



## Decolonizing The Camusian Absurd: A Bakhtinian Reading Of Kamel Daoud's *The Meursault Investigation*

Shivani Alhad Pasalkar

*Holds an M.A. in French and Francophone Literature from  
Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi.*

### Abstract:

This paper studies the retelling of Albert Camus' *The Outsider* written by the Algerian writer-journalist Kamel Daoud, entitled *The Meursault Investigation*. Daoud's novel is analyzed in the light of three important Bakhtinian notions - Dialogism, Chronotope, and Heteroglossia. We see that through his novel, Daoud has not only

counter narrativized the original story but also has broadened the scope of the philosophy of absurdism. While expatiating on Absurdism during the first half of the 20th century, Camus' readership was limited to the European world or only those who had access to it. The exclusion of Arabs from his writings while writing from Algeria, as an Algerian and the use of French language indeed mark the boundaries of his work. The literary adaptation by Kamel Daoud tries to fill the cavity in Camus' work. On the other hand, the adaptation is taken to be a counter narrative to the original narrative. The study of such counter narratives has become ever so important in a society ridden by a binary logic and dialecticism. Daoud's retelling shows the way to understand and represent histories in a non-binary and an inclusive manner. He has not discarded Camus and his discourse entirely in order to give the Arab a voice in the original narrative. This further opens a multitude of questions and outlooks on further research on the role of counter narratives in dismantling the existing social order.

**Keywords:** Absurdism, Adaptation, Counter Narrative, Narrative and story, Robinsonade, Plurality of Consciousness.

---

## Introduction

In 2015, *The Guardian* described the Algerian writer Kamel Daoud's premier novel *The Meursault Investigation* (2013) as "an indispensable companion to Camus". The novel was received by one and all as a response to *The Outsider's* colonial gaze. Despite its philosophical brilliance, this novel has a glaring lacuna. Daoud's novel tries to fill this gap through the narrativization of seemingly the same story. As stated by Kamel Daoud, this lacuna was a rather seductive flaw of Camus' novel and his own novel was one which had to be written sooner or later by himself or someone else. ("Kamel Daoud: The Meursault Investigation", 00:18:50- 00:21:56) His novel not only betokens a personal history but has an intellectual

fascination of departing from *The Outsider* to go further and broaden the discourse on Absurdism.

Daoud's novel offers rich intertextuality. Apart from the direct reference to *The Outsider*, the narrator Haroun often refers to Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe, 1719* in his monologue. On the other hand, the novel also has a structural similarity with Camus' *The Fall, 1961*. It shall be discussed later in this paper. Coming back to Defoe, his novel generated what H. Porter Abbott calls a 'masterplot'. (Porter 83) A masterplot is thus 'a potent instrument of narrative,..' and has a role to rhetorically impact the story. Other words like 'master narrative' or Roger Schank's 'Story Skeleton' do not convey the rhetoric importance of the term 'masterplot'. The Robinson Crusoe masterplot further stimulated various other trans-medial and trans-generic retellings of Robinson's adventures. Such plots recounting a Robinson like figure's struggle for survival on an alien territory are known in the literary discourse as - 'Robinsonades'. They deal with a derelict or a castaway's survival in a surrounding that is unfamiliar to them. However, Kamel Daoud's interpretation of a 'Robinsonade' goes beyond this common understanding of it. Robinson's story is according to Daoud not merely an adventure narrative but a story about the encounter with the 'Other'. He believes that since all the cultures have had to deal with the question of 'the other' they continue to reproduce Robinsonades. Accordingly, Camus' *The Outsider* is one such Robinsonade. It is a story of a castaway - Meursault, who tries to survive on a metaphorical and a metaphysical island that is his societal strangeness but more importantly, it is also a story of Meursault's encounter with the Arab- the Other. There are several parallels in Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* and Camus' *The Outsider* that Daoud draws in his lecture delivered at Yale. He observes that both Meursault and Robinson kill their others; one literally and the other symbolically (by religiously converting him). Thus, according to Daoud, the fundamental question posed by such Robinsonades is

‘Qu’est-ce que je fais avec l’autre?’ - ‘What do I do with the Other?.  
 (“Kamel Daoud: The Yale Lecture”)

