



A Harki History Lesson: Dalila Kerchouche's Filiation Narrative *Mon père, ce harki*

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Abstract

This article reads Dalila Kerchouche's *Mon père, ce harki* (My Father, this Harki) as a postcolonial filiation narrative, which blends memoir and biography, the personal and collective, the past and present. Lack of knowledge and a desire to see for herself the camps her parents and older siblings experienced prompts Kerchouche to adopt an investigative posture characterized by *in situ* exploration in conjunction with interviews and the consultation of archives. This allows the author to achieve a polyphonic account of the past. At the same time, her family serves as the prism through which she confronts the stigma attached to Harkis (Algerian soldiers hired by the French Army) and examines their unjust treatment in France.

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With *Mon père, ce harki* (2003), Dalila Kerchouche undertakes the writing of a filiation narrative in which details of her life are folded into an account of her family's history. Although taking place many years before she was born, the fact that her parents fled Algeria on 1 July 1962, after having fought on the side of the French, has completely informed the course of her life. As the book title suggests, her father was a Harki, an Algerian soldier hired by the French Army. Harkis are often viewed as traitors to their country, a stigma which the author fights against. In writing about her parents and her brothers' and sisters' childhood experiences, Kerchouche confronts the years of trauma her family experienced upon their arrival in France, where they were placed in a series of camps for twelve years, as well as legacies of colonialism and decolonisation. What Michael Rothberg writes of Leïla Sebbar's novel, *La Seine était rouge* [The Seine was red] perfectly describes Kerchouche's oeuvre as well, which 'interweaves the problematic of national and cultural memory with an intimate, familial narrative' (Rothberg 304). It is this unique blend of human interest and historical intrigue that makes the filiation narrative a compelling avenue for rethinking the past.

As the youngest of eleven children, Kerchouche was born in one of the camps but it was not long after her birth that her family was finally able to move into a house in a village. Because of this, her siblings incessantly remind her that she never suffered the way they did, that she doesn't know what it was like. She wishes to make the story her own, however, to give it context and to inscribe herself within the narrative. 'J'aimerais pourtant, à travers ce livre, abolir cette frontière avec les miens, toucher du doigt ce passé que je n'ai pas vécu. Pour me sentir, enfin, membre de ma famille à part entière' [I'd like, through this book, however, to abolish the boundary between my family and I, draw nearer to this past that I didn't experience] (26).¹ Kerchouche embarks on a quest to both connect deeper with her family and to better understand the reasons why things were incredibly difficult for them once in France.

In order to do so, Kerchouche assumes an investigative posture essential to the archaeological novel, of which the filiation narrative is a variant. Contrary to memoir, the emphasis is on what is not known and the effort to uncover traces of the past. In addition, the investigation and the conquest of knowledge are incorporated into the narrative. In his article which lays out the traits inherent to the genre, Dominique Viart writes, 'Le savoir historique n'est plus reçu: il se conquiert. Bien sûr, cela manifeste le changement de notre relation à l'Histoire, qui n'est plus désormais une donnée positive sur laquelle il est possible de se fonder, mais un ensemble obscur d'événements toujours à ré-interroger' [Historical knowledge is no longer received: it is conquered. Of course, that manifests the change in our relationship to History,

which is no longer a given on which it is possible to base oneself, but an obscure ensemble of events always waiting to be reinterrogated] (Viart, 2009, 24). The filiation narrative represents an epistemological shift regarding the experience of history and the transmission of historical understanding. At the same time, the majority of filiation narratives are not as politically charged as Kerchouche's. In order to acknowledge the distinctiveness of narratives such as *Mon père, ce harki*, which concern the legacy of the French empire and question hegemonic historiography, I will refer to this type of filiation narrative as postcolonial.

Kerchouche's investigation takes her to each of the six camps in which her family lived: Bourg-Lastic, near Clermont-Ferrand; Rivesaltes, in the Pyrénées-Orientales; Bagnols-les-Bains, in Lozère; Roussillon-en-Morvan, in Saône-et-Loire; Mouans-Sartoux, near Cannes; and Bias, in Lot-et-Garonne. She chooses to reproduce her family's route and so visits these in the order in which her family occupied them, meaning that the order of events is synchronized with the chronology of the quest. Then, in a reversal of order, she travels to Algeria. 'Je calquerais mes pas sur les siens et sillonnerai les camps, du moins ce qu'il en reste, de l'Auvergne au Lot-et-Garonne, en passant par la Lozère et le Morvan. Comme elle (sa mère R.R.), je vais franchir la Méditerranée [...] Pour découvrir l'Algérie, ce pays haï et adoré que je ne connais pas' [I'll trace my family's steps and roam the camps, at least what's left of them, from Auvergne to Lot-et-Garonne, hitting Lozère and Morvan on the way. Like my mother, I will cross the Mediterranean [...] To discover Algeria, this country, both hated and adored, unknown by me] (32). The reader discovers these places alongside Kerchouche and each revelation is experienced first by the author, then by the reader.

