

Fall 2012

Les Oubliés de l'Histoire: Perceptions of Harkis and Community Awareness

Lauren Gilbert
SIT Study Abroad

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcollections.sit.edu/isp_collection

 Part of the [Civic and Community Engagement Commons](#), [Community-Based Research Commons](#), [Family, Life Course, and Society Commons](#), [Social and Cultural Anthropology Commons](#), and the [Sociology of Culture Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Gilbert, Lauren, "Les Oubliés de l'Histoire: Perceptions of Harkis and Community Awareness" (2012). *Independent Study Project (ISP) Collection*. 1437.
https://digitalcollections.sit.edu/isp_collection/1437

This Unpublished Paper is brought to you for free and open access by the SIT Study Abroad at SIT Digital Collections. It has been accepted for inclusion in Independent Study Project (ISP) Collection by an authorized administrator of SIT Digital Collections. For more information, please contact digitalcollections@sit.edu.

Fall 2012 SIT Tunisia: Emerging Identities in North Africa

Academic Director: Mounir Khelifa

Name: Lauren Gilbert

ISP Advisor: Redouane Kebieche

Title: *Les Oubliés de l'Histoire: Perceptions of Harkis and Community Awareness*

Table of Content

I) INTRODUCTION TO THE ISSUE AND LITERATURE REVIEW	page 2
II) RESEARCH METHODS AND QUESTIONS	page 11
III) STORIES FROM THE WAR	page 13
IV) HARKI INTERVIEWS	page 16
V) ALGERIAN INTERVIEWS	page 18
VI) FRENCH INTERVIEWS	page 24
VII) CONCLUSIONS	page 27

I) INTRODUCTION AND LITERARY REVIEW:

“Harki” is derived from the Arabic word “Harka,” meaning movement. This term is used to denote not only the original approximately 200,000 Algerian Arab and Berber Muslims, who militarily supported the French Army during the Algerian war for independence between 1954 and 1962, but also their families and descendants.¹ Especially during the war with Algeria and immediately following, they were often referred to as *francais-musulmans*, *francais-musulmans repatriés*, or *repatriés d’origine nord africaine*, thus avoiding the topic of conflict with the colony. This support took a range of forms, not always military; for example, the “Groupes d’auto defense (GAD) was tasked with protecting isolated villages...and the Groupes mobiles de securite (GMS) was a rural police force.”² France recruited the Harkis for their knowledge of local terrain and conditions, and in hopes that the FLN could be infiltrated, while reasons for joining the Harki were far more complex, ranging from political to economical to personal. Many joined the French Army with an understanding that further development and better social conditions were necessary before independence would be possible and successful, while others did so purely for the monthly wage and social security rights.³

After the cease-fire, “many Harkis were forced into hiding in Algeria where they fell victims to the brutal purge led by the FLN...as many as 150,000 Harkis were killed after

¹ Eveline Stam-Hulsink, “The Legitimizing Function of the Individual Discourse: Remembering the Harkis’ Tragedy,” *Time and Societ* 21:139 (2012): 139

² Claire Eldridge, “Blurring the Boundaries Between Perpetrators and Victims: Pied-noir Memories and the Harki Community,” *Memory Studies* 3:123 (March 26, 2010): 126

³ Eveline Stam-Hulsink: 139

independence.”⁴ The killings were often performed by “Marseins,” Algerians who joined the FLN in March 1962, just before independence was secured, and found slaughtering Harki traitors to be the best way to prove loyalty to the revolution.⁵ Those Harkis who survived the brutal genocide found Algeria to be an inhospitable environment, as the rural nature of their communities made it nearly impossible to conceal their wartime activities.⁶

France was already overburdened with the challenge of relocating pied-noirs, French citizens living in Algeria, who took priority over the Algerian Muslims who were largely believed to be neither truly French, nor prepared for European life.⁷ Still, 25,000 Harkis entered France with help from the government between 1962 and 1967, while an additional 68,000 entered via unofficial means.⁸ Deportation programs for the Harkis were haphazardly organized, leading to many being housed in still-standing camps originally used for the transportation of Jews during World War II; this, combined with moving to the land of the colonizer and the witness of thousands of slaughters of fellow Harkis only further led to an environment of victimization and helplessness.⁹

But, these tragic events were not broadcasted to the French public upon Algerian independence, and, in fact “had to be hidden from public as much as possible for they ‘might have blemished the image of de Gaulle as having successfully carried out decolonization.’”¹⁰

⁴ Sung Choi, “The Muslim Veteran in Postcolonial France: the Politics of the Integration of Harki after 1962,” *French Politics, Culture & Society* 29:1 (Spring 2011): 27

⁵ Nada Korac-Kakabadse and Geraldine Enjelvin, “France and the Memories of ‘Others’: the Case of the Harkis,” *History and Memory*, 24:1 (Spring 2012): 160

⁶ Claire Eldridge: 126

⁷ Claire Eldridge: 127

⁸ William Cohen, *Algeria & France, 1800-2000: Identity, Memory, Nostalgia* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2006), 169

⁹ Eveline Stam-Hulsink: 140

¹⁰ Geraldine Enjelvin, “The Harki Identity: A Product of Marginalization and Resistance to Symbolic Violence?,” *National Identities* 8:2 (June 2006): 115

And while the public was overwhelmingly unaware, the French government was generally unsympathetic; De Gaulle said the Harkis were a burden to the government as they were not French, and should be forgotten or removed from the state.¹¹ For example, when Harkis initially began to flee to France before the government had prepared official channels of immigration, they were often sent back to Algeria, and, overwhelmingly, to a predictable death for being a deserting traitor to the Algerian cause. For those later admitted to France, forced separation from the larger French community meant “many Harkis spent several years on French soil with hardly any contacts with native French people.”¹² Thus, the French government held the greatest responsibility in the “emergence, perpetuation and progressive ethnicisation of the Harki population.”¹³ Xenophobia combined with apathy designated the Harkis to the periphery of France in all aspects of life, and created the Harkis’ continuing problem of historical placelessness.

