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# COLONIAL ENCOUNTERS IN ALBERT CAMUS: ALGERIA AND LIMITS OF FREEDOM

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**Abstract:** While the early literary works of Albert Camus often neglect and erase the lives of Arabs and the backdrop of Algeria, his later works are infiltrated by the situation and encounters of the Algerian war of decolonization. Multiple encounters between Arabs, Berbers, *pied-noirs*, and French can be found in his later work that complicate both his early philosophical views but also his political stances. These encounters among the backdrop of the Algerian war pushed his philosophical views to their limits. Through reading both literary and philosophical works by Camus, this essay argues that the Algerian war forced a change in Camus' work that complicates widely held views of his political positions on colonial Algeria and his own philosophical ideas.

Much of Albert Camus' literary work is set in Algeria, usually involving some Arab characters, often in the background, perhaps silent observers, yet sometimes holding power or knowledge above and beyond the French characters. As Camus' work developed and changed throughout his literary career, the site of Algeria and the representation of Arab and Berber characters began to push well into his work often complicating his original philosophical points, a change happening alongside the rise of the Algerian War. Camus' literary works move from prioritizing philosophical points in the early works of the 1940s to exploring encounters and conflicts in the midst of the Algerian decolonization war in the later works of the 1950s. In *L'Étranger*, his first major work, the Arabs are nuisances,

watching over Meursault and his friends, and the murder of an Arab follows. Where in *La Peste*, another early major work, Arabs are virtually invisible, disappearing and dropping dead at every moment within the blandly portrayed city of Oran. Yet in many of the stories of *L'Exil et le Royaume*, published fifteen years after *L'Étranger* as the Algerian War was well underway, the Algerian landscape and the Arab characters become more pronounced. These short stories focus on inter-cultural encounters between Algerian Arabs and Berbers, *pied-noirs*, and the French. These encounters open up paths of thought that force his early philosophical notions, like freedom and the absurd, to be expanded. In these stories Camus places *pied-noirs* in situations that draw out their conflicted identities, and the Arab and Berber characters force Camus' work into encounters that question the politics of colonialism and identity rather than affirm them. These encounters force both *pied-noir* and Arab and Berber characters to face each other in the heart of the decolonizing Algerian context, raising new questions about civility and freedom. Camus' characters become more complex and nuanced, attempting, although often failing, to reconcile the complicated position between multiple worlds where one encounters, is confronted by, and is changed by the politics and complexities of others. This later literature can be read as a literature of the encounter in a decolonizing context.

In the short stories *La Femme adultère* and *L'Hôte*, both from the collection *L'Exil et le Royaume*, the Arab characters represent aspects of the French and even *pied-noir* characters' psyches, representing lost or forbidden identities, holding the power to confront and change. We see Janine's ongoing encounters with the Arabs in *La Femme adultère* moving her closer and closer to a personal reintegration, a forced reclamation of what she could not accept about herself and her relationship. These encounters not only show the fragmentation of Janine's identity but also the incongruity of French-Algerian encounters in colonial Algeria. These issues become even more pronounced in *L'Hôte* where Daru, the *pied-noir*, living high up on the plateau surrounded by inhospitable landscape, far away from the daily functioning of colonialism, is pulled exactly into the middle of the French-Algerian conflict as he must take in an Arab murderer under French orders. He must be hospitable amidst colonialism, in an inhospitable environment that refuses freedom, where the roles

between host and guest have been so far distorted that one must closely scrutinize who is hosting whom and at what costs. Daru wrestles with his identity as neither French nor Arab in light of forced encounters with both. These stories and encounters complicate any French presence in Algeria, opening up multiple possible identities, outlining the difficult dynamics amidst French-Algeria.

Rene Girard accuses Camus of playing God in *L'Étranger*, of setting up the reader to think that Meursault committed a murder that can be perceived as innocent only so that he can construct a story where Meursault would be condemned for his personal traits rather than for the murder. (Girard 524) It is a failed allegory where Camus dictates the reader's experience. Camus' later works, however, stepping back from this type of strategic interference, let the themes in his work be pushed by the social context in which he was writing. Such analysis opens up beyond the simplicity of the absurd, where even once meaning in the world is denounced one must still encounter the limitations of freedom and the face of oppression. This contextualization within the Algerian War allows his work to move beyond the frameworks by which he is so often referred today. This late period of Camus' work, although surrounded by political controversy due to his public political stance on *L'Algérie-Française*, allows readers today to rethink his place in literary history, not simply as a French writer or as the author of French-colonial literature, but as literature addressing the impossibility of exile and freedom within colonial Algeria. His stories move across two and sometimes three worlds, yet unable to be completely integrated within, or completely distinct from, any of them.

