

Postcolonialism and Religious Identity in Kamel Daoud's***The Meursault Investigation*****Dr. Leila Bellour****The University Center of Mila****Department of Foreign Languages****Abstract**

Though Kamel Daoud's *The Meursault Investigation* rewrites and responds to Albert Camus's French classic *The Stranger*, it fails to defend Algerians' religious identity, especially that our age is characterized by a fierce criticism and demonization of Islam. Though the novel won many world prizes of literature, and it is considered as a distinguished work in postcolonial literature, Algerian readers view it as scandalous because of its denouncement of the Qur'an and its profanation of the sacred. The paper shows that postcolonialism is embedded in a secular Western methodology. Thus, it fails to defend the religion of the colonized. Hence, there is a need for an Islamic postcolonial approach.

Keyword: Postcolonial approach, religious identity, Islamic postcolonial approach, The Meursault Investigation, Kamel Daoud.

Résumé

Bien que Meursault Contre-Enquête de Kamel Daoud propose à la fois une relecture et une réplique à *L'Étranger* d'Albert Camus, il ne défend non plus l'identité religieuse des Algériens, notamment dans une époque où l'Islam subit des critiques acerbes et une grosse campagne de diabolisation. Bien que le roman ait remporté de nombreux prix littéraires mondiaux et qu'il soit considéré comme une œuvre distinguée dans la littérature postcoloniale, les lecteurs algériens le considèrent comme scandaleux en raison de sa dénonciation du Coran et de sa profanation du sacré. L'article montre comment le post-colonialisme pourrait être intégré à une manœuvre occidentale laïque. de ce fait, il ne parvient pas à défendre la religion des ex-colonisés. Par conséquent, une approche postcoloniale islamique paraît nécessaire.

Mots Clés : Approche postcoloniale, identité religieuse, approche postcoloniale islamique, Meursault Contre-Enquête, Kamel Daoud.

الملخص:

على الرغم من أن رواية "مورسو تحقيق مضاد" للكاتب كمال داود ترد على رواية الغريب للكاتب الفرنسي ألبير كامو و تعيد كتابتها، إلا أنها فشلت في الدفاع عن الهوية الدينية للجزائريين خاصة في عصر قد ميّزه نقد لاذع للإسلام و تشويه لصورته. ورغم أن الرواية حازت على جوائز عالمية للأدب، و هي تعتبر عملا مميزا في الأدب ما بعد الكولونيالي، إلا أن القراء الجزائريين اعتبروها تدنيسا للمقدس و احتقارا للقرآن. سنحاول في هذا المقال أن نبين ان ما بعد الكولونيالية

متجدر في منهج علماني غربي و لذلك فهو غير قادر على الدفاع عن دين المستعمر و من ثم هناك حاجة إلى منهج ما بعد كولونيالي إسلامي.

الكلمات المفتاحية: المنهج ما بعد الكولونيالي، الهوية الدينية، المنهج ما بعد الكولونيالي الإسلامي، مورشو تحقيق مضاد، كمال داود.

While postcolonialism is supposed to correct the colonial misconceptions about Islam, this approach raises many questions and debates after the publication of *The Satanic Verses*, a text that is widely read as blasphemous by Muslims despite the fact that it was written by a postcolonial writer. Postcolonial critics, like Edward Said who defended Islam in his seminal book *Orientalism*, lavish praise on Salman Rushdie's novel. He considers his transgressions as a form of free expression that must be defended in the Islamic world. Said's views on *The Satanic Verses* makes the relationship between Islam and colonialism more complicated. Seemingly, postcolonialism fails to offer a satisfactory stance towards Islam which is misrepresented in colonial discourse. In this regard, Amin Malik posits that in postcolonialism, there is an "inattentive or deliberate marginalization of religion as a force or factor with its own complex dynamics [and this] reflects privileging a secular, Europe American stance that seems to shape the parameters of postcolonial discourses"¹