While the Harki were officially accepted as French nationals, there remains a lingering sense of otherness that has made the children and grandchildren of Harkis endure the effects of their fathers’ supposed crimes during the Algerian war for independence. When the Harkis first arrived in France, security was strict, movements restricted to Army-constructed camps of makeshift buildings and tents scattered primarily in the rural South; “in 1974, more than 14,000 Harkis were still lodged in such camps.”¹⁴ Thus, ascribed to the periphery of French towns and history, the Harkis continued to suffer the effects of unemployment, marginalization and abandonment. Many Harki camps, including Bias and Ardoise, have been officially dismantled,

¹¹ Nada Korac-Kakabadse: 160

¹² Nada Korac-Kakabadse: 161

¹³ Nada Korac-Kakabadse: 161

¹⁴ Geraldine Enjelvin: 116

but, lacking opportunity and existing communities, most Harkis remained in and around these camps, and continue to be neglected.

Although the Harkis who arrived in France were safe from slaughter, the memories of torture and genocide left most with post-traumatic stress syndromes. Combined with feelings of shame and inadequacy for having fought against their Algerian relatives and friends, and depression from political as well as spatial isolation in the designated camps, the Harkis were unable to discuss the events of the revolution.¹⁵ Thus, this first generation is known as the Silent Generation, classified by those original Harki soldiers and their families who suffered from identity crises on both the individual and community levels.

Because the silent generation was unable to share their experiences with their children, the second generation, known as the Children of the Harki, became increasingly frustrated and angry with inter-generational misunderstandings.¹⁶ As these children of the Harki communicated their agitation with the collective stigmatization and discrimination of the French government and society, frustration occasionally turned to violence. Movements, led mostly by men, to gain the attention of the French media included burning of tires, public hunger strikes, and occasional clashes with the police. Two summers, 1975 and 1991, were high points for such demonstrations against neglect, isolation, and objectification that had resulted in the Harkis' socioeconomic plight; the goal of these protests was to make the French people conscious that French citizens were being forgotten at best, alienated at worst, and by all accounts collectively discriminated against, not on religious terms, but on social and economic.

With the start of the 21st century, a new generation of Harkis has emerged, distinguished not by silence or violence, but by an active, eloquent community of speakers and writers, with

¹⁵ Eveline Stam-Hulsink: 141

¹⁶ Eveline Stam-Hulsink: 141

high participation from women. This group seeks not as the second generation to redeem themselves through the redemption of their ancestors, but to provide a voice to the silent and ignored, and social justice to the suffering. In June 2000, Louissette Ighilahriz, an FLN supporter during the war, recounted her experiences of torture and rape with French officers; this opened a floodgate of dialogue about the long-ignored war with Algeria. 2003 is often referred to as the year of Algeria in France, as women of this generation published several influential autobiographies recording the suffering of Harkis. These narratives had a profound effect in exposing the plight of the Harkis, especially a film portraying Kerchouche's book, undoubtedly the most visible and widely seen piece reflecting Harki identity in France. As the writer Fatima Besnaci-Lancou explained, she felt writing these histories was one of the best ways to both construct collective identity and expose the struggle to the public; and, perhaps more so, this process was necessary for future generations to construct increasingly positive identities.¹⁷

Several positive actions have been taken by the French government to assist in the Harkis process of identity construction. On October 5 1999, the National Assembly officially recognized the Algerian War for independence, which had before been referred to as "the events," "the operations for civil order," and "peace-keeping missions." In 2001, "nine Harkis filed cases of crimes against humanity in Paris' courthouse, asking retribution."¹⁸ And, perhaps most radically, Chirac announced France had a duty to honor the sacrifices of North African soldiers in their wars for independence. On Bastille Day, 2000, Chirac's speech encouraged the French public

¹⁷ Nada Korac-Kakabadse: 157

¹⁸ Laura R. Reeck, "Forgetting and Remembering the Harki," *Romance Quarterly* 53:1 (Winter 2006): 49

and government to “acknowledge the sacrifice and dignity” of the Harkis, who “are entirely French,” and should “enjoy the respect and recognition of the national community.”¹⁹

September 15, 2001, Chirac planned the first national Harki Remembrance Day; this was used to facilitate communication between the Harkis and French, as interactions had been limited for years due to the closed, excluded living quarters of the French Muslims. Commemoration holidays also help to inform the public and encourage minorities to develop collective identities and expose those to the national public, thus combining those identities over long periods of exposure.²⁰ This was facilitated by the writings of the third generation, which also helped to construct a collective historical awareness where individual memories can be incorporated into a larger narrative. This process of creative collective understandings and memories is necessary for a sense of nationhood.

Still, there has been no official recognition of the first stage of abandonment by the French government that led so many Harkis to be massacred; and, despite Chirac’s public appeal to French obligation to honor these North African descendents, there seems to be no signs that speaking of the war with Algeria has become socially acceptable, or that the Harkis are truly considered French. Just one year after Chirac’s Remembrance Day, Harkis were forbidden from laying a wreath at the Arc De Triomphe on Bastille Day, suggesting they were not truly French veterans. In 2007, Sarkozy addressed an audience of Harkis, promising increased aid for education, housing and employment for the improvement of conditions for all Harki families.²¹ These recent events have paved the way for a national remembering, but have in no way normalized the idea that Harkis should be given work and schooling opportunities as the spirit of

¹⁹ Nada Korac-Kakabadse: 155

²⁰ Eveline Stam-Hulsink: 142

²¹ Sung Choi: 41

national forgetting from above remains strong, as does positive discrimination in housing, education and employment.