A story is incomplete without the other. Friday was essential to Robinson’s story. Similarly, the narrator of *The Meursault Investigation* observes that his brother- ‘the Arab’ who was effectively erased from Camus’ narrative is the second most important character of Camus’ novel. Yet the narrators or the protagonists of Robinsonades fail to share their novelistic space with ‘the other’. They are unable even to slightly turn the perspectival angle of their narrative towards their alterity. In other words, Robinsonades cannot be qualified as what is known in Bakhtinian terms ‘dialogical’. Unlike Dostoevsky’s novels, they are completely oblivious of other consciousnesses. On the other hand, in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the French writer Michel Tournier envisions Friday’s viewpoint in Robinson’s story. This is the first time that *Robinson Crusoe* is reimagined and rewritten as it would have been experienced by but an auxiliary figure of Friday. The exclusionary nature of Robinsonades have kept these narratives partial and fragmented. Michel Tournier takes upon himself for the first time, the task to complete the Robinsonade. Further, Kamel Daoud, inspired by Tournier’s preoccupation to do representative justice to an alternative and marginalized consciousness, rewrites the story of the Arab from *The Outsider* and thus endeavours to fill the lacuna left in the Camusian Robinsonade.

In another instance worth remarking, while inspecting a manuscript of Camus’ essay *The Myth of Sisyphus* at the Yale Library, Daoud notes that it is in the scratched and scribbled lines of the manuscript where the book has not erased its other possibilities. The retelling of Meursault’s and the Arab’s story is thereupon an actualization of the latent possibilities of *The Outsider*. Thereupon, *The Meursault Investigation* is indeed more than a postcolonial response to Albert Camus. It is more than an act of writing back to the empire as it deals with the present but also with the age-old question of dealing with ‘the other’.

In other words it can be said that Daoud writes a counter narrative of *The Outsider*. However, the questions that arise in this process are what is counter narrativizing and what is an appropriate method of doing it? To find answers to these questions, I will refer to Michael Bamberg's deliberations on the practice of counter narrativizing a story or a particular discourse. He states that "Countering dominant and hegemonic narratives is the flip side of being complicit" (Bamberg, Michael, et al, 2004). Accordingly, he proposes that the master narrative (Camus' *The Outsider* in this case) forms the backdrop for the counter narrative. While counter narrativizing, both the narratives engage and interact with one another. Thus, the prior narrative cannot be effaced in a counter narrative. We find that in Daoud's story, certain elements of the dominant story are left intact and are constantly referred to while others are reshaped. As Lia Brozgal observes, "Haroun is less interested in representing the facts of Musa's (the Arab's) death and more concerned with the meta-story, or the conventions of the story's narration; when it is recounted, by whom, and to what effect." (Brozgal) This paper will try to conduct a comparative analysis of the two narratives of *The Outsider* and *The Meursault Investigation* by employing the Russian scholar and philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin's notions of dialogism, chronotope, and heteroglossia.

First of all we can observe that, even while appropriating Camus' story for himself, Daoud's narrator is constantly aware of the presence of multiple other consciousnesses. This acknowledgment of the other prompts a dialogue between several consciousnesses. This dialogism emerging from counter narrative is explored in the first argument.

In the second argument, Bakhtin's notion of chronotope is employed to analyze the relationship between *The Outsider* and *The Meursault Investigation*, based on a similar kind of comparative analysis done by Tara Collington in case of the novels *Robinson Crusoe* and Michel Tournier's *Friday, or The Other Island* (Translated from *Vendredi ou les Limbes du Pacifique*). Daoud's chronotopic

rearrangement allows him to re-contextualize Camusian notions of 'the Absurd' and 'the Revolt'.

Finally, the third argument focuses on the heteroglossic arrangement of Daoud's novel. Through the recurrent interaction and friction between the narrative voice and other voices in the novel and the different types of social languages that Daoud employs, he inscribes a critical commentary on colonial history and politics on the one hand and on the failings of the decolonized on the other hand. His novel certainly denounces the hegemonic discourse of the European writers but also resists the fundamentalist and extremist tendencies that arose in the postcolonial era.

### **The Dialogical Discourse of a Homophonic Novel**

In his book *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics, 1963* Mikhail Bakhtin introduces a typology of prose as he talks about the three principal ways a discourse can come across in a novel. Accordingly, there is a 'Direct and unmediated discourse' (Bakhtin 1981) where the speaker has the narrative authority. The second type is known as 'Objectified discourse' (Bakhtin 1981) which is the discourse or the speech of the character occurring in the text. Lastly, there is the 'Double-voiced discourse' (Bakhtin 1981) that is oriented towards and anticipatory of another's (other characters') speech. The first kind of discourse is driven by a singular consciousness that is not sociable and does not take into consideration other consciousnesses. Which means that a single perspective subsumes within itself all other elements, characters, desires, values, ideologies, and beings of the novelistic world. Other characters or consciousnesses exist in the story solely to transmit the author's ideology. If Meursault's discourse in the novel *The Outsider* were to be categorized under one of these typologies, it would qualify as a Mono-logical or direct discourse where the reader comes across a one-sided and a singular reality presented by the narrator. For example, the reader is unable to see or imagine the reality of the Arab in his novel as he has only an auxiliary role to play in the entire narrative. He is nothing but a

