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Reprisal Violence and the Harkis in French Algeria, 1962

MARTIN EVANS

Abstract: Rejecting notions of inherent violence, this article focuses upon the large numbers of Algerians from the French organised anti-FLN Militias who were subjected to reprisals after the French exit from Algeria in 1962. Estimates of those killed range from 10,000 to 150,000, and the violence is justifiably described as brutal. The specificity of this violence has only emerged as a field of enquiry since the 1980s. Initially this stemmed from the impact of eyewitness accounts, combined with the emergence of organised pressure groups in France. Collectively these new voices spoke out against simplistic interpretations that reduced these Militias to pro-French villains in a heroic decolonisation narrative - a perspective reinforced by the recent historical research of Pierre Daum, François-Xavier Hautreux, Mohand Hamoumou and Michel Roux. This article draws upon this historiography, but it also moves beyond it to situate Algeria within a global history of violence and to challenge interpretations that explain this violence solely in terms of a Franco-Algerian dynamic. Instead, the 1962 massacres must be understood in terms of broader global processes of violence that connect these generic contexts to the specificity of the Algerian case.

Keywords: Algeria, Harkis, Decolonisation, Violence, Emotions

The French military archives provide graphic accounts of the violence conducted against the *harkis* by vengeful Algerian nationalists of the FLN during 1962. “The *ex-harkis* are subjected to diverse torture and bullying in front of the civilian population”, comments an intelligence report of 18 August:

Everyone had the right to come and strike them, insult them or spit in their faces. The FLN members forced them to cover their faces in excrement. In the day, they are forced to do hard work, or stand in groups under the sun with nothing to drink...the ‘suspects’ are crammed into cells full of human excrement. The women, heads shaved beforehand, are shut away separately in identical conditions.¹

The same report goes on to outline how, on 9 July in Aïn Mellouk, three former French Muslim Military Auxiliaries were dragged behind a lorry in front of the population until they died; and in Merouana (in Sud-Constantinois), at the end of July, 40 former auxiliaries were forced tear up grass with their teeth; while in Bouthamama and in Taberdga (Khenchela region) several

were bound hand and foot and dragged behind horses until they died.² In July in the Aurès Mountains at M'chouneche, a captain in the auxiliary forces had his eyes gouged out before being castrated and then dragged before the local population for ten days until he died.³ This was retribution carried out against Muslim Militias in the wake of Algerian independence in July 1962. By any measure these were acts of extreme bloodshed: the aim was not death in itself, but death by protracted physical humiliation. Through symbolic violence, the perpetrators wanted to mark these Muslims out as traitors who had no place in the new nation state.

It can become tempting to interpret this violence in pathological, a-historical terms: the result of an Algerian mind-set that is inherently attuned to bloodshed. It can become tempting, too, to see this retribution simply as the result of a uniquely violent Franco-Algerian dynamic. This article contests such interpretations. It aims instead to situate the Algerian case within a global history of violence and to challenge explanations of violence that rest solely in the dynamic of Franco-Algerian relations, while offering a historically grounded framework for understanding violence that studiously avoids prejudice. It is a response to Laleh Khalilli's call, published in November 2013, for a scholarly conversation that challenges a hysterical mainstream narrative which 'locates the sources of violence in or emanating from the region in Islam(ism) or attributes it to some half-baked but remarkably persistent cultural explanations (tribalism, ancient hatreds, cycles of violence, etc) which uncomfortably echo the racism of an earlier scholarly era.'⁴ Specifically, she argued, this analysis must understand 'the political and sociological processes and relations that produce violence, the form violence takes, the embedding (or dis-embedding) of violence in law and procedure, and the after-effects of violence.'⁵ It must also encompass the strategic choices of oppositional movements (guerrilla warfare, violent revolutionary action, anticolonial warfare) as well as the violence wielded by states and empires (war, policing, incarceration, torture). Equally, she continued, it must challenge hackneyed myths by bringing the region into conversation with those working on other geographical areas such as, she underlined, Allen Feldman on conflict in Northern Ireland; Katherine Verdery's ethnography of the politics of dead bodies in Eastern Europe; and Veena Das's work on gendering of violence in India.⁶

Any consideration of violence in the Middle East and North Africa must also engage with the insights of Helen Graham's history of the Spanish Civil War. Graham views this struggle as part of a wider European pattern of violence between 1936 and 1947 - one that was defined by a war of intimate enemies and local massacres where civilians were killed by their

own compatriots. In explaining the endemic violence in the Spanish Civil War, she warns against de-historicized categories that see Spain as ‘violent and southern.’⁷ Such de-contextualisation, she continues, is fatal for the historian because it can lead to ‘a mesmerising focus on the acts of lethal violence themselves which fail singularly to place in their proper historical context either the motives or the forms of violence.’⁸ Instead, the Spanish Civil War must be seen as a pivotal episode in Europe’s ‘dark twentieth century’:

that is, in the story of how, not so long ago, the mass killing of civilians became the brutal medium through which European societies came to terms with structure shattering forms of change.⁹

Graham’s approach is richly suggestive for historians working on the Middle East and North Africa because it shows how violence in any area must be located in much broader patterns of cause and effect.