One of the greatest barriers remaining for the Harkis is the official policy of the French government toward minorities. Due to the strong sentiment of French nationalism, minorities are not legally identified, and instead all citizens should be regarded as equal for the sake of social cohesion; however, the Harki community has been discriminated against and this policy makes it more difficult to address the problem openly, as official history cannot be reconciled with individual and collective memories. And, despite a lack of official government documentation, it is known that the “Harki community is today one of the country's poorest and most disadvantaged, with unemployment more than four times the national average.”²²

Until this problem is openly addressed, the Harkis cannot truly assimilate into French society. This phenomenon is known as the “Fabrice Syndrome,” whereby “participants at the bottom do not usually see historic events they live through as top people or historians do.”²³ This suppression of cultural identity has in fact enraged segregation, misunderstanding, resentment, and alienation, instead of encouraging social cohesion and nationalistic support. In order to truly create a shared consciousness, the French government must first recognize its tense relationship with its former colony Algeria, acknowledge its history of colonialism, and provide forums for open, multicultural dialogue.

Several suggestions to improve relations have come from both within the Harki community and from the within the French government, all generally asking for the same things: official recognition of the French government toward their citizens, the Harkis, an official

²² Alan Riding, “For Algerians in France, what future memories?,” *Guardian Foreign Pages*. April 14, 2005, Sec. NEWS 2

²³ Nada Korac-Kakabadse:155

apology by the French government, and some sort of compensation. Abdelkrim Klech, of the organizations Justice for the Harkis, demanded “a parliamentary admission of France's moral responsibility for our fathers' fate, together with a five-year plan of financial aid and concrete measures to improve their descendants' living conditions, solve their problems and heal their wounds.”²⁴ Politicians such as Alain Madelin, leader of the Democratie Liberale opposition party, Fracois Loncle, a member of the Socialist, Radical, Citoyen et Divers Gauche and of the French National Assembly, have pressured the government to release an official apology for committing crimes against the Harkis, as “this criminal abandonment...is the responsibility of the French state.” But, more than an official apology, the Harkis want monetary compensation and official veteran benefits after years of isolation, discrimination and abandonment that have left the large majority of Harkis without adequate education or opportunities to pursue class mobility. The most the Harks have ever received from the government is a pension of approximately 1,100 Euro per year “for elderly Harkis with no other resources.”²⁵

Many, especially elder politicians who lived through the war with Algeria, have discouraged any move to reconcile with the Harkis, even an apology. “It is up to the FLN to express its regrets,” Pierre Messmer said, “It was they who massacred the Harkis.”²⁶ And, in a widely televised moment in 2006, Georges Frêche, the controversial mayor of Montpellier and President of Languedoc-Rousillion until his death, called the Harkis “subhuman,” and taunted them for killing their fellow Algerians, saying they had “no honor.”²⁷ French military leadership

²⁴ Alan Riding: 2

²⁵ Alan Riding: 2

²⁶ Alan Riding: 2

²⁷ Georges Frêche, un habitué des dérapages,” *Le Monde*. January 28, 2010 at 16:10 sec. Politique <://www.lemonde.fr/politique/article/2010/01/28/georges-freche-un-habitué-des-derapages_1298203_823448.html#ens_id=1430654>

has also discouraged reconciliation with the Harkis, “largely because they were the victims of one of the least glorious chapters” in France’s military history.²⁸

Such comments have inflamed the Harkis’ collective sensitivity, culminating in a forceful community protest in 2005. “The Father’s Name,” a play written by Messaoud Benyoucef, an Algerian expatriate, began to tour France, exploring the struggles of young French-Arabs to define their identities and find their places in society. The main character is a young descendant of a Harki who turns to Islamic fundamentalism in rebellion against his community and family. For many Harkis, this was a smear against the Harkis’ already tainted name, suggesting “just as older Harkis were accused of betraying Algeria, a new generation of Harkis was ready to betray France.”²⁹ Harkis began a nonviolent protest outside theatres presenting the play, trying to stop people from entering to watch, demanding the play be taken out of circulation on stage and in print. Mohamed Haddouche, the President of AJIR pour les Harkis France, then brought a case of defamation against Benyoucef, the writer, Clause-Alice Peyrotte, the director, and Les Editions de l’Embarcadère, the publisher.³⁰

Haddouche justified his case with Article 5 of the law of February 23, 2005, which prohibits “all insult or defamation of a person or group of persons because of their real or supposed identity as a Harki.”³¹ The Harki community lamented that Benyoucef had used his character to insidiously arrive at his “hidden goal: to revive the scars of the Algerian War and to wound a community.”³² However, Benyoucef’s trilogy of novels exploring identity and truth expose troubling scenarios in many communities; for example, in one, a pied noir wife discovers

²⁸ Alan Riding, 2

²⁹ Alan Riding, 2

³⁰ Vincent Crapanzano, *The Harkis: the wound that never heals* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 15

³¹ Vincent Crapanzano, 20

³² Vincent Crapanzano, 19

her husband was involved in the gang rape and murder of an Algerian girl. Nevertheless, his incident was powerful, whether justified or not, as it allowed Harkis to utilize their rights as citizens of France; along with this activism are extreme sensitivity and increasing anger from decades of silence while others defined truths of a misunderstood community.

