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**The Discourse of Cultural Superiority in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899) and Albert Camus' *L'étranger* (1942).**

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## **Dedications**

I dedicate this modest research to my supportive parents, my beloved siblings and cousins and my dear nephew, whose encouragement and love have been my inspiration.

Limani Souad.

To my parents and siblings who have always shown me love and support, to my best friend and cousins who have supported me since childhood. Your encouragement has been my strength.

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## **Abstract**

This research paper studies the discourse of cultural superiority in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899) and Albert Camus' *L'étranger* (1942). It aims to provide an account of the writers' attitudes towards the African peoples and cultures and to explain how the Europeans in general looked at the African natives during the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century in the context of colonialism. It discusses different aspects of ethnocentrism and otherness in themes and characters and analyzes the superiority complex that appears in the characters' actions, thoughts and behaviors towards the natives. This research relies on important theories which are: William Graham Sumner's *Folkways* (1906), Franz Boas' *Race, Language, Culture* (1940), Alfred Adler's *Understanding Human Nature* (1927), and Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) to define the concepts of ethnocentrism, the superiority complex, and otherness respectively. The first chapter deals with the representation of ethnocentrism in both novels at the level of themes and characters. The second chapter deals with the 'superiority complex' and 'otherness' in the novels. This work highlights the oppression and brutality of European colonialism and sheds light on the African peoples' suffering from subjugation, dehumanization and racism. It attempts to deconstruct the discourse of cultural superiority in both novels. Ethnocentrism exposes the racist and ethnocentric attitudes of the European characters towards the natives, otherness reveals the writers' process of categorizing characters according to a binary system of divisions between Europeans and indigenous characters, and the superiority complex highlights the European protagonists' arrogant behaviours and racist actions towards the natives. This research introduces the discourse of cultural superiority in colonial literature which reinforces the colonial enterprise by presenting an ethnocentric perspective resulting in otherness and superiority complex.

**Key words:** Conrad, Camus, Ethnocentrism, Orientalism, discourse, Otherness, Superiority Complex.

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## **I- Introduction**

Since the time human beings had invented the art of writing, literature started to play an important role in our lives. It allows writers to express their feelings and thoughts about their societies by exploring both their positive and negative aspects. In other terms, literature reflects a society and the latter reflected in literature. Literary works deal with realities and attempt to divulge social, historical and political truths both directly and indirectly and people's natures from different parts of the world wild.

Colonial literature played a crucial role in justifying European imperial mission in Africa during the 19<sup>th</sup> and the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. A discourse was created by European writers for the aim of describing the European presence on African lands. In other words, the western discourse created an inferior image of Africans and a primitive picture of their traditions languages and cultures. In short, they portrayed Africans as archaic and savage peoples who needed to be civilized and educated. On the other hand, this colonial discourse also created a superior image to the Europeans. They put themselves at the center of the world, and their culture and traditions were considered as the most enlightened and refined. Ideologically speaking, they justified their conquest by bringing civilization and enlightenment to the dark spots of Africa by colonisation; however, the real reason was grabbing its riches and natural resources.

The present research examines the discourse of cultural Superiority in *Heart of Darkness* (1899) by Joseph Conrad and *L'étranger* (1942) by Albert Camus. Both novels were written during the European domination in Africa. Conrad's novel deals with the Belgian conquest of the Congo and Camus' deals with the French colonization of Algeria. Accordingly, both are concerned with the European imperialism in Africa during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. They share several common points but they are set in two different periods of time and two different countries. Yet, colonialism made huge changes in both societies and

individuals. The aim of this study is to deconstruct the colonial discourse in order to show how the African was represented in these novels, and how these primordial representations of the colonized helped construct a discourse of cultural superiority. To achieve our aim, we rely on some key concepts, such as ethnocentrism, superiority complex and otherness.

## **1-Review of the literature**

Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899) and Albert Camus's *L'étranger* (1942) are considered as classics of literature. Both were debated by scholars, theorists, and critics from different perspectives. Themes, such as identity, absurdity, feminism and racism had the lion share of criticism.

*Heart of Darkness* was examined by several African writers and others around the world. In his essay "*An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's Heart of Darkness (1977)*", the Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe criticizes the novel from racist perspectives by denouncing Conrad's destruction of the image of Africa and describing it as a dark barbaric land. He claimed that Conrad used a white man, Marlow, as the main character and portrayed him as a European man who brought civilization to the Africans whom he regarded as savages, cannibals for the sake of demeaning them and reinforcing the Eurocentric beliefs. (Achebe 1977, 782-794) In addition, the novel consists of racist stereotypes; the African characters were depicted as silent, voiceless and uncivilised whereas the European characters were depicted as superior, intelligent and civilised. He added that *Heart of Darkness* projects the image of Africa as the other world, the antithesis of Europe and therefore of civilization, a place where man vaunted intelligence.

In "*Multiple Perspectives toward Women in Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness*" (2016) Farough Fakhimi Anbaran deals with the few secondary female characters that were presented in the novel, Fakhimi has accomplished a feminist approach to the novel. He

examines how Conrad and the male characters in his novel portrayed women. According to Fakhimi, Conrad described women as a belonging or a property and refers to the possessive adjectives that the writer uses to express men's possession of women. He also portrayed them as naive creatures and believes that they have less experience in life comparing to men, they are easily manipulated because they are housewives who serve their husbands and children. On the other hand, Fakhimi affirms that Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* puts men at the center and women at the periphery to humiliate them. He says: "Every single piece of writing by man tend to be against women consciously or unconsciously and nowadays, for sure feminism does not keep silence encountering with this kind of things" (Fakhimi Anbaran 2016, 130).

Similarly to Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, Albert Camus *L'étranger* was the subject of many criticism around the world. For instance Lamria Chetouani wrote this article, *L'étranger d'Albert Camus : une lecture à l'envers du stéréotype arabe* published in the journal *Mots: Les langages du politique* in 1992. This essay looks at Camus's famous novel from a postcolonial point of view and talks about how the Arab man who Meursault killed is shown in the story. As Chetouani said: " les arabes sont, on effet, reconnaissables dans le texte a partir de quelques incidents: le mot arabe lui-même, L'anonymat, l'étrangeté, le flou et l'inégalité de leur place dans la société, etc" (Chetouani 1992, 39). The fact that the Arab doesn't have a name, voice, or unique traits shows an implicit racist logic. He is only a story function, not a real person or victim. The article goes against traditional philosophical readings of *L'étranger* by focusing on its colonial setting in the 1940s, when native Algerians were politically and culturally pushed to the side. According to Chetouani, Camus's so-called universal humanism is constrained by a colonial viewpoint; his representation of "the Other" is still abstract, silent, and incomplete.

Murat Demirkan explored the novel from another perspective which is different from what others did before such as feminism, violence, racism and absurdity. "L'absurde et

L'humour dans *L'Étranger* de Camus”, Demirkan examined the absurdity of the main character's actions as well as the writer's use of humour in telling past events. He noticed that absurdity was highlighted through his behaviour and in describing every simple detail about his life style. Meursault's reaction toward the death of his mother and the crime he committed being unconstrained by social norms (Demirkan 2009, 91-94). According to his analysis of every situation and gesture in the novel, he asserted that Camus used dark comedy to convey a message which is the absurdity of human conditions and the detachment from society and its expectation.

These criticism of *L'étranger* and *Heart of Darkness* have addressed different interesting topics that were not dealt with before. When gathering all the elements of the criticism which are identity, absurdity, feminism and racism, we see that they are not far from existing inside a community especially within a colonial context. We deduced that Europeans did not only treat the African women badly but also its men. All of them were considered as the Others and marginalized in their own country. On the other hand they boycotted the colonizers' identity, they practiced their own culture and did not show any consideration for European culture, which presented its norms and values as superior and the model to follow. This lack of consideration led European to judge the natives and treat them badly for not adhering to their social norms. Thus the reasons that lead the Europeans to treat people that are different in a barbaric manner, prompting us to investigate Ethnocentrism and Superiority Complex that the western settlers hold inside them.

## **2- Issue and working hypothesis:**

After the observation of the above review of literature, it is apparent that the two novels *Heart of Darkness* (1899) and *L'étranger* (1942) were studied from different perspectives. The interest of several scholars in *Heart of Darkness* was to criticize Conrad's portrayal of the African society which experienced many social transformations, injustice, racism, gender, discrimination and cultural ruination as a result of the 19<sup>th</sup> century European colonialism. In the same way, *L'étranger* has received many criticisms concerning the absurdity of the characters and identity struggles during the French conquest in Algeria from the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

These novels share several common points and differ in many others. The two works do not share the same setting, but are both African countries that suffered from the European domination, and both were victims of racism, subjugation and the struggle for liberty and identity, the two novels depict the circumstances that the colonized countries lived during that period of time. Therefore, since no study as far as we know has yet put the two works together in order to analyse the issue of ethnocentrism and the superiority complex of the European settlers. The present research investigates *Heart of Darkness* and *L'étranger* in relation to Ethnocentrism and the discourse of cultural superiority that the Europeans spread to valorize their culture, language, and identity while demeaning those of the colonized peoples. To achieve our goal, we will rely on the concepts of Ethnocentrism, Superiority Complex and Otherness.

