initial French occupation of Algeria in 1830 claimed to redress a farcical diplomatic insult in which the Dey of Algiers struck the French ambassador with a ceremonial fly-whisk, while a more plausible explanation for the establishment of what became French North Africa was the stubborn operations of Mediterranean pirates. Over time, Algeria developed into the centerpiece of the new French Empire. Unlike the

¹ For example, Jews, such as the Tunisian author Albert Memmi, who supported independence but found no place for himself in post-independence society.

British and other European powers, the French attempted to treat their overseas possessions as potential provinces (departments). With its proximity to Europe and large settler population – approximately one million at the conclusion of the Algerian War of Independence, 10% of the total population – Algeria became both the physical embodiment and cultural representation of the French imperial saga. The duplicity of the French “civilizing mission,” the assertion by French imperialists that “Algeria is France,” and the sudden insistence following decolonization that Algeria had *never* been French, showcase the complexity of late European colonialism and provide context for current immigration politics.² This language of citizenship and rejection also frames the experience of soldiers recruited from local Algerian populations.

The other two divisions of French North Africa, Morocco and Tunisia, were protectorates, but Algeria was designated a French metropolitan territory in a series of measures in 1870, following the establishment of the Third Republic after the Franco-Prussian War. This difference of status – the remainder of French Africa was regulated by the Ministry of the Colonies – posed legal problems that were never fully resolved until independence and even thereafter. As Alice Conklin and others have observed regarding the French Empire generally, French Republican ideals often conflicted with imperial practicalities – though these were not mutually exclusive. Consequentially, citizenship was a complex matter, a combination of legal distinctions and cultural questions over the meaning of being French.³ Occupying a vague interstice – French nationals but not citizens – Algerians possessed limited rights and minimal representation, despite the colonizer’s insistence that they were a part of French civilization – colonial schoolbooks made a point of referring to “our ancestors, the Gauls”.⁴ These rights and terms of citizenship fluctuated through the 19th and early 20th century, as France transitioned from Republic to Empire and back again.⁵

² See: Martin Thomas. *The French empire between the wars: Imperialism, politics and society*, (Manchester University Press, 2005).

³ See: Alice L. Conklin. *A Mission to Civilize: The republican idea of empire in France and West Africa, 1895–1930*. Stanford University Press, 1997.; Laurie L. Blevis. «Les avatars de la citoyenneté en Algérie coloniale ou les paradoxes d’une catégorisation,» *Droits et société* 48 (2001) 557–80. E. Langelier. *La situation juridique des Harkis: 1962–2007*. Poitiers: Université de Poitiers, 2009), 2–3.

⁴ Conklin, *A Mission to Civilize*, 20.

⁵ The decree of July 22, 1834, which declared the annexation of Algeria, made all its inhabitants subjects, but not citizens, of France and, as such, subject to their own laws and customs. Islamic law was subordinated to French law in 1842. While Islamic law was further restricted throughout the 1800s, in reality this was primarily an instrument for land transfer to colonists and local laws tended to hold sway outside of the major cities. The jurisconsult of July 14, 1865, granted non-French colons French citizenship and recognized Muslim and Jewish Algerians as having “la qualité de Français”; that is, they officially became French nationals of the French Empire. Muslims could become French citizens if they renounced Islam. Few did. On October 24, 1870, the Crémieux Decree granted the Algerian Jews French citizenship. The marginalization of the Muslim population was hardened

Affiliation with French culture and loyalty to the state were promoted throughout the colonies as administrative realities necessitated expanded educational opportunities. Even anti-colonial authors, such as Frantz Fanon, acknowledged that they often articulated their ideas in the context of the French intellectual tradition. The diversity of Algeria's ethnic landscape bolstered this ideological project as the common literal and figurative language of colonial France represented a unifying conception in fragmented territories.

Algerian society, like Maghreb in general, was comprised of varied kinship groups within Arab and Berber communities – smaller tight-knit clans and broader but less cohesive tribes.⁶ These entities allied against larger threats; however the fragility of Algerian tribal alliances is well reflected by the saying “I against my brother, my brother and I against our cousins, and so on”. Groups could conquer one another but, though the system was rife for vendettas and blood feuds, there was no mechanism for integrating members who did not share ancestors. These family connections were obscured to a large degree by the complexities of the independence struggle and postcolonial integration, but played a sizable role in the recruitment of the Harkis during the World Wars and the mobilization efforts of the French government and the National Liberation Front (FLN) during the Algerian War.⁷

To some extent, the French encouraged transference of these loyalties – which appeared far more assailable than religious affiliations – to the state. However, this encouragement of assimilation had its limits as citizenship was virtually unattainable. Once the cultural and moral mission of the colonizer became untenable French imperialism, unprofitable and increasingly controversial within metropolitan France, it maintained the livelihood and social status of the *pied noirs*. Allowing the colonized admission to French society threatened both and at some point the impossibility of entering this world became apparent. This was a particular shock to intellectuals who believed they could assimilate by embracing the ideals and attaining the education of the colonizer as well as civil servants or favored ethnic minorities. A more readily available option with a higher physical risk was the hope that blood sacrifice of military service would place the colonized on an equal playing field, exemplified by the fate of the *Harkis*. But the results proved painfully mixed. The Harkis are an example of the colonized's inability to fully enter the world of the colonizer through even extreme loyalty.

under the Code de l'indigenat of 1881, which, among other restrictions, prevented Algerians from leaving their villages without permission from French authorities. Restrictions were removed in 1914. L. J. Miegge. “Legal Developments in the Maghreb: 1830–1930”. In *European Expansion and the Law: The Encounter of European and Indigenous Law in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Africa and Asia*, ed. W. J. Mommsen and J. A. De Moor. (New York: Berg, 1992), 103.

