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Vincent Crapanzano, *The Harkis: The Wound That Never Heals*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2011. xii + 240 pp. Notes, references, and index. \$29.86 U.S. (cl). ISBN 978-0226118765.

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Throughout the Algerian War of Independence, the French Army recruited tens of thousands of young Arab and Berber auxiliaries as “Harkis,” to serve as informants and combatants in various counterinsurgency operations against the National Liberation Front or FLN.[1] On the eve of independence, the Fifth Republic prematurely discharged the Harkis. Officials in Paris and commanders in the French Army ignored the French civil status of these soldiers and encouraged them to return to their villages, fully aware of the dangers that awaited them. Consequently, somewhere between 60,000 to 100,000 Harkis fell victim to vicious fratricidal purges led by partisan militants in retribution for their betrayal as *collabos*. [2] 68,000 or so of the luckier Harkis and their families escaped to the metropole but were interned straightaway on government orders in dilapidated camp enclosures where they were forced to endure years, if not decades of extreme poverty, unemployment, depression, and medical neglect. Today an unknown number of Harkis live in France with their families with a heavy concentration in the southern departments.

Owing to the persistent and impassioned plea for aid and attention especially by the Harkis’ children who grew up in the camps and to the sometimes pugnacious activism of the Harki associations, the plight of the auxiliaries has gradually broken free of the taboo bind of silence over the years. The French government has also been more forthcoming in the past two decades about the internment of Harkis, but such admissions have often been driven by political motives, as seen in President Jacques Chirac’s efforts to curry electoral favor by making a point of atoning for the Republic’s mistreatment of the Harkis and showcasing the nation’s recognition of the loyalty and valor of the soldiers. [3] Many Harki associations have unfortunately bought into these disingenuous gestures in order to obtain immediate indemnities and public commemorations. In effect, the Harkis have inadvertently endorsed politicized narratives about the just causes behind the “North African Wars” and delayed a real confrontation with their historical role as French Muslims who served an imperial war.

Having suffered violence at the hands of FLN militants and the subsequent despair of life in internment, the sole recourse for the Harkis has been to live out their memories and promote their cause, but this has led to the perpetuation of a Harki identity, leaving them in a state of social isolation. Vincent Crapanzano’s anticipated book, *The Harkis: The Wound that Never Heals*, is the first ethnographic account in English devoted solely to the Harkis and a rare critical examination of this very predicament. Memory, as Crapanzano maintains throughout the book, is at once a source of solidarity and the cause of a perennially self-inflicted paralysis.

Crapanzano makes two key points of critique with regard to this fate. First, in the constant reliving of trauma, the Harkis have become blinded to the suffering of other Algerians. Second, in wishing to retain a shared collective memory and meaningful place in France, the Harkis are unable to dissolve into

French society as individuals and citizens. They thus sustain the very stereotypes that have made them social pariahs and marginal to the French. Together they make a powerful critique, although the second point does leave room for argument, touching on themes dear and near to many historians of contemporary France, namely the interconnected questions of French universalism and particularism, assimilation, and integration.

The book consists of seven chapters and an introduction, with chapter one being the actual set-up to the book. It opens with a play written by an Algerian playwright, Messaoud Benyoucef, who gives a “picaresque” depiction of the fate shared by all Algerians who suffered the repercussions of colonialism and civil violence (p. 29). Dramatized in gruesome form, Benyoucef’s poignant reading of Algerian society, rather than evoke sympathy, only elicited hostile reactions from the Harki community. The playwright’s Algerian status was enough for the Harki associations to call the work foul. Chapters two and three proceed in chronological order and give the historical background to the origins of the Harkis. These rely mostly on oft-cited secondary sources in French, however. It is with chapter four that Crapanzano truly starts to unpack his ethnographic exegesis. While chapter four gives unique insight into how a Harki might have made his way to France, chapter five follows the stories of the children who grew up in the camps amidst the violence, delinquency, insalubrious environs, and the despair that accompanied their confinement. Chapter six is an intimate portrait of how the children came to be politicized and the kind of difficulties that followed their release from internment. Finally, chapter seven, titled “Reflections,” encapsulates Crapanzano’s theoretical and ethnographic insights, as well as concluding arguments about the Harkis.