Similarly, Donald Bloxham and Robert Gerwarth’s recent work on political violence in Europe highlights the need to guard against the “socio-cultural fatalism” that portrays some areas (e.g. the Balkans and the Caucasus) as inherently more violent than others (e.g. Scandinavia).¹⁰ The contributors to the Bloxham and Gerwarth volume also challenge the conventional chronology of global violence. They reject the notion, advanced with typically compelling verve by Eric Hobsbawm, of an intensely murderous phase lasting from 1914 to 1945, that is preceded by a long and relatively stable nineteenth century, and then followed by post-1945 peace (itself initially conditioned by the long economic boom from 1944 to 1974).¹¹ In contrast, the revisionism of Bloxham and Gerwarth views 1914 to 1945 not as a sudden eruption, but in terms of practices that began in last part of the nineteenth century – during what they term “the long twentieth century.” Nor, they continue, is there a sudden turn away from violence at the end of the Second World War. Indeed, the continuation of these violent practices shaped the wars of decolonisation from 1945 into the 1970s.

In the violence conducted against pro-French Algerians after the exit of the French from Algeria in 1962 it is estimated that reprisal killings accounted for between 10,000 and 150,000 deaths, and the incredibly brutality of the murders is widely attested. This violence only emerged as a specific field of enquiry from the 1980s, initially stemming from the impact of eyewitness accounts, such as *Un Enfant dans la Guerre* by Said Ferdi, combined with the emergence of organised pressure groups in France.¹² Collectively, these new voices spoke out against simplistic interpretations of this violence. For them it was wrong to reduce these

Algerians to villains in a heroic decolonisation narrative - a perspective further amplified in the recent historical research of Pierre Daum, Mohand Hamoumou, François-Xavier Hautreux, Michel Roux and whose work seeks to understand these Algerians in terms of complexity and nuance.¹³ This article draws upon this historiography, but also presents a new analytical framework by situating Algeria within a global history of violence. It represents a change of perspective - one attentive to the danger of explaining this violence solely in terms of a Franco-Algerian dynamic. Instead, the 1962 massacres must be understood in terms of broader global processes of violence that connect these generic contexts to the specificity of the Algerian example.

The article is divided into four parts. The first part examines who were these Muslim Militias at the cease fire in March 1962 and how they were recruited as part of a counter-insurgency strategy. The second part focuses on the period 1959-1962 when, as the Algerian war entered a protracted endgame, the fate of these Muslims became a contentious issue within the transition process. It will also outline when and where the massacres took place. Part three then examines the factors that shaped the reprisal violence of 1962, looking beyond the specifics of rural Algeria to identify motivations and influences. The conclusion then employs recent work on emotional history to explore the emotional context that framed this violence.¹⁴

Who were the *harkis*?

On 19 March 1962, a ceasefire came into effect that opened the way to Algerian independence.¹⁵ After a long drawn out negotiation process, the Algerian conflict was seemingly at an end; one of the bloodiest episodes in the decolonisation process that had begun on 1 November 1954 with a series of attacks by the then unknown National Liberation Front (FLN). Twenty four hours later, *Le Monde* calculated the number of Algerians still in the French army, police and civil service as 263,000 out of a population of nine million.¹⁶ This was composed of 20,000 professional soldiers, 40,000 conscripts, 20,000 with the Special Administrative Sections (*Section Administrative Spécialisée*, SAS) units, 15,000 police, 60,000 within self-defence villages, 50,000 civil servants and 58,000 Muslim military auxiliaries, known as *harkis* derived from the Arabic word for movement.¹⁷ Collectively *harkis* became the blanket term for all pro-French Algerians, flattening out differences even though in 1962 there was a huge variation according to class, gender and geographical location.

The same day the Armed Forces Minister, Pierre Messmer, outlined how these ‘French Muslims’ in the army would be treated.¹⁸ Under these provisions professional soldiers could continue to serve or leave with a pension. Conscripts could stay with their units or be integrated into the transitional local police force under the control of the Provisional Executive. While the Muslim auxiliaries could be demobilised, join the transitional local police force or be absorbed into the Aid Centres. Within the peace accords themselves, although there was no specific clause referring to the ‘French Muslims’, article two had explicitly forbidden any recourse to ‘collective and individual violence’: a principle of ‘non-reprisals which had been accepted by the Provisional Government during the secret talks in November 1961.¹⁹ In this manner the accords recognised that independence was taking place within the context of the United Nations Charter on Human Rights.²⁰

Algeria was on brink of independence. Yet, originally these recruits had been engaged as part of a counter-insurgency strategy to win and keep Algeria French or at least arrive at a pro-French solution and here the key promise had been that Algeria would never be handed over to the FLN. However, this was about to happen; an outcome that left these Algerians feeling terribly vulnerable.

The *harki* units were part of a long-standing tradition of Muslim recruitment into the French administration, army and police that were a key aspect of colonial rule, in particular in the remote areas of rural Algeria.²¹ They were also part of a colonial military strategy that stretched back to invasion of Algeria in 1830 when the army recruited local units and established Arab Bureaux, run by officers who spoke Arabic and Berber, to administer local justice and win the population over to the French cause.²² This strategy became part of the military mind set during imperial expansion but was crucial in Morocco in the 1920s and 1930s when the army brought the countryside under central authority through a combination of the stick and the carrot. Repression went hand in hand with and the establishment of governing structures where Native Affairs Units, led by French officers with expertise in local languages and customs, sought to build lasting bridges with the population.²³ This Moroccan experience in turn framed the Indochina War 1946 to 1954. Now, however, counter-insurgency strategy was further refined by the Cold War as, confronted with communist insurgents, officers soaked up Mao’s theories on guerrilla warfare, in particular his conclusion that, to win, insurgents must move amongst the population like fish in water.²⁴ Specifically, they fashioned a response whose pillars were the separation of the population from insurgents and the recruitment of local

allies: two ideas crucial in a war that was seen to be about winning ‘hearts and minds’ rather than just holding territory.²⁵