⁶ John Ruedy, *Modern Algeria: The Origins and Development of a Nation*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001).

⁷ Vincent Crapanzano. *The Harkis: the wound that never heals*, (University of Chicago Press, 2011) 41.

The expectation of citizenship through blood sacrifice is not unique to Algeria, France, or European imperialism by any means. Rather the potential opportunities of military service render the material and political issues surrounding it themes common among oppressed peoples and domestic minorities including European Jews, African-Americans undocumented immigrants.⁸ European nationalist appeals in the late 19th and early 20th centuries were steeped in martial imagery and, while ethnic distinctions played a crucial role in such constructions, modern European militaries required massive armies. Colonial troops were key components of European armies in both Europe and Africa during the World Wars – and, given the complexity of French loyalties during the Vichy era, there was less suspicion of their loyalty than one might expect. The French army formed the first regiment of local troops – one for each of Algeria’s three provinces – in 1856. In 1912 the French began drafting Algerian Muslims. Of the 81,000 troops who took part in the First World War, twenty-five thousand died. A 76,000 man corps fought in World War II.⁹ However, the development of a middle class of loyal soldiers and civil servants epitomized imperial necessity and tension. Consequentially, imperial authorities sought to exacerbate ethnic and religious divisions in order to prevent an educated middle class from becoming a revolutionary vanguard.

Colonized peoples might compose either a minority or a majority of the population but their access to power and social status was highly restricted. There exists a community within the community which they cannot take part in and it is this disparity which lies at the heart of the postcolonial canon from Octave Mannoni’s work in the early 1950s to Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masques*, Memmi’s *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, and Gayatri Spivak’s more recent arguments regarding a broad based structural hegemony.¹⁰ The symbols, language, and rules of the colonizer enforce this separation and the “mythical portrait” encourages failure, impacting intellectual, religious, and cultural life. The advantages of knowing two separate cultural and linguistic vocabularies are negated by the poverty of the world of the colonized and the inaccessibility of the colonizer’s world.¹¹ The barrier between the colonizer and the colonized forced

⁸ A recent example of scholarship on the subject is Ronald R. Krebs. *Fighting for Rights: Military Service and the Politics of Citizenship* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2006) in which Krebs compares African-Americans in early 20th century America and the Druze minority in Israel.

⁹ Langelier, *des Harkis*, 6.

¹⁰ Mannoni, in his pioneering analysis of colonialism from a psychological perspective, argued that the colonized are inculcated into the symbolism and language of the colonial world through developmental experiences in childhood. Octave Mannoni, *Psychologie de la Colonisation* (Paris: Le Seuil, 1950). For Spivak’s primary work on the subject see: Gayatri Spivak. *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*. (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1999).

¹¹ Bilingualism has been a topic of interest for colonial and postcolonial scholars. Work on Africa has been particular abundant in studies of bilingual education during the colonial period and especially as an aspect of broader questions related to education and globalization in the postcolonial world. ex: Eyamba G. Bokamba “ French Colonial Language Policies in Africa and

them to choose: actions which brought an individual closer to the colonized entailed estrangement from family and friends. This was particularly true for aspiring students, leaders, and those with skills in desirable fields who became leaders of the Algerian independence movement.

While egalitarian ideologies and pragmatic hopes for a loyal supply of colonial soldiers led to expansions of citizenship rights and public services, the fundamental problem with colonial reforms is that they were imposed, reminders of the political agency only attainable through an independent state. French attempts to provide stronger infrastructure and educational opportunities in North African cities were met with skepticism. Albert Camus saw them as taxpayer funded showpieces for “tourists and commissions of inquiry,” and the attitudes of a nascent revolutionary movement were expressed succinctly by a Muslim student in a 1962 novel by Algerian Mourad Bourbonne “It is not with you but against you that we are learning your language”.¹² Colonial divisions grew more distinct as political movements among the colonized became convinced that compromise was no longer viable. The eventual break took on numerous features, mechanisms for creating unity and justifying sacrifice beyond immediate material needs. However, when the conflict between Algerian revolutionary groups and the colonial administration broke into full-scale violence on 1 November 1954, following a series of attacks by the National Liberation Front (FLN) referred to as the *toussant rouge* (red All Saints Day). Those Algerians actively engaged in the revolutionary movements and existing colonial forces were quickly supplemented by local soldiers recruited from the unengaged population.

