

# Exile and Inclusion: Excerpts from Albert Camus' "Exile and the Kingdom"

Alison M. Brady

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## Abstract

*The collection of short stories entitled "Exile and the Kingdom" by pied-noir Albert Camus embrace the themes of exile and return as illuminating an underlying anxiety of inclusion and exclusion. Written during the time of the French-Algerian war, these stories may be said to exemplify those who, in Cassin's terms, "'are' never there, never at home." Through considering such stories, this paper discusses the connection between belonging and identity, and what it means, then, to be simultaneously included and excluded. Such ideas are important for education, not only in recognising identities of those who 'belong-in-exile', but in creating educational spaces where such identities can be more fully accounted for. Firstly, I will give a brief overview of Camus' pied-noir status as an influential factor in his writings, before looking more closely at two of these stories, and discussing the ways in which they explore these themes in relation to Camus' absurdism. I will then briefly point to how such themes might be understood in relation to the wider themes of anxiety, recognition, and rootedness. Finally, I will briefly offer some insights into the role education might play in relation to these themes.*

## Introduction

In 1957, the French-Algerian writer Albert Camus wrote a collection of short stories entitled "Exile and the Kingdom". These stories were composed during the time of the Algerian struggle for independence, culminating in the displacement of around one million *pied-noirs*, who later "returned" to France, the country of their origin.

In this paper, I will explore the themes of exile and return as demarcated in these stories, and how these can lead to an underlying, often inarticulatable anxiety in relation to exclusion and inclusion. I will begin by giving a brief overview of Camus' *pied-noir* status as an essentially influential factor in his writings, before looking more closely at two of the stories from this collection, discussing the ways in which they explore these themes in relation to Camus' own philosophy of the absurd. I will then briefly point to the ways in which such themes might be understood in relation to the wider theme of the anxiety of inclusion in light of recognition, belonging and rootedness, which will hopefully lead to further discussion on what belonging looks like, and what it means to be simultaneously included and excluded. Finally, I will discuss what role education may play in relation to this, and to think about how the use of such narratives can offer an educational space in which those who identify as 'belonging-in-exile' are more carefully accounted for.

## Camus, the *Pied-Noir*, and Algeria

Camus was born to a *pied-noir* family in the small coastal village of Mondovi (now Dréan) in the then French-governed Algeria. *Pied-noir*, which literally translates as “black foot”, was a term used to denote those who were of European origin, who resided in the colonized states of Northern Africa after their families had migrated there, some of whom later returned to their country of origin after such states gained independence. Being a *pied-noir*, indeed, would have a profound impact on Camus and his writings, who, like many, are often described as not feeling quite at home in neither the country of their origin nor the country of their birth.

In a sense, one could say that *pied-noirs* were somewhat nomadic, with fragmented identities and a deep-seated feeling of exile. It has been widely documented that the *pied-noir* community were strongly associated with a general sense of *dislocatedness*, particularly upon their ‘return’ to France in 1962 following its cessation of colonial governance in Algeria. This uneasiness is often described in relation to their attempts to “negotiate their sense of being simultaneously part of and apart from their own nation” (Elridge, 2013, p. 2). There is a sense here that *pied-noirs* were not just returning to their country of origin, they were simultaneously exiled from the country of their birth. Because such a return entailed a permanent movement away from the place in which they had grown up, they were left with an enduring feeling of exile, and a nostalgia for that which they had left behind. This state of ‘permanent uprootedness’ and its accompanying sense of nostalgia is evident in the discourse of the *pied-noir* character, and the themes of exile and return certainly feature strongly in the work of Camus, perhaps most strikingly in his collection of short stories, “Exile and the Kingdom” (1957).

Camus’ own stance on the relationship between Algerian independence and the *pied-noir* community was somewhat tempestuous. On the one hand, his concern over the poor treatment of indigenous Algerians under the French regime was evident throughout his life, particularly upon his exposure to French official negligence towards these indigenous communities whilst he was working as a journalist in Algeria in the late 1930s (Hammer, 2013). Much of this may be argued to also come through in his writing, where often the entrenched viciousness of the colonial attitude towards native Algerians is palpable in the more disapproving characters, such as Marcel in “The Adulterous Woman” (1957) or Raymond in “The Outsider” (1953). It is also signalled somewhat in the notably silent roles that native Algerians often play in many of his works. Indeed, he was overall quite sympathetic towards the Algerian struggle for independence, despite being severely critical of the violent ways in which this was being achieved (Hammer, 2013; Todd, 2011; Carroll, 2007; Hargreaves, 1987).