### **3-Methodological Outline**

In our dissertation, we relied on IMRAD system. Thus, our work will be divided into four major parts. In the introduction, we presented the topic and the purpose of our work. In the review of literature, we reviewed some critical works that analyzed the selected novels from varied viewpoints, and we ended up with the issue and working hypothesis. In the ‘Method and Materials section’ we defined the theoretical concepts according to theorists such as William Graham Sumner’s *Folkways* (1906), Franz Boas’ *Race, Language and Culture* (1940), Alfred Adler’s *Understanding Human Nature* (1927) and Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (1978). Concerning the material section we have provided the historical background of the two concerned countries and the summary of the two selected novels and a conclusion.

The discussion part includes two main chapters. The first one deals with the representation of ‘ethnocentrism’ in the two selected novels in themes and characters highlighting cultural superiority and racism. The second chapter deals with the ‘superiority complex’ and otherness in both novels focusing on the degrading treatment of the African people at the hands of Europeans in the context of imperialism, stereotypes and cultural differences. This research paper will end with a general conclusion in which we summarize the key ideas that were developed in the previous chapters.

## **II-Methods and Materials**

### **1. Methods**

Since this research is a study of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and Albert Camus' *L'étranger* from the perspective of the discourse of cultural superiority, we have chosen concepts that are related to our subject and help to develop the discussion section. Hence, it relied on ethnocentrism according to William Graham Sumner and Franz Boas, and the superiority complex according to Alfred Adler, and finally Otherness according to Edward Said.

#### **1.1 William Graham Sumner' *Ethnocentrism***

William Graham Sumner introduced the sociological idea of ethnocentrism in his 1906 book *Folkways*. American sociologist William Graham Sumner was born in 1840. The majority of his works, particularly in *Folkways*, address the topic of societies, cultures, and their development. He was a professor at Yale University. "Folkways" are defined by Sumner (1906) as the social norms, customs, and behaviors that define a particular group of people. He claims that "Folkways" and "Ethnocentrism" are two sociological concepts that are related (p: 03).

'Ethnocentrism' is a concept originated from two Greek words *ethno* which means nation and *kintron* which means center. Sumner (1906) argues that it refers to the aptitude of people to judge others' culture, behavior, and practices by using their own standards and principles (13). He defines this concept as:

The technical name of this view of things in which one's own group is the center of everything, and all others are scaled and rated with reference to it. Folkways correspond to it to cover both inner and the outer relation. Each group nourishes its own divinities, and looks with contempt on outsiders. Each group thinks its own folkways the only right ones, and if it observes that other groups have other folkways, these excite its scorn. (Sumner 1906, 13)

In this quotation, Sumner refers to the essence of ‘Ethnocentrism’ where one’s culture and practices are seen as an example to follow and all other culture are judged according to it. This perspective could prevent peoples of different communities to interact with others’ and exchange their viewpoints, and attitudes.

Sumner explores the way societies were built and the role of citizens and their interaction with society, and examines the customs and traditions, and how they control social behavior. He also explains the causes that lead citizens to be ethnocentric toward the individuals of other groups, such as the fear of outsiders and cultural pride which result in over valorization of their own practices, mores and habits. Accordingly, they tend to consider them as the best customs and the most correct way of living comparing to others’. Sumner (1906) illustrates this distortion of meaning and moral judgment when he writes, “Since ‘democratic’ is now a word to conjure with, we hear of democracy in industry, banking, education, science, etc., where the word is destitute of meaning or is fallacious. It is used to prejudice the discussion” (178). His remark highlights how people often misuse ideas or values to justify their own superiority, just as ethnocentrism does across cultures. This creates conflicts between different cultural groups and gives rise to racism, misunderstanding, and the feeling of superiority. The judgments that people make on other cultures, languages and peoples are considered as negative discourse which aims to confirm one’s culture as superior regarding the differences and distinctions that define each ethnicity.

## **1.2 Franz Boas’ *Ethnocentrism***

The colonial discourse that powerful countries spread in order to justify the colonization of African countries culturally, economically, politically and to exploit their resources led to the raise of ethnocentric attitudes between societies, groups and individuals. Several writers and sociologists have debated these issues. The German-American

anthropologist Franz Boas (1858-1942), in his turn, investigated this issue in *Race, Language and Culture* in which he introduced several concepts, such as “cultural relativism” It is considered as a belief that one person’s values and practices should be comprehended based on one person’s own culture instead of being judged against the norms of others. Boas emphasizes that superficial similarities between cultural practices do not justify judging them by the same standards, highlighting the need to understand each culture on its own terms. As he explains:

First of all it must be borne in mind that ethnic phenomena which we compare are seldom really alike. The fact that we designate certain tales as myths, that we group certain activities together as rituals, or that we consider certain forms of industrial products from an esthetic point of view, does not prove that these phenomena, wherever they occur, have the same history or spring from the same mental activities (Boas 1927, 317).

This shows that evaluating another culture by the norms of one’s own society leads to misunderstandings and reinforces ethnocentric attitudes, which cultural relativism seeks to prevent. Thus every culture is unique and should be understood in its context. He also refers to ethnocentrism which he defines as the judging of others’ culture and beliefs by comparing them to one’s own standards.

Boas accomplished several studies on the behaviours of a particular primitive group in America and he deduced that their customs were important just like others; thus, we should accept them as they are rather than making judgements on them, and every culture that exist in the world is valuable and deserves to be respected (Boas 1927, 325). He was against judging people by their physical traits because the unique responsible of their appearance is the environment they grow up in. He criticizes ‘Racial Determinism’ by asserting that a person’s features and intelligence are not just determined by their race (Boas 1927, 327).

Franz Boas and William Graham Sumner argue that Ethnocentrism is the tendency of judging one’s own culture as superior to others; however, they disagree on the causes that

lead to this phenomenon. Boas defines this concept according to cultural relativism meaning that it arises from the inability to appreciate and understand others' cultures. He refers to 'Historical Particularism' which means that each culture arises according to historical context that plays a role in its development and existence (Boas 1927, 330). However according to Sumner, ethnocentrism arises from social group dynamics that characterise the belief of the superiority of one's group and a center of everything. Also, the belief that some cultures are superior to others is just an idea invented by people that hold ethnocentric attitudes and has not been proved scientifically. His studies led to the creation of an important sub-field in his domain which is *Cultural Anthropology* which studies the human culture's past, present, and how societies entertain relationships with others.

### **1.3 Alfred Adler's *Superiority Complex***

Superiority Complex refers in general to a state where the individual feels superior to others. According to Alfred Adler's *Understanding Human Nature* (1927), people with this complex usually show arrogance and a belief that they are the best among the people surrounding them (Adler 1927, 76). Alfred Adler was an Austrian psychiatrist who was known for his famous theory of 'Individual Psychology'. He argues,

We are now certainly prepared to recognize the fact that children who have been treated as stepchildren by Nature have an entirely different attitude toward life and toward their fellow human beings than those to whom the joys of existence were vouchsafed at an early age. (Adler 1927, 69)

In this quote he is concerned with the factors that shape the individual personality and gives more importance to the aspects that lead to the rise of superiority complex, and everything begins in early childhood life and the treatment of the parents and environment affects them either positively or negatively (Adler 1927, 62-63). In this book, he explains the concept of the 'Superiority Complex' as a defense mechanism developed from people to hide their

feeling of inferiority which manifests as a high confidence on their abilities or importance; this is usually followed by a desire to exercise power and dominance over other individuals.

#### **1.4 Edward Said's *Otherness*:**

A Palestinian American theorist, Edward Said, taught comparative literature at Columbia University in the United States. He created the idea of "Otherness" in *Orientalism* (1978), where he critiques how the Orient is portrayed in the West. Eastern societies (North Africa, the Middle East, and Asia) were marginalized by the west, which depicted them as the "Other world," which is illogical and primitive. Said also asserts that the occident's presentation of the orient as inferior and primitive was to fulfil their interests and to justify their colonial domination and exploitation of the riches of these lands. In the first page of the introduction, Said asserts that,

The Orient is not only adjacent to Europe; it is also the place of Europe's greatest and richest and oldest colonies, the source of its civilizations and languages, its cultural contestant, and one of its deepest and most recurring images of the Other. (Said 1978, 01)

This quotation means that most of the Western societies view Eastern societies as different and this image of the Orient has influenced the Europeans' definition of their identity. He claims that the primordial representation of the East and the denial of the vast diversity and the richness of the orient served to define the Western individual as rational, developed and superior to the oriental man. According to him literature and art had an important role in spreading the dichotomy of the self and the other made by the occident in different works written by different authors, such as Rudyard Kipling, Gustave Flaubert and many others. (Said 1978, 10)

## **2. Materials**

### **1. Historical Background**

This part focuses on the historical background of the novels which helps understand the context of the study. It is important to shed light on the political and social conditions of both countries, The Congo and Algeria, especially that they were both colonized by European empires.