The Algerian War and the Harkis

The first Harka of the Algerian War was created in 1955 by the French official Jean Servier in the region of Arris in the Aures Mountains. Finding the local administration disorganized and panicked at the wake of initial FLN attacks, Servier ordered Agha Abdullah Merchi of the Alt Daoud clan to form a company to counter a group led by the revolutionary Mustafa ben Boulald, who was blamed for the murder of the local caid (a title for a local indigenous official) and two liberal pied noir teachers.¹³ Cursed by the Europeans for arming the rural locals, Servier later explained: “in acting so I avoided eventual reprisals by the European

their Legacies”. In David F. Marshall, David F. (ed.): *Language Planning: Focusschrift in Honor of Joshua A. Fishman*, vol. III. (Philadelphia: 1991) 175–213; Gervaid Mendo Ze ed. *Le français langue africaine: Enjeux et atouts pour la Francophonie*. Paris: 1999.

¹² Albert Camus, *Actuelles III Chroniques algeriennes 1939–1957* (Paris, 1958). Mourad Bourbonne, *Le mont des genets* (Paris: Julliard, 1962).

¹³ Others, including many Harkis from the area, insist that the agha himself – always loyal to the French – first offered to form the Harka.

population and I explained to the local populations that the French were not confusing them with the FLN outlaws". Greatly exaggerating his importance, Servier asserted that "the revolt suddenly took on another aspect [with the creation of this first Harka]. It was no longer a war of liberation led by all the Muslims against the Christians, but an open rebellion against the law. On the side of order and French peace, there were Muslims; and on the other side, some French were already wallowing in the troubles and, in secret, without a doubt aided the rebels"¹⁴

Most Harkis were poorly educated agrarian peasants. They served all manner of duties from scouting and combat to manual labor. Recruited independently and sometimes forcibly by local French commanders, they were recruited on short-term contracts and in vague circumstances. It was not until December 11, 1961, less than a year before the signing of the peace at Evian, that the French army granted the Harkis more formal legal status. Their pay was minimal – in July 1957 this meant 750 Algerian francs a day and an additional 400 if they came with a mule or a horse out of which they had to pay for their own food – and they received no guarantee of future benefits outside of compensation for permanent disability and a payment to their families if they were killed.¹⁵

Jacques Soustelle, the governor-general, who later supported the rightwing attempted coup d'état of 1961 known as the "Algiers Putsch" or "Generals' Putsch," encouraged the recruitment of Harkis and inserted a larger sense of mission into his recruiting efforts: "we can say: 'We lost but we did not fail thanks to those Arabs and Berbers who supported, indeed, died for, France'".¹⁶ The Harkis' circumstances were often irregular, their units were sometimes administered by local rulers, other times more directly by the French military. For example, Said Boualam, a tribal leader and long-serving soldier in the French colonial forces from the area southwest of Algiers, organized groups of up to 1,000 Harkis throughout the late 1950s. His forces were loyal to him and he was treated by French authorities in the manner of an influential mercenary leader – on separate occasions it was feared he would join the FLN or support the pied noir *ultras*.¹⁷

In April 1956, the French prefect Robert Lacoste finally established rules for the creation, organization, and arming of Harkas, which he defined as "temporary formations whose mission is to participate in order-maintaining operations". Lacoste wanted to turn the Harkas into independent anti-guerrilla units, with ranked Muslim soldiers under French officers, but Raoul Salan – commanding general in Algeria and future leader of the putsch – argued this would lead to the

¹⁴ Crapanzano *The Harkis*, 49, 61

¹⁵ C. R. Ageron. «Les supplétifs algériens dans l'armée française pendant la guerre d'Algérie.» *Vingt-trois ans de 48* (1995) 3–20.

¹⁶ M. Faivre. *Les combattants musulmans de la guerre d'Algérie: Des soldats sacrifiés*. Paris: L'Harmattan, 1995) 38.

¹⁷ Roux 1991, 220–23).

development of an Algerian army, “thus materializing an Algerian nation”.¹⁸ Although some military officers were opposed to the use of any indigenous forces in the war, not only because they feared desertion and betrayal, but also because they believed that people should not be made to turn on themselves, the army generally found enlisting the Harkis – without having to guarantee their continued employment – a “convenience”.¹⁹

Salan himself – supported by the minister of state charged with cultural affairs, the novelist and art critic, Andre Malraux – managed a little more than a year later to have the number of Harkis increased from seventeen to thirty thousand. Five months later, Maurice Challe, who had replaced Salan, was accorded permission to recruit another thirty thousand. But, since de Gaulle opposed “the engagement of Harkis in any operation against their brothers in race,”²⁰ Challe promised the General that they would be used only for surveillance and protection. However, neither Challe nor other French commanders followed this commitment and the Harkis were, in fact, used whenever and wherever they were needed for any operation, defensive or offensive. These actions included the organization of Harki police in the Algiers and even in Paris during the height of FLN activity in the metropole.²¹ Figures regarding the number of the Harkis serving in auxiliary units and those who migrated to France following the war are unreliable. At the signing of the peace in 1962, the French government estimated a total of 260,000 pro-French Algerians serving in some military or bureaucratic capacity, with 58,000 classified as Harkis.²²

A variety of circumstances could lead to an Algerian becoming a Harki. Said Ferdi, whose 1981 memoir *Un enfant dans la guerre*, was one of the first published accounts by a Harki, recalled the sense of sheer fear in his village following the rise of FLN activity in the countryside and the beginnings of French counterinsurgency – “During the following three months, a true terror seized the population. Incredible rumors about the bandits spread. Some said that they were invisible, others that they had the power to transform themselves into animals-sheep, donkeys, or cows – and, thus, present everywhere, they were able to observe everyone. Each was afraid for his life.”²³ In this atmosphere it is difficult to assess the degree of agency available to those who ended up serving. Crapanzano observed during the course of his interviews that “Most of the veterans who had

¹⁸ Ageron. “Les suppletifs algériens,” 6.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, 7.