Along similar lines, Anouar Majid points to the limitation of postcolonial discourse in relation to Islam. For him, postcolonialism has not done justice to Islam. One of the reasons, he assumes, is postcolonial critics' limited knowledge about Islam and their unreliability "as adequate speakers for Muslim subjectivities. Spivak, who had defended Islam against intolerance, had not read the most central and defining text of Islamic cultures"². According to Majid, the problem of postcolonial critics is not just their lack of knowledge about Islam, but they are also intoxicated by Western assumptions. Their excessive familiarity with the Western philosophical and literary traditions, Majid writes, "make them appear unsettlingly unreliable to many non-Westernized Muslims"³. Even Edward Said, who is very much loved by many Muslims because of his defence of Islam in books like *Orientalism* and *Covering Islam*, avows that he was not really defending Islam. He writes: "In the Arab world I'm read by many people as a champion of Islam, which is complete nonsense. I wasn't trying to defend Islam. I was simply talking about a very specific form of activity: representation"⁴

In the same vein, Wail S. Hassan believes that postcolonial theory is rooted in the European traditions of thought⁵. Hence, it is not immune from being influenced by Eurocentric views. He posits that "postcolonial theory seems sometimes to deploy a sort of

reverse-Eurocentrism. The almost complete reliance on the Western tradition of antihumanist critique of metaphysics—from Nietzsche to Heidegger, Foucault, and Derrida—has meant that the ‘non-western’ Other remains inaccessible and unknowable”⁶. Hassan adds that postcolonial theory “seems to inscribe neo-colonial hegemony by privileging the languages (and consequently the canons) of the major colonial powers, Britain and France”⁷. Hassan goes further to say that postcolonial theory might be worse than colonial discourse. He states: “Indeed, in its very attempt to challenge Western epistemology, postcolonial theory sometimes homogenizes Asia and Africa in more subtle ways than the older paradigms or colonial discourse itself”⁸. So, one of the shortcomings of postcolonial theory is its inability to deconstruct the Western negative constructed image of Islam that is propagated in Western discourse and media especially after 9/11.

Daoud, who tried to defend himself against Algerians’ outrageous comments, states that there is a difference between fact and fiction. Reading Daoud’s novel evinces his Othering of Islam which is very common in colonial discourse. According to John McLeod, postcolonialism “involves the *challenge* to colonial ways of knowing, ‘writing back’ in opposition to such views”⁹. Unfortunately, Daoud is antagonistic to Islam and religious discourse. His representation of Islam is supportive of colonial discourse. Daoud belongs to a group of postcolonial thinkers and writers who are hostile to Islam; “An overt antagonism might be discerned in their attitude toward Islam as a religion, Muslims as individuals, and muslim communities as collectives”¹⁰

In the novel, which struggles with the question of identity, Islam is a domestic Other. Daoud’s view of Islam tallies with the postcolonial secular trend that considers Islam as an oppressive force;

In its attachment to a secular and rationalist methodology derived from the European Enlightenment, postcolonialism remains embedded within an epistemology that is predominantly Western [...] postcolonialism remains embedded in Western secularism. Islam, on the other hand, while it continues to inform varied social, political and cultural formulations, remains an edifice irreducibly reared upon a religious foundation¹¹

The postcolonial, in the novel, is a position against two kinds of imperialism: Islam and the West. Islam, for Daoud, is an imperial force that deprives the individual of his freedom. According to S Sayyid, “neo-conservative discourse displaces the postcolonial critique of

imperialism onto imperial Islam, either explicitly or more implicitly (e.g. by arguing that the imperial sins of Islam are far greater than those of Western empires)¹²

In a similar vein, Edward Said opines that religion is an authoritative force that might have disastrous effects. He states: “Religion [...] furnishes us with systems of authority and with canons of order whose regular effect is either to compel subservience or to gain adherents. This in turn gives rise to organized collective passions whose social and intellectual results are often disastrous”¹³. For Said, absolute freedom of expression is one of the qualities of being modern. He considers religion as a major impediment to being modern. He writes:

We live in an age where the whole question of what the tradition is, and what the Prophet said, and the Holy Book said, and what God said, and what Jesus said, etc., are issues that people go to war over, as in the case of Salman Rushdie, who was condemned to death for what he wrote. That is for us the battle—the battle over what the modern is, and what the interpretation of the past is. It is very important in the Arab and Islamic worlds. There is a school of writers, poets, essayists, and intellectuals, who are fighting a battle for the right to be modern¹⁴

Colonial prejudices and racial attitudes are based on Manichean and ethnocentric thinking and self/other binary opposition. The colonizers and the white racists are obsessed with their chauvinistic and stereotypical claims of racial and cultural superiority.