stimulus whose murder triggers the Absurd for Meursault. Concurrently, other named characters of a European descent in the novel like Raymond, Marie, Salamano, etc. too have only supplementary and inconsequential roles to perform in the entire story. Not only are they denied a chance to speak but their consciousness, their experiences, and their voices have no real representation in the discourse. Only Meursault, by the means of the author, has all the 'power to mean' in this narrative. As a result, the reader too is engaged in Meursault's strangeness and journey throughout the narration while the other characters and especially the Arab become irrelevant and superfluous. In other words, the reader is entirely immersed in Camus' philosophical discourse and the Arab endures a discursive death. He is pushed into a state of non-being. Au contraire, Bakhtin states that the 'being' is always concomitant with other beings. Human sensibility cannot exist in isolation and yet Meursault's being barely responds to others. He has a separate consciousness that does not interact with other consciousnesses. He reciprocates predominantly to his corporal desires, nature and physical surroundings. The strangeness of his 'Being' lies precisely in this desire for existential singularity and hence, any 'other' consciousness was bound to be silenced in his narrative.

Both Camus' and Daoud's protagonists are intradiegetic narrators who are telling their own stories from a first-person point of view. That means these speakers are engaged in autobiographical narrativizing. Out of the reasons why one chooses to narrativize their lives, one is when a literary author writes for an imagined and generalized audience. (Bamberg 355) Meursault and Haroun are both recounting their lives for an audience. However, there is one very crucial aspect that distinguishes Haroun's narration from Meursault's. There is in *The Meursault Investigation* an internal presence of an auditor. Although silent and unequipped with actual speech, he occupies a space within the novelistic world in a way that none of the other characters in Camus' novel could. While Camus'

characters couldn't affect or provoke any reaction from Meursault, it is different for Haroun who will be constantly and nervously aware of his auditor's presence. As a result, the significant distinction in the two narratives is that Meursault is narrativizing his life for himself and Haroun is narrativizing his and his brother's and his mother's and all of Algeria's life for University student who most probably hails from Europe.

Although a Double-voiced discourse would literally mean the occurrence of two or more voices, there are, as a matter of fact, more than one stylistic ways of inserting the multiplicity of voices in a novelistic prose. Notwithstanding the actual number of speakers in the text, the novels can be placed upon a scale ranging from monologism at one end to polyphony on the other. Daoud's novel could be placed somewhere in the middle of this scale. This is because Haroun's discourse falls under Bakhtin's category of a 'word with a sideward glance'. This means that Haroun's speech is profoundly anticipatory of and sensitive to another's (the student's) words or reactions to his narration. Despite his silence, Haroun surmises his auditor as an interlocutor and engages accordingly. As Meursault's story has a general readership, the scope for countering or interaction is minimal while he narrates. Conversely, Haroun's listener, who represents a particular consciousness, maintains the possibility of countering the narrator's claims throughout the novel.

Haroun's case is curiously comparable to one of Dostoevsky's characters from the novel *Poor Folk* - Devushkin. (Dentith, Simon, et al.) Just like Devushkin, whose speech about himself is reflective of the potential words of the addressee of his letters, Haroun's is regulated by the potential rejoinders of his auditor. Therefore, even though Kamel Daoud's novel is a homophonic monologue like Meursault's, the discourse of his novel is 'double-voiced'.

There are several instances in the novel that can validate this analysis. First and foremost is Haroun's way of directly addressing the auditor by employing the French 'tu'-a pronoun of familiarity. With the use of 'tu' Haroun also establishes a certain familiarity



with the listener. “*En poussant la porte de ce bar tu as ouvert une tombe mon jeune ami. Est-ce que tu as le livre dans ton cartable ? D'accord, fait le disciple et lis-moi les premiers passages... Tu as compris? Non? Je t'explique.*” - When you opened the door of this bar, you opened a grave, my young friend. Do you happen to have the book in your school bag there? Good. Play the disciple and read me the first page or so ... (Daoud). On the other hand, he is highly conscious of what he narrates and constantly weighs his words, especially when he is about to confess to the murder he committed. Elsewhere, he is aware that he is deconstructing a canonical discourse and thus foresees the unrest building up in the auditor's as well as the reader's mind and expresses so in his speech – “*Cela te déstabilise, hein, que je résume ainsi ton livre? C'est pourtant la vérité nue.*” (You find my summary of your book unsettling, eh?) (Daoud) The recurring interruptions occurring in Haroun's monologue is indicative of the presence of another consciousness therein. Wherefore, just like the Bakhtinian scholar Caryl Emerson rearranges Devushkin's speech in a dialogic form in her article “The Hero's Monologic Discourse and Narrative Discourse in Dostoevsky's short novels.”, Haroun's utterances too can be turned into dialogues. (Dentith, Simon, et al.) This dialogic nature of the two unidirectional speeches of Devushkin and Haroun is owed to the merging of rejoinders (responses) imagined by the narrators. Thus, there is a discourse and the presentiment of a counter-discourse or some sort of interaction. Although externally a monologue, this makes Haroun's narrative internally dialogic.

