

Crapanzano, Vincent: *The Harkis. The Wound That Never Heals*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2011. 240 pp. ISBN 978-0-226-11876-5. Price: \$ 35.00

This year, 2012, marks the fiftieth anniversary of Algerian independence. Coming at the end of an extremely brutal war of decolonisation which, from 1954 until 1962, saw the Front de Libération Nationale (FLN) pit itself against the French state, the Algerian War achieved global notoriety for the violence employed by both sides. Over the past five decades the legacies of this complex and highly divisive war have played out on both sides of the Mediterranean in multifaceted ways. Since the 1990s, in addition to attracting an increasing amount of academic attention, this history has also become a highly contested terrain for the many groups implicated in and affected by the conflict and the colonial period. As groups ranging from veterans, to the former settlers (*pieds-noirs*), to Algerians living and working in France have each stepped forward to claim a space for their histories and memories, the French state has found it difficult to navigate the resultant plurality of voices and competing demands for recognition.

Anthropologist Vincent Crapanzano has chosen to use his latest book to focus on one of the communities intimately embroiled in this so-called “war of memories”: the Harkis. These were Algerians who, for varying reasons, ended up fighting with the French during the War of Independence and who, as a result of their actions were subjected to retributive violence on a massive scale at the end of the conflict. Those who could, fled with their families to France where the state, already overwhelmed by an influx of close to one million *pieds-noirs*, placed the Harkis in a series of camps which were intended to be temporary expedients, but which for many Harkis ended up being their homes for far longer. The treatment received by the Harkis in these camps and even after they were successively closed, combined with the sense that France had abandoned them at the end of the conflict to a vengeful FLN, produced a powerful sentiment of betrayal and injustice within the community. From the mid-1970s onwards this sentiment has been harnessed and mobilised by the children of the Harkis who have sought, through a variety of tactics and forums, to use it to claim recompense, but more importantly, recognition from the French state on behalf of their parents and also themselves.

Crapanzano begins his narrative by setting out the contemporary character of this activism, using protests in 2005 against Messaoud Benyoucef’s play “Le nom du père” (The Name of the Father) to highlight what is deemed to be at stake for this “community of memory” (160) and how this shapes their interactions with other actors and representations. This is followed by chronologically structured chapters which trace the history of the Harkis from the colonial period, through the war and its immediate aftermath, to their arrival in France and their time in the camps, finishing with their present-day situation and self-perception. As Crapanzano himself admits, for those familiar with the history of the Harkis there is little new information in these chapters (13), although for Anglophone readers coming to the subject for the first time they offer a useful, if partial, point of access to ex-

isting French scholarship. The final chapter has the self-explanatory title of “Reflections,” although Crapanzano’s reflections are not confined to these thirty-two pages, but instead are interwoven throughout his text. It is here that the real substance of the book lies, with history serving as a necessary hook onto which Crapanzano hangs his psychologically attuned anthropological insights. He eruditely explores the many paradoxes embodied in the experience of being a Harki, but, more particularly, in being the descendant of one of these men and the “double wound” this imposes (9). Early on in the book, Crapanzano quotes Michael Jackson’s observation that “every human needs some modicum of choice, craves some degree of understanding, demands some say, and expects some sense of control over the course of his or her life” (The Politics of Storytelling. Copenhagen 2002: 14), before going on to highlight how difficult and problematic each of these fundamental elements has been, and indeed remains, for the Harkis and their children to achieve. He conveys very forcefully what he perceives as the internal struggle faced by these individuals as they try to negotiate the binaries and paradoxes that structure their lives, and the extent to which they feel trapped by these. For Crapanzano, perhaps the greatest “trap” for the Harki community has been the “politically vested identity that they have taken up – that they have been forced to take up” (176). This politicised collective identity, which is presented as revolving around a set litany of betrayals, injustices, and grievances, primarily directed against the French, is very openly described by Crapanzano as a source of “irritation” (10) and a barrier which repeatedly prevented him from accessing the particularities of individual experiences and emotions that he sought. In his own attempts not to generalise the Harki experience, Crapanzano introduces a variety of different voices and perspectives into his narrative, with these becoming progressively more detailed and extensive as the chronological narrative advances. However, there remains a strong sense throughout of a collective Harki identity and set of experiences anchored in emotions of betrayal, abandonment, shame, humiliation, and rage that are continually repeated and which consequently threaten to subsume Crapanzano’s carefully elucidated individual nuances. As he writes in the final chapter, his portrait “does not do justice to the often remarkable ways in which many Harkis and their families have been able to preserve their dignity, their honor, and that *élan* that is a prerequisite for successful family and professional life” (188). In addition, there is perhaps space within Crapanzano’s “loosely phenomenological approach” (6) for a more extensive discussion of methodology, especially in relation to his data collection methods given the issues he admits encountering in this regard.

One of the most dynamic areas within studies of the Harkis in recent years has been the publication of testimony. Coming in the wake of a long period of silence from the Harkis and their spouses, this has been a highly welcome development. However, now that these voices are being made increasingly available, it is perhaps time that more attention was devoted to the motivations and strategic choices that underpin these narratives and the

actions of those collecting and distributing them. It is in this respect, by providing a thought-provoking, if at times controversial, reflection on these issues and their implications, that Crapanzano makes his most significant contribution.