#### **1.1 The Historical Background of *Heart of Darkness* (1899)**

Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899) is set in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century where the Congo was under the control of the Belgium king Leopold the Second. The Congo was forced to endure all the brutal exploitation of its natural resources, and violation of its human rights. The late 19<sup>th</sup> century witnessed 'the Scramble for Africa' because many European countries, such as Britain, France, Germany, Belgium, Spain, Portugal and Italy united to colonize the African continent and set their rules on the African peoples (Pakenham 1990). In the Berlin conference (1884-1885) Europeans met to draw several rules concerning their exploitation of Africa and how each power expanded its empire on the African continent. The king Leopold the Second practiced violence, slavery and all types of brutality against the Congolese people who were obliged to work under hard conditions. Even women and children were victims of the barbarism and the cruelty caused by the Belgian king. Ruling Africa as his personal possession was also by utilising all its raw materials and natural resources as rubber and ivory found in the Congo to invest money and make industry (Hochschild 1998).

In short, Africa was known as the Dark Continent because it was seen by Europeans from a lens of racism and ethnocentrism. Hence, Africans were considered as primitives, savages, emotional and uncivilized populations who had no traditions or cultures. The

imperialist operation was legitimized as being a ‘civilizing mission’ that was intended to bring enlightenment and education to the barbarians. Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* was set in this context, and Europeans were convinced of the barbarism of Africans due to the colonial discourse that was spread among the European populations.

## **1.2 The Historical Background of *L’étranger* (1942)**

*L’étranger* of Camus (1942) was published during the French colonization of Algeria and the Second World War. Thus mentioning the most important events during that period is primordial. In 1942, France was occupied by the Nazi Germany where the military officer Marshal Philippe Pétain established the Vichy regime and collaborated with the Nazi Germany to control southern France (Rossou 1987, 309). Since Algeria was a French colony, Algerians were called to participate side by side with France in its war against Germany, and promised to give them independence after the war. Thus Algerians were divided into groups; some of them were supporters and some others were against, the Algerian elites who were educated in colonial schools suggested to support France in a war against Germany. However, the Algerian Muslim scholars association refused to participate in France’s war. Finally, the Algerian population joined the French army (Oumri, 2024).

Many operations were executed in Algeria in relation to the Second World War, among them Torch Operation and the Blackstone Operation (November 1942) which aimed to secure the French territories in North Africa. These operations had an impact on both countries, France and Algeria. Algeria was liberated from the Vichy control and become again free French under the General Charles De Gaulle, and the disruption of the local economics. France benefited from political reorganization and its authority started to strengthen and regain its position as the legitimate government of France (John Gordon, *Joint power Projection: Operation Torch*, 2000). The French colonialism brought many changes to the

Algerian society because it attempted to annihilate the Algerian identity. The native culture and language were marginalized whereas the French ones were valorized. They created a new system of education and they tried to spread Christianity all over the country.

## **2. Summaries of the Novels**

### **2.1 Summary of *Heart of Darkness* (1899)**

Joseph Conrad published his novella *Heart of Darkness* at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, during the scramble for Africa. The story was about Charlie Marlow, a British man who described his journey on the Congo River. The events started when Marlow's aunt secured him a job as a steamboat captain with a Belgium company travelling to the Congo River for ivory trading. As the Congo was a European colony, he thought that people there were civilized, educated and free, but once there his optimistic expectations had changed. He found the natives suffering from violence, racism and famine, and living in miserable conditions. Marlow heard about a Belgian man, named Kurtz, whom the Africans were talking about as a successful talented man. He was the chief of the inner station in the Congo and a very known ivory trader.

Marlow was very curious and excited to meet Kurtz. When he finally met him, he discovered that he was not as people descanted him; Kurtz has abandoned his morals and principles as a civilized man and made himself as a god for the indigenous people practicing brutality, violence and fear to secure his domination. After his death, Marlow returned to Europe and met with Kurtz's intended who still idealized Kurtz as a great man. She asked Marlow about his last words, but he lied to her and told her that his last words were her name not The Horror!

## **2.2 Summary of *L'étranger* (1942)**

Meursault, the protagonist of *L'étranger*, was an ordinary young man who lived with his old mother in a small apartment in Algiers, but due to his bad life conditions he sent her to an old people's house and rarely visited her. The story began when Meursault received a telegram from that old people's house to inform him about the death of his mother. His dispassionate reaction and indifferent behavior at his mother's funeral made a lot of people confused about his emotions and feelings toward his mother. After the funeral, Meursault met a girl at the beach and soon she became his girlfriend. One day they went to the beach, Meursault, Marie and Raymond met Arabs, one of them had a conflict with Raymond, and the two groups started fighting. Meursault faced the Arab man again and his apathetic character led him to commit a crime and killing the Arab. He was arrested by the French police and later he was sentenced to death by guillotine.

### III- Results

This dissertation, studies Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899) and Albert Camus' *L'étranger* (1942). It investigated two major literary works that had an impact on the world of literature. It deconstructs the discourse of cultural superiority and explores the process of othering the Africans within the context of European colonialism in Africa in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Both works highlight the real life of the colonized African peoples, their suffering and struggling to live under the yoke of colonialism.

Our analysis of these two novels has been completed by relying on the concepts of ethnocentrism and superiority complex, defined respectively in William Graham Sumner's *Folkways* (1906) and Franz Boas' *Race, Language, Culture* (1940). These theoretical notions are deemed relevant to our study because they allow us to understand the characters' personalities and behaviours, and the inner motives that led to their ethnocentric, racist attitudes towards the natives.

We deduced that 'Ethnocentrism' is the major aspect of the westerners' cultural superiority. *Heart of Darkness* misrepresents Africa negatively, as a dark place and its people as savages, primitive, less important and far from being equal to the Europeans who were civilized and enlightened. Thus they reject them and consider them as 'others'. The same issue was represented in *L'étranger* in which the Arabs identity were marginalized, voiceless and their values were violated.

Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) was useful in examining the stereotypical views of the western societies about the Orient and Orientals. These views are characterized by unfair judgements, prejudice and the tendency to "other" the African people and considering them backward and inferior. This Orientalist discourse transmitted via these books was aimed to justify the colonization of African territories.

Both authors' literary works were shaped by the discourse of Orientalism. Taking into account the geographical territories they belong to, and the colonialist contexts that defined both the Congo and Algeria in the late 19th century and early 20th century, Joseph Conrad and Albert Camus have created comparable works since both their texts illustrated the reality of colonialism indirectly by praising the west over the east, and by revealing the ethnocentric, racist attitudes of the European colonizers vis-à-vis the African people, creating a discourse of cultural superiority defining the relationship between the occident and the orient.

## **IV- Discussion**

### **Chapter One: The Representation of Ethnocentrism in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899) and Albert Camus' *L'étranger* (1942)**

This chapter deals with the representation of 'Ethnocentrism' in *Heart of Darkness* (1899) and *L'étranger* (1942) through the analysis of the characters and themes representative of ethnocentric attitudes. The purpose of this study is to investigate and analyze different aspects of the ethnocentrism presented in the novels, and reveal the complexities of the native's life under the European imperialism.

#### **1. The Representation of Ethnocentrism in *Heart Of Darkness* (1899)**

*Heart of darkness* (1899) is considered as one of the most impressive works in English literature in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Through themes related to imperialism and its implications, Conrad revealed his inner attitudes towards the African people. The novella reflects the ideas and perceptions that shaped European understanding of Africa during the colonial period. It provides a framework to explore the cultural and social assumptions embedded in colonial discourse. These aspects make it a significant text for analyzing historical perspectives and attitudes toward African societies.

##### **a. Themes**

Imperialism is a theme which is relevant to our research topic and which is present in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. Imperialism impacted the African population negatively particularly because it reinforced prejudiced attitudes, discrimination, and violence, both physical and moral. It downgraded their cultural practices and traditions and attempted to obliterate their cultural history.

The first aspect in which the Europeans see themselves as different from the Africans is the skin color. The European settlers were white; a color that is considered as beautiful and symbolize peace, whereas the natives' skin color refers to darkness. Accordingly, Africans were regarded in a dismissive manner and were described as brutes, cannibals and savages by Europeans. Indeed, Conrad often refers to them in dehumanizing terms like 'shadow' or 'abstractions' rather than individuals who have their own identity. He considers their clothing as a sign of primitiveness since they contrast with the European standards. On the other hand, the writer's portrayal of the European colonizers often includes beautiful terms, such as educated and civilized despite all their inhuman actions and violence towards the blacks. An example of this would be his description of Kurtz who was regarded with great respect and consideration since he was considered as a perfect man and a model to follow.