In situating the start of the narrative in the present day and then revisiting people and places of the past, *Mon père, ce harki* manifests the retrospective narrative orientation characteristic of the filiation narrative, which often operates in multiple temporalities concurrently. This is necessarily the case when the past is being told along with its discovery or echo in the present. These different temporalities are not always kept separate but may in fact be collapsed into one, as is the case when Kerchouche likens her trip to going back in time:

Demain, le 1er juillet 2002, je me rends à Marseille, première étape de mon périple. Demain, le 1er juillet 1962, ma famille est arrivée en France et j'ai rendez-vous avec elle. Demain, je me dissous dans le temps, demain, je ne suis plus née. Bondissant quarante ans en arrière, mon âme va errer autour des miens, invisible, omnisciente, cheminer auprès d'eux comme un fantôme du futur. [Tomorrow, July 1st, 2002, I'll go to Marseille, the first stop on my itinerary. Tomorrow, July 1st, 1962, my family

arrived in France and I have a date with them. Tomorrow, I'll dissolve myself in time, tomorrow, I was no longer born. Jumping forty years backwards, my soul will wander around my family, invisible, omniscient, stroll near them like a ghost of the future]. (32)

This collapsing of temporalities points to the filiation narrative's goal of a past made palpable, the opposite of a dissipated past.

Kerchouche seeks to consult with as many people as possible in order to obtain a polyphonic account of the past. She had planned on speaking with her grandfather but is unable to join him before his death, shortly after she began her research. She regrets all the knowledge that has disappeared along with him. 'Avec lui, tout un pan de la mémoire familiale disparaît. Sans lui, tout un chapitre de mon livre ne sera pas écrit' [An entire section of family memory disappears along with him. Without him, an entire chapter of my book won't be written] (53). This passage is reminiscent of Amadou Hampâté Bâ's famous remarks that 'En Afrique, un vieillard qui meurt est une bibliothèque qui brûle' [In Africa, the death of an elder is a library on fire.] His death is also a reminder of descendants' responsibility to listen to elders' stories and to pass them on before it's too late. 'Voilà ce qui attend les harkis: la mort et l'oubli, si nous, les enfants, ne témoignons pas, si nous les laissons partir sans les écouter, sans leur parler, sans essayer de les comprendre' [That's what's waiting for Harkis: death and being forgotten, if we, their children, don't testify, if we let them pass without listening to them, without speaking to them, without trying to understand them] (53). This race-against-the-clock is a common feature of the filiation narrative which attempts to preserve what once was in the face of a disappearing past and experiences the past as mutable and fugacious. Ivan Jablonka has expressed as much in the incipit of this filiation narrative, *Les grands-parents que je n'ai pas eus* [The grandparents that I never had]: 'Il est donc urgent, avant l'effacement définitif, de retrouver les traces, les empreintes de vie qu'ils ont laissés, preuves involontaires de leur passage en ce monde' [It's, therefore, urgent, before definitive erasure, to find the traces, the imprints of life that they left, involuntary proof of their passage in this world] (10).

When the child of immigrants writes about their parents' or grandparents' lives in their new homeland, they are also, in a sense, legitimizing their presence there, anchoring them in a way that they may not have managed to be anchored before. They are inscribing them within the history of the place. Nacira Guénif-Souilamas explores this idea in her book *Des Beurettes*: 'Un renversement générationnel inédit s'opère ici: c'est aux descendants de 'faire exister les parents; de les faire naître' au pays d'accueil' [An unprecedented generational reversal is at work here: it's the descendants' turn to

'bring the parents into existence; to have them born in the country of origin] (Guénif-Souilamas, *Des Beurettes*, 114, quoted in *Endofiction*, 84). Second-generation authors make use of their position as French citizens to revendicate their immigrant heritage while they grapple with the complicated realities they are faced with. They have amassed a certain amount of cultural capital and assumed the right to speak up about injustice that their parents didn't have, didn't know they had, or didn't use. As Enzo Traverso puts it, 'Traditionnellement, l'historiographie ne se présentait pas sous la forme d'un récit polyphonique pour la simple raison que les classes subalternes en étaient exclues, avec le résultat de réduire la narration du passé au récit des vainqueurs' [Traditionally, historiography didn't present itself in the form of a polyphonic narrative for the simple reason that the subaltern classes were excluded, reducing the narration of the past to a victor's narrative, as a result] (34). This no longer needs to be the case. Their children now speak on their behalf and on behalf of the voiceless in general.

