EDICIONES COMPLUTENSE

Cuadernos de Historia Contemporánea
ISSN: 0214-400X
ISSN-e 1988-2734

DOSSIER

A New Geography of Remembering: Unveiling the Harki Silences in Dalila Kerchouche's *Mon père, ce harki*[1]

Meritxell Joan-Rodríguez
Universitat Pompeu Fabra (España)

https://dx.doi.org/10.5209/chco.100204 Recibido: 13 de enero de 2025 / Aceptado: 3 de junio de 2025

Abstract. This article analyses *Mon père, ce harki* (2003), by Dalila Kerchouche, to shed light on the exile experienced by those harkis who left Algeria for France in the aftermath of the Franco-Algerian war (1954-1962), locating this episode in the context of the complex postcolonial relationship between France and Algeria in recent decades. As it is used today, 'harki' refers to those Algerian subjects (and their families) who somehow found themselves on the French side during the conflict. In her book, a literary testimony, Kerchouche revisits the story of her father, a former harki, to conduct her own search for identity within the harki universe. She borrows from familial and collective memories and dialogues with an array of texts that have helped her make sense of and write over the historical silences, which the harkis – constructed as traitors – have had imposed on them by both the French and the Algerian administrations. Throughout her "harkeological quest", Kerchouche retraces her father's steps and visits first the camp where she was born and then Algeria itself, the homeland that her family abandoned and from which she was also symbolically exiled. This return draws an alternative map of her family history and, at the same time, equips her with the historical accounts and family memories that she uses to write a counter-narrative to the French hegemonic account of its relationship with Algeria. Read against the backdrop of the work of historians and literary critics, *Mon père, ce harki* allows for a nuanced understanding of the position of the harkis in post-imperial France.
Keywords: Harki; Franco-Algerian war; exile; harki camps; literature; France; Algeria; Dalila Kerchouche.

[ESP] Una nueva geografía de rememoración: los silencios harkis en *Mon père, ce harki* de Dalila Kerchouche

Resumen: Este artículo analiza *Mon père, ce harki* (2003), de Dalila Kerchouche, para arrojar luz sobre el exilio de aquellos harkis que abandonaron Argelia por Francia tras la guerra franco-

[1] This publication was developed as part of the research project "Estudios geocríticos de la Alteridad y el Exilio en la 'littérature-monde' francophone-EGALEF", funded by the Spanish Ministry of Science and Innovation, [ref. PID2020-119495RB-I00].

argelina (1954-1962), situando este episodio en el contexto de la compleja relación poscolonial entre Francia y Argelia. Tal y como se utiliza hoy en día, «harki» se refiere a los argelinos (y sus familias) que participaron en el conflicto del lado francés. En su libro, un testimonio literario, Kerchouche recupera la historia de su padre, quien fue harki, para llevar a cabo su propia búsqueda identitaria dentro del universo harki. Recurre a la memoria familiar y colectiva y dialoga con un conjunto de textos de diversa índole para escribir sobre los silencios históricos que las administraciones francesa y argelina impusieron a los harkis, considerados como traidores. A lo largo de su «búsqueda harkeológica», Kerchouche rehace el camino de su padre: visita el campo de harkis donde ella nació y termina en Argelia, la tierra que su familia abandonó y de la que ella también fue exiliada simbólicamente. Este regreso dibuja un mapa alternativo de su historia familiar y la dota de relatos históricos y recuerdos familiares que utiliza para escribir un contra-discurso, el cual dialoga con el relato hegemónico que Francia ha construido con respecto a su relación con Argelia. Leído en conexión con la obra de historiadores y críticos literarios, *Mon père, ce harki* permite comprender la posición de los harkis en la Francia posterior a 1962.
Palabras clave: Harki; guerra franco-argelina; exilio; campos de harkis; literatura; Francia; Argelia; Dalila Kerchouche.

Summary. Introduction. 1. Defining 'harki'. 2. The harkis in France. 3. Harkis vs. *pieds-noirs*. 4. Harki silences. 5. Writing the harkis' exile. 5.1 From shame to hatred: the harki camps. 5.2 Literature of the homecoming. 6. The map for a new remembering. 7. Bibliographical references.

Cómo citar: Joan-Rodríguez , Meritxell. (2025). "A New Geography of Remembering: Unveiling the Harki Silences in Dalila Kerchouche's *Mon père, ce harki*". Cuadernos de Historia Contemporánea, 47(2), 367-384

Introduction

During the Franco-Algerian war (1954-1962)[2], the French army deployed a wide range of auxiliary troops who collectively came to be known as 'harkis', although this was properly the name of only one category of soldier. Equated with being pro-French, by the end of the conflict 'harki'[3] also functioned as a synonym for traitor, referring not only to those who had fought on the French side but also to their families. While some of these harkis stayed in the country following Algeria's independence, large numbers went to France, in a displacement that felt like an exile. In France they were put into different housing arrangements by the French administration. Despite the multiple experiences that comprise the harki universe, the harkis themselves existed at the margins of both France and Algeria's hegemonic discourses, their experiences silenced. This fact, compounded by feelings of guilt, meant that harkis also kept silent about their participation in the war, an attitude that impacted the way they lived in France.

In 2003, a group of books written by the daughters of former harkis managed to breach this multi-layered silence, by highlighting the complexities of the harki relationship with the war, and by elucidating the ways in which the harki label has been passed on from generation to generation within harki families. One of these works is *Mon père, ce harki*, by Dalila Kerchouche, who at twenty-nine decided to confront her father's harki inheritance. She embarked upon what she calls a "quête harkéologique" to come to terms with her own sense of identity, examining her relationship with both France – where she was born – and Algeria, where her family roots are and to which she is inextricably connected. Through her quest, Kerchouche revisits her family's exile and travels herself to Algeria, the lost homeland to which her parents never returned after 1962, and from which she, too, might be said to be exiled.

---

2 Throughout this article, I shall use "Franco-Algerian war" and "Algerian war for independence" to refer to the conflict fought between the French Army and the FLN from 1954 to 1962, which ended with Algeria's independence from France.

3 Scholars write "harki" in different ways, sometimes with a capital 'H', for example, or in italics. I have chosen to follow Kerchouche's spelling.

Taking Kerchouche's work as a cue, this paper will attempt to unpick the position of the harkis in post-imperial France, looking at how they were received by the French government and then categorised within French society, both linguistically and sociologically. This analysis will be intertwined with an examination of the "policy of forgetting" (Susan Ireland, 2009: 306) that was carried out by France in relation to its former colony. At the same time, the paper will delve into the story of the Kerchouche family – which in *Mon père, ce harki* is linked to the stories of many other harki families – to understand the exilic condition of the harkis that ended up in France: how they projected their return to Algeria and how they experienced their life in France. We will follow Kerchouche in her "harkeological quest" and examine the tools she uses to write a counter-narrative to the French hegemonic account of its relationship with Algeria. Her book, of a markedly autobiographical tone, is also polyphonic in nature, borrowing from the memories of others and incorporating those academic sources that have helped her make peace with the harki that defines her sense of identity.

Kerchouche starts her account by succinctly defining the term 'harki', and foregrounds her lack of understanding of why her father chose to become one. By the end of *Mon père, ce harki* she has arrived at a conclusion; throughout the text she highlights the pivotal encounters, readings and reflections that allows her to reach this conclusion. Her book is prefaced by a text by writer and journalist Jacques Duquesne, who also offers a definition of the term 'harki' and points to the intricacies it entails. Duquesne writes for a French audience that he will confront with the racism that articulates the position of the harkis in France. In this respect, Kerchouche's work could be read as a pedagogical tool of sorts that challenges French society so that it, too, might better grasp the nuances within the word 'harki' and the difficulties faced by those people in France that inhabit the harki universe. At the same time, Kerchouche's account also considers a gendered reading of the harkis' reality in France and allows us to understand to what extent memory work in the harki sphere is largely undertaken by women; these important layers add value to Kerchouche's contribution.

1. Defining harki

Etymologically linked to *haraka*, an Arabic word for 'movement', during the Franco-Algerian war 'harki' referred to native Algerians that were members of harkas, mobile units created by the French army consisting of auxiliary soldiers, or "supplétifs musulmans" in colonial terminology (Charbit 2006: 9)[4]. The harkis were only one type of *supplétif* and co-existed with many others. In *Mon père, ce harki,* Dalila Kerchouche refers to this terminological conflation: "le terme 'harki' est devenu générique et désigne toutes les catégories de supplétifs, qu'ils soient moghaznis (chargés de la sécurité des SAS), GMPR, GAD (groupes d'autodéfense) ou affectés à des commandos de chasse" (2003a: 247)[5].