The French lost in Indochina in 1954 and left Morocco in 1956, but the lessons from both theatres were applied to Algeria from November 1954 onwards. Importantly the military and political thinking was one and the same. This was because French leaders constantly talked about winning over the Muslim population through a third way solution that, by rejecting Algerian nationalism and settler extremism, would create a Franco-Muslim community based upon equal rights. Such thought defined policy throughout the Fourth Republic and into the Fifth whereby the fight against the FLN was a two-pronged affair that combined reform (political empowerment as well as efforts to overcome poverty, illiteracy and unemployment) and repression. In both respects Algerian participation was seen to be a measure of imminent victory.²⁶

Turning FLN prisoners against the FLN was a particularly important part of this strategy because their retractions, distributed as tracts amongst the population, were used to demoralise the FLN. This 1959 testimony, for example, called upon FLN fighters to face facts and accept de Gaulle’s promise of a truce, drawing upon a shared emotion experience of the liberation struggle:

My very dear brothers,
It is soon five years that our country endures an implacable and murderous struggle...I have lived amongst you, I have shared your suffering and misery, your anguish and your grief...It would be criminal on my part not to warn you and share the feelings that I have. General de Gaulle has given his honour to respect the brave ones amongst you and welcome them with open arms and in all dignity.²⁷

Beyond this propaganda aspect, turning FLN prisoners had another military goal. French offices knew that their inside knowledge was a precious weapon, so some prisoners were recruited into *harki* units or used to infiltrate the FLN.²⁸ In part these prisoners were turned by the power of argument. They were convinced of the sincerity of French promises or at least the futility of armed struggle. But there was also manipulation. As prisoners they were in a weak position and French officers ruthlessly exploited this power relationship. In the case of the thirteen year old Saïd Ferdi he was captured by the French in 1959.²⁹ He was then given a choice: either work for the French army or his father would be tortured. Thereafter he was locked into a terrible logic. He understood that he had to fight because if he was captured by the FLN, he would be executed as a traitor.

Saïd Ferdi was indicative of a much larger truth: how counter-insurgency strategy fed off the vulnerability of Algerian society in the mid to late 1950s. Extreme poverty, allied to the fact that by 1959 two million Algerians had been relocated into camps, meant that a dependency culture was endemic.³⁰ In this context the French army knew that the promise of food and money could recruit allies in the first instance.

The FLN activist and historian Mohammed Harbi has underlined the complexity of *harki* history. He first grasped this complexity when imprisoned after the June 1965 military coup.³¹ Many fellow prisoners were *harkis* and talking to them he began to understand that it was wrong to think just in terms of a black-and-white story of resistance and collaboration, framed by the memory of the French Occupation. He realised that there were large grey zones of behaviour which explained why some original FLN members could end up in the *harki* ranks. These ambiguities had been effaced by the power of the national liberation narrative of ‘one and half million martyrs’ at independence. Indeed, writing in 2003, Harbi was adamant that these ambiguities, challenging easy divisions of heroes and villains, went to the heart of a new analysis of the Algerian War.³² However, it must be underlined that this type of understanding, itself a product of Harbi’s long historical reflection, is the exception rather than the rule as regards wider Algerian society. The strength of the resistance narrative means that at the level of daily lexicon the *harki* remains the ultimate hate figure and the ultimate political insult.

Clearly some Algerians were motivated by an identification with France. Bachaga Boualam was a prominent landowner and head of the Beni Boudouane tribe from the Ouarsenis Mountains in the north-west Algeria, an area where nationalism was weakest. Rising to become the Vice-President of the French National Assembly at the end of the 1950s, he saw himself as French and rejected the FLN as a tool of communism that threatened landowners like himself. Moreover, he used his prestige as a regional leader to win over his tribe to the French cause. Through meetings he convinced the local peasantry that they would profit from a French victory, thereby ensuring that membership of the Beni Boudouane became synonymous with a pro-French position.³³

For many more rural Algerians much lower down the social scale joining the *harkis* was a way out of crushing poverty through the provision of a regular income. Often, given the high levels of illiteracy, these recruits had little clear idea what exactly they were enlisting for.

Dalia Kerchouche, for example, explains how in 1956 her 29 year-old father, needing to feed three small children, joined the local police in the Ouarsenis region where, as has just been noted, the FLN was weak.³⁴ Immediately he was posted to Kabylia where the FLN was strong and in the ensuing months he came to gradually realise that he was not involved in police work but full scale warfare where his unit was being used to isolate the civilians from the FLN.

In many cases *harki* recruitment was about physical survival – it was a way of securing protection from French Army exactions as well as using the French Army to shield them from FLN violence that aimed to control the Muslim population. This last dimension, understanding *harki* recruitment as a reaction to FLN ruthlessness, is a very strong aspect of *harki* memoirs and testimonies.³⁵ But it was also recognised by Mohammed Harbi in his ground breaking analysis of the interior politics of the FLN, published in 1980. For him the striking increase in *harki* numbers in 1957 was in part because FLN violence drove Algerians into the arms of the French army.³⁶ Again in 2003 he admitted that the FLN strategy on the ground was politically unsophisticated and brutal, alienating many pro-independence Algerians who began to fear the FLN methods.³⁷ As one *harki* remembered:

You get up one morning and you discover that your neighbour has had his throat cut during the night. You, you know him, your neighbour for a long time. You do not understand why he has been killed. You understand only that you must not ask questions... So, in the beginning, you say yourself to reassure you: ‘It is astonishing but the moudjahidin know undoubtedly what they are doing. The men killed were perhaps playing a double game.’ And then after a while, with all these deaths, the old people, the youngsters fifteen or sixteen years old, you say to yourself there is something not right here, that tomorrow it could be your turn, like that, for nothing.³⁸