And yet, Camus was also very concerned for the safety of the French *pied-noir* community that was still residing in Algeria during this bloody conflict, his own mother included. Above all

else, Camus was both a pacifist and a humanist, and his loyalty lay with those close to him rather than what he considered to be an abstract ideal of justice. At his Noble Prize winning banquet, he was quoted as saying that, during the conflict, “[p]eople are now planting bombs on the tramways... My mother might be on one of those tramways. If that is justice, then I prefer my mother.” (Camus, 1957 as cited in Hammer, 2013). Camus refused to support the often brutal tactics used by such Algerian militant groups as the *Front de Libération Nationale* to further their cause.

Ultimately, Camus wished to have a multicultural Algeria, wherein which both native Algerians and the *pied-noir* community could live side-by-side in peace. In 1955, Camus asserted that “[w]hen that happens, we who are both exiled in hatred and despair shall together recover our native land” (1955, as cited in Carroll, 2007, p. xi). Yet, this vision would fail to take hold, despite his persistent attempts to do so, and shortly after his death, around one million *pied-noirs* were displaced from North Africa.

Camus’ seemingly non-aligned stance is demonstrated quite clearly in his Noble Prize winning speech some years later in 1957. He describes his sentiment as a cause of great “inner turmoil” (Camus, 1957). Furthermore, his deliberate silence would later draw much criticism. He was labelled as an “unrepentant colonialist” (Carroll, 2007, p. xxi), with “incapacitated colonial sensibility.” (Said, 1993, p. 66) The absence, silence and underdevelopment of Arab characters in his works only further aggravated this reproach, and he remains a controversial writer for those very reasons.

Whatever his stance, it could be argued that, indeed, Camus was a man who was “doubly exiled” (Cosman, 2006, p. 115) - a *pied-noir*, who felt neither French nor Algerian (or, most likely, a strange combination of both), and as an independence-sympathiser who, at the same time, couldn’t bring himself to fully endorse this struggle. Camus, perhaps, didn’t quite fit the category one might instinctively suppose of a writer whose notoriety in the French literary scene at that time was unmistakable. Parts of Camus’ life, particularly in terms of his relationship to Algeria, can be seen in many of his works, perhaps most acutely in two of the six short stories in the collection “Exile and the Kingdom” (2006), to which I will now turn.

### **Exile and the Kingdom**

“Exile and the Kingdom” (2006) was published in 1957, arguably at the pinnacle of Camus’ literary career. It was also written amid the armed resistance between Algeria and their colonizers, which would later claim over 600,000 lives, displacing thousands more. Many of the stories, indeed, take place in the deserted, desolate landscape of Camus’ native Algeria, and the emphasis on the isolation and remoteness of this landscape serves as a fitting backdrop to the themes of exile and return, and indeed inclusion and exclusion, throughout.

The title itself is indicative of Camus' own experiences as a *pied-noir*, but also signal the more philosophical underpinnings of his work. Exile is placed paradoxically with the ideal of unlimited freedom, which is signified in the use of the term 'the kingdom'. Commenting on these two themes, Camus proclaims that the kingdom represents a "certain stark, free life that we have to rediscover in order to be reborn. Exile in its own way shows us the path on the condition that we are able to refuse at the same time both servitude and possession" (Camus, 1957 as cited in Carroll, 2007, p. 63).

In one of the short stories, "The Adulterous Woman", Camus juxtaposes the *pied-noir* community who are in possession of stolen lands, enforcing servitude on their Algerian counterparts, with the nomadic communities who reside in the Sahara, exiled from their own lands, but who are nonetheless free lords in possession of nothing and serving no-one. Upon describing the moment when the *pied-noir* protagonist, Janine, looks out across the barren desert before her, Camus describes these nomads as...

Homeless, remote from the world, they were a handful of men wandering through the vast territory her gaze had discovered ... a few men ceaselessly [making] their way, possessing nothing but serving no one, the destitute and free lords of a strange kingdom. (Camus, 2006, p. 11).