Although the first harkas were formed in the Aurès mountains in 1955, they were regularised in 1956 when governor General Robert Lacoste "institutionalised their use as mobile units to undertake offensive military operations" (in Eldridge, 2016: 23). Lacoste established that members of a harka were to participate "aux opérations de maintien de l'ordre" (in Miller, 2012: 13), with each category having a special task: "*moghaznis* protected the *sections administratives sociales* (SAS), a corps of French doctors, nurses, educators, and social workers charged with 'pacifying' native populations and promoting French Algeria. The *groupes mobiles de sécurité* were rural police forces and *groupes d'autodéfense* were tasked with protecting rural villages. Finally, the *aassès* were Muslim auxiliary policemen in *unités territoriales*, which protected Algerian infrastructure and communication lines" (*Ibid.*).

As highlighted by Kerchouche, by 1962 these nuances had been erased and harki came to refer to any Algerian who found themselves on the French side of the conflict, or as some scholars define it, those who fought *alongside* rather than *for* France (Enjelvin, 2006: 113-127). In fact, the

4 The participation of indigenous populations on the French side of its colonial conflicts was not new to the Franco-Algerian war. In *Mon père, ce harki* Dalila Kerchouche explains that her grandfather fought three wars for France: the Rif War, the Second World War and the Franco-Algerian War (2003a: 47).

5 For a complete list of the different categories associated with harki see Khemache, 2018: 12–13.

reasons that brought these men[6] into the French army were manifold, and not always connected with an allegiance to France. Some sought the economic benefits of receiving a salary; others were following the example of their tribal leader. Historian François-Xavier Hautreux notes that "l'engagement se comprend comme un acte collectif, subordonné à la décision d'une autorité familiale reconnue" (2013: 238)[7]. As we shall see, within the harki universe, the line between the individual and the collective is frequently blurred.

Such a blurring is in fact at the core of what the term designates today. If during the war it referred specifically to the auxiliary forces, 'harki' soon came to apply to their families, too, regardless of whether they had played an active part in the conflict. In yet another semantic leap, as noted by sociologist Tom Charbit, "le terme en est parfois venu à désigner l'ensemble de ceux qui durent, après l'indépendance, quitter l'Algérie et s'installer en métropole" (2006: 9). In fact, as we are reminded by Jacques Duquesne, the dictionary references two meanings for 'harki': "supplétif", and "membre de la famille ou descendant d'un harki" (2003: 10). Hautreux has noted that the term 'harki' shifted from a description of "un état inscrit dans une chronologie (servir dans une harka)" to indicate "une identité, transmissible à leurs descendants" (2013: 386).

This shift is of paramount importance, as it is mainly the descendants of former *supplétifs* who have carried out the memory work that has led to a deeper understanding of the two meanings referenced in the dictionary, particularly the second. Coinciding with the celebrations of *l'année de l'Algérie* in France, four books written by harki daughters were published in French in 2003: Fatima Besnaci-Lancou's *Fille de harki*, Hadjila Kemoum's *Mohand le harki*, Dalila Kerchouche's *Mon père, ce harki*, and Zahia Rahmani's *Moze*. Each taking a different approach to historical material and literary technique, all four elaborate on the fate of the harkis after the war and the conditions of their exile in France.

Also published in 2003 by a historian specialising in the Franco-Algerian war, Abderahmen Moumen's *Entre histoire et mémoire: Les rapatriés d'Algérie – Dictionnaire bibliographique* (2003) is an invaluable companion in reading the books mentioned above. Prior to this date, the majority of fictional and scholarly works that addressed the harki phenomenon were primarily focussed on the reasons that led the harkis to side with the French during the conflict. The works by Besnaci-Lancou, Kemoum, Kerchouche and Rahmani therefore filled a kind of bibliographical gap, exploring the consequences of that participation not only for the combatants themselves but also for their families.

In a subsequent essay entitled "The Historical Construction of Harki Literature", Moumen noted that some scholars had even begun to discuss the emergence of a "harki literature" (Moser, 2014), to which the accounts by the harki daughters would belong. Moumen argues that the publication of these works was facilitated by the desire of the French state to reframe its relationship with Algeria, particularly its narratives around the Franco-Algerian war. For example, the war was referred to as "les opérations effectuées en Afrique du Nord", "les opérations du maintien de l'ordre" or "les événements en Algérie" up until 1999, when a law was passed that designated the conflict as "la guerre d'Algérie ou aux combats en Tunisie ou au Maroc". This official renaming was of paramount importance, since the terminological erasure of the war had ensured that "the events of 1954-62 were not inserted into the nation's official memory. Instead, they were effectively forgotten in what appeared to be a troubling case of national amnesia" (Eldridge, 2016: 6).

Under this prism, the book by Kerchouche, like those by the other harki daughters, became tools to help overcome this narrative amnesia by *naming* the experiences of the harkis during the war and, even more importantly, following their arrival in France. Abderahmen Moumen highlights the conditions in which the works by this so-called "second generation" of harkis surfaced: "Many of these youth had never experienced the drama of the Algerian War first-hand, dealt with repatriation issues, been interned in camps, or had ever seen Algeria" (2014: 8). Despite their authors' lack of any first-hand experience of the war, the texts are very much rooted in the conflict – the source of the harki identity – and focus extensively on the attitude of the French

6 A female harka was created in Catinat (Jijel) in January 1959. See Ceaux, 2018: 18.

7 For a detailed examination of the reasons that led Algerians to side with France see Hamoumou, 1993: 129-211.

army, government, and administration towards the harkis in the aftermath of the war and the subsequent four decades.

2. The harkis in France

Figures regarding the total number of harkis that went to France (and those who stayed in Algeria, for that matter) continues to be a contentious issue. Historian Charles-Robert Ageron has referred to the debate as a "bataille de chiffres" (1994). Using colonial terminology, *pied-noir* historian Jean-Jacques Jordi claims that around 85,000 "Français musulmans" went to France in 1962; in 1968, the official census listed 138,724 "Français musulmans", of whom 88,000 were born in Algeria (2003: 13). Abderahmen Moumen states that between 1962 and 1968, 20,600 former auxiliary soldiers (or 66,000, counting their families) fled to France from Algeria (2014: 5). Another historian, Claire Eldridge, whose research interests focus on the French empire, offers other figures: quoting William Cohen, she states that "government organised repatriation programmes brought 25,000 harkis and their dependants to the French mainland between 1962 and 1967, while a further 68,000 entered the country by unofficial means, frequently with the assistance of their former officers." (2016: 24) These figures, Eldridge notes, are along the same lines as those offered by François-Xavier Hautreux, "who lists 12,000 transferred to France by July 1962, rising to 20,000 by December with a further 6,600 arriving in 1963" (*Ibid*).

Abderahmen Moumen highlights the "aspect massif" of the harki migration to France, which he defines in these terms: "l'exil des rapatriés d'Algérie". He goes on to say that "[e]n quatre mois, il y eut autant de réfugiés qu'en 5 ans pour les précédentes migrations liées à la décolonisation française" (2003: 14). When commenting on the migration of the harkis from newly independent Algeria to France, Dalila Kerchouche writes: "dans l'histoire de France, les harkis étaient le premier enracinement massif de familles musulmanes dans l'Hexagone" (2003a: 188). Kerchouche describes how she came to this realisation after reading a thesis on sociology that explained how the French administration created an image of the harki as "socially dangerous", a construction rooted in the colonial imaginary.

There had been important flows of Maghrebi immigrants to France prior to 1962, but these were mostly men who worked temporarily in France before returning to their native villages[8]. The fact that entire harki families were settling in France affected the nature of the measures taken by the French administration with respect to these newcomers, as we shall see below. Following the argument of the thesis, Kerchouche claims that the French State ensured the social death of the harkis through systematic references to their religion, which was seen as foreign to French national identity. The administration insisted on referring to them as "Muslim-French from Algeria" while in French Algeria they were also known as "Muslim subjects". This naming policy contributed to their otherisation in France and equated them, in the eyes of the majority of French society, to other (non-harki) Algerian immigrants[9].

To understand how the harkis and their families *felt* towards France, it is important to look at the reasons that first led them to go to France, particularly in light of the fact that pro-French sentiment was not necessarily a given amongst harki families. In a piece entitled "1962: the French exodus from Algeria", Jean-Jacques Jordi explains that "no sooner had [the Évian Accords] being signed [on 18 March 1962] than these agreements were challenged by the OAS, the ALN general staff and the FLN itself"[10] (n.d.). Jordi notes that, in this scenario, large numbers of people sought

---

8 Historian Peggy Derder states that "Algerians fuelled an early and large migratory flow of colonials to mainland France from the second half of the 19th century". She continues, "[t]he implementation of the colonial system [...] worsened the situation of the native populations", which led to rural exodus and emigration. "[T]he war of independence did not bring about a pause in Algerian migrations." (n.d.) For their part, Linda Amiri and Benjamin Stora explain that "[l]e sentiment national [algérien] va naître de l'exil. Loin de sa terre l'immigré algérien découvre l'entre soi, une connivence avec d'autres exilés." (n.d.)