Harun, in the novel, is a product of Western discourse. He does not dispel the colonizers’ misconceptions of Islam, but he rather reinforces them. He depicts Islam in the same way it is represented in Western discourse. Hence, like Rushdie, Daoud is guilty of cultural treason, because religion is one of the defining aspects of cultural identity. According to Geoffrey Nash, Kathleen Kerr-Koch, and Sarah Hackett, “Although postcolonial theory favours anti-colonial movements and defends the right of people of colonized nations to speak, some have questioned secular postcolonial intellectuals’ qualifications for voicing Muslim concerns in the struggles with the West over the name ‘Islam’”¹⁵. Algerians’ negative response to the novelist evinces the fact that Daoud does not represent them and their culture. A postcolonial rewriting of Camus’s *The Stranger* is supposed to voice the concern of the colonized and to deconstruct the stereotypes about its cultural aspects including religion.

In Daoud’s novel, Muslims’ voices are silenced. The novel evinces the effects of colonialism on Algeria, which include murder, loss of the land, dispossession of identity, and

fragmented families. However, Harun has profaned Algeria' cultural and religious conventions. For him, human liberty is reduced to three defining characteristics: Sex, drinking wine, and indifference to morality. He hates God whom he imagines as an awful face shaped in the form of a huge and crushing No.

The narrator is an atheist who finds the Qur'an very repulsive. He distrusts mosques and religious clothes. In his description of his neighbor's recitals of the Koran, which he finds very noisy, he says:

My neighbor's an invisible man who takes it upon himself, every weekend, to read the Koran at the top of his voice all night long. Nobody dares tell him to stop, because it's God who's making him shout. I myself don't dare. I'm marginal enough in this city as it is. His voice is nasal, plaintive, and obsequious. It sounds as if he's alternating roles, from torturer to victim and back¹⁶

Harun regards the old religious myths as mischievous and archaistic legacy bequeathed us by the primitive ages of human history.

When the Imam visits him and tries to make him see the light of God and admit his guilt, Harun explodes with insults and attacks on the Imam: "One day the imam tried to talk to me about God, telling me I was old and should at least pray like the others, but I went up to him and made an attempt to explain that I had so little time left, I didn't want to waste it on God"¹⁷. When the imam says to Harun that he will pray for him, Harun says: "I started yelling at the top of my lungs, and I insulted him and said I wouldn't put up with being prayed for by him"¹⁸. The conflict between the imam and Harun represents the conflict between Islam and secularism/atheism. The secular tradition belongs to the West, and it is associated with modernity. Homi Bhabha sates that the "trouble with concepts like...secularism is that we think we understand them too well. These are ideas and ideas that are increasingly complicit with a self-reflective claim to a culture of modernity whether it is held by the elites of the East and West, or the North and South"¹⁹. Harun views Islam as an impediment to modernity. He trivializes all religions, and he endorses the secular view of the death of God. He states:

Sometimes I 'm tempted to climb up that prayer tower, reach the level where the loudspeakers are hung, lock myself in, and belt out my widest assortment of invective and sacrilege. I long to list my impieties in detail. To bellow that I don't pray. I don't do

my ablutions, I don't fast, I will never go on any pilgrimage, and I drink wine-and what's more, the air that makes it bitter. To cry out that I'm free, and that God is a question, not an answer, and that I want to meet him alone, at my death as at my birth²⁰.

Harun criticizes the inherited religious and cultural customs. For him, Islam constrains people's life and freedom.