On another level of complexity, some recruits became involved in a double-game. Gaining French confidence gave them greater freedom to aid the FLN food, financial support, information. This was because the FLN and the *harkis* were not two separate spheres. In some cases they did have relatives in the FLN and this resulted in covert support. This nether world is difficult to quantify although Michel Roux has calculated that about forty per cent of recruits were involved in aiding the FLN in some way and certainly some French army officers misgivings about reliability.³⁹ This is why, even if desertions until late 1961 desertions were strikingly small, just 3000, the *harkis* were employed on a monthly contract because if they were thought to be colluding with the FLN they could be simply laid off. In 1959 in Thiers in south Kabylia, for example, 200 out of a unit of 450 not renewed because suspected that working with the FLN.

Finally, it is important to underline the large variations in personal engagement. Some *harkis* were highly committed. This was the case of the Commando Georges counter-insurgency unit, as well the units that were used in anti-FLN repression in Paris in 1961.⁴⁰ Others, though, were in *harki* units only for a few months, weeks or days even. In many cases this momentary engagement was the product of complicated micro-histories as individuals navigated the complex, constantly evolving, and highly dangerous local politics of rural Algeria.

The massacres

In May 1958 a political crisis brought on by the Algerian War led to the collapse of the Fourth Republic and the return to power of Charles de Gaulle. Initially de Gaulle continued with the Fourth Republic policy of reform. Thus, during the elective process that established the Fifth Republic much was made of Muslim representation, both in terms of the large scale election of Muslim deputies and the fact that Algerian women voted for the first time. Then, on 3 October 1958, de Gaulle unveiled an ambitious investment programme for Algeria which was combined with a conciliatory call on the FLN to lay down their weapons.⁴¹

When this last tactic failed de Gaulle gave the army carte blanche to destroy the FLN militarily through a renewed offensive in 1959. In preparation General Challe, the brains behind the operation, raised fresh *harki* units. De Gaulle expressed misgivings about their effectiveness, but Challe was insistent. In his opinion they had a key role. Militarily they would provide knowledge of the local terrain, while symbolically they would demonstrate that parts of the Algerian community were opposed to the FLN.

However, for de Gaulle this offensive, which in military terms reduced the FLN in Algeria to a skeleton, was not about keeping French Algeria. It was about allowing him to find a solution from a position of military strength and on 16 September 1959 he gave a televised speech which outlined three solutions: independence, complete integration or some form of association between the two countries where government by Algerians would be back up by close French cooperation.⁴² Clearly his preferred scenario was the last one, but in the following year this scenario was overtaken by events. Above all huge nationalist demonstrations in Algeria in December 1960 convinced de Gaulle that there was no alternative to negotiations with the FLN. Algeria had now entered the end game, but many army officers were ashamed

at this prospect. They saw it as a betrayal of promises made to the *harkis* which is why officers like Challe became embroiled in a failed coup against de Gaulle in April 1961.⁴³

Ironically this failure accelerated the path to independence and led to a collapse of *harki* morale. Indeed, anticipating FLN victory many deserted to the FLN, especially when, as some *harki* units were disbanded at the end of 1961, it was clear that the French government wanted to prevent an influx of Muslim refugees. In this tense context the 19 March 1962 cease-fire did not bring an end to the violence. On the contrary there was an intensification as hard line settlers conducted a last ditch terror campaign against the FLN and the French Army. In this chaos, compounded by the departure of one million settlers, the particularity of the *harki* massacres was difficult to immediately discern, especially since much of the violence took place in remote rural areas. Only gradually did this violence take shape as news of the massacres filtered out through French politicians, journalists, campaigns by intellectuals and French Army intelligence.⁴⁴

In this respect the 1963 report to the French Minister of the Armed Forces, compiled by Brébisson, commander in chief of the French Army in Algeria in 1962, is a crucial source of information, along with civil servant's report by Jean-Marie Robert in the area around Akbou in the upper Soummam River valley in Kabylia in Northern Algeria and the press reports by the *Le Monde* journalist Jean Lacouture.⁴⁵ Using these documents as a starting point it is possible to talk about four phases of violence, the first of which was from March-July 1962. This phase was characterised by isolated acts of reprisal. The only collective massacre took place on 18 March at Saint Denis du Sig in the South West Oran region essentially because until the French surrendered formal sovereignty the French Army presence was still a deterrent to such massacres. Overall there was a gathering atmosphere of violence as many *harkis* realised that they were in danger. Here the response of one *harki*, Ahmed Kerchouche, was typical. Shortly after the cease-fire he attended a meeting organised by the FLN for members of the Beni Boudouane tribe which, as has been noted, took a largely pro-French position. The local FLN leader explained that the new state was willing to forgive but this stance, he underlined, was at variance with his own position of revenge:

If it was up to me, you, the Beni Boudouane who rallied en masse to the settlers, I would kill you all.⁴⁶

Kerchouche immediately concluded that whatever the promises of the future FLN state in reality the lives of him and his family were in danger. He now made preparations to leave for France.