Despite an increase of recent activism within the community and action by the French government, the Harkis remain ultimately *les oubliés de l'histoire*, the forgotten of history. At the root of this community's painful struggle to recapture autonomy of identity creation is a historical amnesia laced with xenophobia within the French population. Fears that the colonial past could create modern-day turmoil has led France to collectively neglect the embarrassing and inglorious events of its war with Algeria. But, the acknowledgement of this unpleasant history is the foremost obstacle for the full and successful integration of many immigrant groups, including the Harkis; how and when these events are remembered will define identities for millions.

II) RESEARCH METHOD AND QUESTIONS:

I began by conducting extensive literary research, as explored in the previous section, but was limited to articles in English and a few interviews in French; still, I found I had more than sufficient information to provide both myself and the reader with the necessary knowledge of the Harkis' history and identity. My initial approach to the research involved traveling to Harki camps in the Midi-Pyrenees area, and talking with those who identify or are identified as Harkis. My primary purpose was to provide an opportunity to allow the Harki community to reflect on the 50th anniversary of the French-Algerian war. My planned research questions included:

-What aspirations do those who identify as Harki have for their futures?

- How have conditions altered over generations and in varying administrations?
- Have any Harki accomplished social mobility, and if so by what means?
- Do Harkis accept their identity as French nationals?; or, do they one day hope to return to Algeria?
- What are the major issues they wish the French government would address?
- Have they personally experienced racism or discrimination?
- To what extent do they feel there is an organized community of united Harkis?
- Do gender or age affect these opinions of identity?

I started by contacting organizations of Harkis in the area, including “Comite Departemental De Liason Des Harkis,” but found that these organizations were defunct.

I changed my approach to explore perceptions of Harkis from outside communities, and began contacting social organizations. The return responses from these organizations were few, and those I did receive, including from Fédération Nationale des Anciens Combattants Algérie, were overwhelmingly negative, as Algerian organizations were unwilling to associate with Harkis, and French associations were unwilling to provide any information for a topic they thought did not require attention.

I then moved to the idea of an opinion-based pole approach, whereby I began to research the perceptions of Harki communities from two groups: Algerians living in France, and those born in France. I concentrated primarily on open discussion, as I found those who agreed to interviews generally had stories they had never shared before that were waiting to escape. I occasionally interjected questions, which included:

- Do you have any personal experience with Harkis?

- What is your personal opinion of the Harkis?
- Can you make any assessment on how your community perceives Harkis?
- Do you often hear news of Harkis?
- Do you feel the situation has changed over years and administrations?
- How do you see the situation of Harkis in the future?

I also conducted several small classroom surveys, in which I asked, “Do you have any knowledge of a group called the Harkis?” After the response, I then briefly explained who the Harkis were, and asked again if anyone had any knowledge.

I ensured all of my interviewees that their identities would remain confidential, and when referring to a speaker, I will use a fabricated name.

In addition to the first section, a literature review and introduction to the subject of Harki identity, and this section on research methods, the study will continue with five additional sections. The third is a collection of narratives taken from my interviews with men of Algerian origin living in France in order to give the reader a sense of Algerian society at the time of the war for independence and provide personal, tangible examples to an otherwise overwhelming subject. The fourth, fifth and sixth sections are interview-based, divided into accounts from Harkis, those of Algerian origin, and those of French origin respectively. The seventh and final section is an analysis of the entire study, and conclusions on the topic.

III) STORIES OF THE WAR:

- 1) Youcef: “My grandmother told me a story of a great soldier who first fought in the Indo-China War and then joined the ALN, a branch of the FLN. People hated him because they saw him as wise and knowledgeable. Jealousy turned to rage, and, so, they created a plan to kill him. They knew they couldn’t kill him directly, so they sent him on an impossible mission to attack a French Army convoy alone. Somehow, he succeeded and didn’t die; when he discovered the plot, although he was known as a great nationalist, he surrendered to the French Army to save himself. He then served as a Harki, because otherwise those who were jealous of him would have killed him. He knew they couldn’t make it through the extensive French security in the Army barracks he stayed in. Is he a traitor? No, he is a hero.”
- 2) Youcef: “There was a Berber man in my town who married a woman from another Berber tribe; after three years, they divorced, and a few years later, the revolution began. The woman’s family was heavily involved with the FLN, but the man was still a civilian. The woman’s family moved to the mountains, as many revolutionaries did, leaving the French, the civilians, and the Harkis on the grounds below. This man knew he wouldn’t be safe, as in any raid, the family’s grudge could be taken against him and he would be killed. So, he joined the French Army to protect himself; he knew anyone that tried to attack him would need to first make it through the military barracks.”
- 3) Lotfi: “One man worked with the FLN, but was captured by the French Army and tortured until he told them secret information about the positions of the FLN; after he surrendered this information, even though he was tortured for it, he couldn’t return to the FLN because he was considered weak and traitorous. He was then forced to fight

as a Harki, but, in 1962, he was captured by the FLN. He managed to escape, and hid in my Aunt's house. My Aunt's husband was an FLN revolutionary, but he died in battle in 1959, so no one suspected her of helping a traitor. My Aunt brought him a doctor every day for three months until he recovered; she then snuck him onto a boat leaving for France, a dangerous and difficult mission."

- 4) Walid: "A man I know was originally a soldier in the FLN, but he felt he was treated badly in the Algerian Army because many people had personal grudges against him. He eventually left the FLN and sold intelligence to the French Army so he could have an opportunity to leave the country. He now works in Northern France as a translator. He dreamed for years of returning to his home country, but feared torture or death. A few years ago, he returned but still feared he would be killed at any moment."
- 5) Samir: "In many towns, all lands were confiscated by the French during the war, and the Arabs and Berbers fled to the mountains for safety, and to join the resistance movement. One famous Harki, known as "Ahmed," tortured the population in the mountains; after independence, he was captured by the FLN and tortured until death."
- 6) Karim: "There is a girl, a daughter of a Harki, whose father was silent for years about his activity in the war. He only told his family that he became a Harki because he believed in France and French values. He had a personal vengeance against many Algerians, even those in his own family, and used this anger to fight for the cause of French colonization. He never confessed why he wanted revenge, but only said it was something terrible and personal. That was the first, and only time he ever spoke of the war."