### **La Peste and the Problem of Algerian Representation**

From the first pages of *La Peste*, Camus' second major work, Algeria is portrayed silently. Oran, the coastal city where the story takes place, is "ugly. It has a smug placid air and you need time to discover what it is that makes it different from so many business centers in other parts of the world" (LP 3) It is a town of lack, it has an indistinct view that refuses differentiation. Its meaning in the text

derives only from absence and its inability to differentiate itself. This inability and this lack that puts Oran in line with all other business centers around the world gives the reader the impression that it is not too bad. Colonialism, that is. It is "A town without pigeons, without any trees or gardens, where you never hear the beat of wings or the rustle of leaves" (3) Its elements are deadening, and the citizens are perfect for this town. They are bored, habitually wandering through life, missing of passion and spirit. They lack mindfulness and personhood as they wander silently in this place of non-differentiation. Habits dominate the environment that convinces these wandering lacks that this world has meaning, that this city encompasses a future. Camus' narrative strategy offers the reader a privileged perspective that can sufficiently distinguish this fullness that can diagnose the lack and decipher the loss from what should be. He stands within yet beyond the functioning of this society, and as a result Camus, here, holds the power of differentiation, not the reader. The reader cannot have an authentic experience with the landscape, because the narrator has already and can only make these distinctions, and we must read with this power in mind. Such a positioning raises the question of authorial intention and of the limitation of possible readings, of whether we can trust Camus. Looking back upon this work we must read these aspects of his early work historically, written by an author both the product of, and collaborator with, French colonialism.

Under Camus' guide one can too easily point to the name Oran in *La Peste*, and Algeria in the text generally, as a generalizable signifier, one that can be substituted for any other bland coastal town anywhere else. Yet such depictions raise suspicion as to Camus' relationship with Algeria. David Carroll in his defense of Camus' portrayal of Oran states, "The city depicted in *The Plague* shares little with it except its name, geographic location, and general physical characteristics." (53) He argues that readers should disregard the city as any possible representation of Algeria so as not to place Camus within the tradition of French colonialist writers. While Camus attempts to present in *La Peste* an allegory displaying the limits, breadth, and sometimes refusal of political resistance even when the disease being resisted continues to spread, one also cannot ignore other political positions at play within the text. Where *La Peste* has

something to say about the situation of French occupation in World War II, one too cannot ignore the author's subjectivity and history at work in relation to French-Algerian politics. Following Roland Barthes, two references he wrote not long after the Algerian War, one must release *La Peste* from authorial intention as World War II allegory and instead interact with the multitude of possible meanings and implications of this text, of its play and production, while taking particular care to not simply consume it (1968, 1977).<sup>1</sup> Hence it becomes difficult to agree with Carroll's overall point that this allegory is devoid of colonialist implications and that the location of the city used in the text is of little importance to critical analyses. Camus and his work could never be outside of the French colonial situation even if he wanted to or thought he was. However generalized Oran becomes in the text, this city is specifically late colonial Oran, and one must call attention to such details within this book written just fifteen years before the French-Algerian story gains a different voice, one that differentiates itself. From Edward Said: "To read them [Camus' texts] in light of decolonization, is neither to slight their great aesthetic force, nor to treat them reductively as imperialist propaganda. Still, it is a much graver mistake to read them stripped of their affiliations with the facts of power which informed and enabled them." (161) Camus no longer controls the meaning of his text. Since its release it has produced connections and activities of interpretation beyond the intended allegory. It can and should be read within the history of writing on Algeria during the late colonial period. One must read Camus' social situation into his fiction as textual practice. In this early work, Camus specifically archives Algeria near the breaking point of a French colonialist vision.

While Camus publicly and repeatedly denounced the inequalities of French-Algerian colonialism,<sup>2</sup> and this point should be remembered, his early fictional constructions confirm his political and philosophical limitations at the point of their development,

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<sup>1</sup> See *The Death of the Author* and *From Work to Text* both essays can be found in Barthes, Roland. *Image Music Text*. London: Fontana Press. 1977. Print.