This meant that the second phase began with independence on 5 July. Now the *harkis* were truly exposed particularly because the movement of pro-French Algerians had been closely monitored by new Algerian government in waiting. In Akbou, Jean-Marie Robert reported how initially the FLN message was conciliatory.⁴⁷ FLN tracts claimed that the past was forgotten. He himself was assured by FLN representatives that Muslim administrators and politicians would not be harmed.⁴⁸ Yet, he concluded, in many cases this was a ruse because in this area of rural Kabylia the massacres began in earnest end of July. At this point it was very much a movement from below, motivated by a surge in patriotic anger produced by independence.. There was no overall coordination. Popular tribunals sprung up to enact local micro-histories of revenge where some were put into camps, some were executed en masse while others were subjected to systematic humiliation lasting several days.⁴⁹ Significantly, with the French Army ordered not to intervene, some massacres were staged near French barracks: a symbol of new Algerian sovereignty.

The violence was a reflection of the on-going chaos as the FLN imploded into a bitter battle for power between the Provisional Government and Ben Bella. On this basis Ben Bella's victory in September, bringing with it the prospect of stability, brought a temporary lull in the massacres. However, they began again in November 1962, the third phase of the violence. The trigger was the eighth anniversary of the original FLN rebellion on 1 November 1954 which provoked a renewed desire for revenge. Now, though, this violence, more centrally controlled in nature, was driven forward by the incoming army of the frontiers. Having built up its strength in Morocco and Tunisia, this was the spine of the embryonic Algerian state which, through the public punishment of traitors, wanted to assert general control over the Algerian population. This phase petered out by early 1963 and seemed to be finally closed in June when Ben Bella declared that the *harkis* were forgiven in an interview with the French paper, *Le Figaro*.⁵⁰

This opened the way to the final phase: an uneasy peace that lasted until the mid-1960s. Momentarily, the violence could flare up, as in Souk-Ahras on the Tunisia border in January 1964. There were also some reprisals in France but overall there was a sharp decline in the violence and in 1965 20,000 *harkis* were released.⁵¹ During this period too discrimination on

the basis of anti-national behaviour was enshrined in the law while property of those deemed to have taken a pro-French position was confiscated. However, in contrast to France after World War Two, this was the limit of legal punishment. Revenge never translated into major trials, although this was partly because the major figures escaped to France.

This violence had a strong class and gender character. Most of the victims were from the poor, largely illiterate, rural peasantry and male who had served in *harki* units, although a minority were a more privileged strata of administrators and local politicians who were being punished for benefitting from the push for great equality and more Muslim representation since 1956.⁵² A small number women were targeted but here rather than murder violence generally took the form of sexual humiliation such as rape, head shaving or, in the case of those from the local elite forced marriages with men of lower social standing. Arriving at the numbers killed is difficult, however. One French Army report dated 13 August 1962 put the figure killed in hundreds and identified the violence as being particularly concentrated in the east and south of Algiers.⁵³ But it also recognised this calculation was speculative, firstly because the FLN was covering up these killings, and secondly because they were being carried out in remoter rural areas where there were few French troops and it was difficult to get precise intelligence.⁵⁴ Jean-Marie Robert talked about 1,000 to 2,000 victims in his arrondissement. Yet, this was only one area and it is difficult to extrapolate from this example, although, with 72 arrondissements in Algeria, pro-*harki* groups have then put the figure at between 72,000 and 144,000, even rising to 150,000.⁵⁵ Jean Lacouture in *Le Monde* on 12 November 1962 gave a figure of 10,000 killed between 19 March and 1 November 1962.⁵⁶

Ever since there has been a problem of calculating violence, largely because the figures have become ideological, bound up with political struggles pursued by *harki* community groups in France.⁵⁷ In contrast, amongst professional historians Benjamin Stora has cited 10,000 to 25,000, Gilbert Meynier has estimated 30,000, while Mohand Hamoumou has talked of 150,000.⁵⁸ What is easier to quantify is the number who escaped to France. Although de Gaulle was hostile to a mass influx of *harkis*, the government did put in place makeshift reception camps to receive those most at risk before which was estimated at 10,500.⁵⁹ Crucially too large numbers arrived in France via clandestine networks established by French Army officers. Most were made to reapply for French citizenship and according to subsequent French census figures between 1962 and 1968 140,000 Muslims made such applications which included 80,000 former *harkis* and their families with the rest made up of for the most part of civil servants, politicians and military personnel.⁶⁰

Algeria 1962

How do we understand of the character and extent of Algeria's violence in 1962? On the French side the drivers were state power combined with nationalism, imperialism and a chaotic end of empire scenario. Seen in these terms the anti-*harki* violence was the result of a long colonial violence deployed by the state that was intensified by the fact that Algeria was an integral part of the Republic as well as the eight year duration of the Algerian War, one of the longest and bloodiest episodes in the decolonisation process.⁶¹ The French state felt threatened both in terms of nation-state sovereignty and global imperial interests. This is why it deployed huge violence that led to the death of 141,000 Algerians in an asymmetrical war where the two sides were ill matched in terms of resources.⁶² Critically, within this counter-insurgency war the *harkis* played a key part especially during the 1959 offensive that effectively brought the interior FLN to its knees. Yet, military success did not correspond to political victory because this counter-insurgency violence alienated the majority of the Algerian population. For this reason independence produced an intense desire for revenge, magnified by the manner in which some *harki* units had gained a reputation for human rights abuses. It was what the FLN journalist and theoretician Frantz Fanon called mirror violence: a response to original colonial violence.⁶³ But although some retribution was directed towards the departing settlers, most concentrated upon the *harkis*. They became the objects of mirror violence par excellence because, left behind by the French state, they were the easiest targets for retribution.