Like Meursault, Harun has relinquished religion and relied on his pitiless soul to create his own values. The novel shows Harun's commitment to atheistic premises. "When the sun's not there to blind you, what you're looking at is God's back. I hate that word"²¹. In Harun's world, codes and traditions lose their sacrosanct quality. Harun, who denies the existence of religion, declares: "I don't like anything that rises to heaven, I only like things affected by gravity. I'll go so far as to say that I abhor religions. All of them!"²². Harun is at odds with his society. He is considered as maverick, pariah and a social rebel against a conventional morality. Harun and Meursault reject conformity to patterns of behavior befitting the social category, and they seek to go beyond an existing set of values toward new ones created by them. For him, conformity is a denial of personal freedom. Harun transgresses all moral values and societal taboos. For example, he questions the banning of wine in the Algerian Muslim society. He says:

Shall we order the same wine as yesterday? I love its rough edges, its freshness. The other day, a wine producer was telling me his troubles. It's impossible to find workers, because the activity is considered *haram*, illicit. Even the country's banks are pilling and refusing him credit! Ha, ha! I've always wondered, what's the reason for this complicated relationship with wine? Why is it treated as though it's of the devil, when it's supposed to be flowing profusely in paradise? Why is it forbidden down here and promised up there²³.

For Harun, Islam restrains the individual freedom. He summons his readers to drink wine, because after death, the only beer that flows with wine will be in paradise. Harun recommends: "Drink up-in a few years, after the end of the world, the only bar still open will be in Paradise"²⁴. In fact, the wine of paradise is too different from the one on earth. It has never been tasted or seen by anyone. In an authentic and holy Hadith narrated by Al-Bukhari and Muslim, God says: "I have prepared for my righteous slaves what no eye has seen, no ear has heard, and the mind of no man has conceived." The previous quote shows Harun's limited knowledge of the Qur'an.

Harun is very critical of his mother, who typifies an older generation which urges children to live in accordance with the teachings of the Gur'an. He dislikes her way of dressing, Very much like the colonizers, Harun views the veil as a symbol of imprisonment and oppression. In fact, the veil is associated with identity and culture. This is why the colonize made herculean efforts to fulfill their project of unveiling women. In his discussion of the veil, Frantz Fanon write: "The way people clothe themselves together with the traditions of dress and finery that custom implies, constitutes the most distinctive form of a society's uniqueness, that is to say, the one that is most immediately perceptible"²⁵. The veil was also used by Algerian women to protect themselves from being visually possessed by French men. By wearing the veil, they assert their inaccessibility. However, French men violently unveil Algerian women to see what they hide behind the shroud they wear. In fact, the veil played a very important role in the Algerian war of independence. In this regard, Frantz Fanon states: "If we want to destroy the structure of Algerian society, its capacity for resistance, we must first of all conquer the women; we must go and find them behind the veil where they hide themselves and in the houses where the men keep them out of sight"²⁶.

In addition to making fun of her clothes, Harun even describes her religiosity as a sort of fanaticism. In his comments on the day of murder, Harun says: "So on that particular day, nothing unusual. Even Mama, who loved omens and was sensitive to spirits, failed to detect anything abnormal"²⁷. When Harun and his mother learned from Meriem, who brought them Camus's book, some missing details about Musa's death, Harun says: "We had just discovered, all at once, the last traces of Musa's footsteps, his murderer's name-which we had never known-and his exceptional fate. 'Everything was written!' Mama blurted out, and I was surprised by the involuntary aptness of her words. *Written*, yes, but in the form of a book, and not by some god"²⁸. Harun reacts to the Arab connotation of the word "written", which means divine destiny or in the Algerian dialect "al mektoub".

Harun, ironically, compares his brother Musa to a mighty and strong god. For him, he is like Pharaoh's Musa who was endowed with the miracle of parting the sea. According to Harun, "Musa was a simple god, a god of few words. His thick beard and strong arms made him seem like a giant who could have wrung the neck of any soldier in any ancient pharaoh's army [...] My brother Musa was capable of parting the sea"²⁹. Daoud used Qur'anic names like Harun, Musa, and Meriem, but he utterly changed, or tainted, these characters' roles and values.