9 However, as explained by Dalila Kerchouche in her account, some harki children were treated with contempt by the children of Algerian immigrants, because harkis were seen as traitors.

10 The Organisation Armée Secrète was a French paramilitary organisation who were opposed to de Gaulle's support for Algerian self-determination. The Armée de Libération Nationale was the armed wing of the Front de Libération Nationale; together with the ALN, the FLN was at the forefront of Algeria's campaign for independence.

to flee to France. The harkis' willingness to abandon Algeria was mainly connected with the fear of being massacred by so-called "Marsiens", a term that referred to latecomers to the ranks of the FLN who used extreme cruelty as a way of asserting their loyalty to the winning side.

After the signature of the Évian Accords, the harkis – already traitors in the eyes of the FLN – felt unprotected by the French Army and the French government. Despite the efforts of many French generals who were still in Algeria and documented cases of extreme violence and torture toward the harkis, the government of Charles de Gaulle established a policy to limit the ability of the harkis to enter France. Those wanting to flee Algeria needed an authorisation from either the French Minister of Algerian Affairs or the Minister of Armies, and these were difficult to obtain.[11] The administration's attitude fuelled a sense of abandonment amongst the harki community. In the prologue of *Mon père, ce harki,* Jacques Duquesne writes that what Dalila Kerchouche recounts in *Mon père, ce harki* is "l'histoire cruelle d'un véritable abandon, né du mépris, né, il faut le dire, du racisme" (2003: 12-13). Abandonment is a key word in the harki vocabulary.

In Jeanette E. Miller's thorough historical analyses of post-independence Algeria, she traces the roots of the harkis' abandonment by those who were meant to protect them. "[T]he peace treaty negotiated by representatives of the French government contained no specific mention of the harkis", who remained "second-class citizens". (2012: 4, 15) French government's assessments of the amount of people that would "return" to France after the declaration of independence undercounted by a large margin. As recounted by Jean-Jacques Jordi, "[l]ocal authorities and representatives of the State sought somehow to regulate the flow of migrants, but without any real success." (n.d.) Both "French people of European origin" (i.e. *pieds-noirs* and also Algerian Jews, who became French citizens in 1870) and "French Muslims" (mainly harkis) felt unwanted in France, but the latter had to endure extremely arduous travelling conditions and were left with "psychological and emotional scars" due to their "brutal uprooting, the exodus, and the early days in France", as recounted by Jordi (*Ibid.*).

The terminology used to describe the harkis was in fact linked with the way they were perceived and treated by the French administration, which was itself connected with how French society perceived and treated them. In *Mon père, ce harki*, Dalila Kerchouche explains that, in the press, harkis were homogenised, their cultural differences erased (even the fact that some of them identified as Arabs and others as Berbers), and their individual stories brushed off. The press, or what little press coverage there was, called them "réfugiés musulmans", never French. In fact, she concludes, they were considered "des citoyens de seconde zone dans l'Algérie coloniale et des réfugiés [en France]"; "[l]es harkis, qui croyaient avoir gagné l'égalité citoyenne en se battant aux côtés de la France, restent des indigènes" (2003 : 66, 68).

3. Harkis vs. *pieds-noirs*

The harkis' marginal identities in both French Algeria and in France was translated into an ambiguous legal status. In French Algeria, harkis were French nationals but categorically different to both European settlers and the Jewish population, the two other communities that held French citizenship. These differences remained intact in post-imperial France. Harkis had the right to request French nationality, which in this new scenario equated to holding citizenship. However, governmental policies *de facto* defined harkis as "not quite" like other French citizens, including the *pieds-noirs*. In fact, Jeanette E. Miller states that "Muslim Algerian French citizens [...] never achieved full French citizenship, with rights equal to those of the settler population in Algeria" (2012: 3).

In "Of Mimicry and Man", Homi K. Bhabha discusses the concept of mimicry as inscribed in the colonial sphere. Bhabha argues from literary texts and the ideas of Edward Said, Sigmund Freud, Jacques Lacan, and others, to construct a theoretical reflection on the dynamics established in

[11] As recounted by Miller, "Messmer [the Minister of Armies] even issued a warning in mid-May that any harkis repatriated to metropolitan France without his authorization would be sent back to Algeria" (2012: 75). The scholar also notes that French General de Brébisson characterised the ALN's actions against the harkis as an "epuration, [which was] the term used to describe the 'purge' of Vichy collaborators after the 1944 Liberation of France" (2012: 73).

binary contexts – such as those that arise from colonial projects– in which there is a dominant group and a dominated one. In our case, this binary would be the harkis and then the rest of the French citizenry. According to Bhabha, mimicry is articulated around the idea of desire and works as "a gaze of otherness" (2004: 126) whereby the colonial mimicry is "the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, *as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite*. Which is to say, that the discourse of mimicry is constructed around an *ambivalence*; in order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference" (2004: 122; emphasis in the original). This idea of mimicry plays out in the texts of the harki daughters, which depict a France that administratively considers the harkis as French but, discursively and socially, treats them as Other.

The position the harkis occupied in France is one of continuous slippage, to use Bhabha's word, and is enmeshed in the colonial gaze. The harkis' status as *supplétifs* granted them certain privileges vis-à-vis other Arab and Berber "Muslim subjects"; most notably, they could apply for French nationality once in France, and most of them did so[12]. This meant that the harkis were not, strictly speaking, immigrants, although we know that, when dealing with them, "the government used many of the same social welfare offices and agents as it did for immigrants" (Miller, 2012: 24), which further reinforces the idea that they were treated like foreigners. The fact that they could opt for French nationality (via a pro forma procedure) excluded them from technically being refugees, too. In the words of Jean-Jacques Jordi, the harkis, "whom France did not want [...] were as much 'repatriates/expatriates' as the French of European origin" (n.d.). However, the harkis remained "rapatriés Français *musulmans*" (emphasis added), which, again, was designed to evoke their former status in French Algeria.

The root of this difficulty in naming the harkis in France can be located in the conditions of their exile. In the introduction of an issue entitled *Documenting, Representing and Thinking about Exiles*, editors Ségolène Débarre, Alice Franck and Patrick Simon quote Algerian sociologist Abdelmalek Sayad: "exile does not always take the same form" (2022: 8). They note that, historically, exile was "a form of banishment [...] [that] raises questions about the relationship to power and the way the latter set out its territorial limits and political values" (*Ibid.*). An examination of the treatment received by harkis who settled in France illuminates the power dynamics and values that France projected in its postcolonial relationship with Algeria. Débarre, Franck and Simon continue to define exile as a form of exclusion, as a "migration forced by danger" that includes "the idea of forced departure, of distance from home residence and relatives, involving suffering linked to uprooting and a changed environment". They argue that "[t]he place of exile can then become a place of absence" (*Ibid.*). These remarks would serve as a fitting description of the voyage undertaken by the Kerchouche family and of many others like them.

At great risk, the Kerchouche family were able to board on a boat that was to transport them across the Mediterranean to France. Kerchouche explains that when her family got to Marseille, "[ils] ont survécu, mais ils ont abandonné une partie d'eux-mêmes là-bas, en Algérie. [...] Ils sont sortis du bateau, mais leur histoire, elle, croupit toujours à fond de cale, rejetée par les deux rives de la Méditerranée" (2003a: 23). The voyage to France is described as a case of forced migration and not as a return to an original homeland, complicating their categorisation as repatriates. In his analysis of the French exodus from Algeria, Jordi unpicks the trauma shared by the repatriates (harkis and *pieds-noirs* alike) when they left Algeria to settle in France, a country fundamentally unknown to them. However, unlike harkis, the *pieds-noirs*' response to their uprootedness was "the cult of memory, followed subsequently by the fight for compensation and campaigns for recognition" (n.d.). On the contrary, as shown in the above extract from Kerchouche, the harki "cult of memory" was hindered by the fact that their history and stories were surrounded by multiple layers of silence. France, their place of exile, was – to adopt the words of Débarre, Franck and Simon – a place of absence.

---

12 Harki families had to pay 10 francs to complete the process, a considerable sum for a group whose access to the job market was at best precarious. This leads Dalila Kerchouche to write: "[c]omme si la perte de leur pays ne leur avait pas couté assez cher" (2003a: 66).

4. Harki silences

Professor Mohand Hamoumou, himself the son of a harki, published a seminal work about harki identity: *Et ils sont devenus harkis* (1993). In this text, Hamoumou describes the harkis as a heterogeneous community marked by the stigma of treason, a stigma that stains them on both sides of the Mediterranean. Stemming from "la désinformation du FLN, simple continuation sous une autre forme de la guerre subversive", the association between 'harki' and 'treason' was, according to Hamoumou, adopted by some French media outlets, which accepted the point of view "imposé par l'Algérie indépendante pour qui les harkis [...] demeurent des 'renégats'" (1993: 113)[13]. In order to understand the lack of memory work carried out by the former *supplétifs* – as already stated, this was mainly undertaken by descendants of the actual combatants[14] – Hamoumou speaks of a three-fold silence.