Janine may be said to be reminiscent of these nomadic communities, since she herself is uprooted in different ways. She is trapped in an unhappy marriage, entombed in an aging body over which she has no control, and fixed in a place with a culture she does not quite understand, a language she cannot speak, and with the *pied-noir* community she derides. Indeed, she is a "colonizer who has no place in the world of the colonized." (Carroll, 2007, p. 64)

This sense of alienation she feels from both her country of birth and her country of origin is manifest throughout. She has been travelling for days with what she deems a "mute escort", their "silence weighing upon her" (Camus, 2006, p. 2), on a bus where she is one of the only *pied-noirs*. The desert spreads out in front of her with immense silence, and "empty space" (Camus, 2006, 2; 9). Camus, whose main philosophical idea relates to the absurdity of the universe, uses silence as a way to inculcate the idea of an indifferent universe, but it is also connected to a sense of uprootedness, and the fragmentation of identity that often accompanies this. This disintegration of identity seems to trigger a deep feeling of anxiety, perhaps due to Janine not being able to clearly articulate her 'place' in the world, where she feels 'included' or to which she belongs. As I will point to below, it may also relate to recognition, in a sense, if we are to understand that the recognition of others – how *they* envision our place in the world – impinges upon how we see ourselves, and how this can often lead to a disjointed sense of self where, as *pied-noirs* may experience, one is perpetually uprooted or exiled.

Janine, indeed, may be said to be in this permanent state of exile, like the nomadic communities she witnesses in the far-off distance. Like them, this sense of exile serves to isolate her from the things she possesses, the land she feels somewhat a part of but distant from at the same

time. She briefly encounters this moment of realisation, and the thought is both exhilarating and anxiety-inducing. But what is the source of this anxiety, precisely? Is it that she has suddenly recognised the permanency of her exile? That she, perhaps, belongs in exile? Or perhaps that she will never be an either/or – she must, instead, struggle with her fragmented identity, as the prodigal *pied-noirs* similarly had to struggle with the dichotomy of inclusion and exclusion, of return and exile?

The second story which I will consider here as pertinent to the theme of exile is possibly one of the more famous ones – “L’Hôte”. Interestingly, the translation of this title is twofold – either as “The Guest” or “The Host” - which further illuminates the difficulty in contraposing the themes of exile and return, of inclusion and exclusion.

The Guest/Host perhaps most accurately depicts Camus’ seemingly unallied stance in the French-Algerian conflict, and also expands upon the notion of ‘hospitality’ in a colonial context. Daru is a *pied-noir* teacher, living on an isolated plateau in the desert, who is one day tasked with taking an unnamed, condemned Algerian man to the nearby village where he will await trial for murder. Daru mulls over this for some time, welcoming the man into his ‘home’, and, after breaking bread with him, ultimately decides that he is unable to decide. Thereby, he leaves the condemned man at a crossroads. At the crossroads, the man must choose for himself - to be free, in exile, living out his days with a nomadic community, or to travel to the police station himself where he will be arrested. Daru, in shirking his responsibility to the man by choosing not to act, soon realises that inaction itself is a choice.

What is particularly interesting about this story is the question of Daru’s status, of where he ‘belongs’. Is he the guest or the host in that situation? Is it he who is responsible for showing hospitality to the Algerian, or is he who must accept it? Is Daru the outsider, the stranger? Or is he estranged from this merciless land that he is simultaneously familiar with and rooted to? Is belonging in this occupied territory an avoidance of the feeling of exile? Or is exile inescapable? Indeed, this land was “a cruel place to live... But Daru had been born here. Anywhere else, he felt exiled.” (Camus, 2006, p. 44).

As with the “Adulterous Woman”, silence and speech play a significant role in this story, which again, is quite in line with Camus’ own philosophy of the absurd and the idea of a silent world, deaf to our cries. This is made manifest once again in the “solitude and silence” (Camus, 2006, p. 49) of the “vast country he had loved so much” in which Daru “was alone.” (Camus, 2006, p. 55) Such feelings of isolation, as with Janine, can be a source of great anxiety. And like Janine, this anxiety might also stem from our belonging to a particular community we feel uprooted from, on the one hand, and yet intimately apart of on the other. Indeed, this anxiety of belonging or inclusion may be characterised as an anxiety of the permanent flux of rootedness and uprootedness, of exile and return.

## **Exile, Belonging and Recognition**

Thus, there seems to be a sense of exile even when someone is ‘at home’, as Cassin (2016) explores, even if one is rooted to something or someone. Interestingly, this sense of rootedness and uprootedness may be said to correlate with recognition. Rootedness might be considered as being part of something – a community, a nation, a marriage. Oftentimes, this is not necessarily by choice. Rather, it can come about via how others see us, what their expectations are of us, with whom we try to make sense of the world. And this is intimately linked to our identities, not forged in isolation, but in dialogue with others and with the communities with which we consolidate these wider frameworks of meaning. Indeed, that *something* is part of who we are – it is part of how “significant others” (Taylor, 1994, p. 32) recognise us and, by virtue of that, how we recognise ourselves.