For the narrator, the existence of God limits man's freedom. He thinks that God's existence would turn man's freedom to a mere illusion. He goes further to accuse God of being unfair with his creatures. He writes: "I detest religions and submission. Who wants to run panting after a father who has never set foot on earth, has never had to know hunger or work for a living?"³⁰. Harun's vile and malignant words might hurt many Muslims', Christians', and Jews' sensibilities. Harun does not show respect for those who believe in God, and this makes him a stranger in the world of believers. Daoud's novel fails to adhere to one of the main tenets of postcolonial theory, which is tolerance and respect of cultural diversity and difference.

The Meursault Investigation is an atheist novel that does not even accept the Holy Qur'an as a book. Harun avows: "I always react that way whenever I hear someone reciting the Koran. I get the feeling it's not a book, it's a dispute between a heaven and a creature! As far as I'm concerned, religion is public transportation I never use"³¹. Daoud's book is saturated with arrogance, with hubris which is explained as a perverse kind of exaltation in which one seeks to abandon the basis on which the mind should be firmly fixed and seeks instead to become self-created. Harun is haunted by a desire to be completely sovereign, autonomous, and self-sufficient. He expresses his uneasiness with anything that threatens to compromise his sense of mastery and control. Harun's staunch attack on Muslims' holy book accords with the Orientalist discourse which represents Islam as a backward and primitive religion.

Harun insults the holy Qur'an, Muslims' holy book that is spoken by God, and which is the most sacred book in Islam. He denigrates, belittles, and makes fun of its contents. He even refuses to believe the miracle that God had spoken to his prophet Musa. He states: "How can you believe God has spoken to only one man, and that one man has stopped talking forever? Sometimes I page through their book, *the Book*, and what I find there are strange redundancies, repetitions, lamentations, threats, and daydreams. I get the impression that I'm listening to a soliloquy spoken by some old night watchman, some *assas*"³².

Friday, which is a holy day in the Islamic world, is the day Harun dislikes most. He says: "Today's Friday. It's the day closest to death in my calendar. People dress ridiculously"³³. Harun expresses his disgust of the religious rites Muslims perform on Friday. He finds the Imam's speech and the recitations of the holy Qur'an very annoying. He also dislikes the Islamic architecture. He writes:

It's the Friday prayer hour I detest the most-and always have, ever since childhood, but even more for the past several years. The imam's voice, shouting through the loudspeakers, the rolled-up prayer rugs tucked under people's arms, the thundering minarets, the garish architecture of the mosque, and the hypocritical haste of the devout on their way to water and bad faith, ablutions and recitations³⁴.

Harun's talk about God the almighty is very offensive. He asks: "Friday? It's not a day when God rested, it's a day when he decided to run away and never come back"³⁵. Despite being a work of fiction, freedom of writing can be tolerated only if the things one writes are not offensive or disrespectful.

In addition to his negative representation of God and his violation of the sacred, Harun views Islam as an oppressive religion that denies women freedom. Harun was enmeshed in a temporary relationship with a teacher from Constantine called Meriem. She visited his house, because she was doing research on a book that tells Musa's story. The title of the book is *The Other*, and it is written by the murderer whose name is Meursault. Meriem exemplifies the liberal woman who rebelled against the teachings of her religion and followed non-Islamic styles of life. Meriem, who mentions to Harun her father's polygamy, "claimed the status of a 'free woman'-and she accompanied the declaration with a look of defiance that spoke volumes about her resistance to her family's conservatism"³⁶. Islam, for Harun, is a patriarchal religion that deprives women of their liberty. This view tallies with Orientalist discourse which depicts Islam as an oppressive religion which restrains women's freedom. A modern woman, according to Harun, is a sexually available one. Talking of Meriem, Harun states that "Her type of woman has disappeared in this country today: free, brash, disobedient, aware of their body as a gift, not as a sin or a shame"³⁷. Harun wants an illicit love free from any real and concrete entanglement. Both Meursault and Harun regard women essentially as instruments for temporary relief of physical and emotional needs. They think of them lustfully. In the Algerian conservative society, Harun complains, "Accessible women were rare, and in a village like likeHadjout, you couldn't come across a woman with her face uncovered, much less to talk to one. I didn't have any female cousin anywhere around. The only part of my life that was anything like a love story was what I had with Meriem. She's the only woman who found the patience to love me and lead me back to life"³⁸. Harun vehemently criticized the Algerian society because of its moral values. It is a society in which women preserve their purity and honor, and they forbid men to use their bodies as means of satiating their carnal desires either visually or physically.

