

<p>CONRAD, GIDE, AND CAMUS: THE PERILS OF LIBERAL ANTI-COLONIALISM</p>		<p>Literature</p> <p>Keywords: Conrad, Gide, Camus, colonialism, critique, allegory, political unconscious.</p>
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Abstract

Joseph Conrad has won a prominent place in the English literary tradition though he could have earned a similar name for himself in the French literary tradition if he had tried his hand in writing in French of which he had also a good command. However, his choice of writing in English has by no means diminished the impact that oeuvre, and much more particularly his *Heart of Darkness* has had on French writers such as André Gide, who in critical circles came to be dubbed as the “Conrad de France.” In this research, we would argue that Albert Camus also fully deserves the nickname of a French Conrad adduced to Gide because of those striking resemblances in their works as imperial authors. Admittedly, unlike Gide, Camus is not Conrad’s fellow contemporary. He neither exchanged friendly correspondence with Conrad across the English Channel, nor did he write that stylized version of *Heart of Darkness* that Gide called *Travels in the Congo*, which explicitly invites comparison of the two authors. However, as we would contend Camus followed Gide’s lead by having another look at the imperial or colonial world through Joseph Conrad’s eyes to correct and adjust the existential vision of life in relation to the Self-Other encounter that Gide develops in his writings about colonial Algeria and the Congo. Hopefully, a triangular historicist postcolonial perspective on controversial fictions such as Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* on the one hand, and Camus’ *The Stranger* and Gide’s *Travels in the Congo* as well as *Nourriture terrestre* on the other hand, will enrich the already available critical literature on the three authors and their ambivalent stand to empire.

Introduction

Not only is Conrad, particularly *Heart of darkness*, is taught to all Algerian undergraduates in English, but he is also the favorite author for Algerian university researchers. Without exaggeration, we would say right from the start of this research that he is the one Polish-British author who has received the most critical attention often of a comparative nature alongside Anglophone African authors, such as Achebe, Ngugi, and Salih. The same can be said about the importance that Camus and Gide hold in the Algerian French Departments for similar reasons, that is to say their controversial character as to their attitudes to colonialism or empire. The result of this controversy is a division in Algerian critical circles among a very small grouping of pros and a huge number of cons of the three authors as to their degree of commitment and critical resistance to empire or anti-colonialism. Now, being knowledgeable ourselves in French and English and as teachers at the Faculty of Letters and Languages of the University of Tizi-Ouzou (Algeria), in this research we shall attempt to steer a middle course between the two critical extremes by seeking to show the complexity of the ideological positioning of each of the three authors, and their negotiation with as well as resistance to the general ideology of empire and colonialism by reading each through the eyes of the other. We shall focus mainly on Conrad’s *Heart of darkness* (1994) on the one hand, and Gide’s *Travels in the Congo* (1986) and Camus’s *The Stranger* (1954) on the other hand for illustrating the critical points that we shall make in the course of the results and discussion section of this research.

Two assumptions lay are at the basis of this research. The first one is that literature like money can circulate in a community only if it is authorized and accepted by the literary establishment as well as the readership of the time of its production and placement in the literature market. If it is timely, that is to say, up to the expectations of the public, it is readily accepted and becomes a commercial success as a literary commodity, otherwise it is destined, temporarily at least, to be considered a flop, waiting per chance to be resurrected by a belated readership, once its style, mode of writing, and thematic concerns have at last become relevant. The second major assumption of this research is that as studies in linguistics, and particularly pragmatics have fully demonstrated over these last few decades, language including the production of literature are full of holes, voids and absences that the readers/addressee have to fill up if s/he has to get a little closer to the culturally determined meanings or “signifieds” that they presumably convey. It is these voids in our three authors’ works (Conrad’s *Heart of darkness*, Gide’s *Travels in the Congo*, and Camus’ *The stranger*) that we would attempt to fill up by looking at where the three authors stand ideologically as far as empire or colonialism is concerned. To this end, we would deploy a historicist postcolonial approach (Fanon, 1968); Said, 1978; Said, 1994; Ashcroft, Tiffin & Griffiths (2010); Bhabha (2006); Jameson, 2002), etc.), which we would supplement by an appeal to Macherey’s theory about the production and consumption of literature (1970).

Conrad, Gide, and Camus: Imperial life and times as reflected in their works

Conrad, Gide and Camus, may at first sight look like strange bed fellows, but their respective imperial life and times, in different but similar contexts as well as their philosophies of life and visions of the world, amply justifies their being brought together in a triangular comparative study of empire. The reader surely remembers that Conrad is Polish by birth; went into exile with his father and mother because of the father’s revolutionary activities against the Russian authorities in the 1860s; that he became an orphan of both parents at an early age; that he was brought up by his uncle for sometime during his childhood; that like some of his contemporary fellow Polish nationals, he preferred to be an émigré in Marseilles, France first, and then in Britain, than live under the yoke of Russian domination; that he tried unsuccessfully to enroll in the French navy before opting for British nationality and signing up with the British merchant navy that allowed him to visit the four corners of the world, particularly the Eastern part of it, and long enough to become a captain of a British merchant vessel; Finally, he married a British lady spending his honeymoon in Brittany in France, before deciding once more to drift out to his life as a sailor with the help of a widowed Belgian relative, who had him recruited as skipper by the Belgian Congo Company to steer a ship in the Congo River.