On the one hand, there was the silence of Algeria. The newly formed Algerian government designated the harkis as traitors because they symbolised a fracture in the narrative that presented Algerians as having been united against French colonial rule. As traitors, they had no right to belong in the national narrative and they were relegated to oblivion. The stigma that was rooted in the Franco-Algerian war lingered for decades. On the 16th of June 2000, a statement made by then Algerian president Abdelaziz Bouteflika during an official visit to France, left a significant impact on the harki community. When asked about the return of the harkis to Algeria, he declared: "Les conditions ne sont pas encore venues pour des visites de harkis. [...] C'est exactement comme si on demandait à un Français de la Résistance de toucher la main d'un collabo" (in Besnaci-Lancou, 2003: 14).

This statement is reproduced in *Fille de harkis*, the 2003 account published by Fatima Besnaci-Lancou, who claims that Bouteflika's words – which she describes as a slap – triggered her investigation of her own harki inheritance, which until that point she had chosen to conceal: "Il m'a [...] sorti de mon 'trou de mémoire'" (2003: 13), she writes. It was upon hearing Bouteflika's statement that she decided to write about the history of the harkis in an attempt to counter the "stigmatisation qui a touché la communauté des harkis depuis la fin de la guerre" (2003: 18). Dalila Kerchouche, too, introduces Bouteflika's words in *Mon père, ce harki*, as a reminder of what her family had taught her: in Algeria, 'harki' is an insult[15]. When she decides to visit Algeria, she wonders how she will be received: will she be called a traitor for being the daughter of a harki? "Là-bas, le mot 'harki' vaut toujours l'infamie" (2003a: 206), she recalls before her trip. She wonders whether she will encounter the same hatred that her parents found in their French exile (*Ibid*). She notes that, officially, harkis are not permitted to return to Algeria and can be detained at the border[16]. In fact, lifting this restriction was one of the principal demands of the harkis' descendants in the new millennium.

But Kerchouche is also outraged at the lack of a formal French riposte to the Algerian president. It took four weeks for Jacques Chirac to condemn Bouteflika's words. For many harkis, Chirac's failure to give an immediate response felt like another form of disrespect. As declared by Vincent Crapanzano, "[t]he Harkis were furious at the Algerian president and, if one can compare levels of fury, even more so at the French president for not having immediately responded to Bouteflika's insult" (2011: 172). This brings us to the second silence: that of France.

---

13 We learn that "Muslim French repatriates" even got letters sent by the FLN informing them that they had been declared "traîtres à la nation" (Hamoumou, 1993: 336).

14 Claire Eldridge notes that "[i]t took several decades for scholars to turn their attention to the harkis. Like memory activism within the community itself, this was also a development that owed much to the impetus of harki descendants" (2016: 27).

15 In 2004, an article was passed in the French Senate making it illegal to use 'harki' as an insult.

16 Kerchouche is aware that other harkis have gone back to Algeria to visit their relatives. In 2015, journalist Pierre Daum published *Le Dernier Tabou: Les "harkis" restés en Algérie après l'indépendance,* which suggests that, contrarily to popular belief, many harkis and their families who decided to stay in Algeria were able to lead normal lives in the newly-independent Algeria. He bases his statements on numerous interviews that he conducted in Algeria over the years, and does acknowledge that some families were killed. It is worth noting that there are no official figures for the actual number of harkis that stayed in Algeria or for those that went to France.

As noted earlier, French military elites did not prioritise the protection of harki families after the war, and this led to many of them being tortured and murdered on Algerian soil. Indeed, French passivity made it an accomplice to these acts. Those who did manage to reach France were received very differently than the *pieds-noirs*. While *pieds-noirs* received preferential treatment when it came to housing, a significant number of harki families were placed in camps that reproduced colonial logics and enhanced the harkis' cultural and physical alienation from their new land. The French government argued that one of the reasons why they placed the harkis in camps – crowded together[17] and easily surveillable – was to protect them from the FLN. It is true that the Amicale des Algériens en France (ADAF), the metropolitan arm of the FLN, attempted to terrorise the harkis. However, far from remembered as a refuge, the camps remain a profound wound in the harki worldview, a continuation of the abandonment they suffered in French Algeria.

The silences of the Algerian and the French administrations were then covered over in turn by the silence of the former *supplétifs* themselves. At its root lay the stigmatisation that surrounded the harkis' role in the Franco-Algerian war. Compounded by guilt and shame, this silence created a vacuum in which harkis were spoken for by others and frequently constructed as traitors. Besnaci-Lancou wrote that the harkis were enclosed "dans la culpabilité comme dans une carapace" (2003: 18), which took the shape of silence. Most of harkis chose to remain silent about their participation in the war. One of the sentences that punctuates Dalila Kerchouche's accounts, and which best encapsulates this kind of silence, is *"li fat met"* (the past is dead), a phrase that Dalila's father utters whenever his daughter pushes him to speak about Algeria. Indeed, Dalila can't mourn Algeria, because she has never encountered it. The country she mourns is the silent Algeria of her father.

Li fat met is an injunction – Dalila's father is ordering her not to stir up old memories — and is freighted with a fear of retaliation that is still active many decades after the family's departure from Algeria. When Kerchouche tells her parents about her "harkeological quest", her mother asks her fearfully: "Et s'ils nous le reprochent?" The author wonders: "Qui est ce *ils* mystérieux qui tourmente encore mes parents" (2003a: 15). The family's silence surrounding her father's involvement in the war — the proximate cause of their exile to France – is received with frustration by the daughter: "[l]es harkis hésitent à parler. Comme si parler, et écrire, était trahir encore..." (2003a: 16). However, her attitude towards their distant relationship shifts when Kerchouche learns that her father's silence is the product of his own difficulties navigating the question of identity; how the war had placed him, too, in a limbo not dissimilar to her present dilemma.

This third and final silence – added to the void at the heart of the official historical narratives of both France and Algeria – profoundly shapes the familial stories of those subjects read as harkis, as the Kerchouche case illuminates. The sense of loss it engenders hinders the exercise of recounting. Hamoumou notes that the lives of the harkis were marked by manifold losses: "la perte du pays natal, de la confiance en ceux qui les ont abandonnés, d'un statut social, parfois même de leur identité", all which were ultimately conducive to the construction of a collective memory that previously had been "bien délicate de faire émerger, au point d'entendre parfois évoquer une impossible transmission de mémoire chez les harkis" (1990: 13). Hamoumou's views are shared by other scholars: Abderahmen Moumen, for example, speaks of the harkis' memory as a "mémoire blessée" (2014: 2). The text by Kerchouche, as well as those by the other harki daughters, are written over the triple silence exposed above. I read them not only as artefacts that contest the historical amnesia of both France and Algeria, but also as a gesture that facilitates the healing of the harkis' "wounded memory".

5. Writing the harkis' exile

In his seminal essay, *Reflections on Exile*, Edward W. Said writes: "Exile [...] is fundamentally a discontinuous state of being" (2001: n.d.). As I have argued, the uprooted existence of harkis in France – forced to abandon their homes, land, and extended kin – had consequences not only for

[17] As described by Kerchouche, "[d]ans le camp [...] les régions d'Algérie se mélangent dans une promiscuité inhabituelle. Chaouis, Oranais, Kabyles et fellahs de l'Ouarsenis cachent leurs épouses et se toisent avec méfiance." (2003a: 48)

those who took part in the war, but also for their relatives and descendants. Dalila Kerchouche's sense of identity pivots around the word 'harki', which her father refuses to use, but which has shaped her upbringing and her sense of self. In *Mon père, ce harki*, she discusses the various orthographies of 'harki', which directly correlate with different aspects of her sense of belonging in both France and Algeria, and allow her to plot the outline of her fragmented identity. At the very beginning of her text, she describes herself as a "fille de harkis" (2003a: 14), which highlights the second definition of harki as discussed above: harki as an identity that can be passed on.

In the initial pages of the account, the author summarises her parents' story, focusing on her father, who is, as the title hints, at the source of her harki identity. The first subtitle of *Mon père, ce harki* offers the first spelling of harki: with "un petit 'h', comme 'honte'" (2003a: 13). This first association between the harki universe and shame stems from the role that Dalila's father played in the war, and her response to this fact: "Comment a-t-il pu soutenir la colonisation contre l'indépendance, préférer la soumission à la liberté?" (*Ibid.*). The passage is filled with questions that shadow an intricate interrogation of the author's sense of belonging and that of her family, questioning her subjectivity as she attempts to understand both her family and France, the country where she lives and from which she writes.