²⁰ *Ibidem*.

²¹ The FLN’s campaign of assassination and extortion among the Muslim population of metropolitan France and the brutal response of French police officials – including several who were later convicted of war crimes under the Vichy regime – is too easily overlooked. However, both in terms of the colony and the metropole, the scale of the Algerian conflict dwarfs that of the Irish “Troubles”.

²² Crapanzano, *The Harkis*, 77–9.

²³ Said Ferdi, *Un enfant dans la guerre*, (Paris: Seuil, 1981).

become Harkis simply reported that they were “soldiers” when I asked them why. They did not elaborate. That fact was sufficient.²⁴ Ferdi’s story has become an iconic depiction of the extremes of French recruitment in the countryside –

Early in the morning, on March 3, 1958, as he was washing in a stream before starting for school, Ferdi, then thirteen, was picked up by five Algerians serving in the French army, beaten, and carried off to a nearby casern. “I immediately had the impression of having entered a world apart, a world of savage beasts from which I would have no chance of leaving”. Refusing to answer questions about the political affiliations of various villagers, he was subjected to the *gegene*. He was strapped naked to an iron table, electrodes were attached to his penis and one of his ears, and, each time he refused to answer a question, an increasingly powerful electric charge was sent through his body. “The pain was such that I suffocated and then howled horribly”. After about twenty minutes, the base commander entered and ordered a halt to the torture. Ferdi was told that he would not be allowed to leave the base and was forced to tell his father (who, unknown to the French, was sympathetic to the FLN) that he wanted to remain in the casern with the French. He hoped that his father would understand that he was remaining against his will as the French had threatened his family, but he could say nothing and, in fact, never saw his father again. After working in the casern’s kitchen for several months, he was sent on operations until the war ended. Luckily, he was favored by the captain and his successor, who, after the signing of the Treaty of Evian, counseled him to go to France and managed somehow to arrange for his transfer. He was still too young to join the army.²⁵

FLN fighters captured in the field, themselves occasionally recruited by force, were sometimes given the choice of becoming a Harki or being killed. On the other side, the Harkis captured by the FLN often met torture and death as well as reprisals upon families and villages. Periodic assurances of forgiveness were held out in order to inspire desertion, but those who attempted to join or rejoin the FLN were often killed. Like the Harkis themselves, the revolutionary organizations were often fragmented, especially early in the war as the FLN operated in concert or competition with the National Liberation Army (ALN).

Despite the drama of Ferdi’s account, the vast majority of Harkis joined for material stability, offered regular pay on the basis for support work. For the majority of Harkis, however, becoming an auxiliary was simply a way to earn a living. It also implied a certain dignity and the potential for better terms from colonial authorities – a large number of Algerians worked on farms owed by the settler population. As the war expanded, those farms became the site of FLN requisitioning and reprisals from both sides. As the conflict made greater demands on the local population, food became scarce. The “decision” to become a Harki is a difficult matter to discuss effectively for the same reason as the term “forced migration” is

²⁴ Crapanzano, *The Harkis*, 67.

²⁵ *Ibidem*, 68–70.

problematic. While the cause of the Harki immigration itself is clear, it is impossible to fully comprehend the nature of initial decisions to join French forces.

Peace and Displacement

The withdrawal of the colonizer lowered some boundaries and raised others as former rebels now had access to state authority. Lending support to less threatening minorities and exacerbating existing tensions was expedient for the colonial power but devastating to social relations. The future of minorities favored and subsequently abandoned by the French, including the large Jewish population, was cast into uncertainty. Given responsibility for the entire country, the leaders were able and inclined to associate the nation's problems with opposition to the regime, shifting blame onto the West or internal others: the remaining colonizers and minority groups among the former colonized.

While cultural and religious chauvinism would reassert itself, adherence to the colonizer's practices was no longer a strict dividing line used to identify "disloyal" Muslims through the actions such as the FLN's ban on alcohol consumption,²⁶ enforced via individualized violence or attacks on French cafés and bars.²⁷ While quick to settle internal scores and consolidate power, the leaders of the postcolonial state proved less fixated upon citizens' daily activities. However, the exuberance of independence era activists eagerly anticipating the collapse of barriers to political expression evaporated due to the fears of a fragile leadership unwilling to accept popular movements if they might crystallize into anti-government protest.²⁸

Nationalism proved key to anti-colonial movements, however flourishing independence movements rooted in nationalist conceptions threatened intermediary or marginal groups. And following independence, new regimes translated the practical Manichaeism of revolution into a new setting – defining opposition

²⁶ The O.A.S. in Algeria had their own versions of such repression to enforce the loyalty of the *piets noir*, such as fining families who took vacations abroad. See: Alistair Horn. *A Savage War of Peace: Algeria 1964–62*. New York: New York Review of Books, 2006 [1977].