As such the massacres were the product of an end of empire scenario that was utterly chaotic. The coordinated exit envisaged by the French-FLN Accords was quickly swept aside and the ensuing anarchy meant that imagined revenge could be translated into actual revenge. Algeria was an uncontrolled space during the summer of 1962 which became the cover for settling of accounts in the remote mountainous regions to the south of the capitol and eastern part of the country as the French army underlined on 13 August 1962:

This repression...takes a form of extreme violence, going from degrading bullying to summary executions and torture. One can only confirm that these exactions are ordered by the wilaya commanders, but all is happening as if the FLN is profiting from the present period of anarchy in order to carry out against Algerians who served for France a purge which it leaves the responsibility to the lower echelons.⁶⁴

Allied to this de Gaulle was adamant that the *harkis* were not the same as the settlers. For him they were not French and had to remain in Algeria: an uncompromising stance that formed a key context for the massacres. This perspective stemmed from his adherence to cultural separatism, articulated in private in March 1959 to Alain Peyrefitte, a young Gaullist deputy and close political advisor. He privately confided that he could not see how France could absorb 10 million Muslims who would become 20 million and then 40 million because France would no longer be France that ‘a European people of a white race, Greek and Latin culture and Christian religion’.⁶⁵ It also stemmed from the fact that de Gaulle did not see the *harkis* as a coherent group, discounting in a government meeting on 3 April 1962 as ‘a magma which had served no purpose, and which it was necessary to get rid of without delay’.⁶⁶

This prejudice had a clear class complexion. For de Gaulle only those who he saw as having successfully assimilated, such as the politician Bachaga Boualam, could be accepted in. However, the majority could not be because they were Algerian who would find it impossible to adapt to French culture and would represent an economic burden. There was the suspicion too that some *harkis* might be sympathetic to settler terrorism that was threatening the French state, while at the same time the French government did not want to jeopardise future relations with the Algerian state by allowing in potential opponents to that state. As a consequence little was done for rural peasantry who bore the brunt of the violence. Even when knowledge of the massacres became impossible of the French government to deny by August 1962, the authorities set out strict guidelines stipulating that the French units could not actively search out threatened *harkis*. They had to wait until the *harkis* came to the barracks themselves and then they had to carefully screened.⁶⁷

On the FLN side, violence was shaped by a mixture of nationalism and state-making, coloured by a war culture as well as a belief in the purification of society. Right from the outset all these elements were at the centre FLN strategy. Within the ‘1 November 1954 Declaration’ violence was not a political lever.⁶⁸ It was how national liberation was going to be achieved. Algerians had a national duty to mobilise behind the FLN in a peoples’ war and those who did not would be treated as traitors to be liquidated. Within this framework FLN militants became obsessed with the idea that the greatest danger was pro-French Algerians; a fear that was fuelled by the uncertain conditions of clandestine warfare that made rumour rife and produced constant purges of supposed collaborators.

This violent, polarised nationalism was shaped by models of French nationalism and French revolutionary culture, both in terms of a peoples' war of patriots versus enemies and the desire for a centrally controlled nation-state. It was derived more recently from the examples anti-colonial nationalism of the Irish War of Independence, seen like Algeria to be national struggle to recover land and religious identity, and the Vietnamese struggle against the French in the Indochina War. At the same time it drew upon a deep seated rural millenarianism which envisaged the end of French colonialism in terms of a climatic violent act.⁶⁹ The role of the FLN, therefore, was not mass action. It was about hardened, uncompromising, masculine vanguard that would set this millenarianism alight through terrorism.

That said at certain moments FLN documents could be conciliatory. In autumn 1959 slogans to be diffused as graffiti or on tracts claimed that there was a place for the *harkis* in the National Liberation Army (ALN): 'the colonialists despise you, the GPRA (*The Algerian Provisional Government Republic*) will restore to you dignity, Honour and liberty, join the ALN.'⁷⁰ The same language was also aimed at Algerian conscripts in the French Army in a February 1960 tract:

ALGERIAN: In the French army, you are suspected, watched, despised, in the ALN, you are with your brothers! Come...⁷¹

But this language of conciliation, seeing the *harkis* and Algerian conscripts as victims of colonialism, was far outweighed by an unforgiving language of violence, based upon the conclusion that these groups had made the wrong political choices. Repeatedly it was made clear that independence victory would lead to a violent reckoning as with this letter of intimidation to 'Muslim counter-revolutionaries' from 1956:

Those who link their future to the moribund mechanism of colonialism are making a bad calculation. Before classing you amongst those who have gone astray, we are offering you one more chance to retake the path of Honour. Misfortune to those who stubbornly persist against our liberation movement. Today or later or anywhere the judgement of the ALN tribunals will be carried out. The traitors condemned to death will not escape the blows of our *fedayeens* (commandos).⁷²

Or the following tract from late 1957 calling on Algerians to desert from in the French army:

ALGERIA WILL BE INDEPENDENT WITH OR WITHOUT YOU. But we do not want you to be tarred with the shame of being a collaborator...ONE DAY IT WILL BE TOO LATE AND THEN IT WILL BE OH WELL FOR THOSE WHO DID NOT LISTEN TO THE VOICE OF TRUTH.⁷³

In the Aurès Mountains in the south of the country on 9 January 1958 the following warning was left on the body of Algerian, left in full view contrary to Islam that calls for immediate burial:

Here is the fate reserved to he who obeys or loves France. Deserved to die. He had no faith in our movement. He is not a Muslim. With colonialism, he deserves to die like a dog. He ignored the benefits of the ALN and we have cut his throat. Pay the price...of betrayal, O dog!⁷⁴