Conrad came back from the Congo health-broken wrecked by the malaria disease that compelled him once for all to forget his days as sailor, and turn his hand into writing, through the urging assistance of authors like Bennett, Galsworthy, and Ford Madox Ford, who made him aware that he could tap on his acquired experience as a sailor to produce the type of imperial literature that was then deeply appreciated mainly for two socio-political reasons. The first reason was related to empire building with all the ideological apparatuses supporting it, whilst the second

one pertained to the hungry search by the stay-at-home readership of his time for titillating, exciting, and exotic experiences on the freer, wilder shores of other lands as a soothing remedy for the drab, numbing, and conservative, life of Victorian and Edwardian Britain. It is with the support of British authors that Conrad carved a place for himself among writers, such as Kipling, Stevenson, Haggard, Forster, and Maugham with one crucial advantage over them all. Conrad himself had an exotic flavor with an incomparable linguistic and cultural hybridity amongst the native Britons that made him an attraction to whom they are ready to listen in recounting his yarns somewhat like his favorite character-narrator Charlie Marlow. To add an important element to this sketchy imperial life and times of Conrad, it has to be noted that, just like his father, Conrad is some sort of translator. This made him play perfectly the role of *passeur* of cultures or a cultural or book mediator with his many references to French and American authors, whose literatures are marked among other things by grandiloquence and prose ornaments, such as metaphor, which deeply inflected his literary imagination (Bloom, 1980).

As Conrad himself avowed in many of his letters, his readings of French and American authors in the original include Hugo, the first translator of Shakespeare into French, Maupassant, the French story teller par excellence, Cooper, the American romance frontier author, and Hawthorne, the American orientalist romancer if there is one in the American literary tradition, and last but not least Melville, the sea writer whose haunted hunter of the white whale, Ahab, in *Moby Dick* strangely recalls Kurtz, the haunted hunter for another big game the African elephant for ivory in *Heart of darkness*. A full bibliography about the literary affinities between the American authors and Conrad can be found in Secor and Moddelmog's book (1985). Since the publication of the latter, comparative studies involving Conrad and other writers across the world, have so dramatically increased that the short space of this research will not allow for their citation. If we have put into relief, at this stage, the ornamental and grandiloquent aspect that Conrad has brought to British, or would we say English fiction, it is in order to show that if there is, indeed, an orientalist dimension in Conrad's fiction as postcolonial critic Said and his unconditional fellow disciples often loudly claim, this orientalism can also be due to the effect or refraction of an ornamentalism and grandiloquence that Conrad has acquired through his readings of French and American authors.

Furthermore, these two aspects (orientalism and ornamentalism) indicate that Conrad, like all modernist writers, is involved in a quest for a style that would distinguish him and his fiction in a highly competitive, contemporary, imperial British literature market wherein every author tries to sell their exotic wares. The second result of our research that contests those critics who took to task Conrad for not being unequivocal or unambiguous in his denunciation of colonialism in his fiction, most notably *Heart of darkness*, have overlooked the fact that despite his naturalization as a British citizen Conrad remained in the public eye of the British readership of his times, and arguably in his own eyes as well, a foreigner / stranger or émigré at heart. His story *Amy Foster* (1990) goes in the direction of this line of thought in its narration of the alienation of a central European male survivor (by the name of Yanko Goorall) of a shipwreck off the coast of Kent, who apart from the loving but the dull-witted Amy Foster, is shunned by all the inhabitants

of a Kentish village to which he has drifted. Even the latter finishes fleeing from his home with their son during a fatal fever-heat, just because she has mistaken his asking for a glass of fresh water in his native language for a mere raving.