²⁷ Including the bombing of a milk bar bustling with families, portrayed in a notable scene of Gillo Pontecorvo's film *The Battle of Algiers*

²⁸ The French revolutionary model of a conservative reaction in the mode of Thermidor is so commonly ascribed to other cases (for example Sheila Fitzpatrick's analysis in *The Russian Revolution* and the conflicts following 19th century Latin American revolutions) as to seem obvious to current historians but revolutionary optimism was no less real among intellectuals as well as the crowd during decolonization. Political Scientist Crawford Young recounted: "I recollect attending political rallies by the Neo-Destour Party in Tunisia at the time of independence in 1956, at which President Habib Bourguiba spoke. The air was electric, the crowd's adulation overpowering. Equally memorable was the universal esteem of the university student population...in an atmosphere free of the fear and intimidation that years later might influence public debate". Young, *The African Colonial State in Comparative Perspective*, 239

to the government as counterrevolutionary disloyalty.²⁹ The pressure to prove one's loyalty combined with the real desire to avenge injustice resulted in tertiary violence against individuals and groups associated with the French rule. Violence towards the Harkis and former members of the French army escalated as the war drew to a close. One scholar of North African folklore recorded anti-Harki songs in Berber dialects and Arabic from the Aures region with verses such as:

“Gather the Harkis Gather them together.
 What remedy is there for them? The sharpened knife.
 A hail of gunfire will eat them”
 And:
 “Harkis, be cursed!
 France will not help you.
 The civilians' children will track you down”³⁰

Popular violence actually contrasted with a more concerted attempt by the FLN to reintegrate the Harkis following French withdrawal. Generally, the Algerians in the French army were treated by the FLN and the ALN with greater sympathy as the war concluded. As Crapanzano notes, “many of the directives from the FLN urged moderation in the treatment of the Harkis. For example, one issued on March 30, 1961, concerning “contact with Muslims enrolled in the enemy ranks,” reads: “Firmly promise them absolute pardon if they join the ALN with arms and their kits [bagages]. The ALN knows that they were tricked by the enemy”.³¹ However, the grim reality was large scale violence against the Harkis by local populations in the absence of intervening forces.

Towards the conclusion of the war, the French began to demobilize Harki units to recoup weapons and supplies, although formal procedures for demobilization were not established until 20 March, 1962, several days after the Treaty of Evian. There was much confusion regarding what benefits were available and to whom; over 17,000 had already been demobilized and numerous groups had been recruited and released during the course of the war. The Harkis were given three choices: 1. They could enlist in the French army at a minimum rank and be stationed in Europe, but without transportation provided or support for their families. 2. They could return to civilian life with a bonus of 500–2,000 francs based on time served. 3. They could ask for a *delai de reflexion* (a delay for reflection) of six months during which they would receive their salary and work

²⁹ Spivak employs the term “strategic essentialism” to characterize the “enemy of my enemy” form of sublimation of differences during revolutionary struggles and rights' movements. Gayatri Spivak. “Feminism and Critical Theory” in *The Spivak Reader* (New York: Routledge, 1996 [1985]), 214.

³⁰ N. Boulhais, *Des Harkis berberes de l'Aures au nord de la France*. (Villeneuve d'Ascq: Presses Universitaires de Septentrion, 2002) 281.

³¹ Crapanzano, *The Harkis*, 90–5

in non-combat roles. About fifteen hundred auxiliaries opted for the first choice. Encouraged by their officers, most Harkis opted for the second choice.³²

The results were chaotic. The Harkis returning to their villages often met with torture and death. Again statistics are difficult to come by accurately, however, estimates of the numbers of the Harkis killed in Algeria range from 75,000–150,000. While the Algerian government has been loath to discuss the subject, a 2001 government report acknowledged a similar figure. Violence, and specific forms of violence excused in the name of extreme circumstances, such as torture and the execution of suspected traitors, became tools of new regimes possessing many of the same fears they held as revolutionary leaders.³³ Many conflicts within and between postcolonial states represented the settling of previously buried scores writ large.³⁴

In response to escalating violence, or in anticipation of it, large numbers of the Harkis sought to immigrate to France. Since the Harkis had some claim to citizenship, immigration was referred to as repatriation. However, French policy fluctuated rapidly due to a combination of fears both demographic and ideological – conservative worries regarding a large influx of poor and Muslim immigrant as well as socialist concerns that both the Harkis and pied noirs could potentially bolster the radical right. The French minister for Algerian affairs, Louis Joxe, told the Council of Ministers in early 1962 that “the Harkis want to leave en masse” and “it was necessary to fight an infiltration, which under charitable pretext would have the effect of our welcoming undesirable elements”.³⁵ The number of the Harkis able to immigrate to France was approximately 85,000.³⁶

The Harkis in France

Harki fortunes in France have proved similarly chaotic. Repatriates fall into two categories – those who arrived on their own or with private assistance and those official, assisted by the French military. The former are impossible to quantify, however, the latter were sent to transition camps until they found work – in many

³² Michel Roux. *Les Harkis: Les oubliés de l'histoire, 1954–1991*. Paris: La Découverte, 1991) 187–88.