Personal testimony is essential to Kerchouche's project, as Harkis' actual experiences, both those that led to their fighting with France during the Algerian War and those endured once arriving in France, remain known to few as they are marginal to institutional memory. Their voices have not been sufficiently heard and the traitor narrative insufficiently challenged. As Jacques Duquesne writes in the preface to *Mon père, ce harki*, 'La guerre d'Algérie a souffert de mille silences [...] Les principales victimes de ces silences sont sans doute, aujourd'hui encore, les harkis' [The Algerian war has suffered a thousand silences [...] The main victims of these silences are still, without a doubt, Harkis] (9). In the context of such silencing, the filiation narrative offers a platform for voices to be shared.

Mon père, ce harki, is the first of multiple works in which Kerchouche seeks to impart the voices of Harkis and thus reveal the injustice France had inflicted on them. In *Leïla, avoir dix-sept ans dans un camp de Harkis* [Leïla, being 17 in a Harki camp], a novel in which many of the characters and events are recognizable from her earlier work, Kerchouche assumes the perspective of her older sister in order to tell the story from the point of view of a young woman living in the various Harki camps in which her family lived. Additionally, in her collaboration with photographer Stéphane Gladieu, *Destins de harkis* [Harkis' fates], Kerchouche turns her attention to the most silenced of this already voiceless group : Harki women. 'Si l'on a peu entendu parler du drame des harkis, que dire de celui de leurs femmes? Aucun ouvrage ne les mentionne, aucun article ne les évoque, aucun journaliste ne leur a tendu le micro [...] Personne n'a pris la peine d'entendre leur souffrance [...] [If little has been heard about the Harki's tragedy, what can be said of that of the women? No book mentions them, no article

evokes them, no journalist held a mic to them [...] No one bothered to hear their suffering [...] (85). The reactions she receives are of gratitude that someone is at last interested in hearing their story. 'J'ai attendu ce moment toute ma vie, nous a dit Mme Séby [...] J'attendais que quelqu'un m'écoute. Merci du fond du coeur d'être venus me voir' [I waited for this moment all my life, Mrs. Séby told us [...] I waited for someone to listen to me. Thank you from the bottom of my heart for coming to see me] (85).

Kerchouche had herself long internalized the prevailing narrative that Harkis, and thus her father, were traitors. This was the version accepted by most French and because France is where she was born and educated, this is the version she heard and accepted.

Depuis mon adolescence, j'occulte cette histoire, gênée par le passé trouble de mes parents. "Fille de harkis [...]" Le dire, le taire, je ne sais plus quelle attitude adopter. Honte, révolte, injustice, colère, larmes, désir de crier, de cogner [...] Je suis une fille de harkis, j'en pleure et j'enrage parce que je n'ai pas choisi de l'être. Je traîne une rancœur contre mon père, contre mon pays d'origine, contre celui dans lequel je vis [...] [Since my adolescence, I've hidden the story, embarrassed by my parents' troubled past. "Daughter of Harkis [...]" Say it, not say it, I know longer which attitude to adopt. Shame, revolt, injustice, anger, tears, urge to scream, to hit [...] I am the daughter of Harkis, I cry about it and I become enraged because I didn't choose it. I carry resentment against my father, against my country of origin, against that in which I live [...]] (14).

For many years she failed to understand how her father could have 'betrayed his country', as she saw it. 'J'ai longtemps cru que mon père était un traître. Harki, pour moi, valait la pire des infamies' [I long believed that my father was a traitor. Harki, for me, amounted to the utmost vileness] (24). She often dissimulated this part of her identity before eventually owning it and defending it. She grew to learn that neither she, nor her father, nor those others dear to her were traitors. Instead their realities and motivations had not been incorporated into the narrative. This is the narrative she seeks to complicate and render more representative of those involved.