Similarly a letter by Colonel Amirouche, commander of Wilaya 4, to a local *harki* leader dated 15 November 1958 made clear the terrible consequences of his actions, not just for him but his children who will always be hated as ‘sons of a traitor.’⁷⁵ He then posed the question:

Will France take you?...She will well and truly abandon you, and you will be like a blind man in the middle of the desert, trying in vain to find your path.⁷⁶

Yet, as Algeria entered the endgame some FLN language was reconciliatory. One directive by Ben Tobbal, the Interior Minister in the Provisional Government, from January 1961 underlined the need to multiply contacts with the *harkis* and by ‘a work of persuasion’ bring them over to the ALN ranks.⁷⁷ He was frank that many were ‘bastards’ but many too had become *harkis* through ‘weakness’ or ‘pressure from the enemy.’⁷⁸ In the weeks following the cease-fire in March 1962 this sympathetic approach surfaced again. One FLN document in Western Algeria in April stated that the *harkis* would not be harmed and considered just like any volunteer for the liberation struggle:

O soldiers with the French army, you are today under the guardianship of France but your provisional Algerian government has signed an agreement with the French government which brings us peace. They must be respected by the French forces and by us in accordance with national honour.⁷⁹

In contrast one FLN document dated 10 April 1962 left no doubt about the fate awaiting them. It underlined how the FLN had to play a cunning double game, winning them over temporarily in order to eliminate them:

Nobody ignores their shameful and criminal behaviour...If the Revolution has condemned them, the fact remains that the people will strike them and will always continue to reject them. Nevertheless, the cease-fire is not peace, we will use tact and act with flexibility in order to win them over provisionally in order not to give them the opportunity to play the game of the enemy...Their final judgement will take place in a free and independent Algeria before God and the people will then be responsible for

fate...They will be written down on a black list which must be that must be kept thoroughly.⁸⁰

Such language laid the ground for the massacres. It drove the violence from below just after independence as well as that of November 1962, the third wave of anti-*harki* violence, when the massacres took on a new colour. Now, through the coordinated action of the military and the police, it was about state violence from above. It was about the organs of a state in making asserting control over the Algerian population through the elimination of a perceived internal fifth column.

By the same token the massacres were the consequence of a specific FLN revolutionary war culture. Encapsulated in the 1955 Algerian national anthem composed by the patriotic poet Zakariyya Mufdi, this war culture was built upon the concept of martyrdom:

On our heroes we will build a glory
And on our bodies we will go up to immortality,
On our hearts, we will build an army
And of our hope we will raise the standard.
Face of the Release, we lent oath to you
And we swore to die so that Algeria lives

Refrain:
Testify! Testify! Testify!

The cry of the fatherland assembles battle fields.
Listen and answer it the call.
Write it in the blood of the martyrs
And dictate it with the future generations.
We gave you the hand, O glory,
And we swore to die so that Algeria lives

Refrain:
Testify! Testify! Testify!⁸¹

By September 1959, as with the following slogan aimed at Algerian conscripts in the French Army, the FLN had given this blood sacrifice a precise number - of one million: 'Algerian brothers, a million of your brother martyrs are watching you, they have died for you, honour their sacrifices and join the ALN.'⁸² Such imagery became the basis of a heroic resistance narrative that stigmatised the *harkis* as the enemy of the people and the ultimate hate figures. With the euphoria of independence this war narrative reached new heights: a muscular patriotism that stirred up calls for revenge in the name of the dead martyrs.

For this reason the anti-*harki* violence was conceived of in terms of particular purification model. It was about cleansing the nation of traitors. Furthermore, they had to be killed because of the future threat they posed to internal security; a sentiment intensified by paranoia about neo-colonialism, that is perceived French attempts to maintain their rule by both installing pro-French elements in power and limiting the power of the new Algerian nation state. In this context another layer of complexity was the role of those *harkis* who deserted just before independence. Painfully aware of how their own behaviour could lay them open to retribution, they had a vested interest in showing their loyalty to the incoming FLN and for some this was done by being at the forefront of revenge violence.

In turn this purification model explains why the violence was symbolic. It was not about military objectives. It was about asserting national boundaries through protracted torture which is why the violence was neither detached nor technological. This was intimate violence performed in front of a public. This was violence which aimed at personal humiliation through bodily mutilation, in particular sexual humiliation through emasculation of men and the head shaving of women, as the 18 August 1962 French report cited at the beginning testified. Crucially, too, at no point was this revenge violence stopped and channelled into a legal process. There was no Algerian equivalent of the post-1944 trials of French collaborators. Nor did anti-*harki* violence endure as a state organised internment system. Instead the violence petered out while the interned *harkis* were released by 1970. What remained was a language of hate where to be called a *harki* was the ultimate political insult. By contrast it was in France that large numbers of *harkis* became the basis of a camp system. This is the striking specificity of the *harki* example: camp control by the former colonial power as they were placed in camps and organised into forest clearance schemes, in effect sealed off from mainstream French society through a continuation of colonial control.⁸³

Finally, and no less importantly, the anti-*harki* violence happened because there was little or no international reaction at the level of global organisations, other countries or the press. Partly this was because the particularity of the violence was lost within the generalised bloodshed that marked the end of French Algeria, but mainly it was because of geo-political calculations. By 1962 there was generalised international support for Algerian independence, particularly in Africa and Asia but also amongst communist bloc and France's allies, and in this context the massacres just did not register or were tolerated as a necessary evil. In other words the violence was accepted because it was interpreted as internal violence that would bring about long term good on the world stage: the creation of a stable Algerian nation state.