Harun spends all nights in a bar drinking heavily. He is buffeted by an extreme sense of absurdism. His life is empty, sterile, and futile. He is an ineffectual and irresponsible person who lives a monastic life, and he does not want to get out of his lethargy and carelessness and face the future. His life is without human meaning because he prefers to be sheltered in a cocoon and he is anxious to keep his hands clean and refuses to drag them in the mud of authentic existence. This is evident in his rejection of marriage and his refusal to take part in the Algerian revolution. In fact, there are striking similarities between Harun and Meursault. Harun avows:

I was looking for traces of my brother in the book, and what I found there instead was my own reflection, I discovered I was practically the murderer's double. I finally came to the last lines in the book: '...had only to wish that there be a large crowd of spectators the day of my execution and that they greet me with cries of hate'. God!, how I would have wanted that!³⁹.

Meursault's crime was seen as accidental and committed without malice or intention. In fact, Meursault does not acknowledge his share of responsibility for the murder. He says that the incredible heat and sun light provoke Meursault to commit a murder. Like in the case of Meursault, natural environment does play a crucial role in manipulating Harun's destiny. He is influenced by the moon as Meursault was affected by the sun. Both Harun and Meursault are atheists. While Meursault hates Sundays, Harun dislikes Fridays. Like Meursault who was visited by a priest in the prison, Harun was visited by an imam. Like Meursault, Musa is raised by his mother.

Since they are both atheists, both Meursault and Harun believe that there is no ultimate meaning or purpose inherent in human life; in this sense, life is patently chaotic, incoherent, meaningless, and worthless. In other words, it is absurd. This sense of absurdism makes Meursault and Harun react to others and the outside world with an utter indifference. Harun, for instance, did not show any sorrow for the death of his brother. He states that "on the day when we learned of his death [...] I didn't feel sad or angry [...] I almost never wept for him"⁴⁰. In his emotional coldness towards the closest people to him, Harun is the alter ego of Meursault who did not cry over the death of his mother. Meursault sent his mother away to a home for the aged, an action that brought him criticism. This act or deed highlights his lack of affection and love towards his mother. When he receives a telegram stating his mother had died, he seems cold with his lack of sentiment. So, his reaction to his mother's death is not sadness; it is a matter-of-fact and unemotional acceptance of death. The day after his mother's

funeral, Meursault goes swimming, meets Marie, has lunch with her, takes her to the cinema and they watch a comic film, and then he makes love to her. Like Meursault, Harun responds to events with an utter indifference. He says: "I realized how alike we were, he and I"⁴¹.

Very much like Meursault, Harun does not live with his mother. He says: "You want the truth? I rarely go to see my mother nowadays. She lives in a house under a sky where a dead man and a lemon tree are loitering"⁴². In the entire novel, Harun seems to be indifferent to his mother who "does not seem to want to die"⁴³. Harun does not love his mother because her care and love of him makes him feel as if he is an object. He says: "Yes, Mama's still alive today, and that fact leaves me completely indifferent. I feel bad about this, I swear, but I can't forgive her. I was her object, not her son [...] I'll take you with me to her funeral"⁴⁴. Harun wants to cut ties with his mother who controls his life completely and deprives him of the freedom to go on with his own life as he wishes, because his body, as he admits, "became the visible *trace* of her dead son, and I ended up obeying her unspoken injection"⁴⁵.

Like Meursault's trial, that of Harun was absurd. His mother pushed him to kill a French settler named Joseph Larquais. Harun was arrested and judged not for killing the Frenchman, but for the time of the murder; in other words, for killing him one day after the independence. The incident brings to mind Meursault who was tried not for killing the Arab but for showing no grief for the death of his mother. Harun was judged for not taking part in the revolution to liberate his country. The judge says to Harun:

This Frenchman, you should have killed him with us, during the war, not last week!' I didn't see what difference that made, I replied. Visibly taken aback, he was silent for a while, and then he roared, 'It makes all the difference!' [...] He started stammering, declaring that killing and making war are not the same thing, that we weren't murderers but liberators"⁴⁶.