What does it mean to be recognised as a *pied-noir*, a host in the land one occupies, a guest in an occupied land, a wife, a woman, a writer? And what happens when how others recognise us – Janine as the wife who needs to be needed, Daru as a *pied-noir* oppressor through his inaction and privilege – does not match with how we understand ourselves, or how we experience the world? Are we rooted to that which is recognised in us? What happens when the recognition of others and/or our frameworks of meaning become confused, tangled or obscured? Might it be said that we are left in a permanent state of exile, like the characters in the stories?

These are all interesting themes worth exploring, and are clearly related to the ideas of exclusion and inclusion. We may try to live up to the ‘ideal’ or ‘fixed’ ways of being that others recognise in us by virtue of demonstrating or performing particular qualities, features, and expectations, perhaps. But when our attempts to comprehend the world leave us feeling uncertain or disarrayed, a visceral feeling of deep-seated anxiety might ensue. It is difficult to put a name to such anxiety, but it might be understood as a sense in which what we feel we are rooted to, or what we should be rooted to, is torn from us, much like displaced peoples around the world. Without such roots, or with our failure to hold on to them, we are in exile.

And yet, Camus teaches us that this sense of exile does not have to lead us to despair and nihilism. Like the ‘free lords’ of the desert, exile can represent “the most profound sense of belonging, a belonging-as-exile” (Carroll, 2007, p. 62). When we possess nothing, we serve no one, we are free to make our own meaning in the indifferent universe. We are free to make noise where there is silence. We no longer need to rely on a dichotomy between being excluded and being included. Perhaps, then, to be free is to accept the perpetual anxiety which underpins much of our lives, this oscillation between inclusion and exclusion, between exile and return.

## **A Space for Education?**

Although such notions of identity and the influence of recognition in relation to this are often thought to be inarticulable, philosophers such as Taylor (1944) argue that we should, nevertheless, continue to do so, even if the task itself is ultimately futile. Often attempts to

articulate one's identity is met with a sense of anxiety. Indeed, in asking the question, "Who am I?", we are often confronted with a feeling of uncertainty and uprootedness that many of us might wish to avoid. Instead, one might decide to cower in what Sartre (1943) calls 'bad faith', an inauthentic mode of existence wherein which we fail to take responsibility for responding to such questions, and where we try to fruitlessly overcome the uncertainty that such notions as 'identity' often make manifest through concretising how it is that we see ourselves, often by virtue of the recognition of others.

This idea corresponds to Camus' own notion of absurdism, where, in accepting the idea that the world is devoid of any inherent meaning, it is often tempting (and even justifiable in some sense) to fall into the traps of nihilism. And yet, as explored in the *Myth of Sisyphus*, Camus (1975) argues that we should nevertheless continually try to overcome our nihilistic sensibilities when faced with the absurdity of the universe, and to find meaning in even the most banal of activities we undertake. This, indeed, involves accepting uncertainty in the (re)forging of our identities, and the accompanying anxiety that such a realisation often provokes.

Education is often considered in terms of its grander purposes – to help the nation's economy, to create a more cohesive society, to cultivate democratic values in pupils in order to create a more equitable society, to learn how to live together in harmony with others from various backgrounds. There is no denying the role that education often plays in relation to these, and it is, of course, important to take such aims of education into consideration. And yet, equally important, albeit less grandiose, are the more banal and ordinary experiences of education, particularly when considering that which takes place in the classroom. The classroom, indeed, might be thought of as a microcosm of sorts, where, as Gadamer (2011) discusses, a 'fusion of horizons' is made possible. According to both Gadamer (2011) and Taylor (1994), it is only through such 'fusions of horizons' that one can learn to value the cultures of others, to recognise the validity of their identity, and to come to learn something new about oneself and the cultures from which one derives one's own values.

This is not to say that such a task is simple, however. Nor does it end at a fixed point in time. It is often in such circumstances that a battle of wills is extant, and that a struggle for recognition is all the more palpable. Nevertheless, it is through such struggles that one's own identity can be continually (re)forged, and that one can learn to accept the value of uncertainty and uprootedness in light of this, despite the anxiety it may induce. Such struggles may prove to be difficult and yet, as Camus (1975, p. 34) says, 'to remain on that dizzying crest – that is integrity and the rest is subterfuge.' Perhaps the classroom needs greater consideration in terms of understanding how it is that such struggles ensue, and what values such struggles might possess. The *pied-noir* stories that capture these, therefore, can offer important educational insights into the notions of belonging, identity, and the dichotomy of inclusion and exclusion in classroom practices.

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