Our major focus in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* is the ideology of Ethnocentrism and its consequences on the author's depiction of the non-European characters and cultures. Africa is often portrayed as a strange, dark and primitive land. Conrad uses a language that highlights the sharp difference between Europe and Africa in an attempt to show Europe as civilized and to Africa as a synonym of backwardness. In addition, Marlow's journey to the Congo River is portrayed as a journey back to time into a savage and primal world. His description of the river as a « snake » and the land as wild, uncivilized and impenetrable had reinforced the belief that Africa is the heart of darkness and savagery while Europe is the center of enlightenment and civilization. Conrad noted that: "The snake had charmed me" (1899, 10). This quotation illustrates the colonial belief that Africa is mysterious, dangerous and in need of European control because the snakes are often associated with danger, mystery, and evil in western literature. By describing the river as something that

charmed him, Marlow is also arguing that the land has a kind of primitive power which needs the European civilization.

The novella criticizes the African culture and considers it as inferior, empty and undeveloped. Said differently, it is seen as the 'other' culture to the Europeans. The main character, Marlow, often dehumanizes the African people he encounters; he described the native laborers as « shadows » or « shapes » or « cannibals ». Conrad (1899) asserts that:

The reaches opened before us and closed behind, as if the forest had stepped leisurely across the water to bar the way for our return. We penetrated deeper and deeper into the heart of darkness. It was very quiet there. At night sometimes the roll of drums behind the curtain of trees would run up the river and remain sustained faintly, as if hovering in the air high over our heads, till the first break of day. Whether it meant war, peace, or prayer we could not tell. The dawns were heralded by the descent of a chill stillness; the wood-cutters slept, their fires burned low; the snapping of a twig would make you start. We were wanderers on a prehistoric earth, on an earth that wore the aspect of an unknown planet (57)

From his ethnocentric view, in this passage Conrad shows that Africa is an empty land which has no culture, no language and no value and referring to it as a prehistoric land which needs to civilisation.

Conrad is an ethnocentric who valorizes the Europeans and downgrades the Africans. He normalizes the brutality and violence used by the Westerners toward the natives and justifies the colonialist enterprise by considering it as a 'civilizing mission' which aims to educate the Africans. These are regarded as irrational, unintelligent and incapable of managing their lands' affairs and wealth which is why, according to Conrad, they are in need of the European civilized, rational, and intelligent men to refine their savage manners, educate them and manage their lands. In *Clash of Ideas and Sensibility in the Writing of Joseph Conrad and Chinua Achebe* (2017), Gurnoor Kaur argued that Conrad's representation of Africa can be seen as an Orientalized view. His

use of the word 'darkness' in the novel's title, symbolizes the savagery, exoticism, horror and wildness of the African continent. He argues that Conrad represents Africa as a land of inhuman people and cannibals. Conrad asserts that,

Instead of going up, I turned and descended to the left. My idea was to let that chain-gang get out of sight before I climbed the hill. You know I am not particularly tender; I've had to strike and to fend off. I've had to resist and to attack sometimes—that's only one way of resisting— with-out counting the exact cost, according to the demands of such sort of life as I had blundered into. I've seen the devil of violence, and the devil of greed, and the devil of hot de-sire; but, by all the stars! These were strong, lusty, red-eyed devils, that swayed and drove men—men (1899, 24)

In this passage , the narrator Marlow reflects the harsh life he had in the 'dark land' stating that he had to fight and defend himself to survive, describing the devil of the whites towards the blacks by strength and self defend.

The natives' behaviors, actions, languages and traditions are different from the Europeans' that are considered as superior. This reinforces the Europeans' ethnocentrism and opens the door to prejudices and stereotypes of all kinds about the natives. Conrad, as a European writer, behaves towards the characters' differently; the Africans are voiceless or rarely given the opportunity to speak. Indeed, when they speak, their English is broken or they use the pidgin which makes them appear silly and weak. Sembène Ousmane argues: "I have never heard a white man who had learned to speak Bambara or any other language of this country. But you rootless people think only of learning his, while our language dies" (1960, 04). This statement exposes the deep effects of colonialism on language and culture, highlighting how linguistic domination reinforces the colonizer's sense of superiority. However, the Europeans are often depicted as masters, intelligent and powerful, creating a binary opposition between the European settlers and the African natives.

Conrad's representation of the Africans as mysterious, uncivilized and weak reinforces and perpetuates the idea that the European culture is more valuable than the

African one which then appears worthless. The fact of not accepting the difference leads to ethnocentrism, and Conrad is being ethnocentric due to his denial of non-European cultures and languages. In other words, he manifests ethnocentric attitudes toward the native characters by valorizing western culture while demeaning the eastern one. He goes farther in brutalizing the natives as he justifies the inhumane behaviors of European colonizers as a consequence of their interaction with the Congolese, whom he portrays as savage. The transformation of Kurtz from a good man to a cruel and aggressive person.

This orientalist discourse reflects his prejudice and serves to support his vision about African people. He says: “I could see every joint of their limbs were like knots in a rope; each had an iron collar on his neck, and all were connected together with a chain whose links swung between them rhythmically clinking” (Conrad 1899, 32). The author reveals how the natives were chained together and were forced to work. They were so slim and weak that their bones and joints are sticking out. Conrad explains the brutality and the mistreatment of the colonizers towards the natives by asserting that the natives are savages and cannot preserve their country so they should be under the European control.

The ‘civilizing mission’ was a concept used by Europeans to justify their colonization of African territories. They framed their presence as an effort to bring enlightenment, progress, and education to what they called ‘primitive’ native populations. This allowed them to exploit Africa’s resources and dominate the continent. Driven by a belief in their cultural superiority, European colonizers aimed to impose their values, standards, religion, and language on the Congolese people. This was a strategy to establish their conquest and transform Congolese society to a mirror of European norms, and facilitate the exploitation of natural resources.

Conrad describes the reaction of Marlow when he first arrived to the Congo; his first encounter with the land and its inhabitants created a disillusionment and discomfort in

him. He was shocked by the reality of this continent which contrasted with his expectations. He found himself in a confrontational situation where he had to adapt to its harsh and to live with it all over the period of his stay. Conrad says: “Here and there a military camp lost a wilderness, like a need in a bundle of hay, cold, for, tempests, disease, exile, and death, death skulking in the air, in the bush. They must have been dying like flies here” (1899, 14). ‘The lost wilderness’ refers to the uncivilized state of the area; its lack of infrastructures and facilities necessary to human life especially within the harsh weather conditions. The word ‘death’ is repeated many times and it stands for the emphasis of Conrad on the haunting atmosphere found in the African land because of the dead bodies found everywhere, and this due to multiple diseases. In this ethnocentric, racist way the European settlers made judgements about Africa, and established comparisons with the European places while highlighting their developed state.

The bias against the natives based on their ethnicity has negative effects on them. It leads to and encourages social stratification, which is when society divides the two communities into different groups. In the novel for instance, the white men work in higher jobs such as Mr Kurtz who was the leader of ivory company, other characters including Marlow were either captains, managers or sailors. Yet, the lower jobs are often given to the blacks who work under very hard conditions and with small wages, contrary to the whites who were well paid. This is what *Ousmane Sembène* explains in his famous novel *God’s Bits of Wood* (1960), he argues: “At the time of that first strike it was true that she had been living in the west, in the country of the toubalous dyions \_ the slaves of the Europeans”(02). He criticizes the colonial system that exploits African laborers, dehumanizes them and makes them work under very harsh conditions with small wages. Sembène explores how the colonizer imposes his laws and his restrictions on the African workers and he describes the mistreatment of that working class.

African workers suffered from the horrific treatment of the foreign officers who forced them to work under hard circumstances and they were left to die from starvation and diseases. Marlow had witnessed the miserable life that the native laborers had. He had seen them dying in the forests without trying to help them, which explains the whites' love for wealth even at the expense of the workers' lives. The mental health of Congolese workers was destroyed due to all that suffering they endured. They lost confidence in themselves and had an inferiority complex in front of the Europeans' sense of superiority. In this sense, Conrad says: "it had become a dark place" (1899, 10). It shows the moral and psychological decline of individuals and societies during colonialism; when Marlow saw the Africans or the "Niggers" were chained together from their necks like animals and forced to work his reaction was as all the whites' men he did nothing and he normalized that act.

## **b. Characters**

Charlie Marlow is the protagonist and narrator of the novel. His journey to the Congo serves as the primary stand point through which we read the story. He is an observant and thoughtful young man who is fascinated by the unknown and a desire to explore and understand the world around him. Unlike other European characters, Marlow is considered as a complex character; he was not entirely complicit in the exploitation of Africa, and he justified imperialism. He reports the brutality of the Europeans at the Belgian Congo colony. He had an observational role in the story; he did not participate in the colonial cruelty, but he did nothing to rebel against that oppressive system and did not try to help them when seeing them suffering. He occasionally expresses compassion and kindness with them, for example when he saw a group of starving natives, he felt disillusioned of the inhuman treatment they received from the company, however he did not engage to help them. Indeed,

when his helmsman was killed during an attack on the boat Marlow felt as he had lost something but he had quickly forgotten those feeling.