Dalila is aware that harki is synonymous with traitor. When describing her father, she states: "Consideré comme un renégat en Algérie, traité comme un paria en France, il a vécu en exclu, expiant toute sa vie une faute dont les deux camps l'ont accablé: la trahison" (*Ibid.*). Her writing is enmeshed in a desire to understand her father's choice, which she cannot comprehend because "il ne [lui] a jamais parlé" (*Ibid*). It is an attempt to fill his silence, which she describes as "honteux et obstiné" that transforms into "le poids d'une histoire trop lourde à porter" (2003a: 14). In order to find answers, she decides to retrace her family's migration from Algeria to France and their first years in French soil, and then reenact it in reverse, finishing her journey in the land that her family had to abandon and to which they feel they can't return. She describes Algeria as her country of origin, as her "fêlure intime, [s]on chagrin secret" (*Ibid.*). The word choice is significant, because it connects her with a sense of trauma that is shared by other exiles and the painful memories associated with the homeland.

In her book *Espionnes*, Kerchouche states that she wrote *Mon père, ce harki* motivated by a desire "pour [s]e libérer de ce monde du tabou, du secret et du silence, qu'incarne encore l'histoire des harkis" (2016: 22). The loss of Algeria as a country – one of the many losses cited by Hamoumou and one that is central to the harkis' exilic condition – is present from the very beginning of *Mon père, ce harki*. Every 30th of June, the anniversary of the Kerchouches' arrival in France, the entire family gathers together, a powerful sign of the importance of this displacement in their lives. In 2002, the present-day of the narrative, Kerchouche's mother confesses that she is not up for a celebration: "Je n'ai pas envie de fêter le jour où j'ai perdu mon pays." (2003a: 21) Forty years after her arrival to France, Algeria remains a wound unhealed.

The author is interested in the many wounds that have become part of her family's narrative and everyday lives. All are connected in some way with their physical separation from Algeria. She describes her parents as "psychologiquement détruits[,] [f]atigués, méfiants, déracinés" (2003a: 15). She claims that they still live in relative isolation from wider society. Despite having spent forty years in France, they don't speak French, emphasising their attachment to their land of origin: living in France they continue to inhabit the language of Algeria. However, "[l]'Algérie, ils ne l'ont jamais revue. C'est le drame de leur vie, et la trame de la mienne" (*Ibid.*). This last statement explicitly states Dalila's connection to Algeria. To get to know Algeria fully, she will first have to learn about its (post)colonial relationship with France, the country to which she still feels unproblematically attached when she starts her search; by the end of her "harkeological quest", such a bond will crumble.

5.1. From shame to hatred: the harki camps

Dalila Kerchouche was born in Bias, a relocation camp for harkis that had previously housed repatriates from Indochina. She has no memories of the camp because her family settled in Saint-Étienne des Fougères, some 20 kilometres from Bias, when she was only one. At the same time, the camps informed her upbringing: "J'ai grandi dans cette mythologie familiale, partagée entre

la nostalgie de l'Algérie et la souffrance des camps, qui représentaient, dans mon imaginaire d'enfant, le paradis et l'enfer" (2003a: 25). Each of her visits to the seven camps where her family lived grants Dalila a piece of her family's story and, with it, a better understanding of what the harkis experienced arriving in France. Although not all the harkis ended up there[18], the camps became "a symbol of France's abandonment" (Ireland, 2020: 227), and they occupy a very important space in the accounts of harki descendants, as exemplified in *Mon père, ce harki.* The way the camps functioned – frequently controlled by formed *pieds-noirs*, and located at a distance from rural French populations – explains the harkis' feelings of "apartness, marginality and interstitiality" (Crapanzano, 2011: 175) and why the camps have become such a powerful symbol in the harkis' collective memory.

Mainly located in the south of France, some of the camps that housed the harkis after 1962 had previously been used to lodge other population groups, such as Spanish Republicans fleeing the civil war, or the Jews that would be despatched to Nazi concentration camps in the Vichy period. This layered historical legacy makes them important *lieux de mémoire* (Nora, 1984) for different communities. The camps were located far from French villages, which served a sociological purpose: unlike the *pieds-noirs* and Jewish repatriates, whose Frenchness was not in question and were therefore placed in accommodation such as hotels or HLMs, harkis were seen by the French administration as unfit to enter French society[19]. Thus, they needed to be kept apart.

This physical separation between the harkis and "French society", a distance enhanced by the realities of camp life, would reinforce the tendency to turn to their Algerian identity: in the camps, harki families would attempt to reproduce the life they had in Algeria. The lack of contact with the local French population hindered the adults' ability to learn French, while Algerian cuisine and maintaining Algerian (Arab, Kabyle) traditions and clothing helped soften the experience of their exile. Kerchouche describes how the gendered divisions that informed the everyday life of harki families in Algeria continued in the camps[20]. She even remarks that the camps *sounded* like Algeria; whenever there was something to celebrate in the camps – the end of an academic year, for example – *youyous* would fill the air with the sonic landscape of Algeria (2003a: 152).

Contemplating the fact that her parents had never returned to their homeland, Kerchouche writes: "peut-être qu'ils ne l'ont jamais quittée, au fond" (2003a: 200). It is during a visit to a camp in Roussillon-en-Morvan that she realises how their in-between state – placing them *in Algeria* while living in France – was also experienced as a physical reality: "La situation de mes parents, coincés entre le cimetière et le village, résume parfaitement leur existence dans les camps: à mi-chemin entre les morts et les vivants" (2003a: 96)[21]. Later on, Kerchouche incorporates whole passages from a 1985 report written by two sociologists in an effort to elucidate her doubts. Particularly revealing is the following extract: "En même temps que le discours officiel [...] les confirme dans le statut de 'Français à part entière', le traitement et le destin qui leur sont réservés font paraître un autre statut, celui de 'Français entièrement à part'" (in Kerchouche, 2003a: 184). Their condition as "Français entièrement à part" is mirrored by the fact that they occupy spaces "outside the law", spaces ruled by "le non-droit, voire le contre-droit" (*Ibid.*).

Banished from the landscape, the harkis were also absent on the discursive level. Kerchouche is impressed by the fact that in many of these now-empty camps, there is little to indicate that the harkis once lived there. During one such visit, she says she is "prête à remuer chaque caillou pour y trouver un signe du passage des harkis," but is enraged to learn that "il ne reste [...] donc rien,

---

18 Miller notes that "[a]pproximately 55,000 harkis and their family members resided, at least briefly, in camps housing only other harki population members." (2012: 146)

19 Dalila Kerchouche is aware of the difference in the way harkis and *pieds-noirs* were treated. For example, she notes that a local newspaper used to publish a "chronique des rapatriés", but only with reference to the *pied-noir* population, which reads as exclusionary (2003a: 68).

20 Besnaci-Lancou explored the two-fold confinement to which harki women have been subjected in *Nos mères, paroles blessées: Une autre histoire de harkis* (2006).

21 Jennifer Howell imagines the harkis' liminal state as layered, describing it as a "double rejet": they are "[i]ncapables au niveau psychologique ou interdits au niveau juridique de se déplacer librement dans et entre [la France et l'Algérie]" (2011: 415).

dans ce morne coin de forêt invisible de l'extérieur, du passage des harkis, pas même une plaque. Rien à quoi me raccrocher" (2003a: 45).

In her analysis of Kerchouche's work, Jennifer Howell writes that through her quest, the author hopes to unearth "une architecture mémorielle harkie", which renders her neologism, "quête harkéologique", even more meaningful, for it is underpinned by an archaeological imperative to study "civilisations disparues, cachées, ou oubliées" using material remains as its cue (2011: 416). The lack of visible trademarks that Kerchouche encounters lead her to speak of the camps as "lieux du vide" which draw a "géographie du néant" (2003a: 91). Professor Susan Ireland has noted, in reference to *Mon père, ce harki,* that the "repetition of terms connoting absence" which traverse Kerchouche's text "points insistently to France's 'policy of forgetting'" (2009: 306) – epitomised, as discussed earlier, by the refusal to properly name the Franco-Algerian war until 2004.

Ireland interprets Kerchouche's multiple references to the lack of traces of the past, both physical and archival, as a strategy to highlight the "erasure and [...] reluctance to put the harkis on the national map" (2009: 305). Because of this, Ireland reads Dalila's "reference to the star shape that the camps form on the map of France" as a personal cartography that offers "an alternative mapping of the events of the war that reflects the harkis' experiences" (*Ibid.*), as indicated by the titles of the work's sections, which fuse geographical references with individual memories belonging to the author's family narrative. Howell also notes that the harkis planted trees in the camps where they were housed so that their families "prennent racine dans leur pays d'accueil" (2011: 418); this is read by Howell as a gesture of transformation by the harkis, a reappropriation of the spaces they were given by the French state.

The camps are portrayed as sites that exercise great power over the shaping of harki identity. Kerchouche describes herself as "une fille du camp" (2003a: 128), and writes of her parents' departure from the camps as a "nouveau déracinement" (2003a: 180). Another important moment is when Dalila learns that most of the camps were managed by *pieds-noirs*. The logics of French Algeria, whereby harkis were categorised as inferior to the *pied-noir* population, were reproduced in the microcosm of the camp, which Dalila refers to as prisons, micro-dictatorships, or "ghettos coupés du monde" (2003a: 139). In her account, Kerchouche never names any of the *chefs des camps*, a strategy that I read, not only as a form of data protection, but as a deliberate decision to render them nameless, the same way that the French administration silenced the harkis.