<sup>2</sup> See: *Selected Political Writings*. Ed. Jonathan H. King. London: Methuen & Co. Ltd, 1981. 167-215. Print (French Edition).

showing their contamination in his literary works. Camus's early texts offer a unique site for reading how a colonial archive functions, and to read Camus' undifferentiated landscapes and politics of Arab representation as unimportant elements of how his work is consumed reifies French colonial history and allows himself to be canonized as a product of this very history. One must read carefully as Camus' work overall cannot be so easily placed as a French colonialist, nor even as simply French. He was born and raised in a low-income, mixed area of Belcourt, Algiers, and to place him so easily within a French archive would be to ignore the specificity and development of his politics, philosophy, and literature.

### The Limits and Development of Freedom

To place Camus solely as French is to neglect the complexity of his own upbringing in Algeria, and to read his work solely as a colonial product refuses an engagement with his literary development and neglects the details of his personal life and politics. Emily Apter, however, locates Camus' notion of freedom as the product of a thoroughly western spectator forever speculating on his own freedom, at the expense of Algerian freedom. She states, "It is the stranger in the Algerians' midst who reverses the path of his own estranging effect as foreign occupier, so that it falls back on himself; forming a narcissistic loop around that eminently seductive, philosophically prestigious figure of the existential anti-hero--l'étranger." (505) Apter's quote locates Camus' work as neglecting the estrangement French presence enacts, an estrangement that seemingly includes the actions of *pied-noirs*, upon Algerian Arabs and Berbers,<sup>3</sup> so that the "French" can privilege their own situation. Although Camus distanced himself from the term existential, Apter's critique marks one of the most important concepts of Camus' early work, freedom, as founded upon French colonialist narcissism. Freedom played an important part all the way through Camus' work while being pushed to and beyond its limits. To address Apter's

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<sup>3</sup> The term 'Algerian' or Algerians from this point forward, intends to encompass the Arab and Berber population of Algeria. *Pied-noirs* will be referred to separately.

stance on the issue of freedom, however, one must look at his literary and political writings as well as his upbringing and position as a *pied-noir* to determine whether this notion functions in the same way all throughout his work, whether there can be a stabilized notion of freedom in Camus, and to determine whether his experience as a *pied-noir* can accurately be described as French.

As Camus began to write about the politics of Algeria and colonialism his literary work was undergoing a change where Algerians and the burgeoning war were infiltrating his work, provoking yet unforeseen encounters that deserve specific analysis. Politically, his notion of freedom played a particularly important role as the war was underway in defending the right for *pied-noirs* to live in Algeria after colonialism. His position raises questions as to whether this application of the concept was simply a colonialist move or whether his situation as a *pied-noir* differentiates him from the privileged French colonialist position. Camus, himself, was born in Algeria to a French father and a mother of Spanish origin, and his childhood was far from privileged. In Herbert R. Lottman's biography *Camus* we see a lack of privilege surrounding the Camus family and their life in Algeria. (1979) Albert and his family lived in a mixed French and Muslim neighborhood in Belcourt and were extremely poor, his mom illiterate, his dad dying when Albert was young. While this is not to say he did not experience an ethnic based European privilege, he definitely did not experience any financial or capitalist gains from French colonialism. Further, his political writings and views, while complex, directly critique French colonialism and the inequalities placed upon the Arab and Berber populations, and as we will see in *L'Hôte* he did not align *pied-noir* identity with French identity.

While one should question Camus' support towards some French involvement in a postcolonial Algeria, to accept Apter's point one would need to argue for the greater truth of his early writings like *L'Étranger* and *La Peste* along with his political writings over and against the developing trajectory of his literary writings. While one cannot deny that individual freedom in works like *L'Étranger* and *La Peste* stand on top of an Algerian landscape, wasting the possibilities available, referring only to a French or a *pied-noir* perspective, the later short stories dramatically focus on the differences between *pied-*

*noirs* and the French and the Arabs and Berbers. As we will see in *L'Hôte* and in *La Femme adultère*, encounters emerge where complex identities are thrust into the foreground and any notion of freedom from a French colonialist position is pushed well beyond its limits. The freedom from the earlier works is a differentiation from social ideology, a denouncing of meaning in the world while affirming life. Yet the notion of freedom that emerges in the later works is one that falters in the colonial situation that can never be outside of the tension and conflict in French-Algeria, where the Arab characters display and confront the limitations of any concept of freedom. Apter's quote, while sweeping, raises the important question as to who is welcome within Camus' early notion of freedom and whether this notion can be read as a colonialist notion, but it neglects the shifts that can be seen in the later literary works.