Foremost an ethnographic work, Crapanzano builds his argument from the numerous interviews he collected during his research. The interviews are few in number, with a single interview extending over several pages. Crapanzano explains the economy of interviews in terms of a methodological concern: only by relying on a choice set of interviews could he remain true to the individual voice and avoid reducing them to faceless types. Each is more remarkable than the previous for their extraordinary first-hand revelations of torture, survival, fear, resignation, determination, passion, anger, and courage. He admits that most of the interviewees were the children of the soldiers who are also called Harkis. The children visibly carry on the legacy, living through and against their Harki status. Crapanzano also brings in important accounts of French officers who served with the Harkis, uncommon among studies on the Harkis. The narratives of the officers confirm the abandonment by France, a history that has become the pivotal focus of the Harkis’ collective testimonies. The accounts of the French officers also reveal the unresolved feelings of guilt and closeness that have continued to haunt them, as well as Harkis, through the years.

Crapanzano does not really discuss how he came to select certain interviews over others. He does imply that many of those interviewed chose to hide behind a shared storyline “deflecting the pain of the personal,” and converging on script-like iterations (p. 180). These iterations in which the “I”s are no longer discernible, provide the political storyline toed by Harki associations, too often at the expense of the community’s true need to grapple with their participation in the history, as the author argues.

While the book underlines the failure of the French government to protect the Harkis, Crapanzano’s reflections on the suffering of the Harki are bifocal: first, on the excessive cruelty and terror they suffered at the hands of FLN militants, the *marsiens*, and with a more distant vision in time, on the legacy and impact of such terror on the lives of the younger generation. Crapanzano is most disquieting when he analyzes the pain and resilience of the children. It is apparent that his compassion for the children has shaped his misgivings about the political activism of the Harkis and his pained frustration about the unfulfilled paternal roles and responsibilities of the Harki soldiers.

In chapter four, with regard to the massacre of Harkis by the nationalist militants, Crapanzano posits a hypothesis about human pathology and internecine hatred. In cases where the victim and accuser are connected through intimate ties, the accuser feels the urgent need to render the victim an enemy and an alien to the community precisely in order to cast off the intimacy and reveal the real target of attack and elimination (p. 99). This, Crapanzano explains, necessarily entailed the dehumanization of the victim beyond recognition, mainly through sexual humiliation.

In many ways, it is the fratricide and the submission to the most atrocious forms of human brutality—force-feeding of blood stained food, “roasting alive” of victims (p. 91) and mutilations, just to name the few—that has paralyzed the Harkis beyond the point of redemption. To underline the penetrating and permanent wounds sustained at the hands of the militants, Crapanzano distinguishes between two kinds of torture. On the one hand, there is the “purposeful” and less vile “torture carried out *in war*,” whose goal is to extract information. This torture—“if we can even call it that”—is carried out “in a more or less systematic way by technicians under orders behind closed doors.” Then there is the other “reactionary torture” carried out *after* wars, which is “spontaneous, without system or purpose” whose main goal is the humiliation and death of its victims (pp. 97-98). It was the latter that fatally wounded the Harkis so they would never recover.

Without exaggerating the centrality of this binary classification of torture in Crapanzano’s larger narrative, it is worth digressing a moment to consider Crapanzano’s analysis and weigh it in the context of broader discussions of internecine wars and civil violence of which the Harki-FLN conflict is an example. Whether we agree with Crapanzano about distinguishing between the types of torture based purely on their level of civility is another matter. But the distinction that one is carried out by technicians and the other by brute militants is disputable for it risks making an overly clean distinction between the messy violence of civil conflicts that emerged in colonies during decolonization and the more rational and ordered violence enacted by “technicians”—usually carried out by those possessing that technology, the colonial military. We can find cases throughout history where the savagery and extent of brutality was often carried out under the watch of technicians. While Crapanzano might not explicitly defer the moral high ground to officially sanctioned forms of torture carried out by the technicians, his argument still moves along a slippery slope. Given that genocidal wars and ethnic cleansing today occur systematically and all too often under official watch, the line separating torture administered by technicians and that carried out by militants is too fluid. The point of this criticism would be that the militant violence against the Harkis must be seen, not as a qualitatively distinct form of native violence, but a response and reaction to a machination of colonial wars, the technicians of which ground their actions in just such unfounded claims of know-how, craft, and restraint.