Naturally, as a “stranger” and a naturalized émigré, Conrad owes a debt to the country that welcomed him. In other words, he has to honor or reciprocate the fact of being offered hospitality by espousing the prevailing general ideology of his hosts at least in the form of lip service to the idea of the British Empire. This, to our mind, accounts for the distinction that Marlow in *Heart of darkness* establishes between the British Empire to which he seems to attach the idea of “efficiency,” and the lack of which he has identified as the major source of the bankruptcy of the idea of civilization mission undertaken in the personal colony of the Congo then owned by King Leopold of Belgium. If we have to characterize further the position of Conrad as a stranger/émigré, we would say, that he is and forcefully plays the role of a “metic,” in the Greek sense of this concept that Kristeva has amply developed in her *Strangers to ourselves* (1991). Conrad on whom the British have generously bestowed the gift of nationality and a spouse, as Zerar (2019) argued in her presentation given at the 46th Annual International Conference of The Joseph Conrad Society (UK) held in London at St Mary’s University, from Friday 5 July to Sunday 7 July 2019, is a modern “metic” under the obligation to reciprocate the gift of nationality and hospitality that he has received by using his craft first as sailor in the British merchant navy and then as artist in defence of the British Empire. So as not to sound as lacking the sense of gratitude, Conrad is forced not to dismiss wholesale the idea of Empire, that is to say without sorting out the wheat from the chaff as regards Empire building during his times. Writing otherwise than he has done about empire building would certainly ring in his British host’s ears as a failure in observing political correctness. Zerar’s reading of Conrad’s *Heart of darkness* in the light of the gift theory developed by Mauss (2007), Hyde (1983; 2007), and Schrift (1977) to cite but a few scholars in this field of cultural anthropology, largely explains why Conrad’s anti-colonial critique is clad in the less hurtful form of allegory of good and evil about Europeans in Africa, amongst whom the British, like Marlow the character-narrator, cuts a comparatively high moral figure.

It has to be observed that Conrad’s capacity as a ‘metic’ that is as a stranger who has fulfilled the obligation to reciprocate for a received gift by putting his craft or talent at the service of his country of adoption was recognized by the liberal critics such Leavis as early as 1913 in his *The great tradition*. The reader of Leavis’ book certainly remembers that Conrad alongside another expatriate the American Henry James, are given pride of place amongst native-born English authors, such as Dickens and George Eliot for the contribution that they have brought to the growth of the British literary tradition. The third result, which we have reached in this research, is that Conrad is not solely the precursor of modernist writing as some critics would believe, but a post-modernist in the sense that he is interested in the deconstruction of modernity with its constellation of scientific ideas, such as the idea of progress, evolutionism including the civilization mission myth that they strogly sustain. This post-modernism with its drive for deconstruction of the prevailing modern ideas is shown in his iconoclasm, or to use Bacon’s

words, the breaking of idols. This iconoclasm is shown in Marlow's reflections on the Belgian type of colonialism in the Congo:

These chaps were not much account really. They were no colonists; their administration was merely a squeeze, and nothing more, I suspect. They were conquerors, and for that you want only brute force – nothing to boast of, when you have it, since your strength is just an accident arising from the weakness of others. ... (p.10).

Conrad's literary iconoclasm as regards colonialism as an issue of power relationship reminds us of Gide's urging of the reader at the very end of *Les nourritures terrestres* not "to sacrifice to idols" (p. 254). In the rest of *Heart of Darkness*, Conrad shows how all the proclaimed ideals of his time, progress, humanism, economic and the social development projects motivating the conquest of the Congo were a sham, adulterated as they are, by greed, fetishism, the worship of ivory in the name of which characters across national classes and religious beliefs commit the most immoral acts. Civilization in the name of which the conquest of the Congo is undertaken is skin-deep for once the European characters find themselves in the African Forest outside the boundaries of established moral laws and the restraining gaze of their community, they regress to their former primitive conditions of life by giving in to their evil propensities.

It is this destruction of the modern idol of progress and evolutionism that constitutes the common ground between Conrad and Gide. Having grown up in the anti-clerical period of the French Third Republic that arose after the demise of Napoleon III in the 1870s, the French author absorbed so much of the emancipating ideas propagated by state institutions, such as schools that he felt himself a stranger with no home country to claim as really his own.

In a sense, as an avant-garde iconoclast, he prefigures in his estrangement from the world the title character, Meursault, of Camus' *The stranger*. This homelessness, internal exile or internal colonialism no matter the words we employ to qualify Gide's existential state of mind, is expressed in his fictions, such as the *Coiners* or *Counterfeiters* where the major young characters flee from their homes, in the *Immoralist* which breaches the social codes and questions the French genealogy of morals, and most notably in the *Nourritures terrestres* (1897) where he develops his philosophy of vitalism *contra* the social and religious bigotry of his time, such as the celebration of national rootedness developed by Barrès, a contemporary fellow anti-Semite writer and nationalist rather than a nationalistic ideologist. Gide's choice of routes over roots largely accounts for the admiration of the British, a sea people always on the move, whom he favorably compares with the stay-at-home fellow French nationals (Gide, 1967).