The first step in rectifying this misconception is to demystify the reasons by which Harkis ended up fighting 'on the wrong side' and thus to lift the stigma still attached to them and to their children. No, they were not traitors to their country as the story would have it believed. As with any actual situation, there are myriad factors and causes. For example, as Kerchouche explains, many of the soldiers who would become Harkis had previously fought for the French in World War Two. When they received

a summons to join the army again during the Algerian War, many thought it was compulsory. It is also not as if the sides were clearly defined. In the remote area where Kerchouche's own family lived, intelligence about the FLN, the National Liberation Front who were fighting for independence from the French, was scarce and unreliable. Others were simply desperate for the bit of food and income that becoming a *supplétif* for the French Army promised. Others still, saw their families murdered by the FLN. In the preface to *Mon père, ce harki*, Jacques Duquesne lists a litany of six very different reasons which led Algerian men to fight for the French.

The incorporation of these voices and stories into the historical narrative is necessary for a fair and honest representation and a first step rendering justice to Harkis. Traverso argues for the eventual inevitability of an understanding of the Algerian War which takes into account the multitude of voices expressing the multiple perspectives. For him, it is only a matter of time before a composite narrative is constructed, if only because France is home to the various groups implicated in the events, including those who fought for Algerian independence but also Harkis and *pieds-noirs*, French citizens living in Algeria. These different facets combine into a heterogeneous understanding which incorporates disparate experiences in all their complexity.

Si en Algérie l'indépendance a rapidement donné lieu à une histoire officielle de la guerre de libération, en France, l'oubli ne pouvait pas s'éterniser. Il devait, tôt ou tard, laisser la place à une écriture de l'histoire nourrie de la multiplicité des mémoires. La mémoire de la France coloniale, celle des *pieds-noirs*, des harkis, des immigrés algériens et de leurs enfants, et aussi celle du mouvement national algérien dont plusieurs représentants portent aujourd'hui l'héritage en exil, s'enchevêtrent dans une mémoire de la guerre d'Algérie qui empêche une écriture de l'histoire fondée sur une empathie unilatérale, exclusive. L'écriture de cette histoire ne peut se faire que sous les yeux vigilants et critiques de plusieurs mémoires parallèles, s'exprimant dans l'espace public [If in Algeria, Independence quickly gave place to an official history of the War of Independence, in France, the memory lapse couldn't go on forever. Sooner or later, it would have to cede to a writing of history nourished by the multiplicity of memories. The memory of colonial France, that of the *pieds-noirs*, of Harkis, of Algerian immigrants and their children, and also that of the Algerian national movement, of which numerous representatives carry on the legacy while in exile, are all tangled in a memory of the Algerian war which prevents a writing of history founded on unilateral and exclusive empathy. The writing of this history can only happen through the vigilant

and critical watch of multiple parallel memories, expressed in the public space] (Traverso 35).

It is not enough for various narratives to be brought forth in the public sphere, but it is essential to find a common ground and understanding. Otherwise, the risk is of competing memories between different groups. We could think of this as the need to place particular narratives within a larger framework which helps account for their existence in the first place. In his article 'Le métissage des mémoires: un défi pour la société française' [The intermixing of memories: a challenge for French society], Philippe Bernard articulates the importance of a historical understanding which incorporates as many groups and perspectives as possible, so that everyone may see themselves represented in that history. A better understanding of the motivating factors at play in the Algerian War, for example, will help put an end to the perpetuation of prejudice which keeps people apart rather than join them as mutually marginalized allies.

Élaborer pour les nouvelles générations une histoire commune ne revient pas à rallumer les conflits mémoriels des aînés, mais à permettre l'identification de chacun à cette histoire dans sa complexité et ses contradictions et, au-delà, à désamorcer les haines nées d'un passé mal transmis et mal digéré. Face au risque de transmission d'une mémoire communautarisée, éclatée entre enfants de *pièdes-noirs*, de harkis et d'immigrés, il reste à creuser l'idée d'intégrer l'histoire de l'immigration, notamment l'histoire coloniale, dans l'histoire nationale [Developing a common history for the new generations doesn't entail reigniting the memory of past generations' conflicts, but permitting each group to identify with history in all its complexity and contradictions, and, moreover, in defusing the hate born of a poorly transmitted and poorly digested past. Faced with the risk of the transmission of a communitarized memory, divided between children of *pièdes-noirs*, Harkis and immigrants, we need to look into the idea of integrating the history of immigration, especially colonial history, into national history] (34).