³³ Fears which were well-founded during the colonial era, as evidenced to a massive degree during the Algerian War when French intelligence succeeded in using a large number of informants to infiltrate FLN, the cells leading to the capture of numerous rebel leaders including those killed or captured during the Battle of Algiers.

³⁴ As the Algerian War dragging on disunity in the North African world became very apparent, most notably the ambition of Nasser in Egypt to be or at least be seen as the representative of Pan-Arabism. Among other things Nasser interested often conflicted with the practical as well as political interests of the FLN and the provisional government which choose Tunis rather than Cairo for its headquarters.

³⁵ Jean-Jacques Jordi, and Mohand Hamoumou. *Les Harkis: Une mémoire noire enfouie*. Paris: Editions Autrement, 1999) 38.

³⁶ Roux, *Les Harkis* 221–3.

cases through government programs relocating them to northern industrial cities or the Parisian suburbs, though 14,000 were settled in rural hamlets as a part of a reforestation project. Most were manual laborers and semi-skilled workers. The city dwellers joined the North African immigrant communities prevalent near major French cities – though they were not necessarily accepted within these communities.³⁷ The elite entered French society fairly seamlessly, while vast majority remained mired in poverty. The largest of the transition camps, Camp Joffre near Perpignan along the Spanish border, remained open until 1977.

New obstacles raised by the 1989 Pasqua laws included restrictions upon the spouses and children of immigrant laborers, including reversals of existing provisions allowing for permanent residency.³⁸ Subsequently political and scholarly discourse expanded beyond the conditions of migrant workers and immediate barriers to citizenship, considering families and longer term considerations such as education and access to the welfare state, particularly public housing.³⁹ Concentrating on the Algerians and the immigrant experience over multiple generations, Paul Silverstein offered a theoretically bold study of Algerian immigrant communities in the metropole in his aforementioned study, *Algeria in France: Transpolitics, Race, and Identity*. In particular, Silverstein focused upon “second-generation Beurs,” connecting the rise of specifically Berber nationalism as well as Islamist ideologies to show the permeability of the categories used to describe immigrant groups.⁴⁰

Silverstein employed the term “transpolitics” to describe these interchanges, arguing that our conceptions of national and regional boundaries have limited discussions of immigration.⁴¹ Immigrants from a given region are portrayed homogeneously, as “North Africans” or Muslims, rather than as Tunisians, Algerians etc. unless that specificity is politically convenient. Meanwhile, the immigrants themselves operate within and across these categories based on both their sense of cultural identity and ability to exercise their own agency. In response to political and social pressures, immigrants may emphasize a specific or broad-based identity and have proven more than capable of navigating the increasingly complex categories of

³⁷ T. Charbit. *Les Harkis*. (Paris: La Decouverte, 2006) 78.

³⁸ Named for Interior Minister Charles Pasqua, the Pasqua laws required additional verification for the issuing of work permits, and placed restrictions upon the immigration of spouses and children. An especially controversial provision, enacted in 1993 and reversed in 1998, required children born to foreign parents to make a formal request for citizenship, altering a longstanding policy of *jus soli* – the right to citizenship for all those born on French soil.

³⁹ For a thorough discussion of the evolution of French immigration policy and questions regarding immigrant families from former colonies, especially the Maghreb, see Miriam I. Ticktin. *Casualties of Care: Immigration and the Politics of Humanitarianism in France*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011) and Catherine Raissiguier. *Reinventing the Republic: Gender, Race, and Citizenship in France*. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010)

⁴⁰ Paul Silverstein, *Algeria in France: Transpolitics, Race, and Nation*, Indiana University Press, 2004.

⁴¹ *Ibidem*, 5

European national and supra-national governance.⁴² In addition to geographical boundaries, Silverstein questioned other entities based around a nation-state based view of politics, “Transpolitics further implies that questions of migration and identity not only cross geographic boundaries, but also *transcend* the formal political institutions of state bureaucracies, political parties, and labor unions.”⁴³ Increasingly, postcolonial scholarship has come to address transnational interchanges as scholars move beyond one-sided narratives of globalization and neo-imperialism.⁴⁴

In general, the Harkis’ identify as politically conservative, however their participation in formal politics has been limited as they lack access to many of the networks available to other Maghrebian immigrants due to mistrust. However, like second generation postcolonial immigrants more generally, the children of the Harkis increasingly identify with broader immigrant movements and appear more inclined to activism.⁴⁵ At the same time, postcolonial immigration and the role of ethnic or religious minorities is a central focus of debates regarding the nature of European identity in general and French identity in particular. While pan-European ventures and the increasing visibility of Islam in European public discourse since the collapse of the Soviet Union heavily contributed to this climate, a related issue of particular relevance to the Harkis and their children is the relationship between the present-day French state and the colonial past.