There is another common ground between Conrad and Gide besides the preference of routes over roots, iconoclasm, and their feeling of estrangement to the world that we have to take into consideration if we wish to understand the magnetic attraction that the French author, later on, felt for his British counterpart. Like Conrad, Gide wrote in a literary age marked by the urge for local color, exoticism, and sensuality, a literary urge that Gide and other fellow French writers, such as Gautier, Fromentin, Flaubert, Feydeau, Daudet, and Maupassant tried to cater for, each in

his particular style and for a particular purpose. What is remarkable to mention in the thematic commonality that we are seeking to establish between Conrad and Gide in this discussion is that each of them has made use of what we would call, for lack of a better word, the “other world,” the primary material for their travel fictions. Much more importantly, whilst responding to the exotic expectations of their readership by providing them with the usual fare of exoticism, each of them inflected the so-called exoticism toward vitalism by making other places as vital spaces for mending their poor health and by extension the health of Western civilization that contemporary scholars like Spengler, Lardau, Halévy, Labriola, and Norman Engell, to cite but a few, declared as being diseased and in decline. It has to be noted here that strangely enough Conrad wrote his first books about his experience in the Eastern Islands of the Pacific after his health breakdown in the Congo arguably in a therapeutic gesture, and that Gide travelled to Algeria at least six times for health as well as social reasons before settling in Algiers in 1942. His characters in the *Nourriture terrestre* and his *Immoralist* came back from French Algeria healed of all the somatic and physical diseases that they suffered from at home.

Aside from this shared vitalist exoticism or exotic vitalism, we have to mention that it is in Algeria, more specifically in Biskra in the East South of Algeria, at the boundary of the desert, that Gide came into contact with many British and American travelers, among whom one can mention Hitchens, author of the famous *Garden of Allah* (1890), Wilde, Francis Scott Fitzgerald, and Francis Jammes. Given the great number of Anglo-Saxon tourists, especially those with poor health like Gide himself, who flocked to Biskra for wintering, the eccentric Count of Albert Landon de Longeville had the idea to build an English Garden of 12 hectares to cater for their various needs as early as 1872. Hitchens’ *Garden of Allah* refers to this garden, which incidentally was used as a setting for the film, *the Sheikh* in 1920 starring Rudolph Valentino, the American sex symbol at whose sudden death many American female fans committed suicide. A huge number of oriental hotels and casinos also mushroomed in Biskra in the middle of a desert with many oases and natural hot baths, the purpose of which is to satisfy Westerners’ need for luxury and sex. The choice of Biskra as a tourist site at that time was not gratuitous, since it is there that the most exotic native tribe of French Algeria resided. The Ouled Nail tribe had a weird sexual tradition that sex-hungry, wealthy, Western tourists exploited to assuage their bottled-up erotic desires. To put it in a nutshell, the Ouled Nail women of Biskra had that strange custom of migrating to other tribes to practice sex, coming back home after a span of time with an amassed dowry for marriage with males of their own tribe. The Western tourists had, therefore, close at hand an erotically colorful tribe to observe and to exploit sexually at will in both the Casinos and a ghetto street managed specially by the French authorities for that purpose in the urban area of Biskra.

So, it is hardly surprising that Powell, an American consular agent, wrote an account or rather promotional tourist brochure about this tribe under the catchy title *The last frontier: The white man’s war for civilization in Africa* in 1912. As suggested by the title of Powell’s tourist brochure Biskra is an ideal place wherein the Western tourists will have the pleasure of attending French shows about the conquest of Algeria. These French shows recall in many ways

the much more famous Wild West Shows by re-enacting for all tourists to see and witness the historical defeat of native Algerians by the French army or legionaries. It has to be noted that Powell's tourist brochure comes in the wake of a steady trickle of English promotional literature about Algeria as a healing tourist destination, developed in such books as *Winter with the swallows* by Edwards (1867), *The land of veiled women* by Fraser (1911), *Last winter in Algeria* by Evans (1867), and *Winter in Algeria* by Mrs. Rogers (1864). What markedly distinguishes Gide from the other tourists that made their way to Biskra in French Algeria for health or other exotic reasons is that he was disdainful toward luxury tourists steered by guides to the hot spots and exotic places away from the grinding daily lives of the poor native villages, and the native population gathering in the Moorish cafes. It is these native poor people that Gide (*contra* Barrès) and his characters in the *Nourriture terrestre* (1897), *L'immoraliste* (1893), and *Amyntas* (1903) visited in their homes, and frequented in the Moorish cafes, one of which still bearing Gide's name in present-day Biskra. So, unlike the exotic literature of his time where the Algerian natives are dismissed or made as elements of the exotic décor, Gide makes poor native characters, most particularly his companion Athman, who is a young Algerian poet, hold central stage in his fiction. This drive to get into contact with the poor Arab population prefigures his creation of the *Ark* journal in 1942 in Algiers where he took refuge following the Anglo-American operation *Torch* that liberated French Algeria from the Petain regime during World War II.

This *Ark* journal a reference to Noah's Ark symbolically allowed for the first time Algerian authors such as Jean Mouhoub Amrouche to publish his story *Jugurtha*, so named after the native Berber or Numidian leader who had put up a strong armed resistance to the Roman occupation of Numidia.