Marlow's behavior with the natives and his passive reaction to their misery and wretchedness stand for his ethnocentric attitudes. At the same time, he was a man who loved sailing, but the desire of exploitation and greed are not found in his personality. He felt alienated from the social reality he found in the Congo due to the moral corruption of society and the collapse of his hopes for the 'civilizing mission' he heard about while in Europe. Marlow also reflects the colonial mindset of his era, considering the natives as cannibals, savages and brutes, and referring to them as 'shadows' or 'prehistoric', this kind of language that he used, dehumanizes them and justifies colonialism.

Kurtz is the most complex and symbolic character in *Heart of Darkness*. He is an intelligent man who is known for his greatness, madness and power. He is the symbol of darkness and greed of colonialism. In the novella, Kurtz represents civilization and enlightenment brought by the western empire. He is portrayed as a talented and charismatic individual with skills in many fields, art and politics. He was sent to the Congo to secure ivory for a company then due to his extraordinary success and ambitious ideas, he became the first agent. Conrad says: "Then he began again, assuring me Mr. Kurtz was the best agent he had, an exceptional man, of the greatest importance to the Company" (1899, 34-35). This statement reflects the high esteem in which Kurtz was held and foreshadows his transformation from a celebrated representative of civilization into a figure consumed by greed and moral decay. In Congo, he established himself as a God and the natives offer him their loyalty while he exploits them to gather ivory and satisfy his ego. He used his charisma to manipulate them to fulfill his desire. His authority over the natives is not just a matter of force; it is also rooted in his psychological hold over them. The natives are drawn to him and are subjugated by him. This mutual dependency reflects the complex dynamics of power and

submission. His rule over them is marked by extreme exploitation and brutality; he forces them into hard labor to extract ivory using violence. His action reflects the broader exploitative nature of colonialism, his declaration to exterminate all the brutes that are the blacks shows his ethnocentric view of the natives and his moral disintegration. Conrad claims: “land in a swamp, march through the woods, and in some inland post feel the savagery, the utter savagery, had closed round him all that mysterious life of the wilderness that stirs in the forest, in the jungles, in the hearts of wild men” (1899, 7). The quote evokes the writer’s ethnocentric attitudes and the use of word savagery indicates a viewpoint that equates wilderness and indigenous life with primitiveness, implying that people living in this environment are inferior and less civilized.

Kurtz reveals the hypocrisy of the European colonial mission. At the beginning he was a man of high values, educated and was supposed to bring civilization to the natives, but at the end Kurtz became a corrupted man, which implies that his contact with the African natives impacted him to become a savages, and a murderer. Kurtz’ final words “The Horror! The Horror!” may be considered as Kurtz’s regret of who he became, and the decrease of social values and moral decay.

Besides Mr. Kurtz and Marlow, there are many other characters and every character refers in a way or another to colonialism. The manager of the central station is a Russian man who believed in the superiority of the European culture and is convinced that the African people and their culture are inferior. He treated the African workers as slaves; he shows no empathy for their suffering and harsh working conditions, rather using them as tools to make profits. The manager dehumanized the African natives. His main concern is to maintain his position of power within the company and justifies the colonial mission which exploits Africa, though this is realized at the expense of their lives. His attitudes and practices reflect his ethnocentric belief that they are less important than Europeans.

The intended, Kurtz's fiancée, serves as a poignant contrast to the darkness and brutality of the Congo. She is a symbol of innocence and idealism; she represents the naive European perspective that sees imperialism as a noble and civilizing mission. She believes in Kurtz's greatness and his ideals reflecting the disconnect between the reality of colonial exploitation and the myths perpetuated by those at home. Marlow lies to her about Kurtz's last words to protect her from the harsh truth of his moral decline, which shows how much she believes in him.

Joseph Conrad, through the characters and themes, represents racist and ethnocentric practices and utterances. Marlow, Kurtz and the manager, in different degrees, adopt ethnocentrism and behave in downgrading violent ways towards the natives. Their belief in their systematic and natural superiority inflicts their behaviors and conduct with the Africans. The intended personifies European beauty and European civilization, and stands for western values and standards. The discourse perpetuated in the novella via themes such as imperialism, the contrast between white Europeans and black Africans support the colonial mission and depict it as a 'civilizing' mission. Conrad, as a European who visited Africa, integrates the colonial discourse within his narrative and tells his story through an ethnocentric lens.

## **2. The Representation of Ethnocentrism in *L'étranger***

Camus' *L'étranger* is considered as a classic in French literature. Camus explores the human condition and explains the signification of Absurdism through his main character Meursault. The novel is set in 20<sup>th</sup> century Algeria during the French colonization. In this part, we attempt to explore ethnocentrism through characters and themes. We also intend to interpret the

signification of the events that happened in the story in order to reveal the superiority complex of the colonizers.

### **a. Themes**

Among the themes that reflect ethnocentrism in the novel is colonialism. The story took place in 1942 when Algeria was a French colony. The existence of two ethnic groups within one territory led to conflicts between the colonizer and the colonized, or between the dominating European community and the dominated Algerian community. Hence, the European culture was valued at the expense of the African one.

Edward Said's *Orientalism* criticizes the notion of 'civilizing mission' which the Westerns used to hide for their exploitative motives on the East especially on Africa. Europeans especially the elites, officials, missionaries, and reformers believed that their lifestyle, values, and social norms were the best and the most correct way of living, thus spreading them was a necessity and a duty to develop the primitive populations in Africa, and to make it a better place to live in (said 1978, 1-2). From an ethnocentric perspective, Europeans lack cultural relativism because they are not open to different cultural backgrounds and fail to accept differences between distinct communities. This is considered as an example of ethnocentrism since it proves that the French judged the Algerian culture according to their own standards and regarded it as inferior and undeveloped. They did not accept the Arab community in Algeria and downgraded its culture and traditions because they were different from theirs. For instance the writer do not refer to the Algerians respectfully in his writing even though the country where he lived in was shared by both Arabs and French communities for a long period of time. Camus(1942) says: " il m'avait dit qu'il fallait l'enterrer très vite, parce que dans la plaine il faisait chaud, surtout dans ce pays"(13). He avoid mentioning anything that is Algerian, in the quote it was enough to say "in this country" instead of saying

“Algeria”, which reflect contempt for this country. It also reflects his detachment and his emotional distance from Algerian.

Accordingly, they tried to impose their lifestyle and rituals on the African countries. What proves the accuracy of this statement is when Camus (1942) says: “je monte chez Emmanuel pour lui emprunter une cravate et un brassard. Il a perdu son oncle, il y a quelques mois”(10). This means that the French culture practice a ritual which is wearing a black tie during funerals, what Meursault did in his mother’s funeral. It is clear from all this, the necessity to practice some rituals even in the hardest times, and the dictation of the French community their norms on what they called the primitive continent.

The French ethnocentric view is reflected in many instances in the novel. In this quote, Camus describes a French family in positive terms:

C'étaient d'abord des familles allant en promenade, deux petits garçons en costume marin, la culotte au-dessous du genou, un peu empêtrés dans leurs vêtements raides, et une petite fille avec un gros nœud rose et des souliers noirs vernis. Derrière eux, une mère énorme, en robe de soie marron, et le père, un petit homme assez frêle que je connais de vue. Il avait un canotier, un nœud papillon et une canne à la main. En le voyant avec sa femme, j'ai compris pourquoi dans le quartier on disait de lui qu'il était distingué. (Camus 1942, 27-28)

The good and the fancy look of the family he describes symbolises the French people’s civilized way of living, their wealth, good status as well as the dominance of their lifestyle in Algerian places. The French practice their culture normally in the country they colonized, which reinforces their power, colonial mindset and social hierarchy. Another example of the good looking appearance is the lawyer who is dressed in a way that looks elegant and which shows that he is part of the legal sector. His appearance reflects the French values and authority, and suggests that he believes and supports the rules and the norms of the French society. This positive description represents the high status of the French community in colonized Algeria, and the author’s boycott the aspects of the Arab’s culture such as their

appearance, religion, practices and language, which highlights the control of the European culture, and emphasizes the superiority of their identity over the 'other' identity.

Camus mentions many descriptions of peoples' dresses which may seem unimportant, but in fact they are significant because they illustrate how characters align within the European principles and set themselves apart from Algerian ones. When the narrator talks about traditions or rituals, he always refers to the French community's and neglects the Algerians ones or refers to them with dismissive words. One reason is that the French characters are not interested in the local population or their culture, and this is shown from the beginning of the narrative, when Camus (1942) says: "J'ai mangé au restaurant, chez Céleste, comme d'habitude" (09). This simple statement, which seems unimportant refer to Meursault's detachment from the native's way of living even in the simplest daily activities and his embrace of the European lifestyle. There exists a barrier between the two ethnic groups reflecting the Orientalist perspective adopted by the French in regards of Algerians.