Camus' concept of freedom, philosophically, is one he felt must be continually revisited, protected, and reclaimed yet it must not be confused with complete and total freedom beyond humanism that disregards life. Although Camus adamantly supported freedom he certainly did not support lawlessness or a Hobbesian state of nature. Freedom, for Camus, comes the result of a move away from any meaning attributed to the world, and once one takes such a stance one affirms other possibilities beyond the ideology of society. Once one rejects meaning in the world one must too reject suicide or death as a form of escape. Freedom, as an acceptance of the absurd or the lack of meaning in the world, is for Camus an affirmation of life despite the meaninglessness of the world. Camus places humanism at the heart of his philosophy where he values life most since accepting the absurd and establishing freedom develops out of personal experience. "But it is obvious that absurdism hereby admits that human life is the only necessary good since it is precisely life that makes this encounter possible and since, without life, the absurdist wager would have no basis." (Camus, RBL 6) Camus' thought depends upon the centrality of life for any analysis and develops out of an analysis of interiority and experience. Any call to freedom, then, must not impose on life or support the destruction of life. For it is humanism, before the absurd and beyond freedom, that supports Camus' philosophy. Camus states that every rebel, and the acceptance of the absurd, opposes oppression, pleading for and

affirming life. "The freedom he claims, he claims for all; the freedom he refuses, he forbids everyone to enjoy." (284) A rebellion as a move against the norms of justice that have become unfair must affirm freedom and justice for everyone. Following this analysis it becomes clear how Camus could support decolonisation but not Algerian independence given that the takeover by the F.L.N. would immediately forbid *pied-noirs* from living in Algeria, a stance that neglects what Camus thinks of as their freedom, and the tactics they used to fight the French military consisted of assassinations and planting bombs in French dominated public spaces. The link that Camus upholds between freedom, justice, and humanism is one that understands the necessary limitations that must be had upon freedom so that life is, according to Camus, justly preserved.

To follow Apter at the point where Camus' freedom is a French colonialist notion neglects an issue extremely important to Camus--that the *pied-noirs* can continue to live in Algeria after independence. With humanism underlying Camus' philosophy his stance against the F.L.N. was a stance against what we today call "terrorism" and guerilla war tactics. Camus felt that the F.L.N. did not value life or freedom for all. Instead he felt that they followed a notion of justice at the expense of freedom and human life. Camus makes this point when he states that the notion of freedom has been mistakenly conceived and inappropriately thrown out since Marx, leading to a general distrust of freedom itself, a stance suggesting the unlinking of justice and freedom. "For even if society were suddenly transformed and became decent and comfortable for all, it would still be a barbarous state unless freedom triumphed." (Camus, RRD, 90) Freedom must still be affirmed even after any revolution, and the relationship between justice, freedom, and humanism must be upheld. Any notion of justice for Camus, even when the struggle can be legitimized, should not be defended if it on any level impinges on humanism and freedom. "The current motto for all of us can only be this: without giving up anything on the plane of justice, yield nothing on the plane of freedom." (93) For Camus Algerian independence and the resistance movement of the F.L.N. is founded upon a notion of justice that impinges on this freedom and humanism. In his essay *Bread and Freedom* and throughout *The Rebel*, freedom is the concern of the oppressed, yet this fight for the oppressed, especially in

relation to his political writings on Algeria, functions along the lines of *pied-noir* oppression to the point of worry, especially if Algeria was to be granted complete independence. "Those who...advocate negotiation with the FLN cannot fail to be aware...that this means the independence of Algeria under the direction of the most relentless military leaders of the insurrection--in other words the eviction of 1,200,000 Europeans from Algeria and the humiliation of millions of Frenchmen, with all the risks that such a humiliation involves." (Camus, PW 122) <sup>4</sup> He calls Algeria the "natural home" for Algerian-born Europeans staunchly defending the rights of *pied-noirs*.