So contrary to claims made by such English critics as Dunwoodie (1998) that Gide wrote in the prevalent exotic mode or vein of his time, we would contend that such claims contain some truth but not the whole truth, for the exotic and the so-called oriental setting that Gide employs in his Algerian novels, just as Conrad does for his fictions turns out to be a pretext, the ultimate purpose of which is to decry colonial injustice whilst developing his philosophy of vitalism. The source of this vitalism is located in the poor native Algerian people, who in spite of their total destitution clung to life, which they celebrated in their music. *Contra* the prejudices of cacophony ascribed to Algerian Bedouin music by other exotic travel writers Gide was able to appreciate it at its right value. This appreciation of Arab Bedouin music was confirmed by the Hungarian musicologist Bela Bartok, nearly ten years later in 1913 when she visited Biskra just to record the folkloric chants and music of the Ould Nail women. It is thanks to the interest that Gide and Bartok in this Bedouin music is saved as part and parcel of the world musical patrimony.

Gide's translation of Conrad's short story *Typhoon*, which took him nearly five years to accomplish, from the outbreak of World War I in 1914 to the Armistice in 1918, shows to what extent he felt literary affinities with the British author. It was during his sojourn in London in 1911 that Gide was introduced personally to Conrad by Larbaud, a post-symbolist French author. His choice of translating Conrad's *Typhoon* was not gratuitous, for in addition to the Franco-English

British alliance against the Germans he viewed Conrad's book as an allegory of the deadly typhoon of the war that rocked the West, celebrating the comic heroism of the skipper and the second mate of the steamer called the "Nan Shan," as well as the human solidarity of the crew who sticktogether in the face of the typhoon until they have made it safe to firm land in what looks like a wreck. In addition to the translation of *Typhoon* in war-time context, Gide later translated Conrad's *The end of the tether* and corrected Rivière's translated French version of *Victory*. During his whole life as a writer, he never ceased urging French translators and bilingual authors to translate Conrad's other works. It is partly thanks to him that Ruysters rendered *Heart of darkness* into French under the title *Le monde des ténèbres*. Gide's passion as a mediator for books across the English Channel was such that he personally handed Ruysters' manuscript of *Le monde des ténèbres* to Conrad for approval.

Though Conrad did not translate *Heart of darkness*, he was so inspired by it that he willingly accepted a mission of inspection in French Equatorial Africa commissioned by the French Ministry of Colonies in 1925.

He seized this mission as an occasion to follow in the footsteps his admired predecessor, Conrad, in the Congo. In addition to the mission report that he wrote for the French authorities, Gide published a diary that he entitled *Voyage au Congo* (1927), translated under the title *Travels in the Congo* with a suggested reference to Conrad's previous travel there as a skipper on which the narrator-character Marlow patterns his story *Heart of darkness*. In treading on Conrad's heels, Gide has made Conrad's denunciation of anti-colonial injustices his own by putting emphasis on the blatant exploitation of the native Africans in the French Congo and the French Cameroon obtained as a mandate after the Great War, that is to say World War I. The blame is put on the plantations owned by commissioned, private French Forest Companies for their glaringly exploitative nature of the business of harvesting rubber, the lack of qualified personnel to run the affairs of the colony, as well as the failure to introduce a money economy for trade purposes.

The harvesting of rubber in the private French plantations replaces the hunting of elephants for their ivory in *Heart of darkness* as objects of greed giving rise to all sorts of injustice, which make a short shrift of the ideals of the civilization mission, such as material and spiritual progress. In treading on Conrad's heels and those of his hero Marlow in the Belgian Congo part of the journey, Gide notes the paradox that the Belgian Congo had become much more prosperous than its French counterpart, suggesting by this the necessity of the French government to put an end to private concessions, just as the Belgian Congo had ceased to be the private colony of King Leopold at the turn of the nineteenth century, and to allocate the necessary funds for the recruitment of doctors in sufficient numbers to stop the proliferation of disease, as well as administrative agents to control fraudulent practices of dishonest French traders cheating over weight and prices for the crops cultivated by the natives, pauperized further by those who were supposed to bring them material and spiritual prosperity.

The comparative points between Conrad's *Heart of darkness* and Gide's *Travels to the Congo* in terms of theme are too many to enumerate in the short space of this research. Instead, we

have to point out that the choice of mode of writing makes each of the works unique in its kind as far as the ideology of form is concerned. Conrad resorts to allegory, or we would rather say metaphor and ornamental prose in his work, thus giving rise to what we call an ornamental Africanism itself the result of his deep influence by French authors like Maupassant and Flaubert with their deeply rhetorical, metaphoric prose as well as the influence of American authors such as Cooper, Hawthorne, and most particularly Melville, all of them noted for their grandiloquence as Bloom has put it in his *Map of misreading* (1980). Strangely enough, as already suggested above, both *Moby Dick* and *Heart of darkness* have at their central stage haunted hunters Ahab and Kurtz respectively, and sea wanderers Ishmael and Marlow who as narrators return completely broken by their experiences of haunted hunting. *Heart of darkness* is also reminiscent of Cooper's *The last of the Mohicans* in its emphasis on adventure through stations in the wilderness.