Harun's murder of the Frenchman is an absurd act that is committed for a reason that sounds implausible. Harun asks: "you know why Mama chose Joseph Larquais as the sacrificial victim [...] even though he came to us that night? [...] that *roumi* had to be punished, according to Mama, because he loved to go for a Swim at two in the afternoon!"⁴⁷.

The issue of alienation, in the novel, is intricately interwoven with absurdism. Harun feels alienated in his own country. He lives alone in a world of iron walls which denies him inter-connectedness and communing with the others. Referring to himself, he writes: "A stranger possesses nothing-and I was one"⁴⁸. Harun wanted to be free of all social obligations.

He loved so many women, but he never got married. He says: “I have always nurtured a mighty distrust of women. Basically, I’ve never believed them”⁴⁹. He is thoroughly indifferent towards others. He wants to achieve freedom by not believing in God and by refusing to have a wife and children. His life is marked by moral blindness and the absence of the ethic of social responsibility that lies at the core of all social relations.

Harun is seen by his people as an outsider. He says: “On Friday all the bars are closed and I have nothing to do. People look at me strangely, because despite my age I entreat no one and reach out to no one. It doesn’t seem right to be so close to death without feeling close to God. ‘Forgive them [my God], for they know not what they do’”⁵⁰. Like Meursault, he is socially alienated and marginalized because of his strange personality. He does not care about the social codes and conventions. What also makes him abandoned by others is the fact that he did not participate in the war of liberation. Harun avows that “the first mayor of Hadjout [...] treated him like a weakling because [he] hadn’t left to join the resistance like the others”⁵¹.

Harun prefers to live a kind of liberal life that is utterly at odds with the social, cultural, and religious conventions. He states: “my neighbors don’t like my independence [...] Children fall silent when I approach them, except for some who matter insults as I go by”⁵². Harun adds that “Centuries ago, I might have been burned alive for my convictions, and for the empty red wine bottles found in the neighborhood Dumpsters. Nowadays, people just avoid me”⁵³. Like his character Harun, Daoud lives in a safe haven despite his blasphemous work that makes his readers seethe with rage. This is mainly because he lives in a country whose religion preaches peace and love. Harun, like Meursault, is a lost creature who has nothing positive or worthwhile to hang on to. He has discovered, as the absurd heroes are always to discover, that the creation of an ethic must be, in fact, the responsibility of the individual.

Conclusion

Kamel Daoud’s *The Meursault Investigation* is widely applauded as the first novel which attempts to write back to Albert Camus’s classic novel *The Stranger*. The novel’s success is in its giving a name to Meursault’s murdered Arab who was nameless in Camus’s novel. However, the novel is vehemently criticized by Algerians who view Daoud as a rebel who has offended Islam and Muslims. Harun constructs a very negative and reductive

image of Islam that has long been rife in Western Orientalist and colonial discourse. In fact, Haruni is a product of Orientalist discourse. He insulted Muslims' holy book and devalued the culture of the natives. Daoud's writing back to Albert Camus's *The Stranger* is matched by heterodox and heretical questioning of Islam. Though Daoud asserts that his novel is just a work of fiction, his readers abhor his misrepresentation and abuse of Islam. By and large, postcolonialism has failed to identify colonial discourse in anti-Islamic texts. Thus, it is faulted for its secularism. Indeed, There is an urgent need to develop a kind of Islamic postcolonialism. A postcolonial reading of the novel should make of Islam an alternative centre.

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- ¹⁸ *Ibid*, 141.
- ¹⁹ Homi Bhabha, Qtd in Touria Khannous, "Islam, Gender, and Identity in Leila Abouzeid's *The Last Chapter*. A Postcolonial Critique." *College Literature*, 37,1. (Winter, 2010), p. 80
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