These six stories paint a painful and complicated picture of Algerian society at the time of the war for independence; poor familial relations, personal vendettas and clan disputes often transferred into wartime activities. Sometimes, centuries-old conflicts resurfaced; for example, two families with land disputes would often chose different sides so they had means to fight one another. As Youcef said, “to Berbers, the land is as holy as a wife;” this attachment to the land made revenge one of the major driving forces in the war. Several men who joined the Harki were known to have wives, daughters or sisters who had been raped by someone in the FLN, and joined the Harki to avenge this crime. Often, the Kaid, the chief of every village, was considered a Harki for receiving French government money and information, and most were killed during or just after the war. The fact that many of these Harkis were victims of circumstance makes the topic of guilt difficult to define and decide. And, as the number of living active combatants is diminishing, many of these stories remain shrouded in mystery.

IV) THE HARKI INTERVIEWS:

The Guardian conducted an interview in 1995 with a daughter of a Harki, Zohra, and one granddaughter of a Harki, Kader, who experienced racism due to their backgrounds.³³ Zohra’s father was in the French Army long before the beginning of the war with France, as it provided him with a simple income to support his wife and six children, and so he became a Harki by default. She recounted the difficulty of moving from Algeria to France: “In Algeria, we lived in a beautiful house near Algiers; now, we live in a tent in a camp without a toilet.” Zohra and her family left behind not only friends and family, but also possessions, as Zohra’s father was sure

³³ Marie Luz-Drouet, “Quelle Identite Pour Les Harkis?,” *The Guardian (London)* February 14, 1995.pg 12

they would return to Algeria. But, “a month later, when we were transferred to another camp, he understood there would be no chance of returning.” Zohra explained that many families experienced a reversal of the normal parent-child relationship, as many children could speak French better than their parents, and while Zohra was a good student, her parents were both illiterate. So, when families such as Zohra’s moved to France, the children gained both freedom and responsibility, serving as interpreters, and their parents’ only access to the world outside the camps. “My parents were obliged to let me play this role, even if it did not fit with their traditional role of Algerian women...I am a French woman.”

But, Kader said that while she officially had French citizenship, she felt openly discriminated against by French society, saying that due to her Maghrebi features and her Muslim first and last names, she was regularly stopped by security: “Has France welcomed me? I don’t want to be French.” Zohra agreed that in France, she was reluctant to admit she was the daughter of a Harki, because even the French people thought the Harkis were traitors. But, Zohra said that she felt conditions were improving between Algerians and Harkis; while Algerian customs in the 1980’s judged her harshly for her French citizenship, in the 1990’s, a man in the airport told her “all of that is in the past, now we must return to the present.” While Zohra said that the animosity toward Harkis was significantly worse from French people, Kader said that Algerians in France had the worst opinion of Harkis, and would openly call her a traitor at school. For both, this racism seemed like a problem without a solution or escape; “today, if a worker moves to France and feels he is persecuted, he can return to his home country; for us, that is not an option,” Zohra explained, “we cannot leave.”

And, the racism only continues to become more complicated with the rise of Muslim fundamentalists, because now Harkis experience persecution not only for their histories, but also

for their faith. And, as people remember the war with Algeria less, many do not recognize a difference between the Harki population and the rising immigrant population, although the Harkis have official citizenship and have been living in France for decades. Kader said that without an Algerian or French identity to attach to, she chose a Muslim one. She even hoped to move to an Arab country, where she felt she would be more accepted for her skin color, her culture and her name. Zohra commented “Kader’s generation is more attached to religion than mine in the search for identity. These young people feel rejected everywhere. Religion allows them to take ownership of their identity.” Zohra seemed troubled by religious fundamentalism, and the political right-wing extremists that could come to power in France. In 1995, France was facing a new election; Zohra said that no matter the result, nothing was likely to change for the Harki. But, she worried if the extreme right continued to gain support, in the future the Harkis could be persecuted again, this time with nowhere to flee.

V) THE ALGERIAN INTERVIEWS:

The opinions of the Algerians I interviewed were somewhat torn; all recognized that categorizing the Harkis as “traitors” was difficult, and most began their statements of opinion by stating they understood many joined the Harki for economic reasons, as Youcef said, in Algeria at the time, “many people were starving.” But, they also agreed that, as Karim said, due to the horrific nature of the war, the Harkis “did many dirty things,” participating in torture and spying. Walid defined the Harkis as “a group of volunteers,” and said “any Harkis who were killed in Algeria after the war had committed crimes and only received punishment for those.” But,

although he felt many Harkis were guilty, he believed some were innocent, and that their descendants were undoubtedly innocent.

Opinions came from a combination of personal experience, familial stories, passed down through generations, school teachings, and propaganda. All of those I interviewed had some family who fought with the FLN, and most had Harkis in their villages; their parents and grandparents would share tales of the war as bedtime stories. The government also released propaganda following the war, especially on national radio and television, which supported hating a common enemy to sustain a sense of nationhood. Thus, opinions of Harkis are often complex, but the idea of Harkis as traitors has been largely institutionalized in Algerian society, with the word Harki now used as a slang pejorative term. Karim said, “In my opinion, we were occupied by a strange country and we can’t accept the acts of those who supported it. But now, we have other problems to solve, and the problem of Harkis must be solved in France. It’s no longer an Algerian problem.”