Another important aspect that highlights the colonizers' ethnocentric view towards the natives is shown through Camus' reference to the natives' rituals in a pejorative language, which ridicules them. Camus asserts, "À Paris, on reste avec le mort trois, quatre jours quelquefois. Ici on n'a pas le temps, on ne s'est pas fait à l'idée que déjà il faut courir derrière le corbillard" (1942, 13-14). The French character Meursault, compares the way funerals are done in his mother country and criticizes how quickly things are done in the colonized country, using words that demean the native's traditions and indicating that the local way of dealing with funerals is less important or absurd. This instance from the novel reflects an ethnocentric attitude towards the Algerian culture since the French character judges it according to his own standards instead of respecting the local practices and trying to accept their way of life and their way of doing things. In short, the French are convinced that the European customs are superior and more reflective than the African ones.

Kamal Daoud, in *Meursault Contre-Enquête*, depicts Camus' portrayal of the natives. He says, "Nous, nous étions les fantômes de ce pays quand les colons en abusaient et y promenaient cloches, cyprès et cigognes" (Daoud 2013,21). This means that the natives were portrayed as ghosts, highlighting how their culture and presence were reduced under the colonial rules. It reveals that colonizers dismissed and looked down on the local's way of life, meaning that the colonizers prioritized their own culture and considered it as the standard.

Ethnocentrism leads Europeans to view themselves positively while seeing the natives negatively. On the one hand, it encourages the marginalization of the non-Europeans. On the other hand, the French characters are considered as first hand citizens, and are provided with better living conditions and endowed with many social and economical privileges compared to the Algerians. Camus says, "Et toute compte fait, elle était plus heureuse ici». J'ai dit: «oui, monsieur le directeur». Il a ajouté : « vous savez, elle avait des amis, des gens de son âge. ” (1942, 10-11). In the old people home there are only French people, and the staff takes care of them and they look very comfortable and joyful due to the good hospitality and the high-quality services they received, whereas there is no proof of the native's existence in that place and do not have the right to such a luxurious life.

This big difference between the people of the two communities is a result of Ethnocentrism results in the establishment of a hierarchical social order that puts French people at the highest rank. In addition Meursault and his colleagues work in offices with excellent conditions and wages, his friends own restaurants, cafeterias and bungalow houses near the beach with the right to do as they wish in these properties. In short, they have a comfortable life with stable jobs and dominate all the public institutions like the legal services. This unequal situation is an aspect of ethnocentrism because all the commodities the French community had was based on the idea of their cultural superiority. They were considered as the ones who had the right to possess everything and govern the different parts

of administrative institutions by virtue of adhering to the French social norms and to their belief that Arabs do not have intelligence to govern these institutions. The director of the old people home is French as Camus says: “C’est un petit vieux, avec la Légion d’honneur. Il m’a regardé de ses yeux clairs. Puis il m’a serré la main qu’il a gardée si longtemps que je ne savais trop comment la retirer. ” (1942, 10). This demonstrates how strict the French government is, regarding important positions. This colonial context emphasizes the hierarchical system and the prevailing inequity which put the French settlers in a dominant position by means of the colonial power.

It is depicted in the novel that the French community constrains its citizens to conform to its values and contrasting them leads to isolation and causes problems of interaction with the other people belonging to the same ethnic group. This is exemplified in the protagonist Meursault whose different behavior led him to troubles. It is true that we noticed him in several scenes practicing rituals from his own community, for example wearing a black tie in funerals; he buried his mother in accordance with French funeral traditions. However in these scenes Camus asserts, “j’étais tassé contre un militaire qui me sourit et qui m’a demandé si je venais de loin. J’ai dit « oui » pour n’avoir plus à parler. ” (1942, 10). And “Le directeur m’a encore parlé. Mais je ne l’écoutais presque plus. Puis il m’a dit : « je suppose que vous voulez voir votre mère. » je me suis levé sans rien dire et il m’a précédé vers la porte.”(11). He fails to be an engaged citizen in his society. He is barely able to hold conversations with others, giving minimal responses to those around him. This clearly shows that he experiences social alienation and is unable to build meaningful relationships. Most of the narrative takes place within his own mind, which ultimately has serious consequences for him. Outwardly, he seems to belong to French way of living, in the way he speaks and lives, however inwardly he is isolated and does not know how to act in important moments. At the end, he lost his freedom due to the crime he committed. In other words, not conforming to the French social norms

cost him his liberty. This is seen during the trial where he was judged harshly about it, mainly in what concerns his relationship with his mother. The French society exhibits ethnocentrism and a sense of cultural superiority and does not tolerate violating its rules.

Another simple example of ethnocentrism and cultural arrogance of the Europeans in *L'étranger* through Meursault is when Camus says, “le soir, dans ce pays, devrait être comme une trêve mélancolique. Aujourd’hui, le soleil débordant qui faisait tressaillir le paysage le rendait inhumain et déprimant.”(21-22). He tried to belittle this country by criticizing its heat, which he described as inhuman and unbearable and later used as an excuse to justify the absence of his emotions during his mother’s funeral. The same excuse used to defend himself in front of the judge. In short, he justifies his heartless, absurd attitude in his mother’s funeral and the crime against the Arab by the harshness of the Algerian landscape, particularly its heat. He explains that the climate’s hotness makes him discomfort and affects badly his emotional state and decisions. Meursault’s description of the Algerian landscape can be seen as ethnocentric because he has the tendency to criticize everything related to Algeria.

Considering these elements, we understand that the novel is ethnocentric in perspective and depicts the cultural arrogance of the colonizers. As a result, the local population is seen as inferior and their language, culture and traditions are misjudged and prejudiced on the basis of their difference with the Western ones. This mindset leads to racism and discrimination; as ethnocentric beliefs served as a justification of the unfair treatment of Arabs. Several scenes in the novel shows oppression, as it is in this chapter, where the French have oppressive behaviors toward the local populations.

## **b. Characters**

The characters in *L'étranger* are divided into two categories, the French characters which are always represented as superior, and the Algerian characters who are represented as

inferior and oppressed. The story is narrated from Meursault's first point of view meaning that all the events of the story are regarded through his lens. This allows us to delve into his inner side to discover his character, personality, shortcomings, thoughts, and attitudes toward the Arab people. Meursault is French born in Algeria; thus, he belongs to the imperial camp and considered as a colonial settler. He is a complex character and he is characterized by his detachment from society and indifference to the norms and social values.

Ethnocentrism is revealed through several aspects in the novel, and the most remarkable one is the oppression and violence that Algerian characters endured by the hands of the French settlers. In the third and fourth chapters of the first part, Raymond becomes Meursault's friend because of their hatred of Arabs. Raymond started talking about how he had physically assaulted and used various forms of violence against his girlfriend's Arab brother. Then, he sought assistance to Meursault and together come up with a clever scheme to severely punish his girlfriend both physically and morally. Camus says:

Il a allumé une cigarette et il m'a découvert son idée. Il voulait lui écrire une lettre « avec des coups de pied et en même temps des choses pour la faire regretter ». Après, quand elle reviendrait, il coucherait avec elle et « juste au moment de finir » il lui cracherait à la figure et il la mettrait dehors. J'ai trouvé qu'en effet, de cette façon, elle serait punie. (1942, 38)

The protagonist has approved this suggestion and they started to execute the evil plan. This inhuman thinking reveals a lot about the French character's personality toward the Arabs; they hate them and seek out issues with them without any valid reason, just to punish them and practice their violence against the Others.

Camus asserts: "Quand il m'a dit le nom de la femme, j'ai vu que c'était une Mauresque" (1942, 38). Even though Raymond had pronounced the Arab women's name correctly, Meursault used the word 'Marqueuse' to identify her origins. The term reflects a stereotype about Arab culture that is seen as inferior and less civilized, and reveals the protagonist's

strong racial prejudice toward people of this community. Some characters believe that Arabs are not humans and should not be respected, and that discussing and mentioning their names or identities would be inappropriate because they are primitive. That's what explains their refusal to call them by their names and the choice to refer to them as "Arabs" in order to diminish them and highlight the insignificance of their existence in society, with the objective of erasing their identity. Despite the woman's loud cries and panic, the protagonist did not seek assistance or stop Raymond from hitting her. After the event, Raymond also requested that Meursault do him a favour by testifying against the woman at the police station, and he accepted without hesitation.