Haroun himself embodies the voice and the presence of another consciousness and thus produces a polyphonic novel where the other is more than an object of representation. What is particularly notable is that he names all the characters in his narrative, especially the one he calls 'his other'- Joseph and whom he also kills. He also asks for the auditor student's name. The structure or plot of the novel, its narrative, are all subordinate to the right of the characters to be treated as subjects, unlike the case of the Arab of *The Outsider*.

Lastly, as we have established that a counternarrative is steadily and invariably referential of the master narrative. It does not necessarily refute all that is proposed and presented in the master narrative. Similar to Michel Tournier, he retells the story from a different perspective which isn't necessarily combative. So, the narration isn't just internally dialogic as explained above but also enters into a productive dialogue with the master narrative (Camus' novel). That is to say that, the hypo-text and the hyper-text commence a dialogue.

The Dostoevsky-like dialogical characteristics of Daoud's writing in *The Meursault Investigation*, as opposed to Camus' monologic writing, lays the foundation for the re-narrativization of Camusian philosophy.

### **Studying *The Meursault Investigation* as an Adaptation of *The Outsider* -**

One of Bakhtin's fundamental assumptions according to several theorists is the idea that narratives are constructed by a sequence of diegetic events, speech acts, and by the conception of a fictional world known as 'chronotope'. A chronotope is such a representation of time and space in a literary work that aids the writer to conceive a fictional world for their story. In his essay "Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel" Bakhtin writes – "The chronotope as a formally constitutive category determines to a significant degree the image of the man in literature. The image of man is intrinsically chronotopic" (Bakhtin, Mikhail, 1981). To put it differently, the fictional world created by the author with the help of a contextualized representation of time and space depicts the worldview of the text in hand, its characters, and the author even. The unity of time and space is intrinsic to the said narrative. So, in the recent Bakhtin scholarship, chronotopes are considered to be representative of worldviews. Furthermore, Nele Bemong in the book *Bakhtin's Theory of Literary Chronotope: Reflections, Applications, Perspectives* (2010) understands chronotopes as "...

an integral way of understanding experience, and a ground for visualizing and representing human life” (Bemong et al.)

Based on the four major levels of significance of chronotopes suggested by Bakhtin namely - , theorists have categorized various abstract chronotopic levels which can be identified in the novelistic texts. If we analyze the chronotopic arrangement of Camus' *L'Etranger*, we find that the entire narrative is constructed in a way that moves towards a final moment of climax which is Meursault's confrontation with the priest who has now come to be his philosophical rival and his eventual cognizance of the absurdity of human life. Camus' novel has a teleological and also a monological chronotope where the entire plot moves along a series of conflicts only to achieve a sort of a narrative conclusion. All other potentially contentious elements of the story like the Arabs or the contemporary colonial reality of Algeria do not find a representation in the text. Only the European worldview or what Caryl Emerson calls 'an integral way of understanding experience' of a European is depicted in the Camusian narrative. This is how Camus' narrative comes to have a monologic worldview. Per contra, the irrelevance and muteness of the Arabs in French Algeria of the 1940s can be said to be a realistic representation.

Much the same as Tournier's tipping over of the European standpoint in *Robinson Crusoe*, sixty years later, Kamel Daoud too overturns Camus' narrative in a manner that adapts to the changed socio-political scenario. Tara Collington regards this literary exercise as an act of adaptation and proposes so in her article "The Chronotope and the Study of Literary Adaptations: The Case of Robinson Crusoe". (Bemong et al). She observes that there is a sort of "intersection between adaptations and other related notions of intertextuality and appropriation". The novel *The Meursault Investigation* is a similar intersection. Moreover, the significant alterations in a narrative occur not when the medium alters but when the chronotope or the perspective shifts. Within this new chronotope, the story might remain the same, but the discourse is

modified. Daoud's novel is tantamount to such a discursive or narrative metamorphosis. For precisely that reason, we will focus on the chronotopic transposition of Camus' story in *The Meursault Investigation* and its consequent significance in the altered cultural and political contexts.