So we would argue that it is Conrad's French-inherited ornamentalism and his American-inherited romanced grandiloquence and allegory that has enabled him to break the taboos about the idea of empire building without hurting the sensibilities of the Britons who offered him hospitality as a metic.

On the contrary, Gide's work comes in the form of a diary much more interested in day-to-day experience of the travels, marked by the record not only of colonial abuses and evils of colonialism, but somewhat in the manner of an amateur naturalist and ethnographer in the minute observation of African tribal village life, their music, their habits, food, clothes, as well as the African flora and fauna. He has even temporarily seen himself in the role of entomologist keeping specimen of butterflies that he loved so much. The question to be posed at this stage is: What can account for the displacement of form from allegory and ornamentalism in Conrad's *Heart of darkness* to diary writing or the literature of fragments in Gide's *Travels in the Congo* for two writers, who share the same concern with the absurdity of the world, the same feeling of being strangers in the world, the same liberal humanist vision of the world, and most particularly the same drive to breach the codes and taboos about empire building? We would sustain that the shaking of Western civilization in its roots by World War I by its savagery and cruelty amongst the very white men who pretended to take civilization to "primitive" people in other lands, and much more importantly the change of paradigm in the ethnographic and anthropological vision of Africa from the predominant Victorian myth of a Dark Continent to the recognition of African cultures by such Western scholars as Frobenius in his *History of African civilization* (1920) and his *African Atlantide*, and Maurice de la Delafosse in *L'âmenégre* (1920).

It is the ideological foundations of Western colonialism such as the civilization mission that were ultimately questioned by such a shift in anthropological paradigms, which sometimes went so far as to claim that the salvaging of the diseased Western civilization needs an adrenaline shot derived from Africa with the purpose of curing its cultural exhaustion or fatigue. So it is not surprising at all that Gide whilst following Conrad in his allegorical denunciation of the evils of colonialism has somewhat in the manner of Montaigne in his essay on "Cannibals," through his *Travels in the Congo*, shows that the myth of the "Negro" cannibal was a European invention after

all, that it was rather the white French colonizers who really deserved that derogatory name for having dehumanized and impoverished both spiritually and materially the French Equatorial Africans. In *Travels in the Congo* Gide shames the French by showing to what extent the Belgian and English colonies in Africa appear to fare far much better than the French counterparts. He goes so far as to praise the positive influence that Islam exerted over the black African population by contrast to the negative impact of Christian missionary activity.

Having reached his final destination in Fort Achambault, situated in the uppermost north side of French Equatorial Africa in the Chad region, Gide is outraged when he witnessed the barbarity to which the southern part of it is reduced, by those very French people who proclaimed to have won it to civilization through modernizing projects of development, Christian missionary activity, and commerce:

Even in the early morning the splendor- the intensity –of the light is dazzling. We [Gide was travelling with a friend of his] are on the other side of hell. At fort Archambault, on the marches of Islam, Barbarism is behind one, and one enters into contact with another civilization, another culture. A still rudimentary culture, but yet one that brings with it a fineness, a comprehension of nobility and hierarchy, a disinterested spirituality, and a feeling for what is immaterial. (p. 129)

This quotation where Islam is compared favorably with Christianity in terms of influence on Black Africans is of course meant to shame the French colonizers for having not only failed to modernize the African zones including the mandate of the Cameroon joined to the French empire after World War I, but also for have further impoverished it by greed and the lack of investment in human and material resources. This shaming technique with reference to Islam reminds us of a similar rhetorical move in Edward W. Blyden in his *Christianity, Islam and the Negro race* published as early 1888.

To summarize this discussion at this stage, we would sustain that as liberal humanists Conrad and Gide have in common, though for different reasons, that feeling of being strangers to the world, an absurd condition which gave them an insight or perspective into the evils of colonialism. We have made the case that both Conrad's and Gide's Africanism, terms which we use for lack of better words, are inflected by vitalism for Gide and prose ornamentalism and allegory for Conrad. Besides being a stranger to the world by virtue of his forced exile, Conrad is a "metic" abiding by the obligation to reciprocate for the gift of nationality and wife that the British accorded to him by rendering services to his host both as sailor and artist. This largely accounts for his resort to the prose ornamentalism, grandiloquence and allegory borrowed from French and American authors. In so doing, he can denounce anti-colonial abuses at will without hurting the sensibilities of his British hosts. Naturally, as a French native citizen and avant-garde artist, Gide had no such qualms in being drawn to the denunciation of anti-colonial scandals including the evils of colonialism by adopting the form of diary or writing of fragments for recording his day-to-day experiences in French Equatorial Africa.