The French and Algerian communities are frequently at odds in the novel, explained by the French's lack of cultural relativism and their belief in their cultural superiority. The violence committed against Raymond's Arab girlfriend is an evident reflection of the ethnocentric attitude that characterizes the European colonizers. Raymond justifies his oppressive act toward that Arab woman by the fact that she betrayed him. He considers his brutal assault against her as right and justifiable. In other words, he behaves in accordance with his own moral code and social status which emphasize the dominance of his community over the Arabs'. This brutality is also a reflection of the disrespectful treatment Algerians received from their French colonizers and settlers.

The police officer did not punish Raymond for the aggression committed against his native girlfriend and her brother, which suggests that the mistreatments perpetrated by the French people against Arabs are often minimized or completely ignored. In this scene, Camus affirms: "La veille nous étions allés au commissariat et j'avais témoigné que la fille avait « manqué » à Raymond. Il en a été quitte pour un avertissement. On n'a pas contrôlé Mon affirmation" (1942, 54-55). The cases are treated differently based on the ethnic and social background of individuals. These instances show how ethnocentrism and social hierarchy

manifest in the novel, where it is highlighted that European authorities often make prejudices against Algerians.

After the story of Raymond and his girlfriend seemed to be over, the girlfriend's Arab brother and his friends appeared on the beach to settle their scores once and for all. Raymond struck the Arab again and a fight broke out between them. In this sense, Camus writes:

Quand nous avons été à quelques pas les uns des autres, les Arabes se sont arrêtés. Masson et moi nous avons ralenti notre pas. Raymond est allé tout droit vers son type. J'ai mal entendu ce qu'à lui a dit, mais l'autre a fait mine de lui donner un coup de tête. Raymond a frappé alors une première fois et il a tout de suite appelé Masson. Masson est allé à celui qu'on lui avait désigné et il a frappé deux fois avec tout son poids. L'Arabe s'est aplati dans l'eau, la face contre le fond, et il est resté quelques secondes ainsi, des bulles crevant à la surface, autour de sa tête. Pendant ce temps Raymond aussi a frappé et l'autre avait la figure en sang. Raymond s'est retourné vers moi et a dit : « Tu vas voir ce qu'il va prendre. » Je lui ai crié : « Attention, il a un couteau ! » Mais déjà Raymond avait le bras ouvert et la bouche tailladée. (Camus 1942, 60-61)

This quotation demonstrates how altercation can be analyzed through the lens of ethnocentrism which is characterized by the tendency of judging others based on the values and norms of one's own culture. The French judged the two young Arabs based on their appearance without knowing their intention or talking to them. They therefore perceived them as troublemakers and began to beat them. This scene of fighting and the conflict reflect the tension between the two ethnic groups in a context of imperialism. This violence can be seen as a manifestation of the prejudice and ethnocentrism inherent in the colonial society and illustrate how cultural misunderstanding and prejudices provoke violence, and lead to act in a hostile and disdainful manner toward the Arabs, with a lack of respect and an inability to recognize their human equality. This conflict is a small example of the larger oppression experienced by the Arabs, highlighting how they are discriminated and how the French exhibit their superiority complex.

However, the story did not end here, after a while Meursault finds himself in confrontational situation with the Arab man who had an issue with Raymond, and he shoot him down until he dies, in cold blood, silently, without pronouncing any single word. He committed this crime under the pretext of the intense heat and discomfort which affected his emotional state. This is absurd as no one commits a crime because of high temperature. His crime has other motives, which underlie ethnocentric attitudes that he holds inside him and which makes him judge Arabs. In addition when Meursault is telling the events of the story we notice that every French character has a name even the dog of his neighbour Salamano, contrary to the Arab characters he call them just as Arabs. Which leads us to say that he does not recognize Algerians as individuals and as a people with rights, belonging to the country they reside in. In short, Ethnocentrism in the protagonist's case leads to a lack of empathy towards the natives and which ultimately led him to commit a murder. He demeans the Arab man and does not show any consideration to his feelings and emotions as a human being. The fundamental moment that took the life of the Arab man can be interpreted on the basis of ethnocentrism. It is also an example of the colonial violence that the power dynamics applied on Algerians during the early twentieth century.

Camus says:

Il m'a seulement demandé du même air un peu las si je regrettais mon acte. J'ai réfléchi et j'ai dit que, plutôt que du regret véritable, j'éprouvais un certain ennui. J'ai eu l'impression qu'il ne me comprenait pas. Mais ce jour-là les choses ne sont pas allées plus loin (1942, 78)

When Meursault was arrested by the French authorities, he did not seem to regret his criminal act even though it costs him his freedom. According to him, his act was just a problem that he dealt with and an issue that he solved. The judges in their turn show ethnocentric attitudes toward the Arabs. Since the criminal was a French settler like them, they talked to him kindly and respectfully, and they did not address the topic of the murder at first and they did not

seem to give much importance to the death of the Arab. Kamal Daoud in *Meursault Contre-Enquête* criticizes harshly Camus' marginalization of the Arab man killed in *L'étranger*. He said: "Mon frère, lui, n'a eu droit à aucun mot dans cette histoire" (Daoud 2013, 16). This highlights the dehumanization of the Arab character killed by Meursault and shows how voiceless the natives were in the novel and in real life at that period of time which depicts the social and political reality of colonialism.

In addition, the criminal was expected and supposed to be judged harshly about the crime he committed. However, the judges inquired about his personal life and he ended up answering questions about his deceased mother, and the old people home stuff appeared and witnessed against him, and the trial became more about the fact that he did not show emotions at his mother's funeral than about murdering the native Arab. Meursault asserts:

il m'a dit qu'il devait aborder maintenant des questions apparemment étrangères à mon affaire, mais qui peut-être la touchaient de fort près. J'ai compris qu'il allait encore parler de maman et j'ai senti en même temps combien cela m'ennuyait. Il m'a demandé pourquoi j'avais mis maman à l'asile. J'ai répondu que c'était parce que je manquais d'argent pour la faire garder et soigner. Il m'a demandé si cela m'avait coûté personnellement et j'ai répondu que ni maman ni moi n'attendions plus rien l'un de l'autre, ni d'ailleurs de personne, et que nous nous étions habitués tous les deux à nos vies nouvelles. (Camus 1942, 92-93)

From this we can deduce the partiality of the colonial legal system which gives more importance to the person's conforming to the French social norms while neglecting the crime committed against the Arab. Hence, the Arabs did not have a place in society, they were not considered as humans with their rights because they did not conform to the European social and cultural standards. Their affair was of no real importance to the French colonial administration or to their legal system.

In *Meursault Contre-enquête*, Kamal Daoud denounces the unfairness of the European legal system and he asserts that: "Du coup, le meurtre est un acte absolument impuni et n'est

déjà pas un crime parce qu'il n'y a pas de loi entre midi et quatorze heures, entre lui et Zoudj, entre Meursault et Moussa. Et ensuite, pendant soixante-dix ans'' (2013, 15). Daoud highlights how the murder of the Arab is disregarded and is not given importance, and that it was an unpunished act since Meursault was condemned for not conforming to the rules of his community, especially that in the colonial context there is no law that protects the natives.

The trial lasted a long time hoping to find a justification for the criminal act. However, since his affaire became a public matter, the authorities found themselves obliged to punish him. But, it is clear that the punishment is more about his violation of French social norms and traditions displayed at his mother's funeral than about the murder. Every French character in the novel has its own way to manifest ethnocentrism against Arabs. Yet, a common aspect that is shared by the French characters is their absence of communication with them, which is indeed explained by their ethnocentric view that they were superior. Hence, they made no efforts to communicate with the natives in order to learn their language or understand their culture or social norms. This enhanced the barriers between the two communities and created more tension between them.

The social hierarchy and the lack of interaction with the natives resulted in violence. They define them briefly in impersonal terms. For example, Meursault refers to the Arab man he killed just as the Arab instead of saying his real name and addressing him as an individual. He also refers to Raymond's Arab girlfriend as 'Marqueuse' though he knows her real name. This highlights his detachment from and disinterest in the natives, and they denounce their refusal as an ethnic group which have the right in their country, demonstrating his ethnocentric attitudes toward them with much disrespect and inconsideration to their culture.

As it is depicted in the novel, the story took place during the French colonization of Algeria. Since it was narrated from Meursault's point of view, this allows us to reveal the

ethnocentric attitudes that define his behaviors and acts with the Arabs as well as to explain the other French characters' attitudes revealed throughout their interaction with the colonized. The French settlers took advantage of the dominant status they had which put their language and culture as superior and the standard. The French colonizers took this as an opportunity to demean the native Algerians and prejudice their norms, rituals and their way of living.

## **Chapter two: The Representation of Superiority Complex and Otherness in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and Albert Camus' *L'étranger***

The historical context of both Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and Camus' *L'étranger* falls within imperialism, and demonstrates how Europeans see themselves as superior and how the African cultures are demeaned, revealing a western sense of arrogance, and a harsh treatment of all the people who do not conform to western rules and principles. In this chapter, we attempt to deconstruct the discourse of cultural superiority in both novels by investigating two psychological and cultural phenomena, superiority complex and otherness.