We could think of this in terms of synchronic and diachronic narratives, where synchronic represents the concurrent realities of different groups and diachronic represents the historical factors which contributed to such fracturing of peoples. For Bernard, it is essential to incorporate the history of immigration and colonialism into the national history. He continues 'Ainsi la "deuxième génération" parviendra-t-elle à

arrimer sa mémoire familiale à "l'histoire de France" [Thus the 'second generation' will succeed in attaching its family memory to 'the history of France'] (34).

Filiation narratives such as *Mon père* are perfect avenues for contributing to the multiplicity of memories and bringing one marginalized narrative into conversation with other marginalized narratives. Kerchouche combines two very different sources of authority: that which comes from being closely tied to the story she relays and that which comes from substantiation through research. Due to the investigative posture which presents discoveries as such, the reader has the impression of learning alongside the author, eliminating a possibly pedantic element which, in addition to the human interest element provided by personal story, renders the history lesson both more palatable and absorbable.

In addition to elucidating the range of reasons that led to becoming a Harki, Kerchouche sets out to better understand and to shine a light on the conditions under which the Harkis lived and the deplorable treatment they received on French soil.

Raconter qu'après avoir été fidèles à la France, ils ont été trahis, abandonnés, parqués, puis effacés de la mémoire collective. Il est temps, aujourd'hui, de rendre justice à nos parents. Car la revendication essentielle des harkis et de leurs enfants tarde à venir: la France ne reconnaît toujours pas sa responsabilité dans le drame des harkis, ni dans l'abandon, ni dans la relégations dans des camps [To narrate that after having been loyal to France, they were betrayed, abandoned, confined, then erased from the collective memory. Today, it's time to do justice to our parents. Because the principle demand of Harkis and their children is a long time coming: France still doesn't recognize its role in the Harkis' tragedy, neither in the abandonment, nor in the relegation to camps] (Leïla 151).

Understandably, this shameful reality was long repressed but it needn't be buried for good. Personal testimony and archival research can complicate the prevailing narrative and reveal what was once swept under the rug. As Didier Eribon writes of Edouard Glissant, 'Telle est donc la tâche que Glissant assigne à l'écriture : en appeler à la mémoire pour lutter contre l'effacement d'une histoire particulière par l'Histoire à prétention universelle. Mais la mémoire n'est pas donnée : il est nécessaire d'aller à sa recherche, de l'aider à s'exprimer, à s'organiser' [This is the task that Glissant assigns to writing: call on memory to fight against the erasure of a specific history by a supposed universal History. But memory isn't given, it is necessary to go after it, to help it express itself, organize itself] (La société 262). Kerchouche aims to do just that,

make use of memory to preserve a specific piece of history at risk of being erased by a selective historical narrative.

One thing Kerchouche learns from the testimony of others, both within and outside her family, is the deplorable conditions of the camps where Harkis were placed. The official French narrative would prefer to gloss over these details but through her writing, Kerchouche ensures that the memory of such places is preserved. The camps, from Rivesaltes to Bias, are consistently likened to prisons. When Kerchouche's parents arrive at the Rivesaltes camp they wonder: 'Pourquoi nous met-on en prison? Quel crime a-t-on commis?' [Why are they putting us in prison? What crime did we commit?] (56). Not only do the conditions appear prison-like, but restricted comings and goings severely limit the Harkis' freedom of movement. There is a curfew and their mail is searched. Like in a prison, the Harkis were sequestered and hidden from the public. The violence incurred in the camps was both physical and emotional. Incredulous at one of his stories, Kerchouche asks her father, 'Tu veux dire que les soldats vous frappaient?' [You mean that the soldiers hit you?] (61). It wasn't just her father who was hit either. Kerchouche's mother was also physically abused.

It's by visiting the camps that Kerchouche fully registers the degree of isolation. 'Pourquoi installer les harkis dans des endroits si rudes, si isolés? En arpentant ces lieux sordides et inhabités, je ressens à quel point les harkis étaient indésirables [...] Ils ont été écartés de la société, sciemment relégués dans des zones inhospitalières' [Why put the Harkis in such harsh, isolated places? In surveying these sordid, uninhabited places, I feel just how undesired the Harkis were [...] They were excluded from society, deliberately relegated to inhospitable zones] (55). Until 1975 the camps were secluded, behind barbed-wire and fences, and all visitations had to be approved. It's truly as if 'L'armée cache les harkis' [The army is hiding the Harkis] (60). This isolation contributed to the ignorance of their actions and the misperception of the Harkis as traitors.