Claire Eldridge

Creed, Gerald W.: *Masquerade and Postsocialism. Ritual and Cultural Dispossession in Bulgaria.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011. 254 pp. ISBN 978-0-253-22261-9. Price: \$ 24.95

Gerald Creed's "Masquerade and Postsocialism. Ritual and Cultural Dispossession in Bulgaria" is an empirically rich and theoretically sophisticated analysis of the postsocialist condition in rural Bulgaria. Using the Bulgarian ritual of mumming as a window onto the lived experiences of ordinary men and women as they have struggled to survive the social, political, and economic upheavals that followed the collapse of communism in 1989, Creed masterfully explores a variety of scholarly themes. Grounded in beautifully written thick descriptions of mumming rituals across Bulgaria, the text is an intellectual tour de force, challenging Western assumptions and pointing out the shortcomings of previous social scientific knowledge production about both Bulgaria and postsocialist Eastern Europe more broadly.

The book is divided up into an introduction, a brief conclusion, and five substantive chapters. The first chapter, "A Mumming Season" is a purely descriptive examination of various mumming rituals in different Bulgarian villages, giving a reader a sense of their similarities and differences across time and place. Because Creed has been conducting fieldwork in Bulgaria over the span of almost twenty-five years, his knowledge of the mumming ritual is nuanced and exquisitely detailed. In essence, mumming rituals consist of bands of men who don elaborate costumes and masks each year in the months of either January or February. In addition to ritual performances for the whole village, these mummers (or *kukeri* as they are locally called) visit individual homes to ward off evil and bring good luck for the coming year. Although these rituals are seemingly remnants of premodern paganism, Creed provocatively argues that they are instead "modernity in drag."

The subsequent chapters are almost stand-alone analyses of four themes: Gender and Sexuality, Civil Society and Democracy, Autonomy and Community, and Ethnicity and Nationalism. The second chapter on gender and sexuality wonderfully explores the definition and redefinition of appropriate masculinities in the postsocialist era and how mumming provides an important avenue for the performance of masculinity for those men who have found themselves emasculated by the collapse of the rural economies. In this chapter, Creed artfully weaves in his own participation in mumming rituals to discuss the shifting terrain upon which men must negotiate their manhoods in response to new Western discourses of gender and sexuality.

The next three chapters are specific engagements with contemporary scholarly debates. Chapter three is a

groundbreaking examination of the inherent Western biases evident in scholarly notions of what constitutes "civil society," wherein Creed argues convincingly that something important is lost, when theorists exclude informal cultural practices and performances from their definition of civic organizing. Chapter four challenges Western idealizations of notions of "community," which rely too heavily on tropes of harmony and cooperation. Creed argues that community can also be sustained by ongoing conflicts and discord, and that the presence of disharmony does not automatically reduce to atomization, a concept that has been used to explain the relative lack of the "right" kind of civil society in postcommunist countries. The fifth chapter is a compelling analysis of relations between ethnic Bulgarians (i.e., Slavs) and Bulgarian Roma populations through an examination of the roles that "Gypsy" figures play in various mumming rituals. This organization of the chapters makes the book particularly suitable for undergraduate teaching purposes. The first descriptive chapter can be combined with any of the four subsequent chapters to produce a rich reading unit that brings the Bulgarian case to bear on any of the aforementioned themes.

Rather than seeing the resurgence of mumming rituals in Bulgaria as a sign of neo-traditionalism or a renewed political orientation to the past, Creed chooses to read into the rituals a critique of postsocialism and the many failures of democracy and free market capitalism in the rural areas of Bulgaria. For many of Creed's informants, he writes that mumming is an: "... apt metaphor for the experience of rural postsocialism – a system where unreason reigns and every economic initiative is more of a gamble than a calculated venture. In their experience, this shift Westward made life more Byzantine, market principles produced patently irrational programs, and democracy generated rather unenlightened political stalemates. Mumming is the perfect response to this difficulty and uncertainty. It is not a return to magic but an assessment of the felicitous affinity between ineffective magical practices and postsocialism. The visceral experience of mumming as somewhat chaotic and unregulated only adds to its affective correlation with the postsocialist condition. Villagers have found new meaning in mumming not because they are backward but because they are thoughtful, expressive beings and see in mumming an image of their inexplicable and unredeemable predicament. For many, it is precisely because they have a modern secular interpretation of mumming as old-fashioned, unrestrained, and even superstitious that it resonates so beautifully with their contemporary lives! For these mummers, the appeal to tradition is not so much a rejection of modern options as an indictment of the current system's failure to deliver the modern spoils they were implicitly promised" (205).

As this extended quote beautifully demonstrates, Creed uses the ritual of mumming to uncover the complex and little discussed experience of rural communities in Bulgaria over the last two decades. As such, the book is a splendid addition to the field of postsocialist cultural studies and particularly to those anthropologists interested in ritual and ritual enactments in contemporary