In her round of visits to the camps, she meets with a former *chef de camp*, who, in Kerchouche's words, "voulait contraindre les harkis à se franciser, de gré ou de force" (2003a: 105). The *chef*, like the social workers, wanted the harkis to give their babies French names and encouraged the women to unveil. They wanted to remodel the harkis, to render them less "primitifs", to civilise them, "les couper de leurs traditions, après les avoir coupés de leur pays" (2003a: 106). Kerchouche speaks of "assimilation forcée" and of a prolongation of the colonial experience. Delving into the history and stories of the camps, she feels she has finally understood why one of her brothers, Moha, committed suicide after a long depression[22].

Kerchouche blames French society for the dissolution of her brother's subjectivity, a reproach that echoes what her brother said to his sister before killing himself: "Regarde ce qu'ils nous ont fait". Moha would always use "ce *ils* mystérieux" (2003a: 32)[23]. This pushes her to set herself a goal: "je regarde, Moha, et je vais même le dire, l'écrire, le graver, le crier. Hurler ce qu'ils m'ont fait" (*Ibid.*). The final sentence of this extract is the culmination of a sequence of verbs that lends the oath a transformative power. She understands how the undefined *they* also affects her own sense of self, a reminder that her brother's fate could easily have been hers. By the end of her physical journey – which coincides with the end of her text – Kerchouche has unravelled what lies behind

---

22 A thorough reading of works that collect testimonies of harki families shows that suicides were a common occurrence within many families following their arrival in France. The starting point of Zahia Rahmani's *Moze* is the suicide of the author's father.

23 A particularly poignant example of the way the *ils* were used within the Kerchouche family occurs when Dalila's mother loses her unborn baby. The family was living at the Bias camp at the time. When the baby is stillborn, linguistic barriers mean that no one at the hospital can explain to Dalila's mother what happened. This will lead the Kerchouche matriarch to state: "ils ont tué mon bébé" (2003a: 155).

this plural pronoun. As Moha's words imply, amongst the harki community France, or rather the French people, are usually constructed homogeneously, as a collective.

Through her journey to the camps, Kerchouche learns that harki children were often treated as outcasts within the schooling system; that they were taught to perceive themselves as different from the French students; that because of their background they would not be given the chance to advance to university and would be directed towards vocational training. She is shocked to learn of the existence of what the harkis referred to as "the centre". The centre was a space where those harki children that the camp administration deemed to be misbehaving would be sent to spend time with ex-convicts, as if they themselves were criminals. Kerchouche begins to associate treason, not with the harkis, but with France: "la France a trahi les harkis, la France a trahi mes parents, la France t'a trahi [her brother Moha], la France m'a trahie. La France s'est trahie elle-même" (2003a: 180).

Kerchouche starts to view the Republican values that she learnt at school, and which she had hitherto held dear, as a lie, exposed by the treatment that her family and others like them had received over the years. She feels disgust towards Charles de Gaulle and the cynicism he demonstrated in his visit to Algeria in 1960; she learns "la honte d'être française", and that is why she changes her spelling of 'harki', writing it with a "petit 'h' comme haine" (2003a: 180). As early as her second camp visit, she writes: "Moi qui ai aimé passionnément la France, cette culture, cette langue, je me sens trahie. Je ne peux plus être française, pas après ce que j'ai appris. La colère m'a envahie" (2003a: 72). After she has visited all the camps that sheltered her family, the question that prompted her quest (i.e. why her father fought for France) has metastasised into an all-caps "POURQUOI?" (2003a: 182). Just as with the "petit 'h'" of harki, Kerchouche deploys orthography as a strategy to reinforce the content of what she writes.

5.2. Literature of the homecoming

Comparing herself to her siblings, Kerchouche feels privileged not to have known the harsh reality of the camps. It is an experience that draws a boundary between her and other family members. With her book, she aims to shatter it, "toucher du doigt ce passé qu['elle n'a] pas vécu" in order to feel "membre de [s]a famille à part entière" (2003a: 25). Writing acquires an almost physical dimension as hinted by the phrasing "toucher du doigt". It becomes a tool to retrieve the past and fill its silences, a strategy that facilitates a sense of belonging and nurtures an identity. Kerchouche's will ties in with Rebecca Raitses's reading of *Mon père, ce harki* as a "filiation narrative". Raitses highlights that the goal of filiation narratives is to construct "a past made palpable, the opposite of a dissipated past", which is linked to the "collapsing of temporalities" that we find in Kerchouche's text (2022: 14).

In a volume dedicated to texts produced from experiences of exile and migration, Alexandre Garner and Keller Privat write, "[t]he roads [...] of exile are often inscribed in loss and impossible mourning, turning imagination, language and memory into the ultimate dwelling space, turning literature into the last remaining space in which to anchor oneself, to write oneself in ink" (2012: 5). Reading *Mon père, ce harki* through this lens, we can see the extent to which Dalila's life is also enmeshed in exile. Exile is presented, in *Mon père, ce harki*, as an inherited experience that has shaped Dalila's existence. Her writing can be interpreted as a site that allows her to reconcile her complex subjectivity.

Having navigated her shame over her connection with the harki universe and addressed her (now fractured) relationship with Frenchness, Kerchouche decides to travel to Algeria, the end point of her quest and the beginning of her family's exile. It is in Algeria where she finds the piece that finally completes the patchwork of her harki identity. Her trip to Algeria – an Algeria that is starting to leave the *décennie noire* behind – is a symbolic performance that enacts the return of the Kerchouche family to their roots. She meets with her uncle, who informs her that her family's roots are in fact Berber (here I follow Kerchouche's choice of terminology), a discovery that triggers a reconciliation with her own sense of identity: "Cette révélation m'a bouleversée, parce qu'elle désensablait tout un pan de mon histoire. Je suis donc berbère...". The discovery of her Berber roots is reassuring to her because she realises that cultural changes are not new in her family: "De Berbères, nous sommes devenus Arabes. Et d'Arabes, aujourd'hui, nous devenons Français.

Comme moi, mes ancêtres ont changé de langue, de coutumes, d'identité". When she learns this, Kerchouche is able to "dédramatiser" her story (2003a: 214).

Throughout her Algerian sojourn, the author continually references the superimposition of her story over that of her parents: "j'ai le sentiment de revivre l'histoire de mes parents, [...] passé et présent se confondent" (2003a: 217), she writes. Her physical presence in Algeria allows her parents to return from their French exile. Upon observing some children running barefoot, not only does she imagine her mother, but she *sees* her: "en elles, je vois ma mère, fillette brune avec un fichu sur la tête" (2003a: 216). Immediately following this observation, the author juxtaposes a comment that brings us to the present moment: "Je remonte mon chèche qui ne cesse de glisser sur mes épaules" (*Ibid.*). Dalila *becomes* her mother.

Despite the central role played by the father figure in *Mon père, ce harki*, Dalila's mother also occupies a significant space in the text. Contrary to the role played by Dalila's father, whose relationship to Algeria is articulated through the formula "*li fat met*", her mother is presented as the guardian of memories. Unlike the father, her mother communicates with her children, sharing the memories she has of her country of birth. In Kerchouche's book, the retrieval of the harki universe through literature is facilitated and enacted by women, who not only act as memory gatekeepers (as epitomised by Kerchouche's mother) but who also become interpreters and propagators of those memories (as is the case of Dalila Kerchouche). In his analysis of so-called "harki literature", Moumen notes that before the new millennia, "an 'enfant de harki' was synonymous with a 'fils de harkis'" (2014: 8). The emergence of the aforementioned works by *filles de harkis* is, thus, significant: the new focus on the wives and daughters of the harkis introduced a new, gendered, perspective.

In 2003, Dalila Kerchouche collaborated with photographer Stéphan Gladieu in *Destins de harkis: Aux racines d'un exil*, a photographic account of the everyday life of harkis accompanied by Kerchouche's texts recounting the stories and memories of women harkis, the wives or daughters of former combatants. Absent from journalistic or scholarly texts, these women had to face the historiographic silences of both France and Algeria, in addition to the patriarchal oppressions that structured the harki life, and whose effects were felt most acutely by the women, particularly the youngest: "les harkis [...] oppriment les femmes, qui de leur côté emprisonnent les jeunes filles", writes Kerchouche (2003b: 89).