Apter's critique does not sufficiently draw out the implications of Camus' political and literary writings and instead links it to a solely French and colonialist vision. The understanding of freedom as a French notion must be scrutinized and differentiated by degree from a *pied-noir* position, especially as his thought develops. The notion of freedom is far more complex than the literary display of *La Peste* and *L'Etranger* and emerges politically alongside a notion of humanism and justice. While Camus did not address the Arab or Berber populations in his early development of freedom and should be held accountable for pushing his philosophical goals over the complexity of French-Algeria, the broader perspective and analysis of larger portions of his work display a more complex and nuanced position around the politics and philosophy of freedom emerging from the perspective of a *pied-noir*. As the Algerian War approaches, he begins to apply a more complex notion of freedom in relation to colonialism and decolonization where he shows how freedom is not being applied, or even applicable, to Algerian Arabs and Berbers. His political stance against colonialism converges with his late literary writings.

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<sup>4</sup> "Ceux qui préconisent, en termes volontairement imprécis, la négociation avec le F.L.N. ne peuvent plus ignorer, devant les précisions du F.L.N., que cela signifie l'indépendance de l'Algérie dirigée par les chefs militaires les plus implacables de l'insurrection, c'est-à-dire l'éviction de 1,200,000 Européens d'Algérie et l'humiliation de millions de Français avec les risques que cette humiliation comporte." (212, Political Writings, Avant-Propos to Actuelles III)

## L'Hôte, the Politics of Pied-Noir Identity

*L'Hôte*, one of the short stories found in *L'Exil et le Royaume*, uniquely stands as a breakthrough work for Camus where the limits of his early notion of freedom presents itself, where the Algerian backdrop and Arab character begins to show as a landscape brewing with an Algerian resistance movement that forces Daru, the main character and *pied-noir*, firmly within the French-Algerian colonial situation on the verge of war. His exile from the social world cannot push him outside of his environment and context, and no matter how much he attempts to be outside of the colonial situation, he cannot escape it. The landscape he lives in is difficult and treacherous, and the native populations are restless and energized. The French are on alert for the impending resistance and the possibility of a decolonizing war. From these circumstances, the story opens up an interesting aspect of the dividedness of Daru around both helping the French in a time of possible war and helping an Arab-Algerian prisoner. Given its unique display of an Arab character the story has received much attention in Camus studies, yet this is not the only interesting aspect of the work. The story also begins to develop a nuanced perspective of the identity of a *pied-noir* and how such an identity refuses both Frenchness and Arabness as well as the limits of freedom in the colonial context. It has been the subject of much scholarship. Eve Morisi argues that *L'Hôte* displays a double collapse of both hospitality and fraternity leading to Daru's further estrangement from the world. (Morisi, 166) For Morisi this estrangement refuses typical binaries and attempts to revive a form of hospitality and fraternity that can survive in the situation of colonialism and resistance. While she is correct in the failure of both hospitality and fraternity, she ultimately recuperates Daru's estrangement rather than pointing out its failure. Connie R. Anderson, however, theorizes a contamination of the personal and the fictional in *L'Hôte*: "Daru is and is not Camus. Camus may have shared some of Daru's racial prejudice...and his tendency to censor those who might threaten his need to see Algeria as his permanent homeland." (Anderson 97) Anderson's speculation seems to point out Camus' conflict between his homeland and his desire for equal rights, assuming a racial prejudice rather than a political one. The impact the story has had in

the era of late French colonialism and the difficulty in securing firm meaning of the story places it at the forefront of Camus studies. It is one of the most culturally sensitive works by Camus where an Arab character is represented in light of the unstable political situation of late colonialism, and the tension caused by the resistance movement can be felt at every stage in the story.

The story begins when, after days of isolation due to a snowstorm, a French gendarme brings an Arab Algerian who has been arrested for murdering his cousin and taken from his village by the French, to Daru, a *pied-noir* schoolteacher, so that the Arab can stay all night in Daru's schoolhouse and be delivered to the French jailhouse the next day. Daru must house a potential murderer alone since the French gendarme Balducci must get back to his post given that the village, and the Algerians in general, are beginning to form a resistance movement that could attack at any time. Daru, however, does not want follow his orders. The difficulty Daru faces reflects perfectly in his location and the setting of the story. While Daru is conflicted about his own identity and role in the colonial situation, his isolated locale no longer keeps him clear of such dynamics, and he is unhappy to have been visited by Balducci and the Arab prisoner. He tries to stand as outside as he can while still being completely inside. He hides from the colonial situation both personally and physically, resisting complete identification with either the French or the Algerians. He lives far away from any colonial presence and would rather stay up on his schoolhouse away from any action. The encounters in the story reflect Daru's divided identity, how he can neither accept the Arab crime or the French treatment of the Algerians, and how he must face his position within the Algerian War. He must confront his own stance on colonialism and question where his duties lie.