None of those I interviewed recalled ever seeing anything about Harkis on the news. And, they all agreed that Chirac’s efforts to make Harkis more accepted in French society had little to no real effect. Fatima said that while the sentiment behind the Remembrance Day and speeches were courteous, they were ultimately futile, as “something has to happen beyond the symbolism...real action has to be taken.” And, Samir said, “Chirac did nothing for the community in reality. Maybe it soothed the Harkis for a moment, but I don’t think they were fooled.”

None of those I interviewed believed the situation had changed for the better for the Harkis or their descendants; opinions were split between those who believed the situation had remained the absolute same, and those who believed that in fact, peoples opinions toward Harkis

were growing worse. Fatima said any change was impossible because “it’s a taboo subject in Algeria, and it’s an unknown subject in France.” Lotfi thought the problem was xenophobia in France, which sets all those with foreign features at a disadvantage; he believed that the situation of the Harkis differed little from the situation of the Maghrebi immigrant population, which often remains isolated in the suburbs, with few educational and economic opportunities, and higher-than-average unemployment rates. The difference, however, is that the Harkis are all naturalized, and they have never included religious persecution among their complaints, while that is a chief focus of the immigrant community.

None of those I interviewed believed that Algeria owed anything to the Harkis; they all believed the principal problem was with France. While some descendants of Harkis have been allowed to travel back to Algeria, Fatima said, “I can’t see the Algerian government ever openly allowing all Harkis to return to Algeria, but maybe the children of their children will be seen as Algerian once again.” Walid said, “the Algerian community doesn’t pay any attention to the plight of the Harkis...we have our own battles.” Samir said, “they are living in France. They have the right to work; but they don’t have the right to ask for anything from Algeria.”

Walid suggested the problem of the Harkis was one of unresolved international relations: “Algeria wants France to recognize its war crimes, and the French always refuse, and so the problem of the Harki remains as long as France refuses to address its past.” Walid proposed, perhaps, if Algeria and France created an international convention, descendants of Harkis could obtain double-citizenship between France and Algeria, and be free to travel between the two places; but, “a social solution will prove more difficult because the memory cannot be erased.” Lotfi said that in the current political environment, nothing can be solved because “France is too stubborn to admit its own mistakes....but once a new page between France and Algeria is turned,

many problems will be solved, including that of the Harkis.” The taboo of addressing the war with Algeria has two primary sources: nationalism and economics; many historical sources about the 50-year old war remain closed because nationalism makes any apology a blow to pride, but possibly also a blow to the bank. Officially apologizing for war crimes and abandoning the Harkis would have a huge price for the French government, which would be obliged to pay billions of dollars in retribution to Harkis and pied noir. Walid, Samir and Lotfi agreed that this monetary issue was the main reason France refused to acknowledge the war and the plight of the Harkis.

However, much of this taboo also comes from within the Harki community; many Harkis and their ancestors still feel great shame for their wartime activities. Fatima explained, they made a choice to join the French military, and “now their children are paying the price for that.” And, the Harkis have endured years of insults referring to them as sub-human, only intensified by the depressing camps used to house them, which often operated without sanitation, schools, and adequate food supplies. Lotfi said, “Simply, the French don’t consider Harkis to be human beings. They were simply disposable and now they are a burden. They betrayed their own country, so why should France accept them?” The very word Harki is now a pejorative term, used as an insult in modern-day Algeria. The silence of the Harki community is also largely due to a black list that still exists; most know whether or not they are on this list, because it does not contain the name of every Harki soldier, but rather the leaders or particularly good soldiers; but, many are afraid that personal vendettas against them allowed their names to be put on the list.

While the Algerians I interviewed believed that the majority of those in Algeria don’t believe the children of Harki are also traitors, they believed that many of Algerian descent born in France strongly hated Harkis. Samir and Walid also said that any descendant of a Harki who

“recognized that their ancestors committed an error against their brothers” would be declared innocent and welcomed to Algeria. But, “those who don’t recognize this betrayal will be treated the same as their fathers.” Walid explained the descendants would be considered “innocent until proven guilty...as long as they don’t say anything in support of the Harki, they will be considered innocent.” This problem of limited clearance for entrance into Algeria has become a particularly potent issue as the original Harkis age and die; many Harkis were Berber, and the land is considered important, if not sacred; the inability to be buried on Algerian territory is heart-breaking for many elderly Harkis, who are forbidden to visit or be buried in their homeland.

When asked if there was any solution for the Harkis’ descendants in the future, the interviewees all connected the plight of the Harkis to that of the Algerian immigrant community: poor education, no work opportunities, unfair treatment. But, an important aspect of the immigrant community is that many do not have citizenship, whereas all Harkis are French citizens. When asked if these two communities could unite, Lotfi said, “the Harkis cannot contribute anything to the cause of the immigrants.” He suggested that the Harkis strengthen their sense of community and take action with a political lobby: “unite themselves only because they are a unique group and no other group will accept them.”

One of my interviewees, a doctorate student named Fatima, felt a strong connection to the Harki community as, by supporting them, she had been alienated by many in her Algerian community. Fatima’s grandfather was an FLN fighter, and often said after the revolution that all Harkis deserved to be condemned to death for betraying their nation; the nature of the war tore apart families, as even Fatima’s grandfather’s cousin was a Harki. Her grandfather’s ideas transferred to her father, who also joined the military, and once said if he ever met a Harki, he

might kill him. But, Fatima's personal experience with Harkis led her to do her own research on the subject, as she saw first-hand how much her community hated the Harkis, a people she had never personally encountered before. This story was the beginning:

“I went to Algeria October 2011, and I was standing in the atrium just before security, where there was an old man, holding a bag, asking if anyone would help him by taking it to Algeria for him. I said I would help him take the bag to his relatives, who would be waiting at the airport in Algeria; just then, a group of old men began to scream, calling the man with the bag a traitor, and an animal. They then began to talk angrily to me, asking me why I would befriend a Harki. They paced the waiting area, talking loudly about how this man deserved to die. The Harki began to cry, saying he couldn't return to his home country, but he had relatives in Algeria who needed this bag, full of medicines. He was so distraught that these men were screaming at him, and he could only say 'France hasn't even accepted me; what can I do?; what can I do?' For the entirety of my flight, none of the other Algerians would speak to me because I had agreed to help this old man in need.”