In the first place, the temporal location of Daoud's narrative is primarily post-War and post-Independence Algeria. Musa's aged brother Haroun is a contemporary of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century reader of the novel. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, reflecting on the Arab's representation by Camus has become crucial. However, it has become just as important to reflect on the now independent Algerian society's socio-political behavior. Daoud has no interest in engaging in a postcolonial upbraiding of France, the French, or Camus. In contrast, he has time and again expressed his displeasure with what he sees as the self-victimizing propensity of postcolonial discourse. This is presumably the reason why in a novel entitled *The Meursault Investigation*, the narrator who is angry at the literary treatment and literary murder of his brother by a White writer, talks less about the actual investigation and more about his mother's changed behavior towards himself and how it negatively affected their relationship.

To understand the significance of the temporal re-adaptation that Daoud introduced in his narrative, it is imperative to understand Algeria's political history of the decades following its liberation. The Algerian war for Independence was one of the bloodiest chapters in the country's history. The beginning of the conflict goes back to 1945 when the French colonial Government suppressed an uprising of the dissatisfied Muslim population against the colonial rule and is known as the 'Sétif and Guelma Massacre. (Horne) The tensions between the two groups rose over the next few years and culminated in a bloody war where thousands of Algerians, as well as French civilians, were killed. Algeria gained independence in 1962 which was followed by the attacks and killings of the *Pied Noirs* or the French settlers of Algeria. The first few governments established in the now liberated Algeria were headed by the leaders from *Front*

*de Libération Nationale (FLN)*. (Prochaska) These governments were, however, of authoritarian nature and inclined more towards military actions. In the following years, what Daoud recognizes as a fundamentalist and orthodox Islamic politics took over the Algerian people. Civil insurgencies and more civil unrest followed.

In “Kamel Daoud and The Paradoxes of Liberation” Robyn Creswell writes, “..., Daoud has been a ferocious critic of the military officers who have run Algeria since it won independence in 1962.” He criticizes the Algerian governments for exploiting the Algerian memory of the colonial trauma to justify their legacy albeit corrupt and problematic. He does not deny the trauma however urges the Algerians to overcome it. He insists that “...the decolonized must get beyond the past, and take responsibility for their present, with sincerity.” This political, religious, and social instability is the background of Daoud’s counter narrative. Along with a postcolonial take in his narrative, he wants to comment on the modern human condition plagued by religious extremism and nationalism. Hence, he considers his novel a homage to Camus’ *The Fall*. The structural similarity of a confessional monologue of Daoud’s novel with *The Fall*, 1956 is not a coincidence but rather a well thought artistic ruse.

He makes clear his breaking away from the postcolonial take when Haroun says

*“If you had met me a few decades ago, I would have served you up the version with the prostitute slash Algerian land and the settler who abuses her with repeated rapes and violence. But I’ve gained some distance now.” (Daoud)*

Moreover, in the last few pages, Daoud cites entire paragraphs directly from Meursault’s dialogue with the priest. He is critical of religion in general and of the specifically heightened religiosity of Algerian society. He has re-adapted Camus’ philosophical discourse of the post-world war era for the current scenario. In *The Myth of Sisyphus* Camus writes about a version of absurdism that is very specific to a 20<sup>th</sup> Century European’s experiences of life. He writes -

*“It happens that the stage-sets collapse. Rising, tram, four hours in the office or factory, meal, tram, four hours of work, meal, sleep and Monday, Tuesday, Thursday,*

*Friday and Saturday, according to the same rhythm - this path is easily followed most of the time. But one day the 'why' arises and everything begins in that weariness tinged with amazement.” (Camus, 1942)*

However, a colonial or decolonized subject's experience of the absurd is different and Daoud is conscious of the need to spell it out. He does so by strategically bringing a chronotopic shift in Camus' story and discourse. One can even designate this chronotope as the “post-decolonization chronotope” or the “post-postcolonialism chronotope”.

## **Heteroglossia in *Meursault Contre-Enquête* as a sight of resistance**

The term Heteroglossia as defined by Bakhtin implies a coexistence of a variety of worldviews subsumed within an individual's language in a novel. This variety of worldviews is represented through the speech of characters, narrators, and the author himself. Bakhtin defines Heteroglossia as “...another's speech in another's language, serving to express authorial intentions but in a refracted way” (Bakhtin, 1981). The co-presence of the multiple languages or worldviews leads to interactions and at times even conflicts. However, these conflicts are understood essentially as dialogues and out of these dialogues are generated new perspectives. That is to say that novels within a frame of Heteroglossia are capable of portraying the varied social dialects, diversity and the combativeness which is natural to human dialogue. Bakhtin observes that this aesthetic of representing multiple voices in the novelistic prose is inherent in Dostoevsky's work. In his *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* Bakhtin proposes that two voices are a minimum for human existence and that consciousness is essentially multiple. Likewise, according to him, the representation of multiple voices is indispensable for authentic novelistic prose.