When the Arab and Balducci arrive, the Arab is brought to Daru hands tied, "His eyes were dark and full of fever...the whole face had a restless and rebellious look that struck Daru." ( Camus, LH 29) Daru immediately experiences the Arab as animality, with feverish eyes, untamed. In the eyes of Daru, the Arab is both beast, a wild animal who killed a family member and may kill Daru throughout the night since he must stay in Daru's schoolhouse, and also a calculating human, potentially of the Algerian resistance but who

cannot for certain be taken as an enemy of the French. He holds within him both possible redemptive 'civility' and pure animality. Daru reads his own dilemma through the Arab where he must decide whether to help French 'civility' following Balducci's orders or to allow the wild animal to run free, a stance potentially helping the development of war against the French. Daru must decide how to choose within a situation that offers no respite given that Daru cannot fully support the colonial French abuses of the Arab in the name of French law, but he too fears for his own life and cannot support the savage murder committed by the Arab. The possible taming and being brought into 'civility', into Frenchness, attempts to pull the Arab into negotiations with freedom, and to bring him into the possibility of 'civil' freedom and the value for life. Yet his animality and Arabness, representing his possible part in the resistance movement, as we will see, can never be of this French notion of 'civility' and of freedom, because the Arab cannot inflict silence upon the struggle of his own people. Daru cannot choose to exile the Arab's animality while assimilating the Arab into 'civility', and as a result Daru finds himself at the limits of choice where nothing he can do will have its intended effect in the given situation. Daru emerges as a *pied-noir* supporting neither side, attempting to apply a notion of freedom that cannot have its intended effect on the Arab.

Daru's complexity lies in the limitations of his choices when both situations have directly political consequences that he cannot control or condone. He has conveniently avoided such situations until now. "That man's stupid crime revolted him, but to hand him over was contrary to honor....And he cursed at one and the same time his own people who had sent him this Arab and the Arab too who had dared to kill and not managed to get away." (37) The situation has already divided Daru's identity along multiple lines--he is both an Algerian and French; he supports the French but hates being pulled into this situation with the Arab and his potential resistance; he resents the Arab for being a murderer but feels he shouldn't hand him over to the French. He is unsure whether the murder even happened but is fearful about this being a ploy of the Algerian resistance. His identity and what it means in his situation consistently causes conflict.

David Carroll reads Camus at this stage of his work as purposely positioning the ineffectiveness of Daru's choices so as to make the political point that the anti-colonial war has gone so far that no individual could intervene or escape its effects. Despite what he refers to as Daru's "absolute hospitality", itself a misreading of Derrida, the situation ultimately, for Carroll, is a tragedy. (Carroll 83) Rather, one can instead read the story as the inability for Daru to maintain the effectivity of his freedom within the situation to make any relevant choice based on French law. Freedom, and hence justice and humanism, within Daru's situation, cannot function for the Arab. Freedom makes no difference for the Arab when any choice is encapsulated within oppressive limits. Camus shows us the injustice and lack of freedom faced by the Arab while offering a perspective of a  *pied-noir*  neither French nor Arab but operating alongside both. Any notion of freedom founded on the earlier philosophical points that Camus displayed in  *La Peste*  and  *L'Étranger*  is pushed beyond its capabilities and no longer applicable here. When Daru offers the Arab his freedom in the final choice, the freedom of both the choice and the path to freedom is simply ineffective. What Camus attempts to display is both the problem of the colonial situation and the difficulty of placing a  *pied-noir*  simply within the French colonial framework.