As with her grandfather, Kerchouche appears to have arrived at the camps too late. The first camps she visits have long been dismantled. 'Je marche au milieu des gravats, des poutres et des tuiles brisées, errant, bouleversée, sur les décombres de mon passé. Voici donc ce qu'il reste de mon histoire: des baraques en ruine et des lambeaux de souvenirs' [I walk among rubble, beams and broken tiles, wandering, shaken, over the wreckage of my past. Here's what's left of my story: huts in ruin and shreds of memories] (56). Ostensibly, an investigation *in situ* would provide her with the tangible evidence she seeks. Unfortunately, her quest does not prove to be so simple. Little trace of the Harkis' habitation in the various camps remains. When she visits Bourg-Lastic not a single sign or plaque attests to the fact that more than 5,000 harkis

and their families, including more than 2,000 children spent three months in this location. Faced with such nothingness, the author experiences a feeling of the futility of searching for traces that no longer exist. At Rivesaltes, she has the impression of describing a void. Due to its emptiness, the anthropologist Vincent Crapanzano refers to Rivesaltes as 'the very opposite' of what Pierra Nora calls *lieu de mémoire* (*The Harkis* 122). It is an empty, negative space. Although three steles briefly attest to the history of the place, one for the Spanish refugees in 1939, one for the Jews interned there in 1942, and one for the Harkis, the state of ruin in which she finds the camp is indissociable with the sinking into oblivion of the Harki experience. 'A l'image de cette cité en décomposition, l'existence des harkis s'est lentement désagrégée dans l'oubli' [Just like this decomposing ghetto, the Harkis' existence slowly crumbled into oblivion] (56).

Crapanzano's words also ring true in another sense. As Etienne Achille, Charles Forsdick and Lydie Moudileno demonstrate in their important 2020 volume *Postcolonial Realms of Memory: Sites and Symbols in Modern France*, Nora too often failed to include 'references to empire, colonial legacy or (post)colonial topography' in his *lieux de mémoire* (5). Rivesaltes has since been recognized as the multidimensional site of memory that it is and became an official memorial in October 2015 with the opening of a museum. In her contribution to the abovementioned collection of postcolonial sites of memory, Susan Ireland argues that Rivesaltes is such a central element in Harki collective memories in part due to the publication of memory works like that of Kerchouche (Ireland 230). She draws heavily on Kerchouche's work for her entry and writes that 'Kerchouche's recounting of life in the camp puts it back on the map' (ibid).

The same can be said for each of the camps she visits, searching for clues. To supplement her search, she consults archives such as those of the chamber of commerce in Marseille, for example. There Kerchouche finds photos of the boat on which her family arrived in France: a cargo ship named Sidi Brahim. She also consults the departmental archives and the local press of the regions where each camp was located.

Kerchouche is also searching for people who knew her parents or were simply familiar with the camps. Hearing their perspective gives dimension to the otherwise one-sided accounts of her family. This is especially true of the few non-Harkis with whom her family was in contact, including both the *pieds-noirs* who ran the camps and the rare good neighbor. The words of a French doctor and his condemnation of the treatment of the Harkis when she meets with him carry special weight as he saw first-hand the reproachable way they were treated. His corroboration is significant in Kerchouche's project of exposing the level of wrongdoing done to the Harkis. The

testimonies brought forth serve to complicate the simplified story told about them. The revelation of their experiences also complicates the story France tells itself about itself, the story of the Rights of Man and of justice.

A key person Kerchouche is able to interview is Juliette, who showed her family more kindness than anyone and restored their faith in humanity. She is the first person Kerchouche encounters during her investigation who is able to tell her about her parents and their life in the camp. The ability to finally consult a living person helps Kerchouche make sense of the various scraps of the past she's acquired. Kerchouche is not the first to seek out this woman who was so kind to the Harkis. 'Plusieurs sont revenus la voir. Des enfants aussi, en quête de leur passé, comme moi' [A number of them came back to see her. Children too, in search of their past, like me] (81). *La quête du passé*, after all, is an increasingly popular pursuit.