In *The Invention of Decolonization*, a historian Todd Sheppard argued that the French state restructured the colonial narrative on multiple occasions. Sheppard

⁴² The current controversy, in the wake of the recent North African revolutions, over the use of Schengen Zone open border policies by the Italian government to shuttle migrants to France along with the subsequent French reaction, illustrates this.

⁴³ Silverstein, *Algeria in France*, 7–8. Another example of this is Dominic Thomas’s, *Black France: Colonialism, Immigration, and Transnationalism* in which Thomas emphasized crossings of national boundaries and the similarities between immigrant sub-cultures and West African places of origin. Other recent studies, in French, on immigrants from West and North Africa respectively include Pap Ndiaye’s *La condition noire: essai sur une minorité française* and Leila Sebbar’s *Mes Algéries en France* both of which acknowledge the limitations of viewing immigrants as either homogeneous or overly attached to the political movements of the former colony.

⁴⁴ See for example: Alex Hargreaves ed. *Memory, Empire, and Postcolonialism: Legacies of French colonialism*. (Landham, Maryland: Rowan and Littlefield, 2005), Roland Hsu ed. *Ethnic Europe: Mobility, Identity, and Conflict in a Globalized World*. (Stanford University Press, 2010) and Hafid Gafaïti, Patricia M.E. Lorcin, and David G. Troyansky. *Transnational Spaces and Identities in the Francophone World* (Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 2009). Rabah Aissaoui is another recent scholar who has addressed transnational political developments. In *Immigration and national identity: North African political movements in colonial and postcolonial France*, Aissaoui confronted the idea that Maghreb immigrants are somehow more difficult or less inclined to formal political participation than other groups, using the connection between supporters of Messali Hadj in France and Algeria to show the interplay between immigrant and North African politics. Rabah Aissaoui, 2009. *Immigration and national identity: North African political movements in colonial and postcolonial France*. (London: Tauris Academic Studies, 2009), 3, 13.

⁴⁵ Crapanzano, *The Harkis*, 147, 54.

contends that, during the period of anti-colonial revolutions, the state recast the permanent Empire as a temporary measure meant to incubate “civilization,” later claiming that independence was an inevitable result of growing tensions between the metropole and the colony.⁴⁶ If this is the case, a fair, if slightly speculative, assessment would be that Albert Memmi’s mechanistic analysis in *The Colonizer and the Colonized* – in which he predicted eventual revolt and independence based on inherent tensions between colonizers and colonized – has become a part of the French colonial narrative.⁴⁷ In this way the former colonizers have adapted to the logic of the anti-colonial movement as their own, while avoiding a deeper moral rapprochement.

However, Sheppard continued to examine how decolonization was rationalized as the necessary end of the colonial project from which sprung not a province of France or a “civilized” allied state, but a new foreign country with France as a “now wholly European republic that emerged in the process of excluding Algeria and the Algerians from France and French history.”⁴⁸ Decolonization thus produced a new series of conflicts, with postcolonial governments in both Europe and the former colonies, denying the strength and importance of the bonds between the countries which share the languages, culture, history, and, in the form of immigrants, people.

In France, the legal status of immigrants from the former colonies has proven unstable. This was not simply a matter of limiting the numbers of immigrants through quotas or work requirements.⁴⁹ Numerous shifts since 1960, most notably the Pasqua laws but also initial responses to decolonization, the encouragement of immigration to supply labor in the 1970s, and responses to the backlash against restrictions on women and children in the 1990s have rendered the status of immigrants tenuous. One of the primary complaints of *sans-papier* activists is that a large number of *sans-papiers* were once legal immigrants and changes in French law have rendered them criminals. This uncertainty is completely foreign to the expectations of the immigrants and their families. Perhaps closer communication and greater political organization has alleviated some of this disconnect since the

⁴⁶ Alice Conklin examined how the civilizing mission evolved to incorporate liberal sentiment for the provision of services and study of and ostensibly respect for local cultures and governing institutions while in turn abandoning universalist principles and incorporating aspects of scientific racism, Sheppard emphasizes that the rhetoric of race blind universalism persisted even if practices shifted. Alice Conklin. *A Mission to Civilize*, 254–6. On the politics of claiming a colony could be both French and colonial see Jonathan Gosnell. *The Politics of Frenchness in Algeria, 1930–54*. (Rochester, NY: The University of Rochester Press, 2002).

⁴⁷ Albert Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*

⁴⁸ Shepard, *Invention of Decolonization*, 15

⁴⁹ These exist too of course and have equivalents in numerous other countries, particularly the United States during the late 19th and throughout the 20th century with quotas and limits on immigration from Asia and Eastern Europe. See: Jeffery Togman. *The Ramparts of Nations: Institutions and Immigration Policies in France and the United States*. Westport, CT: Praeger, 2002).

rise of *beur* and *sans-papier* activism in the 1980s. However, these movements were created in so many cases by the children of immigrants whose parents had little knowledge of what awaited them in a somewhat idealized France.⁵⁰