Daru offers the Arab the choice between walking the path that will lead to turning himself in or walking a different path to freedom. Daru gives him money and food for his journey, and offers him his choice. By setting the Arab free Daru attempts to instill his own ideology in him, to bring the Arab into a situation where all actors can choose equality with meaning and direct consequence to their choices, where individuals can choose to disconnect from the dominant ideology so that they can have a different life. The Arab, however, cannot step into this situation. He is blocked by colonial law. He cannot have the same freedom as Daru because his exterior surroundings cannot offer the possibility of disconnecting from the colonial situation. For Daru to make any choices at all, including offering the Arab the final choice, is to confront the ineffectiveness of freedom and the absurd. The Arab's decision to turn himself into the French is a refusal to be "free", and it demonstrates the bind of his colonial situation. Along either path the Arab is still the product of

French colonialism, he is still trapped, and walking to his freedom within colonial Algeria cannot change that. To be “free”, to go back to what things were, is to accept the colonial situation as it is, to become ‘civilized’. Such a choice is not freedom and does not put Arab lives on equal terrain with French lives. The Arab must reject Daru’s freedom, he must pursue a freedom and justice beyond what Daru can offer while Daru must recognize the ineffectiveness of his freedom in the face of colonialism. The Arab chooses to go to French jail so that the resistance will continue. There is no possibility for the Arab to ever occupy a position within the dominant French culture, and as a result there is no possibility for the Arab to fall in line with the absurd and with freedom. Camus delivers a situation well beyond his earlier notion of freedom showing its limitations while also showing the nuance of the identity of this *ped-noir*.

When Daru arrives back at the school he sees the mysterious words scrawled on his schoolroom chalkboard telling him that he will pay for delivering the Arab to the French, perhaps with his life. Daru’s exile has ended. He no longer exists alone, even though he claims to in the final sentence of the text: “Daru looked at the sky, the plateau, and, beyond, the invisible lands stretching all the way to the sea. In this vast landscape he had loved so much, he was alone.” (Camus, LH 38) As he attempts to still stand outside of the colonial situation, he is now haunted, even hunted, by the upcoming resistance. He has been placed within the opposition, his life and circumstances devalued in the name of the resistance. Choices here for Daru can no longer appropriately calculate their consequences, yet the Arab and his village are very much calculating theirs. It is the Arab who holds the power in *L’Hôte*, forcing Daru to delineate his identity and his stance in the situation of French colonialism.

### **La Femme adultère and the Power of the Arab Encounter**

*La Femme Adultère*, also a short story from *L’Exil et le Royaume*, brings more Arab characters to the forefront of Camus’ story. Their presence here too, as in *L’Hôte*, confounds identity, yet this time it is of a French character named Janine as she travels by bus with her French husband across Algeria. As they travel across Algeria the presence of

many Arab and Berber characters are a threat to Janine as they sit back and observe her behavior. The Arabs and Berbers here potentially catalogue the dark secrets of the French, a common trope in colonial literature, seeing things in the French that they cannot see in themselves. They are servants and travelers who seem to always have close but suspicious interactions with Janine and her husband Marcel. More importantly they represent the failure of the constant state of Janine's need to become what she is needed to be as well as the aspects of Janine that can never be captured in what others need her to be.

Emily Apter states that Camus' literature dissolves the contours of Algeria in a projection wall of the European mind, where the Arab characters and landscape can only represent psychological aspects of the French characters in the story. They have no identity of their own. While Apter makes a good point to address the Arabs and Berbers in *La Femme Adultère*, they also represent more than just projections of Janine's mind. They represent the possibility of calling Janine's complete life and identity into question. They problematize French colonial stability in this story, and to assume Camus is one of these French characters is to misread the nuance of identity. To read the Arabs and Berbers simply as stick figures or props for the French imagination here neglects the power of Camus' writing. While Apter has a point to question the face-value representation of the Arabs and Berbers in the story, upon scrutiny one opens up a power that they hold as well as a critique of French occupation of Algeria. The focus here is on the fragility of the French and the problematic encounters had with the native population and the land. With the Algerian War again in the backdrop of the story, the Arab and Berber characters force questions about what it means to be French in the age of late colonialism.

The first acknowledgment of Arabs in *La Femme Adultère* is one of suspicion: "The bus was full of Arabs pretending to sleep, shrouded in their burnouses." (Camus, LFA 3) What we learn about Janine, and why this observation is pertinent, is that when she is not needed by others she immediately becomes suspicious of them. We learn that her own relationship is one where she is made to feel that she exists only for Marcel. "By so often making her aware that she existed for him he made her exist in reality. No, she was not alone..."