In addition to such mistreatment, Kerchouche shows that the Harkis were denied the chance to improve their lives. Not only were the adults not provided literacy training, but the education given to the children was found to be severely wanting, sometimes equally as little as two hours of instruction per day. This naturally led to their further disadvantage. 'Les séquelles de cette ghettoïsation sont terribles. Au fil des années, les enfants accumulent un retard scolaire de trois ou quatre ans en moyenne' [The consequences of this ghettoization are terrible. As the years go by, the children fall further behind in school, averaging an educational deficit of three or four years] (140).

The prison-like conditions, the physical and emotional violence, the destitution and the lack of opportunity all contribute to a devastating psychological effect. 'Oui, Bias pousse les gens à se détester, à se détruire' [Yes, Bias pushes people to hate themselves, to destroy themselves] (161). Opposition to the harassment and subjugation resulted in further harassment and subjugation. Standing up to mistreatment could and did result in the denial of health care, the withdrawal of food, carbon and work. At one point, Kerchouche's mother's employment at a canning factory is terminated by the camp director for them having moved out of the camp. As the doctor Jammes puts it, 'A Bias, tout se conjugait pour que les harkis ne s'en sortent pas' [At Bias, everything combines to ensure that the Harkis don't get out] (148). Kerchouche advocates that France recognize its role, not only in the difficulties Harkies and their families faced in the immediate aftermath of the war, but also their children's continued disenfranchisement.

Kerchouche interprets this treatment as the continuation of a colonialist posture. 'Au fond, rien n'a changé depuis l'Algérie coloniale. Les harkis, qui croyaient avoir gagné l'égalité citoyenne en se battant aux côtés de la France, restent des indigènes'

[When it comes down to it, nothing has changed since colonial Algeria. The Harkis, who believed they'd earned equal citizenship by fighting on the side of France, remain natives] (64). The doctor Jammes, who devoted his life to helping the Harkis, concurs with this interpretation.

Le ministère avait embauché exclusivement des *pieds-noirs*, parce qu'ils parlaient l'arabe. J'étais quasiment le seul 'métropolitain'. Ils ont recréé l'Algérie de papa, avec l'anisette, la kémie et tous les poncifs de là-bas. Les *pieds-noirs* traitaient les harkis comme des indigènes: ils les dépréciaient, les manipulaient, les humiliaient. Ils étaient ravis d'avoir ramené un morceau d'Algérie coloniale avec eux, d'avoir rapatrié leurs fellahs. Les uns dominaient les autres, c'était la logique du système. [The ministry hired exclusively *pieds-noirs* because they spoke Arabic. I was virtually the sole 'mainlander'. They recreated dad's Algeria, with anisette, appetizers and all the clichés from there. The *pieds-noirs* treated the Harkis like natives: they belittled them, manipulated them, humiliated them. They were thrilled to have brought back a piece of colonial Algeria with them, to have repatriated their fellahs. One group dominated the other, it was the logic of the system] (148).

One episode featured in both her filiation narrative and her novel is the ripping off of her mother's veil by the director of the camp. The episode inevitably recalls Frantz Fanon's essay 'Algeria Unveiled'. Fanon writes, 'If we want to destroy the structure of Algerian society, its capacity for resistance, we must first of all conquer the women; we must go and find them behind the veil where they hide themselves and in the houses where the men keep them out of sight' (*A Dying Colonialism* 37-38). We need only replace 'Algerian society' with 'Algerian (Harki) immigrant community' for this statement to ring true in this context. This underscores Kerchouche's contention that the Harki camps in French were an extension of a colonial program and even an elongation of the war.

The civilizing mission previously enacted abroad is perpetuated at home. 'Pour eux, les harkis sont des sauvages qu'il faut civiliser. Des êtres primitifs, inférieurs et sales que ces bons samaritains ont lavés, évangélisés, élevés au rang de bons "Français"' [For them, Harkis are savages in need of civilizing. Primitive beings, inferior and dirty that good Samaritans have washed, evangelized, raised to the level of 'good French people'] (107). The former director and his wife claimed that the Harkis were happy to adopt French ways of life. And this may well have been true to a certain extent, however it cannot be the case when it means forcing them to abandon

their own customs. 'Car mes parents veulent vivre comme des Français, sans pour autant renier leur culture musulmane' [Because my parents want to life like the French, without having to renounce their muslim culture to do so] (131).