Having said that, these principles are normative and deterministic and that is why Bakhtin has to acknowledge that not all novels conform to the aesthetic of Heteroglossia. Thus, novels devoid of heteroglossic representations are still considered novels. For instance, despite his claims, we have the example of Meursault for whom the multiplicity of human consciousness is almost a burden. Additionally, we have already established in the discussion prior to this argument that Camus' *The Outsider* is a monologic representation. Further, it is written in French language which was during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, already exclusive of the colonized population's speech and experiences. The French language was thus a symbol of centralized power and a closed system to which the Algerians had no access. Thereby, *The Outsider*, while subverting the Bakhtinian novelistic ideal, is the site of 'Monoglossia'.

On the contrary, as we have seen in the first argument of the paper that even though Daoud's novel is homophonic, there exists a plurality of consciousnesses within this homophony. The novel is thus, internally polyphonic. Haroun's discourse treads on the borders of his auditor's, his mother's, Musa's, Meriem's, Joseph's, the ghost in the bar, Meursault's and even Camus' consciousness. The indirect discourses or perspectives of these consciousnesses interplay with Haroun's speech and worldview in an intricate and complex manner. For example, unlike Meursault, he is painfully aware of Joseph's (whom he calls his 'other') fear in the face of death. It is deliberately to topple Camus' representation of the Arab that Daoud has given him a name, identity, background, and humanity. In another instance, there is irony and derision in his tone towards his mother when he describes her reasons for choosing Joseph as their victim. What is even more intriguing is that the angry narrator who commenced his story by reprimanding and countering Meursault, gradually moves closer and closer to him, starts relating with his discourse, and eventually begins to mirror him too.

Even Camus' philosophical speech finds place in Daoud's retelling. As seen in the previous argument, Daoud adapts Camus'

philosophical notions for his contemporary readership. In defiance of his claims regarding the absence of any form of symbolism in the novel, certain aspects do not escape through the lens of symbolism. It is through these symbolic representations that Camusian philosophy finds its way into Daoud's narrative. To begin with, the colonized people's experience of the absurd is depicted through the sudden and unexplained loss faced by Haroun and his mother. Henceforth, their entire lives and energy are invested in the *search for answers* regarding the murder of his brother and the disappearance of his body. Their quest reminds the reader of humanity's efforts to understand the universe. The erased traces of Musa are evocative of the universe's silence to the human thirst for meaning and coherence. Just like Haroun and his mother, the colonial subjects across generations tried to make sense of the loss of their land, dignity, and autonomy with no answers in return. In the face of this socio-political silence and oppression, the ways to avoid and deny the absurd have changed from suicide to murder and from religiousness to religious nationalism. Haunted by this injustice and absurdity, the colonial subjects, or what later came to be known as the nationalists and liberators, replicated the Marxists and revolutionaries about whom Camus talks in his essay *The Rebel, 1951*. There arose an impulse to refuse the suppressed existence amongst the colonized and thus a desire to remake their world. While citing the French Revolutionary Jean-Paul Marat, Camus writes

*"But at the heart of this logical delirium, at the logical conclusion of this morality of virtue, the scaffold represents freedom. It assures rational unity, and harmony in the ideal city. It purifies (the word is apt) the Republic and eliminates malpractices that arise to contradict the general will and universal reason. "They question my right to the title of philanthropist," Marat exclaims, in quite a different style. "Ah, what injustice! Who cannot see that I want to cut off a few heads to save a great number?" (Camus, 1951).*

Here, Camus is talking about 'calculative and justifiable' (Camus, 1951) murder. According to Camus, this ideology results from the



belief that human life has a purpose and a logical culmination into happiness and equilibrium. The end justifies the means and the murder of thousands is a small price to pay. These are theoretically justifiable murders just as the obsession with the colonial past and trauma justified the misdeeds of the Algerian governments for decades. Hence, it is to highlight the unshackling of the colonized subject's absurd condition and the subsequent deaths that Kamel Daoud writes about the physical and emotional violence perpetrated by the Algerians during and after the war of independence in his novel. The war time violence received validation in the name of freedom struggle. However, the question Daoud wants to pose is whether the violence stopped after the Liberation?