(3) Janine needs to be needed. She became Janine by way of Marcel. The Arabs on the bus, in that moment, did not need her. Where Marcel creates Janine over and over as the wife he wants her to be, the Arabs will not, cannot, or enforce such a relation. Marcel offers Janine her identity. Yet she knows some aspect of herself in this identity, in this who she came to be, is not quite capturable within the structure of her life. This missing component is immediately recognized through the suspicious Arabs. In the face of another that does not need her, she could not quite understand what the Arabs were presenting to her, and her identity was immediately questioned. Janine constantly reads her own insecurity about what's missing within herself as well as her suspicion through the Arabs in the story, and not until her near collision towards the end of the story with the gloved Arab can Janine integrate the exclusion produced by her identity, which, in turn, provokes a deeper realization about her life. The Arabs in the story hold the power to both question and unlock Janine's identity. This questioning happens on two levels. Janine and her husband represent how out of place the French were in Algeria as well as the use of the resources of the land for profit, as her husband is there to make business transactions in Algeria. The Arabs and Berbers represent excluded psychic and social elements of Janine while holding the key to her self-realization. The silent Arabs in *La Femme Adultère* are an unfolding contestation of French colonialism and Janine's psyche. They disrupt by virtue of being seen while calling into question the problems of French presence in Algeria. To read the Arabs and Berbers in *La Femme Adultère* as simply projection walls of the French mind would be to assume first that Camus identifies with the French and second that there exists only two positions in Camus' work--that of the native Algerian and that of the French--when there are at least three. Camus is writing from neither perspective in the story.

Janine's identity is finally broken open when the gloved Arab begins forcibly walking towards her without taking notice of her. Both Marcel and Janine were immediately appalled and cursed his arrogance. It is the closest and most forceful interaction with an Arab in the story, and it is here that Janine begins her breakdown. Her near clash floods her with anger and insecurity. "She loathed that Arab's stupid arrogance and suddenly felt unhappy. She wanted to

leave and thought of her little apartment.” (8) From this point forward in the story Janine cannot escape confrontation with this crack and absence in herself, from the fact that her relationship does not fulfill her, and that something is missing in who she has been made to be. From here Janine has her orgasmic integrative encounter with herself through nature, this reclamation of herself, before returning back to Marcel’s side crying where she tells him that there is nothing to worry about. Janine can no longer participate in her marriage without facing the complexity of her identity, and her notion of Algeria will never be the same.

The Arabs here hold the power to undermine the French, and they provoke fragility in the French, highlighting their incomplete identities and how out of place they are. By positioning them as such Camus reminds us that the Arabs did not need the French, and that their gaze holds power over the French despite being subjected to the ills of colonialism. They hang in the background holding power, exposing the ills of colonialism. The Arabs are not simply controlled and dominated products of the French imagination.

### Camus Today

Upon revisiting the trajectory of Camus’ literary works one can address the evolution of Arab characters and the role of Algeria in his work as well as a shift towards the complexity of identity in colonial Algeria. Where in the early work there was a neglect and annihilation of Algeria and the Arab in both *L’Étranger* and *La Peste* while Camus focused on developing his philosophy, the stories in *L’Exil et le Royaume* show the Arabs and Algeria in a much different light. The undifferentiated city of Oran filled with mindless citizens habitually following their path becomes replaced by a vast and difficult landscape filled with strangely powerful inhabitants who pull the French from their comfort. In doing so Camus exposes the complexity of French colonialism and Algerian freedom while also exposing the complicated identities of *pid-noirs*. These inhabitants push Camus’ thought beyond its limits while forging a complex scenario of cultural encounters. Camus positions the Arab and Berber characters so as to question the possibility of freedom in a colonial

context, they question the foundation of Camus' philosophy, and they call into question the limits of any notion of justice that does not adequately assess the complexities of French colonialism in Algeria.

As the Algerian War comes to the forefront of both French and Algerian culture in the early 1950s, these issues infiltrate their way into Camus' work as well as into society at large. When looking at the later work it becomes impossible to read it simply as the work of a French colonialist writer, and one should be careful in referring to him even as simply French. In reassessing his work today one must read beyond the colonial Camus or anti-colonialist Camus. Between Camus' personal stances against French colonialism but also against the F.L.N. war tactics, as well as his staunch defense of the right for *pied-noirs* to continue to live in Algeria even after colonialism, it becomes clear that neither colonialist nor anti-colonialist does justice to the complexity of his political stance. His position as a *pied-noir* confirms him as neither French nor Arab or Berber Algerian, an identity that can waver or position itself on either side, as parts of both, or as neither.

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