Finally, we would say that Gide and Conrad are far from being the strange bed fellows that they might look at first sight for both deserve the term of iconoclast by making it their credo, to use Gide's words in *The Nourrituresterrestres* not "to sacrifice to the idols of their times."

The estrangement from the world, most particularly the colonial world in Conrad's *Heart of darkness* and Gide's *Nourrituresterrestres*, is most prominent in Camus' *The Stranger*, the first book of a trilogy including *The myth of Sisyphus* and *The rebel*. For quite a long span of time, following the lead of Sartre's critique of Camus' novel, critics have tended to see this fiction as an ideological novel or a *roman-à-thèse* developing his philosophy of the Absurd or existentialism. A quite substantial bibliography about how Camus is read politically in Algeria was published in 2014 as the result of his rehabilitation in the wake of the terrorist phase of the country (Azza-Bekat, Bererhi, Chaulet-Achour&Mohammedi-Tabti(2014). This research completes the many political readings sampled in this bibliography, so we would claim that existentialism is indeed inherent to *The stranger*. However, this should by no means be transformed into an intentional fallacy, for deep down it reads as a protest novel laying bear the injustices of the colonial system. It has to be noted that Camus is of Spanish stock by his origins, and was born in French Algeria, which for more than a century, was considered as a French Department. Like all the progeny of the European settlers in Algeria, he was considered as a native, or to use the derogatory though symbolic term, a *piedsnoirs* or black feet. His hero or rather anti-hero Meursault in *The stranger* is also a black feet, who is brought, through what seems at first sight the force of circumstances, to murder an unnamed Arab native in the surroundings of a fresh water fountain on a beach, situated on the west side of the city of Algiers, where the French forces had landed in 1830.

Meursault's involvement in the Arab man's murder starts with a friend of his who has invited him to join him in his seaside bungalow for a weekend rest. The latter has beforehand flouted the honor of the Arab Algerian man's victim for entertaining his sister as a mistress, and has already come to fisticuff with him in the streets of Algiers. Fearing a brawl with the Arabs, this friend seeks Meursault's help in a clan or tribal spirit. The brawl takes place, indeed, but not in the streets of Algiers, which would have made the novel lose its symbolic dimension. The scene is removed to an unnamed west side beach of Algiers wherein the outraged native Algerian man with a companion of his appears on the stage as if they were stalking the French Algerian (*the black feet*) who has breached their honor. A brawl ensues, and ends with Meursault preventing the murder of the Arab Algerian by wrenching his gun from his friend's hand in extremis. The belligerents separated but not without bruises and slashes, and the Arab Algerians are forced at gunpoint to withdraw to the shady rocky area near a fresh water fountain. It is to this symbolic place that Meursault, shortly afterwards, comes back with his friend's gun still on him in order to have a fresh breath of air after the stress of the brawl.

The conflict dramatically regains in tension for the already hurt Arab Algerian as soon as he catches sight of him defensively pulls out his knife, thinking that Meursault has returned to settle accounts. It is at this precise moment in the plot that *The Stranger* takes its whole symbolic dimension by replaying, at the synecdocheor particular level of representative historical figures,

just as in the old epics, the colonial violence, a colonial violence that justifies Meursault's very presence in that fateful Algerian beach. This Algerian beach on the West side of the city Algiers, as claimed above, reminds us of SidiFeruch, the place where the French colonial army had landed in the summer of 1830. Conrad's environmental explanation for the fall of Kurtz into a demonic state in *Heart of Darkness* comes to mind here, for during his trial Meursault (die alone in French) in self-defense puts the blame on the natural elements, the sun. In recounting his colonial crime, Meursault says what follows:

Then everything began to reel before my eyes, a fiery gust came from the sea, while the sky cracked in two, from end to end, and a great sheet of flame poured down through the rift. Every nerve in my body was a steel spring, and my grip closed on the revolver. The trigger gave, and the smooth underbelly of the butt jogged my palm. And so, with that crisp, whipcracked sound, it all began. I shook off my sweat and the clinging veil of light. I knew I'd shattered the balance of the day ... (p.76).