This experience shocked Fatima and she began to seek out movies and books about the Algerian war that related to Harkis. Through this research, she began to form an opinion that was considered radical in her community. “I try to put myself in their shoes, and understand why they made their choices before judging them; it was a war, and of course many terrible things happened. I don't think they made a conscious decision to betray their country, but they have been both betrayed by France and abandoned by Algeria. They are a people without an identity and without a home. I feel sorry for them because I can't imagine having that life, making a decision so long ago, and having it affect my entire family, my children, and even my grandchildren. They made the decisions they felt were necessary to provide for themselves, and

they don't deserve to die for it." This was the speech she gave to her husband's friends, who had come to visit one night; outraged, they refused to ever visit the home again, and told her husband they never wanted to see his wife. "I was so confused; they were too young to remember the war, so how could they judge things they had never even seen? I was shocked to see they were so closed-minded, and after I saw how intolerant they were, I didn't want to see them again either." Through these experiences, she realized that by helping the old man, and by defending the Harkis' rights, she was immediately associated with the group; a friend of a Harki is a Harki themselves.

VI) THE FRENCH INTERVIEWS:

I conducted two surveys in Masters-level classes of French students. When asked about the Harkis, only two out of twenty students responded; they were able to provide a small, accurate definition. Once the other students heard this description, two more students said they had heard of the Harkis, but could not provide any information about them. The rest of the students, ranging ages twenty to thirty-five, said they had never heard of the Harkis, and were unaware they were living in France. Those who knew about the Harkis said they had knowledge only from personal contacts or research, but none had learned about the Harkis in school.

When asked about personal contact with Harkis, the three individual French interviewees said they didn't know any Harkis, but knew some pied noir. Matthieu said, "even if I met a Harki, I don't think I would know, because they would never admit that to me; it's too taboo." Many problems of the Harki community coincide with problems of the larger Algerian or Maghrebi immigrant community. Maghrebi communities tend to be somewhat isolated, with

limited interaction between those of French ancestry and North African ancestry; the situation of the Harkis is an intensified version of this isolation. Matthieu said the only time he has real interactions with any Maghrebis is when his local football league plays against another local team; “from the first laws of the French government, which restricted Harkis to remain in their camps,” Jacques explained, “we still have very little contact with the Harki people.” Pierre said he had a friend who was the son of a Harki, but he only talked about the terrible conditions of the Harki camps. Matthieu’s grandmother’s neighbor was a Harki; his grandmother sometimes said her neighbor was a “tortured spirit,” and that he would be in shock for the rest of his life from the memories of torture and murder. Mattieu contemplated what his grandmother had told him for a moment, and then quietly whispered, “I must go talk with that man.”

Those I interviewed openly admitted that their opinions of the Harkis ran counter to the opinions of their communities. Jacques said, “They are quiet and discreet people; they want to integrate and I think they’re brave to try.” Amusingly, Mattieu said, “of course I accept the Harkis! Our best football player is a Harki!,” referring to Zinadine Zidane, a French player of Kabyle origin whose family fled to France during the war for independence. Pierre was disappointed with the French government for abandoning the Harkis, who had taken such great risks to help France maintain colonization; however, he seemed conflicted when he remembered the Harkis fought against other Algerians, and ultimately decided “I don’t know how I feel about the fact that they fought against their own people, but I know they weren’t treated well by the people they fought for.” There was the overwhelming feeling by these French citizens that an injustice had been committed; Mattieu was shocked when he heard that the Harkis were originally housed in abandoned transportation camps from World War II. But, they all recognized that while they had some sympathy for the Harkis and wished for them to integrate

fully and successfully, their communities had different ideas, which most often translated into silence, but sometimes into blatant racism.

I then asked the group, “Do you feel the situation of the Harkis in France has changed over years and administrations?,” followed by “Do you think there will be any solution for the community in the future?” An interesting discussion formed with three distinct opinions. The first response was from Jacques, the oldest, who said the Harkis’ situation has changed only in that it has become more complicated; he said the French still think of the Harkis and their descendants as Algerians, but the Algerian community refuses to accept them. Matthieu, the youngest of the group, said that while there had been no positive change thus far, there will be a solution in the future, as the subject of the war becomes less taboo and “the French military gets a worse reputation for their actions in the war.” The last response came from Pierre, who said that, with time, the problem of the Harkis would disappear altogether: “in time, no one will speak about it anymore, and all will forget; the community itself is already silent.”

The group agreed that offering money to the community would be akin to providing a bandage for on a gunshot wound, an artificial and inadequate solution; Mattieu said the only solution would be school integration so eventually the community would enter into larger society. And, all agreed that Chirac’s official Remembrance Day and pleas to accept the Harki community were too little, too late, forgotten immediately without any actions to support the words. They also agreed that future administrations are unlikely to address the problem, because it is too expensive to fix, especially in current times of financial crisis. “Perhaps we can finally talk about the Harkis,” Jacques said, “when they’re all dead and government is sure they wont lose any money in reparations.”