Chapters five and six are renditions of the memories of the children during and after life in the camps. These chapters, though mainly confirming known history, are nevertheless powerful for the deep engagement with the individuals and the intensive extraction of the memory and narrative of each son and daughter of Harkis—the domestic violence and alcoholism, the infested housing and bodies, the excitement and fervor felt during the youth uprising, the women’s hopes of marriage beyond the community, the struggle to find and keep jobs, the difficulty of paying for housing after the camps, and the activism that followed.

In chapter seven, Crapanzano shares his thoughts about the necessary but improbable resolution to the isolation of the Harkis. As Crapanzano argues, the Harkis are themselves responsible for their marginalization. Adhering to a group identity itself is for him, a chronic infirmity. By using the term “Harki,” the Harkis themselves have promoted “generalization and stereotypy” (pp. 176-177). Crapanzano believes that unconditional forgiveness is key even if it means crossing an impossible threshold; the overcoming of the Harkis’ identity as victims. But forgiveness is a moral issue, and one

that for historians would appear to divert the Harki problem from an analytic discussion about decolonization and the politicization of memory. Do scholars have the right to ask those whose lives have been historically damaged to find resolution through moral sentiments and decisions such as forgiveness?

If Crapanzano is right to point to the affliction of trauma, his insistence that they throw off the Harki label would appear more controversial. Much is in the name, "Harki." It is by their historical role that they must be considered, valued, and accepted and truly live the universalism of Republican integration. It is in fact up to the Harkis to push for their acceptance *as Harkis* in France and not just individuals. But this would be possible only by compelling the French to come face to face with what it had made of those they called French (or "French Muslims"), and see then what that made of the French as a whole. Only then can the Harkis truly find individual *and* collective emancipation. But unlike what Crapanzano insists, the self-identification of the Harkis as such, does not necessarily have to come at the expense of individual selves. A Harki must be allowed to be a Harki and an individual all at once. As a product of history that must overcome memory, the Harki must be allowed a collective and individual integration.

Crapanzano's work is the first serious attempt to read the profound contradictions in the Harki existence in France. The challenges laid out in this review have to do with points of view rather than with any shortcomings in his research and sensitivity. Even these points of debate are significant for the kind of serious debate they invite on this still deeply contentious topic. The book should open a rare cross-disciplinary dialogue between those anthropologists and historians who are only just now beginning to tackle the subject matter.

NOTES

[1] The word comes from the Arabic *Haraka* meaning movement. Originally divided into several categories, the term Harkis was assigned only to a specific type of unit. Later, however, it became the generic designation for all auxiliaries.

[2] The exact number of casualties is still unknown. Historians, even the more conservative, have generally agreed that the number of Harki deaths after independence might well have reached 100,000. See Matthew Connelly, *A Diplomatic Revolution, Algeria's Fight for Independence and the Origins of the Post-Cold War Era* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 269; Alistair Horne, *A Savage War of Peace: Algeria 1954-1962* (New York: New York Review Books Classics, 2006), pp. 537-538. Crapanzano himself cites Mohand Hamoumou, *Et ils sont devenus Harkis* (Paris: Fayard, 1993) and Guy Pervillé, "La tragédie des harkis," *L'Histoire* 140(January 1991): 120-123 (see Crapanzano, p. 92).

[3] Géraldine Enjelvin, "Entrée des Harkis dans L'Histoire de France?" *French Cultural Studies* 15/1(February 2004): 61-75.

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