Crapanzano confirms the deplorable conditions and extension of a colonialist atmosphere found in the camps. He cites a press release by Abdelkrim Kletch, an activist with the Collectif national justice pour les Harkis. 'The Harkis are kept in the position of the colonized- of little Muslims from the Algerian départements. This policy was carried out in a deliberate and knowing manner by successive governments. The Harkis were willingly prevented from developing, constrained by internment and [forced to turn] in on themselves' (143).

Those who exercised their power with continuous efforts to gallicize the Harkis against their will, claimed that the interdiction of their customs was for their own good. They wrongly equated assimilation with acculturation all while they denied the chance for upward mobility. While the Harkis were refused the opportunity to integrate themselves and instead forced to perpetuate a cycle of subjugation, the functionaries demanded that they assimilate to French standards in matter of food, dress and first names. This false consideration, in fact, masks a latent racism. Of the director, Kerchouche writes: 'Oui, ce Français que j'avais devant moi est un raciste, et de la pire espèce, parce qu'il dissimule sa xénophobie sous un humanisme hypocrite. Parce qu'il n'aimait pas ce qu'étaient les harkis, des Arabes, il voulait les changer en "bons Français"' [Yes, this Frenchman in front of me is a racist, and the worst kind of one, because he dissimulates his xenophobia under a hypocritical humanism. Because he didn't like what Harkis were, Arabs, he wanted to turn them into 'good French people'] (107).

One of Kerchouche's more disturbing discoveries is that this deplorable treatment was delegated from the top. After journeying through the many camps, Kerchouche turns to the materials she'd amassed in order to inform her quest. One report in particular jumps out to her, a 30 page analysis of the way harkis were treated in France since 1962. The study confirms what Kerchouche had begun to suspect but couldn't yet put her finger on: 'C'est le gouvernement qui en est responsable', as doctor Jammes puts it, 'It's the government that's responsible' (149). This stings all the more for everything France is meant to represent.

Si la grandeur de la nation française est quotidiennement célébrée, les lois républicaines, en revanche, ne s'appliquent pas à l'intérieur du camp. Les valeurs de liberté, d'égalité et de fraternité n'existent pas dans cet univers totalitaire, où les harkis vivent entre embrigadement et répression. Bias fonctionne comme une

microdictature, un ghetto coupé du monde, géré par une administration omnipotente [If the grandeur of the French nation is celebrated daily, the laws of the republic, on the other hand, don't apply inside the camp. The values of liberty, equality and fraternity don't exist within that totalitarian universe, where the Harkis live between recruitment and repression. Bias functions like a microdictatorship, a ghetto cut off from the world, controlled by an omnipotent administration] (129).

Mon père, ce harki poses fundamental questions about what it means to be French and whether France can deliver on its historical ideal of *les droits de l'homme*. Kerchouche demonstrates an instance in which these principles break down. It is the sharp contrast of these professed values and reality which the reader is invited to consider. The illusion of equal chances for newcomers and their children is dispelled and that is the first step in seeing things more accurately. 'La France a trahi les harkis, la France a trahi mes parents [...] la France m'a trahie. La France s'est trahi elle-même. Toutes les valeurs que l'école de la République m'a apprises, elle les a bafouées, piétinées, méprisées' [France betrayed the Harkis, France betrayed my parents... France betrayed me. France betrayed itself. All the values that French public school taught me, tarnished, trampled on, scorned] (167).

In his introduction to *Regimes of Historicity*, François Hartog recalls Herodotus's notion of history: the interval, calculated in generations, between an injustice and its punishment or redress (Hartog 1). While the act of confronting the camp director with her true identity and calling him out on his abuses of her family cannot qualify as the punishment or redress of his actions, Kerchouche does refer to it as a small vengeance. In the same way, while the writing and publication of her book cannot be considered to punish or redress the injustices her family, and indeed all Harkis, were subjected to, it is a step in that direction. It is a point on the line between injustice of the past and its possible rectification in the future. As Kerchouche writes in the present, when there has not yet been sufficient acknowledgement of the wrongs done to Harkis in France, whether redress will take place or not remains unknown. Still, she is writing toward that future and contributing toward its eventual appearance. The passing of time has already served as the conduit for injustice and its confrontation and exposure. For Herodotus, 'the historian's task was to study the delays of divine vengeance, with a view of using this knowledge to identify and link up the two ends of the chain' (1). Leaving aside the question of divine vengeance, Kerchouche's project is aligned with floodlighting the interval between an injustice and its redress. She does this by using her family as the prism through which to reexamine a historical moment.

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Notes

¹ This and all following translations are mine.