Haroun did not participate in the war of independence as his fight had started long back when his brother was killed. The Algerians' stage-set was yet to collapse when the absurd had already set in for Haroun, when the 'why' had already started haunting him. Meanwhile, when the war for liberation commences he refuses to be a part of the justified violence being perpetrated by the French state and the Liberation Army. However, later on he goes on to commit an 'illogical' murder towards the end of a 'logical' war. When he is presented in front of the army officer for having killed a french man, Haroun is judged for the inappropriate timing of the murder and not the act of taking a life itself. All the officer needs is a temporal rationality to justify Joseph's murder. Haroun is released without trial. However, it leaves him unsettled. Soon he realizes the futility of his action that did not actually relieve him of the burden. On the contrary, he will now have to carry not only Musa's but also Joseph's corpse along with him throughout the rest of his life. It is this guilt and the burden that drive him to have a confessional interaction exactly like the guilt-ridden Clamence of *The Fall*, 1956. On these grounds, it can be said that the novel *The Meursault Investigation* is a homage to both *The Fall* as well as the essay *The Rebel*. Lastly, there is also the Imam's speech which symbolizes the religious inclinations of the society. The intentions of the author are

refracted from the conflicts and complicities amongst the multiple voices represented in the text.

This is how the Heteroglossia plays out in Daoud's novel and enables not just Haroun's and his own voice but also that of Camus in the text. Through these convergences and divergences of voices, Daoud resists succumbing to the absurd. He says no to a philosophical suicide and to violence by surrendering to religion or to hyper-nationalism.

## Conclusion

Unlike the teleological chronotope of *The Outsider*, Daoud's retelling consists of a network of conflicts as well as philosophical and political divergences and convergences on multiple levels. Haroun's double-voiced discourse is the ground for the narrative maturation of Meursault's and Musa's stories. Such a double-voiced discourse was according to Bakhtin, typical to Dostoevsky's novel. His novels renounce all narrative authority. These narratives recognize a multiplicity of perspectives and consciousnesses. "To affirm someone else's "I" not as an object but as another subject – this is the principle governing Dostoevsky's worldview." (Bakhtin, 1963) Bakhtin celebrates the irreducibility of other voices and perspectives in Dostoevsky's work. This representation of multiple voices is referred to by Bakhtinian theorists as the 'aesthetic of polyphony' which is absent in the Camus' novel writing however finds a way in Daoud's narrativization.

*The Meursault Investigation* is indeed organized by a dialogic chronotope without a teleological end. Daoud's text engages in an intriguing discourse but also leaves the readers with a lot of uncertainties and gaps about Musa's story. Just like us readers, Haroun is also unaware of the facts of what might have happened that day on the beach. We soon realize that an investigation or vengeance or a response to Camus is not the main plot of the novel. So, in Daoud's version, Haroun and his brother, colonial subjects at one time, are still awaiting justice in the now Free Algeria. It is only

a motif that Daoud employs as a literary artifice to recount a decolonized consciousness' experience of absurdism and their weariness expressed through religion, hyper-nationalism, and murder. Further, as *The Guardian* notes, this novel rejects the binary of militarized nationalism and religious nationalism by condemning them both as meaningless.

Daoud probably was aware that one can see one's exterior only through others' perspectives and that is why he felt the need to re-narrativize Camus' story for the Algerian society. Having said that, Daoud has in several of his interviews insisted that the reception of the book depends on the culture of the reader.

About literary transpositions or re-adaptations, Caryl Emerson notes that they...

*"... can serve as an indication of changes in cultural sensitivity from one era to the next. Within the same culture, different elements emerge and expand at different times to carry the weight of the story. In short, the transposed chronotopic framework of Tournier's adaptation reflects a new socio-historic sensibility proper to its mid-twentieth – century context."* (Emerson, 1986)

As we have seen, the same is also true about Kamel Daoud's counter narrative or more appropriately re-narrativized adaptation of Albert Camus' *The Outsider*. The absurdity of human life, death, and totalitarianism were widespread when Camus was philosophizing. So, he was searching for answers to life in the face of it all. In *The Rebel*, he asks "Does the absurd dictate death?" And Daoud shows in his narrative that the Camusian preoccupations are still relevant nonetheless they need temporally appropriate alterations. So Daoud is not only dealing with a post-religious world as was the case for Camus, but also a post-postcolonial or decolonized and conflict-ridden world that still has to come out of history.

Coming back to the Bakhtinian theorization and the study of counter narratives or retellings, he rejects a dialectic way of conceiving a

novel. Even Daoud has strictly refuted a dialectic rebuilding of his narrative.