Conclusion: Towards an emotional history of decolonisation

An emotional history of the Algerian War is still to be written, although clearly personal and political emotions were at the crux of the conflict. This conclusion will point towards how such a history might be envisaged by opening up the question of the emotional economy that framed the Algerian violence of 1962. In particular it will focus upon the concept of the ‘emotional community’ - that is the understanding of the emotional states of other people, in order to situate the particular context for the massacres.⁸⁴

Clearly 1962 was a moment of enormous emotional crisis. It represented the final failure of the ideal of a Franco-Muslim community idea that had been the basis of huge state violence in spring 1956. At this point the Fourth Republic deployed some 400,000 troops in an operation that was justified not as a war, indeed the word war was withheld at an official level, but as an act of patriotic fraternity. This counter-insurgency violence was about not about upholding the colonial status-quo. It was driven by a sense of specific ‘emotional community.’ It was about protecting fellow citizens, French and Muslim alike, from a terrorist minority. It was about reaching out to Muslims through large scale reforms that would result in a large scale emotional identification with France. This is why the French Army invested so much effort in raising *harki* units.

By 1961 De Gaulle had come to the conclusion that this Franco-Muslim community had failed. For him it was clear that although some Algerians did identify with France, even to the extent of feeling to be fully French citizens, most empathised emotionally with Algerian nationalism. In this context de Gaulle underlined the fact that his task as a political leader was to make decisions above emotion or romanticism. Whether performing in cabinet or on television, he projected a particular type of political masculinity that encoded detachment, level headedness and realism.⁸⁵ In contrast both to the Fourth Republic, which he derided as weak and divided, and to pro-French Algeria settlers, which he attacked as pursuing narrow interests, he conceptualised himself and the new Fifth Republic as strong, resolute and forward looking. Crucially he saw himself as speaking from an elevated position above the fray which allowed him to understand the higher interests of the French state and then communicate these interests through a series of direct television and radio addresses to the French people. As such he conceptualised the end of French Algeria and decolonisation in general as a victory for

modernisation, the process by which France married the twentieth century, and therefore he saw the *harkis* as losers to be sacrificed. In terms of ‘emotional community’ he did not see them as French and showed indifference to their plight, openly admitting that they would suffer.⁸⁶ Indeed, in cabinet he ruthlessly exploited his personal political legitimacy to face down ministers over the issue in a cabinet meeting on 25 July 1962:

We cannot agree to take all Muslims who come here declaring that they do not agree with the Algerian government. The term repatriate obviously does not apply to Muslims; they are not returning to the land of their fathers. In their case they would be refugees.⁸⁷

Ministers who disagreed did not continue the argument. Intimidated by de Gaulle’s outburst, they bowed their heads in shame. However, within sections of the army there was anger at de Gaulle’s abandonment.⁸⁸ This led to disobedient clandestine action which, driven by notions of military honour, brought large numbers of *harkis* to France. Likewise at the end of June French newspaper *Combat* published a public appeal to give political refuge to the *harkis* that called upon French people to write to parties and trade-unions demanding action.⁸⁹

This intellectual campaign failed to produce a large-scale emotional response because most French people followed de Gaulle’s logic. By 1962 they just wanted an end to the Algerian War and the dominant mood was relief tempered by indifference and hostility to the partisans of French Algeria. In the case of the settlers, this hostility was balanced by a sense that they were French and could ultimately be integrated.⁹⁰ In contrast most saw the *harkis* as too different culturally and ethnically. They did not see them as fellow citizens to be taken in or allies to be protected. Rather, there was the suspicion that the *harkis* were sympathetic to settler terrorism and hence a potential internal threat to the unity of the nation: an emotional framework which, remembering the Liberation in 1944, also saw them as collaborators whose suffering was a consequence of the wrong political choices. The massacres, therefore, were the result of a double purification process. Both de Gaulle and the FLN wanted to cleanse the *harkis* from their respective nations.

Returning to the revisionist approach to the history of political violence offered by Bloxham and Gerwarth,⁹¹ the Algerian case demonstrates the fallacy of attributing violent practices to socio-cultural determinants, while also illustrating the immense significance of wider global factors in shaping the motives and character of violent actions. The Algerian example therefore fits within the context of other wars of decolonization from the post-1945 period, all the product of a deeper history of imperialism, racism, and subjugation. As Khalilli

reminds us,⁹² violence will never be fully understood unless it is freed from its localised obsessions and set in a broader comparative and global frame.

Martin Evans is Professor of Modern European History at the University of Sussex.

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Endnotes

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¹⁶ Alain Jacob, 'Les forces en présence', *Le Monde*, 20 March 1962, 12.

¹⁷ Guy Pervillé, 'La tragédie des Harkis: qui est responsable', *L'Histoire. La Guerre d'Algérie: sans mythes ni tabous*, 2002, 88-93. The Sections Administratives Spécialisées (SAS) were established in 1955. Trained by the military but under the control of the local civilian administration, the SAS officers' brief was to build bridges between France and poor Muslims through the construction of schools, roads and clinics. In short their purpose was to win Muslim 'hearts and minds'.

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- ³⁴ Dalila Kerchouche, *Mon Père, Ce Harki* (Paris, 2003).
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- ³⁹ Roux, *Les Harkis ou les Oubliés de l'Histoire*.
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⁴⁴ On 28 June 1962 Bachaga Boualam made an impassioned speech on the massacres in the National Assembly. The anti-colonial activist and historian Pierre Vidal-Naquet wrote an impassioned article in *Le Monde*, 11 November 1962,

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⁴⁶ Kerchouche, *Mon Père, Ce Harki*.

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⁷⁶ Ibid.

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