VII) CONCLUSIONS

The nature of the word Harki became a fascinating concept to follow: at once subjective and objective, concrete and abstract, absolute and relative. History identified the Harkis as all those who participated with the French army during the war for independence, their families and descendants. And, while lingering resentment in the Algerian population and racism in the French designated all Harkis, regardless of their circumstances, as guilty, worthless traitors, it was clear that Harkis could also be viewed on individual bases, judged each and every time they told their stories, often with different outcomes. Youcef told a story about a nationalist turned Harki, and finished the tale with “is he a traitor? No, he is a hero.” Karim said that anyone who joined the Harki to avenge a relative’s rape or pay for his family’s food was not “a real Harki...he is not guilty; he has just avenged an injustice.” And yet, the word Harki remains a derogatory, pejorative term now used in Algeria as slang. The Harki Fatima met at the airport was judged immediately by the other Algerian men who said he “deserved to die;” but Lotfi had ensured me that many in Algeria were too old to uphold such personal grudges. It seemed even the Algerians, originally so prepared to judge the Harkis, now had difficulty defining them.

Opinions on Harkis from within the Algerian population I interviewed were complex and depended on personal experience, and degree of community involvement during the war. The average Algerian population now has very few specific memories, but those families that were heavily involved in the revolution, who sought to topple the regime and personally suffered from

the presence of the French Army, have much harsher remaining opinions. While the Harkis were a silent generation, those who fought with the FLN were proud to share their stories and talk about the war, which explains why those of Algerian origin potentially have more stories than the descendants of Harkis themselves.

One of the most interesting phenomena I observed in the interviews was the gradual combination of the plight of the Harkis with that of the Algerian immigrant population. The young French population largely views Harkis as Arabs, no different from any other immigrant; many older French people view the Harkis as sub-human and disposable, remaining sentiments from De Gaulle's wartime rhetoric. In their interview, Zohra and Kader noted that the Harki community was under fire in a new way; whereas the Harkis had always concentrated their struggle for reconciliation of identity on economic and social equality, the fear of growth of religious extremism also threatened their religious freedom. Zohra said she was afraid that with so many young descendants of Harkis searching for an identity, many could turn to Islamic fundamentalism. This fear of being associated with religious extremism was mirrored in the case of Harkis against Benyoucef, the writer of a book titled "Le nome du père," in which the main character is a rebellious Harki descendant who turns to religious extremism to gain an identity.

The Algerians I interviewed found sympathy difficult to find, as many of the complaints the Harki population wanted the French government to address—poverty, poor education, few opportunities, segregation, and discrimination—are all problems of the immigrant community in France. Even Fatima, the most sympathetic to Harkis, agreed that the Harkis received no harsher treatment from the French people than the Maghrebis, citing France's lingering xenophobia that condemns all with Arab features to the periphery of society. While the Harkis have long fought for free access to their homeland, Algeria, they continue to resist placement in the category of

“immigrant,” as their citizenship and fifty-year dwelling in France indicate complete French citizenship and rights. The Algerian immigrant community, too, resists acceptance of the Harkis, who, as Lotfi said, “cannot contribute anything to the cause of the immigrants.” Thus, the communities arrive at a great impasse whereby the Fabric syndrome exposes itself: the French, dominant society sees the Harkis and immigrants as identical, while the two groups are intent on separating themselves, and point to history to justify their differences.

While in my initial research, I had the impression that the Harki community was growing in unity and strength, my interviews left me skeptical of the true effect of the third generation’s collective memory writings. None of those I interviewed, French or Algerian, recall ever seeing news about the Harkis, and all agreed that Chirac’s actions had little if any impact on the Harki community or the opinions of outsiders. Perhaps most troubling was an overwhelming lack of hope that the situation for the Harkis would ever change; but, contrary to my original hypothesis, money, not pride, was the deciding factor. When I asked for solutions at the end of every interview, the common sentiment reflected two ideas: nothing can be done until France recognizes its troubled past, and nothing likely will be done because admitting these faults would be too expensive. Although seemingly frustrated with this chronic lack of movement, every Algerian I interviewed said at least once “this is not an Algerian problem; this is a French problem.”

There was a curious student in one of the classes I surveyed; he had never heard of the Harkis before, and when I explained, he said, “I want to know about this.” I told him he could sit in one interview, and I would send him some articles. He came, sat quietly, listened, and at the end, utterly shocked, said, “I don’t know what to believe. This is my country. I love my country. But how can I possibly accept that this is my history?” Indeed, the history of the Harki is truly a

tragedy, largely a tale of impoverished, illiterate men and women looking for any opportunities to survive and provide for their families, often forced to torture and spy on their own tribes, subjected to horrifying acts of revenge, and ultimately abandoned by the one entity that promised to support and protect them. The camps that housed the Harkis were nothing more than incarceration, a judgment passed by the French government that declared the Harkis unworthy, un-trustable, even inhuman.

In the duel between collective memory and official history, “Harki identity is the result of a complex interplay between the externally-ascribed categorization of identity and the internally-ascribed identity.”³⁴ The only hope of creating a positive collective identity and fully integrating the Harki population is the reconciliation of history and memory; the possibility of community reparation seems dismal with such a taboo still surrounding a half-century old problem. And, despite all the obstacles—racism, xenophobia, fear, religious fundamentalism, memory suppression, community isolation—when that French student, with tears in his eyes, asked me to apologize on his behalf, and on behalf of the French people, to the entire Harki community, I remembered how resilient these people are, how much they have endured. For fifty years, the Algerians and French have confiscated the Harki identity, defined it and molded it; now, the Harkis must resolve to ask, “how can we reclaim it?”

³⁴ Geraldine Enjelvin: 114