In the work's introduction, Jean-Jacques Jordi explains why Kerchouche's particular subject position helps her unearth the testimonies of these women: she is also a woman who shares their language, and, more importantly, she is at once "du dedans et du dehors" (2003: 12). Because of her mother's memories, the stories of these women are not new to Kerchouche, although her relative youth has meant she never experienced the "confinement" they describe. Together with her journalistic training, this gave Kerchouche a valuable critical distance (*Ibid.*). In 2006, Kerchouche published *Leïla: Avoir dix-sept ans dans un camp de harkis*, a novel based on the life of one of her older sisters, in which she actively embraces this distance and decides to explore the topics that inform her previous works from another angle of enquiry. She places particular emphasis on the harsh conditions faced by women and girls in the camps.

All the accounts that Kerchouche manages to bring to light become a sort of archive on which her exercise of memory retrieval rests. Her memory work is thus tied to women's voices and, in *Mon père, ce harki*, to that of her mother. Indeed, it is only because she has listened to her mother talking in Arabic of her life in Algeria that Dalila Kerchouche is able to enact the family's homecoming and render it as the conclusion to her book. Through her "harkeological quest", and then the process of committing it to paper, she has created her family's epilogue and, at the same time, written the harkis' stories into history.

An episode of central significance in her account comes when Kerchouche learns about the role her father played during the Franco-Algerian war. She is told that her father also collaborated with the FLN. She brings the subject into focus as she writes about the lessons she has drawn from her investigation into the role of the harkis in the war: "Il n'y a ni traîtres ni héros dans cette histoire, comme on a voulu me le faire croire... Mais des hommes, des *frères*, pris entre deux feux" (2003a: 275; emphasis in the original). Here, Kerchouche is dissolving the Manichean worldview that has consigned harkis to being an 'other' in both France and Algeria. Significantly, at the end of her quest the spelling of harki shifts once more. This time, she writes it "avec un

grand H. Comme Honneur" (2003a: 277). Not only has she changed her mind about what harki means (its meaning no longer stems from shame), but now she is asking that history be spelt differently, too.

6. The map for a new remembering

Kerchouche's exploration of her family's past and the histories of the countries in which her family has lived presents itself as a restorative gesture. She is redrawing the map of her family's exile by recording the stories that have hitherto remained untold and unwritten, facilitating a form of remembrance that is meant to impact the present from which she writes. In 2021, historian Benjamin Stora presented President Emmanuel Macron with the report he had been commissioned to produce. Entitled "Les questions mémorielles portant sur la colonisation et la guerre d'Algérie"[24] the text was conceived as a tool for reconciliation, a space for dialogue over the history of French colonisation in Algeria and the Algerian war.

Stora stressed the need to do away with the compartmentalised way in which the different memories of the war and the colonial period were stored and circulated. He coined the concept "cloistered remembering" (2004: 190) to refer to the fact that the different parties to the war bore partial memories of their experiences, memories that "tended to seek out cultural representations and social interactions that affirmed their own experiences and perspectives" (in Eldridge, 2016: 8). In this paper, I view the texts by the harki daughters – exemplified by *Mon père, ce harki* – as palimpsests that seek to open up and multiply remembrances of the Franco-Algerian war and, more specifically, the consequences of the war for those harkis who settled in France; to incorporate voices that had had no echo until the new millennium.

As we have seen, Dalila Kerchouche continued to engage in writing about the harkis following the publication of *Mon père, ce harki*. After *Destins de harkis* and the novel *Leïla*, Kerchouche co-wrote, together with Arnaud Malherbe, the script of the film *Harkis* (2006), based on her own novel and which was described by Géraldine Enjelvin and Nada Korac-Kakabadse as "the most visible representation of the Harkis' collective memory in French society" (2012: 157). She began to publicly voice her support of harki associations, and continues to do so today. Like Kerchouche, Zahia Rahmani addressed the harki universe in her 2005 novel, *"Musulman" roman* and Fatima Besnaci-Lancou has also published several books about the harkis.

Notably, Besnaci-Lancou became president of the association Harkis et droits de l'Homme, which was involved in the production of "Le manifeste pour la réappropriation des mémoires confisquées", a manifesto presented to the French Parliament in September 2004 that incorporated the voices of harkis and the children of other Algerian immigrants in France, advocating for a reframing of narratives of colonial history both in France and in Algeria.

In *From Empire to Exile,* Claire Eldridge highlights the role and the importance of these community associations in their ability "to tell us a different story" (2016: 14). The work of harki associations has been crucial in extracting what gestures of recognition the French administration has made towards the harkis over the last two decades[25]. In 2001, Jacques Chirac presided over the first *Journée nationale d'hommage aux Harkis*, to be celebrated annually each 25th of September with the goal of promoting recognition of the former *supplétifs.* However, as noted by Jeanette E. Miller, Chirac's discourse was followed by complaints: "some protested it was a rewriting, not a recognition, of history since he did not admit any responsibility of the French government for the [harkis'] fate" (2012: 388).

Since then, several laws have been passed acknowledging France's wrongdoing in its colonial projects, including their mistreatment of the harkis – even legislation that allowed harkis or their widows to receive indemnity payments, retroactive compensation for the difficulties the harkis had encountered in accessing state benefits under the 1961 and 1970 laws governing repatriates

24 The report was later published as a book, entitled *France-Algérie: les passions douloureuses.*

25 Likewise, different waves of protests in the seventies and nineties, and mainly led by harki children, helped bring the circumstances of the French harkis to public attention. See Moumen (n.d.)

(see Miller, 2012: 395)[26]. However, these measures felt inadequate to a large part of the harki community, who continued to read them as electoral gestures. Economic compensations were not enough for grieving memories.

The Stora report was poorly received by some members of the heterogeneous harki community. Two of the authors mentioned in this article, Dalila Kerchouche and Fatima Besnaci-Lancou, were amongst the signatories of an opinion column that described the report as a political artefact rather than a historically significant document[27]. Amongst other things, they complained about the inaccurate portrayal of the camps, which, as we have noted, are a symbol of central importance to the French harkis, and demanded a full acknowledgement of what Marco Ferro recalls, "les silences de l'histoire sont tout aussi importants que l'histoire" (in Hamoumou, 2003: 39).

In his report, Benjamin Stora notes that Algeria remains a wound for France, and insists that revisiting the past can become a healing gesture. Texts like *Mon père, ce harki* map out the wound inflicted on the heterogeneous harki community by the camps, the treatment they received in France, and the silences that for decades have pervaded the official narratives of both France and Algeria. Stora calls for the archives to be opened and for history to be investigated. But the daughters and grandchildren of the *supplétifs* have already begun the process of revisiting history, retrieving it in multiplicity of memories and perspectives, non-linear and unofficial retellings that leave space for a better reading of our present.

In his exploration of the exilic condition, Edward Said wrote: "Through the writing of exile [it is possible] to apprehend the world differently" (2001: n.d.). This idea finds an echo in *Mon père, ce harki*. In choosing to explore and contextualise her family's exile into France, Kerchouche not only revisits her own subjective understanding, but also encourages French society to rethink its own societal and cultural framings. If we bear in mind that the texts published by harki daughters were published by French publishing houses for primarily French audiences, we begin to see the extent to which French society remains unacquainted with the reality of the harkis. As previously explained, the preface of Kerchouche's book includes the twofold definition of the term 'harki'; the first time we read 'harki' in Fatima Besnaci-Lancou's *Fille de harki*, we find a footnote that contextualises it historically. These books are inviting France to remember its history differently.

This invitation continues to echo out, many years after the publication of the texts by the harki daughters, thanks to women writers whose work tackles the circulation of the label 'harki' a generation further. In 2017, Alice Zeniter, the granddaughter of a harki, published the novel *L'Art de perdre*, which recounts the story of a harki family through three generations. The novel garnered several prizes, including the Prix Goncourt des Lycéens. In 2024, Maryline Desbiolles won the Prix littéraire Le Monde for her novel *L'Agrafe*. The novel pivots around the idea of the wound, both physical and symbolical. Its main character Emma, the granddaughter of a harki, is mauled by a dog; her injury literally halts her life, and she turns to her uncle to learn about the story of her family, and the many silences, the many wounds, that criss-cross it[28].

The camps play a very significant role in both novels, in sharp contrast with the empty spaces they are today. By continuing to feature the harki camps in their works, these writers are also calling for a better memorialistic treatment of the harkis in France. The Rivesaltes Camp Memorial is a notable exception. Susan Ireland has written about the Rivesaltes camp and its memorial museum, opened in 2015, which she reads as a postcolonial site of memory for the harkis. Ireland highlights the importance of *Mon père, ce harki* in the construction of Rivesaltes as a memorial; she claims that its "recounting of life in the camp puts it back on the map" (2020: 230). *Mon père, ce harki* and the other works of the harki daughters were a call for the inclusion of the roads, maps and spaces of those harkis that made France a home. But today, with a third generation still writing, much remains to be done before the work of Kerchouche and her peers is completed.

---

26 On the 23rd of February 2022 the following law was passed: "LOI n° 2022-229 du 23 février 2022 portant reconnaissance de la Nation envers les harkis et les autres personnes rapatriées d'Algérie anciennement de statut civil de droit local et réparation des préjudices subis par ceux-ci et leurs familles du fait de l'indignité de leurs conditions d'accueil et de vie dans certaines structures sur le territoire français".