Last but not the least, Bakhtin's view of language as an unending chain of meaning which keeps cultures and societies incomplete and in motion is an inspiring attitude of studying retellings or counternarratives in general. Generating new perspectives of already narrated stories has the potential to keep alive the novels, stories, and legends in some form or the other while at the same time generating new meanings and helping the previous narratives to mature and grow.

## References

1. Abbott, H. Porter - The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative (Cambridge Introductions to Literature) (2008, Cambridge University Press).
2. Bakhtin, Mikhail, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, 1963.
3. Bakhtin, Mikhail, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M.M. Bakhtin*, Translated by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, University of Texas Press, 1981.
4. Bamberg, Michael G. W., and Molly Andrews, editors. *Considering Counter-Narratives: Narrating, Resisting, Making Sense*. Benjamins, 2004.
5. Bemong, Nele, et al., editors. *Bakhtin's Theory of the Literary Chronotope: Reflections, Applications, Perspectives*. Ginko, Academia Press, 2010.
6. Camus Albert - *The Outsider*, Translated by Sandra Smith, Penguin Modern Classics, 1942, Pdf.
7. Camus, Albert, *The Rebel*, Translated by Anthony Bower, First Vintage International Edition, November, 1991.

8. Camus-La Chute.1956 Pdf.
9. Cebik, L. B. "Understanding Narrative Theory." *History and Theory*, vol. 25, no. 4, Dec. 1986, p. 58.
10. Creswell, Robyn The Force Of Looking: Kamel Daoud in the Spotlight, September 30, 2019, url - <https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/kamel-daoud-chroniques-algeria-book-review/>
11. (Critical Readers in Theory and Practice) Bakhtin, Mikhail Mikhaïlovich\_ Dentith, Simon\_ Bakhtin, M - Bakhtinian Thought \_ an Introductory Reader-Routledge (1995).Pdf.
12. Daoud, Kamel, *The Meursault Investigation*, Translated by John Cullen, Other Press New York.
13. Horne, Alistair - *A Savage War of Peace\_ Algeria 1954-1962-Viking (1978).Pdf*
14. "Kamel Daoud: The Yale Lecture", *You Tube*, uploaded by Yale University, 26 February, 2016, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oF5kWeLGRv8&t=460s&ab\\_channel=YaleUniversity](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oF5kWeLGRv8&t=460s&ab_channel=YaleUniversity)
15. "Kamel Daoud : The Meursault Investigation", *You Tube*, uploaded by Author Events, 16 July 2016, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Mx2YHv3YIw&ab\\_channel=AuthorEvents](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Mx2YHv3YIw&ab_channel=AuthorEvents)
16. Kassab, Robin Yassin, The Meursault Investigation by Kamel Daoud review- an instant classic, Wed 24, June, 2015, Url- <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/jun/24/meursault-investigation-kamel-daoud-review-instant-classic>
17. Kim, Sue J. *Introduction: Decolonizing Narrative Theory*, Fall 2012, Vol. 42, No. 3, Special Issue: Decolonizing Narrative Theory (Fall 2012), pp. 233-247,
18. Lévesque, Jacques. Politique d'utilisation de la bibliothèque des Classiques. Le Mythe de Sisyphe, 1942.

19. Mikhail M. Bakhtin, Michael Holquist - The Dialogic Imagination\_ Four Essays by M. M. Bakhtin-University of Texas Press (1991) Pdf.
20. Prochaska, D. "That Was Then, This Is Now: The Battle of Algiers and After." *Radical History Review*, vol. 2003, no. 85, Jan. 2003.
21. Puckett, Kent. *Narrative Theory: A Critical Introduction*. Cambridge University Press, 2016.

## Shivani Alhad Pasalkar

---

Shivani is currently pursuing Ph.D. in Comparative Literature at Yale University. She works with literature in French, English, Marathi, Hindi, and English languages. Her major areas of interest include Postcolonial literature, Narrative and Counter-narrative research, Representation Theory, Subaltern Studies, and Translation Studies. Her intellectual pursuits are driven by the curiosity to explore the complex manner in which narrative and representation theories interact with socio-political structures. To do so, she intends to focus on literary retellings/rewritings, translations, intermedial and intergeneric adaptations of fictional narratives, or any other deliberate revisitation of canonical literary works in European and Indian languages.

---

## **Get Your Book Reviewed**

If you have got any book published and are looking for a book review, contact us. We provide book review writing service for a fee. We (1) write book review (2) publish review in CLRI (3) conduct an interview with the author (4) publish interview in CLRI. [Know more here](#).

## **Authors & Books**

We publish book releases, Press Release about books and authors, book reviews, blurbs, author interviews, and any news related to authors and books for free. We welcomes authors, publishers, and literary agents to send their press releases. Visit our website <https://page.co/Vw17Q>.