This way of recounting the crime has all the elements of the philosophy of the Absurd that Camus develops in *The Myth of Sisyphus*, including man's existential status as stranger or exile in a seemingly familiar world. The rock of Sisyphus is even there in the form of the boulder from under which the fresh water of the fountain flows. It seems as if the god-punished Meursault-Sisyphus watched helplessly the rock of communication between the belligerent populations that the Arab man and he represent crumbled down to their feet after trying in bad faith to roll it up to the summit of the hilly city of Algiers. However, history reasserts itself over myth by inserting itself in the wide "crack" of the sky through which readers familiar with Algerian history can have peep at the symbolic re-enactment of the colonial crime of displacement of one population by another because of its technological superiority. Fanon has amply analyzed this colonial/postcolonial desire for violent spatial displacement of one population by another in his *The wretched of the earth* (1968). The nativism implied in the name of *piedsnoirs* or black feet rooted in the Algerian soil given to the Algerian of European origins has its source in a buried traumatic memory of colonial violence aimed at displacement or to use today's political parlance the "great replacement." Camus, like Gide and Conrad before him, speaks about the colonial dimension of the political unconscious of the *piedsnoirs* community, for during his trial he is sentenced to capital punishment not for the murder of the equally native dishonored Arab Algerian man, who remains nameless in the whole story, but for having shown himself as an anti-social man or more explicitly for having lacked empathy during the funerals of his mother. Camus' denunciation of capital punishment as an absurdity is as crystal clear in *The stranger* as his other writings, but this philosophical disguise does not hide completely the real motivation of Meursault's condemnation to death by the colonial justice of the settlers' community, which is anxious not to dig too much into the past so as not to revive the guilt inherent to the traumatic memory of their settlement in Algeria. In the final analysis, we would say that Meursault's colonial crime and his sentence to death for the lesser offense of loosened filial bonds are underpinned by a double sacrifice. The Arab Algerian's murder recalls the primitive ritual sacrifices sanctifying the occupation of tribal territories, rituals that Eliade (1987) has fully analyzed in his works. As for the death sentence

meted out to Meursault by the colonial justice for his ignorance of filial relationships, it makes of him a ritual scapegoat for the community of the *pièds noirs* shocked and scandalized by his removing the safety valve retaining the guilty memory of colonial violence. Girard has amply documented how this ritual of the scapegoat works in his seminal book *Violence and the sacred* (1992). So if Meursault affirms his nativism as a French Algerian *colon* by his unconscious elimination of the unnamed Arab Algerian native and by his refusal to accept a promotion as a clerk in Paris that he describes as a “dingy sort of town” populated by dirty pigeons and other yellow-faced bourgeois “birds,” for colonial justice he is overdoing it because his way of behaving allows the return of the repressed memory of colonial violence of displacement or great replacement. In Gide’s *Nourriture terrestre*, Nathaniel after warning the reader “not to bow to idols,” such as nations and religions, ends up crying out “Family I hate you.” Meursault seems to have trodden the same path as Gide’s iconoclastic protagonist narrator by making short shrift of typically French values such as the glorification of his mother country (*terra mater*/ imperial France) and the repulsive reaction to French cuisine. It is on the altar of these bourgeois colonial values that Meursault is sacrificed as a scapegoat, with the purpose of cleansing the political pollution that he has brought to the *pièds noirs* community by flouting its habitus with his strange manners. Meursault’s flaw, if we have to look for one, is that he has stood aloof and thus has made himself a stranger to his community. As a stranger, he turns out to be the ideal scapegoat for a community afraid of the danger of polluting (the words are Douglas’) the political consensus of the French settlers about the irrevocable Frenchness of Algeria. Unlike Marlow in *Heart of darkness*, Meursault does not know how to tell the lie to get his way out of the conundrum of colonialism in a colony of settlement like French Algeria.

Conclusion

To sum up, we would say that Albert Camus has largely inherited his mode of writing and his themes from Conrad and Gide. In his paradoxical condition as a colonial *pièds noirs* or native Algerian of European origins, he has found himself in the same ambivalent condition as Conrad in terms of his allegiance to empire. His double allegiance to his community and colonial France has obliged him to resort to allegory, or as Barthes (1968) put it so well, to “l’écriture blanche,” white writing, for the composition of *The stranger* (1942) in order to disguise its anti-colonial stance.

This technique of allegorical avoidance is deployed for political correction toward the French readership as well as to his *pièds noirs* community still incapable to imagine an Algeria outside French control. Whilst abiding by the Conradian allegorical style or mode of writing dictated, as Barthes wrote by “historical solidarity,” Camus remains true to Gide’s and Conrad’s idea of the absurd condition of man, his strangeness to the world, and the necessity to rebel against received ideas including the double standards of colonial justice. However, their liberal and humanist critiques of the injustices or evils of colonialism notwithstanding, Conrad, Gide, and Camus in various degrees believe that colonialism or imperializing can be reformed, in other words that social, spiritual, and material progress remains a possibility if colonialism is undertaken efficiently. As anti-colonial critics, they do not fully realize that colonialism is an

inherently exploitative structural system no matter the name under which it is supposed to conduct other people to civilization, or as we would call it today, modernization. So we would say that all three of them are involved in bad faith by believing, as Marlow puts it, that “What redeems [...colonialism] is the idea only. An idea at the back of it; not a sentimental pretence but an idea; and an unselfish belief in the idea – something you can set up, and bow down before, and offer a sacrifice to ... ”(p.10). It is this reluctance to abjure all received ideas including the belief in the possibility of reforming colonialism that makes our three authors complicit with the very colonialism that they criticize in terms of practice but not in theory. In doing so, they contributed to extending the life expectancy of an inherently dehumanizing, exploitative system. Such are the perils of liberal anti-colonialism.

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