27 "Nous, filles et femmes de harkis, récusons le rapport Stora sur la guerre d'Algérie" (2021).

28 I explore the idea of the wound and the harki universe elsewhere, tackling it through the lens of what Marianne Hirsch terms "postmemory". See /anonimizado/

7. Bibliographical references

Aa.Vv. (2021): "Nous, filles et femmes de harkis, récusons le rapport Stora sur la guerre d'Algérie", *Le Figaro*, 3 March 2021. Available at: https://www.lefigaro.fr/vox/societe/nous-filles-et-femmes-de-harkis-recusons-le-rapport-stora-sur-la-guerre-d-algerie-20210127 [Last accessed: 14 August 2024]

Ageron, Charles-Robert (1994): "Le drame des harkis en 1962", *Vingtième siècle. Revue d'histoire*, 42, pp. 3-6. doi: 10.2307/3771208.

Amira, Linda and Benjamin Stora (n.d.): "Vies d'exil - 1954-1962. Des Algériens en France pendant la guerre d'Algérie". Available at: https://www.histoire-immigration.fr/vies-d-exil-1954-1962-des-algeriens-en-france-pendant-la-guerre-d-algerie/le-mot-des-commissaires [Last accessed: 28 June 2024]

Besnaci-Lancou, Fatima (2003): *Fille de harki: "Le bouleversant témoignage d'une enfant de la guerre d'Algérie"*, Paris, Les Éditions de l'atelier.

Besnaci-Lancou, Fatima *et al.* (2004): "Manifeste pour la réappropriation des mémoires confisquées". Available at: https://associationahdh.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/529c1-le-manifeste-pour-la-rc3a9appropriation-des-mc3a9moires-confisquc3a9es.pdf [Last accessed: 2 August 2024]

Besnaci-Lancou, Fatima (2006): *Nos mères, paroles blessées: Une autre histoire de harkis*, Léchelle, Zellige.

Bhabha, Homi K. (2004): "Of Mimicry and Man: The ambivalence of Colonial Discourse", in Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, London and New York, Routledge Classics, pp. 121-131. [First edition: 1994].

Ceaux, Dominique (2018): *Rapport: Aux harkis, la France reconnaissante*. Available at: https://www.vie-publique.fr/files/rapport/pdf/184000475.pdf [Last accessed: 6 August 2024]

Charbit, Tom (2006): *Les Harkis*, Paris, La Découverte.

Crapanzano, Vincent (2011): *The Harkis: The Wound that Never Heals*, Chicago, IL, The University of Chicago Press.

Daum, Pierre (2015): *Le Dernier tabou: Les "harkis" restés en Algérie après l'indépendance*, Paris, Actes Sud.

Débarre, Ségolène *et al.* (2022): "Documenting, Representing and Thinking about Exiles", *Revue #1257*, 4, pp. 8-9. Available at: https://1257.pantheonsorbonne.fr/1257-en-anglais/documenting-representing-and-thinking-about-exile [Last accessed: 6 August 2024].

Derder, Peggy (n.d.): "Algerian immigration into France: From the late 19th century to 1962". Available at: https://www.histoire-immigration.fr/en/migration-characteristics-by-country-of-origin/algerian-immigration-into-france [Last accessed: 26 June 2024].

Desbiolles, Maryline (2024): *L'Agrafe*, Paris, Sabine Wespieser.

Duquesne, Jacques (2003): "Préface", in Dalila Kerchouche, *Mon père, ce harki*, Paris, Seuil, pp. 9-12.

Eldridge, Claire (2016): *From empire to exile: History and memory within the pied-noir and harki communities, 1962-2012*, Manchester, Manchester University Press.

Enjelvin, Géraldine (2006): "The Harki Identity: A Product of Marginalisation and Resistance to Symbolic Violence?", *National Identities*, 8, 2, pp. 113-127. doi:10.1080/14608940600703700.

Enjelvin, Géraldine and Nada Korac-Kakabadse (2012): "France and the Memories of 'Others': The Case of the Harkis", *History & Memory*, 24, 1, pp. 152-178. doi: 10.2979/histmemo.24.1.152.

Garner, Alexandre and Keller Privat (2012): *Migrations, exils, errances et écritures*, Paris, Presses universitaires de Paris-Ouest.

Gladieu, Stéphan *et al.* (2003): *Destins de harkis: Aux racines d'un exil*, Paris, Autrement.

Hamoumou, Mohand (1993): *Et ils sont devenus harkis*, Paris, Fayard.

Hautreux, François-Xavier (2013): *La Guerre d'Algérie des harkis: 1954-1962*, Paris, Perrin.

Howell, Jennifer (2011): "Sur les traces d'un père: 'La quête harkéologique' de Dalila Kerchouche", *Contemporary French and Francophone Studies*. 15, 4, pp. 415-422. doi: 10.1080/17409292.2011.594274.

Ireland, Susan (2009): "Facing the Ghosts of the Past in Dalila Kerchouche's *Mon père, ce Harki* and Zahia Rahmani's *Moze*", *Contemporary French and Francophone Studies*, 13 3, pp. 303-310. doi: 10.1080/17409290902938693..

Ireland, Susan (2020): "Rivesaltes", in Étienne Achille *et al*., eds., *Postcolonial Realms of Memory Sites and Symbols in Modern France*, Liverpool, Liverpool University Press, pp. 227-235. doi: 10.2307/j.ctvwvr2vr.24.

Joan-Rodríguez, Meritxell (2019): "Contesting the *Harki* Legacy: Historical Rewritings and Memory Retrievals in Dalila Kerchouche's *Mon père, ce harki*", *Expressions maghrébines*, 18, 1, pp. 157-173. doi: 10.1353/exp.2019.0009..

Jordi, Jean-Jacques (2003): "Préface", in Stéphan Gladieu *et al*., *Destins de harkis: Aux racines d'un exil*, Paris, Autrement, pp. 5-17.

Jordi, Jean-Jacques (n.d.): "1962: the French exodus from Algeria". Available at: https://www.cheminsdememoire.gouv.fr/en/1962-french-exodus-algeria [Last accessed: 9 July 2024].

Kerchouche, Dalila (2003a): *Mon père, ce harki*, Paris, Seuil.

Kerchouche, Dalila (2003b): "Femmes de harkis", in Stéphan Gladieu *et al*., *Destins de harkis: Aux racines d'un exil*, Paris, Autrement, pp. 85-91.

Kerchouche, Dalila (2006): *Leïla: Avoir dix-sept ans dans un camp de harkis*, Paris, Seuil.

Kerchouche, Dalila (2016): *Espionnes*, Paris, Flammarion.

Khemache, Katia (2018): *Harkis, un passé qui ne passe pas*, Morlaàs, Cairn éditions.

Miller, Jeanette E. (2012): *Algerian, French, Refugees, Repatriates, Immigrants? Harki Citizens in Post-imperial France (1962-2005)*, PhD dissertation, Pennsylvania State University, Pennsylvania. Available at: https://etda.libraries.psu.edu/catalog/14050 [Last accessed: 8 July 2024].

Keith Moser, ed., (2014): *A Practical Guide to French Harki Literature*, Lanham, Lexington Books.

Moumen, Abderahmen (2003): *Entre histoire et mémoire: Les rapatriés d'Algérie; dictionnaire bibliographique*, Nice, Gandini.

Moumen, Abderahmen (2014): "1962-2014: The Historical Construction of Harki Literature", in Keith Moser, ed., *A Practical Guide to French Harki Literature*, Lanham, Lexington Books, pp. 1-16.

Moumen, Abderahmen (n.d.): "The harkis, from Algeria to France". Available at: https://www.cheminsdememoire.gouv.fr/en/harkis-algeria-france [Last accessed: 28 June 2024].

Nora, Pierre (1984): *Les Lieux de mémoire*, Paris, Gallimard.

Rahmani, Zahia (2003): *Moze*, Paris, Sabine Wespieser.

Rahmani, Zahia (2005): *'Musulman' roman*, Paris, Sabine Wespieser.

Raitses, Rebecca (2022): "A Harki History Lesson: Dalila Kerchouche's Filiation Narrative *Mon père, ce harki*", *The European Journal of Life Writing*, 11, pp. 12-27. doi: 10.21827/ejlw.11.38656

Said, Edward W. (2001): "Reflections on Exile", *Granta*, 13. Available at: https://granta.com/reflections-on-exile/ [Last accessed: 4 August 2024].

Stora, Benjamin (2004): *Imaginaires de guerre: les images dans les guerres d'Algérie et du Viêtnam*, Paris, Marval.

Stora, Benjamin (2021): *France-Algérie: Les passions douloureuses*, Paris, Albin Michel.

Zeniter, Alice (2017): *L'Art de perdre*, Paris, Flammarion.