The Harkis have not been subject to most of these legal distinctions, but the accompanying political developments associated with various questions of immigration have affected their perception by the public and political actors. Regarding their treatment by French political parties, the far right has alternated between engaging the Harkis as loyal products of French civilization and associating them with a growing foreign ethnic and religious threat.⁵¹ The left has been similarly divided. Sympathetic, if only ideologically, to the cause of Algerian independence, the French Left often had little use for the Harkis. Paulette Peju, a journalist who wrote for the leftist newspaper *Liberation*, published two short books, *Les Harkis a Paris* and *Ratonnades de Paris*, during the 1960s while French leftists reexamined their positions in the light of the Algerian War. In *Les Harkis*, Peju documents the brutality of the Paris Harkis, their arbitrary arrests and seizures of Algerians whom they suspected of being supporters of the FLN, the tortures they used, and the executions they carried out as well various government cover-ups. She refers to them as “mercenaries in service of the occupier who rake [*ratissent*], rape, pillage, torture, and kill”.⁵² In subsequent decades the Harkis’ stories have been met primarily with silence.

Conclusion

Does the immigration of the Harkis constitute a forced migration? Given the violence of their fate in Algeria and the willingness of postcolonial governments to encourage the immigration of minorities and others associated with the colonial regime following independence, immigration appears a logical conclusion when available even if it was not an officially conducted policy. The Harkis risked their place among the colonized as well as their lives for security, loyalty, or against their will. The assumption persists that these immigrants retain a deeper loyalty to their “own people” than France, fueling continued suspicion and illustrating their otherness. Their place, both physical and political, in the French welfare state reinforces difference and isolation through policies regarding public

⁵⁰ Beur and sans-papier organizations reflect a significant generational disconnect, activism itself appears to be part youthful rebellion against the more cautious approach of an older generation seeking stability following the upheavals of the war and independence. Of course the older generation is also much more likely to remember the experience of colonial rule. See: Shepard, Silverstein

⁵¹ Crapanzano, *The Harkis*, 170–75

⁵² P. Peju. *Ratonnade a Paris precede de les Harkis a Paris*. (Paris: La Decouverte, 1961) 109.

housing and welfare. Their displacement resembles that of other local troops in the 20th century conflicts within and beyond the French Empire.⁵³

A transnational view of immigration is not simply a matter of historians attempting to understand the composition and goals of activist networks among *beurs* and *sans-papiers*. Nor is the state's interest in these relationships a product of the 21st century concerns with Islamic fundamentalism and state sponsored terrorism. Rather, these concerns are slowly replacing older international issues; a particularly significant example of this changing of the guard is the predominant concern over radical Islamic groups⁵⁴ as opposed to the terrorism funded by the dictatorships of North Africa.⁵⁵ As in other Western countries, the potential for immigrant cooperation with anti-French terrorists has been a trope of anti-immigrant politicians. This is true even for the Harkis, veterans of the Algerian War.

Michael Lejman

Unrequited Loyalty: The Harkis in Postcolonial France

Summary

The Harkis, Algerians who served in the French military during the Algerian War of Independence, are an understudied group amid the complex transnational webs which defy political and cultural boundaries in the postcolonial world. Their stories – recently collected in a wide ranging series of interviews by Vincent Crapanzano – are striking case studies in the context of the primacy immigration and cultural questions hold in contemporary France, so often personified by Muslim immigrants from the former colonies of the Maghreb. The Harkis have been received in France with a mixture of embarrassment and resentment. For the left, they were condemned as local enforcers of *Algerie c'est la France*. For the right, their presence was a reminder of the failed colonial war and a living denouncement of colonial tropes. On the other hand, politicians across the spectrum have addressed the Harkis as potential allies who could represent their vision of France. Viewed as traitors in the former colonies, they are an uncomfortable reminder of the French Empire's broken promises.

⁵³ See: Gregory Mann. *Native Sons: West African Veterans and France in the Twentieth century* (Duke University Press, 2006). A particularly fertile comparative case would be the Hmong people recruited by American forces during the Vietnam War who migrated to the West Coast of the United States. A portrayal of their difficulties following immigration, along with a brief history of their role in the Vietnam War, can be found in a study of a Hmong family in the United States by anthropologist Anne Fadman *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down: A Hmong Child, Her American Doctors, and the Collision of Two Cultures*, (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1998).

⁵⁴ Non-state actors, though since the Arab Spring revolutions in 2011 there has been greater concern regarding Islamic fundamentalist political parties.

⁵⁵ The most prominent example of the latter was the bombing of Pan-Am Flight 103 in 1988, and the subsequent accusations of direct involvement by the Libyan government.

This article presents a brief history of the Harkis and their role in the history and memory of the Algerian War. By exploring the plight of the Harkis in the context of this volume's focus on forced migrations and in light of a half-century of postcolonial scholarship, I hope to bring further attention to neglected corners of the colonial landscape and the complex web of choices facing those who directly experience political and cultural struggle. These individuals are almost exclusively neither intellectuals nor political actors, but people alternately courted and denounced by all sides during and in the decades following the Algerian War while attempting to fulfil a variety of material needs and non-material demands. Their motivations, choices, and degrees of agency were as diverse as the tumultuous world of anti-colonial struggle and postcolonial tension they endured. Their stories and location in the postcolonial landscape raise questions regarding the boundaries between individual experience and collective identity as well as how histories of decolonization have been constructed.