### 1-The Representation Superiority Complex and Otherness in *Heart of Darkness* (1899) by Joseph Conrad

The superiority complex in *Heart of Darkness* is a systemic issue attached to the European colonial project. Conrad uses characters such as Kurtz and Marlow to expose a colonial mindset. He criticizes the delusion of superiority that justifies imperialism and leads to dehumanization, violence and moral decay. The novel does not only depict the arrogance of European colonialists also shows how the superiority complex shapes the eastern identities and the western understanding of morality.

Kurtz embodies the extreme form of the superiority complex. He is a European colonialist who believes in his own God-like status over the African people which reflects his superior attitudes towards the natives. His station was surrounded by severed heads on stakes which symbolize his dominance and his belief in his superiority as a white man. These heads were not just warnings but trophies that reflect Kurtz's madness about his superiority complex. He considers the Africans as less than human beings and tools to assert his power and ego. The European colonizers including the company where Marlow works justify their exploitation of the Africans pretending to enlighten and develop the 'dark' continent. This paternalistic attitude is rooted in a superiority complex where Europeans see themselves as morally and intellectually superior to Africans.

The superiority complex defines actions of individual characters such as Kurtz, and determines the policy of the entire colonial system. The belief in European superiority is not a sign of strength but of profound moral weakness because their fear of the Africans and their difference is interpreted as a feeling of superiority. The African jungle becomes a metaphor of the dark heart of imperialism, since the supposed civilizers are revealed as corrupt. At the psychological level, the superiority complex among the European characters is a form of defence mechanism.

The colonizers, particularly Kurtz, use their belief in their racial and cultural superiority to justify their dominance and prove themselves innocent from the horrors they committed. Kurtz's degeneration into madness is closely tied to his delusions of greatness; he became a megalomaniac, seeing himself as a god for the natives. Frantz Fanon, in *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952), examines the psychological impact of colonialism and racism on both the colonized and the colonizer, and how the colonizer develops superiority complex as a psychological defence to rationalize oppression and domination. Fanon's interpretation of defence mechanism can be represented throughout Kurtz who is faithful to his own identity as

a European, educated, civilized and superior to the Africans and he maintains a sense of superiority to protect his identity and justifies his actions and behaviors. Indeed, in *Heart of Darkness*, the superiority complex leads not only to moral hypocrisy also to an existential crisis because the Europeans, especially Kurtz and Marlow, struggle morally with the brutality of colonialism. Ultimately, the idea that they are civilized and morally superior collapses as they confront their own capacity for violence and moral decay.

Marlow's complex feelings toward Kurtz suggest that even those who recognize the dangers of the superiority complex are not entirely free of it. Marlow sometimes expresses feelings of fascination and other times of repulsion toward Kurtz; he acknowledges the moral horrors of Kurtz's deeds but he is attracted by Kurtz's charisma and vision at the same time. According to Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Mask (1952)*, the superiority complex is not just a simple belief system that can be rejected but something deeply rooted in the European psyche. At the end of the novel is highly symbolic of the superiority complex; Marlow lied to Kurtz's fiancée about his final words. This suggests that Marlow embodies the superiority complex and in a way he felt the need to protect the idealized image of Kurtz as a noble figure, rather than to reveal the dark truth of his moral collapse. In other words, he preferred to sustain the comforting illusion of Europeans' greatness at the expense of their degenerate colonialist reality "And you admired him, she said. 'It was impossible to know him and not to admire him .Was it? ' He was a remarkable man, I said, unsteadily. Then before the appealing fixity of her gaze , that seemed to watch for more words on my lips , I went on, It was impossible not to love him "( Conrad ,125-126). The writer still valorizes Mr. Kurtz and giving him a good image as a European man even he downgraded the Africans and exterminated them.

Marlow's justification of European violence and attitudes towards the natives is shown throughout the novella. He asserts: " the original Kurtz had been educated partly

in England and as he was good enough to say himself\_ his sympathies were in the right place. His mother was half-English, his father was half-French” (Conrad 1899, 81). This quotation refers to Kurtz’ mixed lineage; his father and mother were both half-French, which suggests a complex identity asserting a sense of superiority because individual with mixed descent consider themselves as superior because of their culture, and the fact that Kurtz is educated in England implies that he belongs to the elite, and he has received the western education which is superior.

The characters represent the European superiority complex as political and social ideology as well as a profound psychological and existential flaw. The novel exposes how this superiority complex leads to moral hypocrisy, madness, and the destruction of the self. Characters like Kurtz embody the dangers of believing in one’s own superiority, and Marlow’s journey reflects the painful process of comforting the darkness within. In *Heart of Darkness*, the superiority complex shows and explains that it is not just a colonial problem but a fundamental flaw in the human condition when power and superiority go unchecked, “More than once she had to wade for a bit , with twenty cannibals splashing around and pushing . We had enlisted some of these chaps on the way for a crew. Fine fellows \_cannibals\_ in their place .They were men one could work with, and I am grateful to them” (1899 ,56).

In *Heart of darkness* Joseph Conrad explores the theme of otherness at several dimensions. The African natives are portrayed as the ‘other’ in relation to the European colonizers. They represent the unknown, the mysterious and uncivilized. This portrayal is deeply tied to the colonial powers’ view of non-European cultures. In his book *Orientalism (1978 )*, Edward Said discusses the concept of otherness in the colonial context and shows the West’s perceptions and representations of the Orient. “The Oriental is irrational, depraved, fallen, childlike, and different; thus, the European is rational, virtuous,

mature, normal. But the way of enlivening the relationship was everywhere to stress the fact that the Oriental lived in a different but thoroughly organized of his own , a world with its own national , cultural, and epistemological boundaries and principals of internal coherence ( Edward said ,40). He argues that the West defines the East as the other in order to reinforce the European identity and its cultural superiority. This process of ‘Othering’ creates a dichotomy between the Occident that is qualified as developed and civilized and the Orient that is considered as backward and uncivilized.

Marlow, the European narrator, sees Africa and its inhabitants through a colonial lens. The Europeans project their fears and fantasies into the African continent considering it as a land of darkness both literally and metaphorically. Therefore, the Africans became symbols of everything that is strange or uncivilized, making them the ‘other’ according to the western eyes. Conrad says:

More than once she had to wade for a bite, with twenty cannibals splashing around and pushing. We had enlisted some of these chaps on the way for a crew. Fine fellows cannibals in their place. They did not eat each other before my face: they had brought along a provision of hippo meat which went rotten, and made the mystery of the wilderness stink in my nostrils (1899, 56).

In this passage, Marlow’s superiority complex is revealed in his description of the African cannibals. The expression “in their place” means that the colonizer sees that the colonized people are accepted only in lower positions and they cannot be in the same position as the white people.

Kurtz is a symbolic figure of otherness in the novel because he occupies a dual role. Initially, he represents the epitome of European civilization; he is well educated and entrusted with a mission to bring enlightenment to the African savages, but as Marlow moves deeper into the Congo and comes closer to Kurtz, he realizes that Kurtz himself becomes the ‘other’. His transformation is a key to understand how otherness can be reversed. Kurtz

becomes the 'other' to his own culture; he no longer represents the ethics and values of the European civilization since he becomes morally corrupt. European traders like Kurtz claimed to bring civilization to Africa became savages through their actions and brutal behaviors. The violence and exploitation they perpetrated against the Africans reveal that the civilized Europeans were capable of monstrous acts. Yet, they attempt through the colonial process to define themselves in opposition to the Africans and to justify their colonial enterprise. However, the reality of the European colonizers exposes their savagery and barbaric actions; hence, the line between the self and the other is confused, suggesting that what Europeans label as savagery in others may in fact reflect their own darker impulses.

In addition, the Congo is portrayed as a significant form of otherness. In the novella, it is a powerful symbol of the indifferent and mysterious nature of the world outside of the European understanding. Describing it as vast, impenetrable and terrifying stand for its messiness and irrationality that oppose the European way of life. As Marlow travels deeper into the jungle, he describes it in increasingly ominous terms, showing how the environment itself becomes alien and something that Europeans cannot understand or control.

Marlow says:

Going up that river was like traveling back to the earliest beginnings of the world, when vegetation rioted on the earth and the big trees were kings. An empty stream, a great silence, an impenetrable forest. The air was warm thick, heavy, sluggish. There was no joy in the brilliance of sunshine. The long stretches of the waterway ran on, deserted, into the gloom of overshadowed distance (Conrad 1899, 54).

This passage can be seen as expressing a sense of dominance and cultural arrogance over the nature and unfamiliar environments. Marlow describes the river as primitive and untouched comparing it to the earliest beginnings of the world, implying that the environment is raw, wild and inferior to the narrator's European world civilization, which is more developed and controlled. Describing the landscape with words such as 'impenetrable',

'sluggish', 'no joy' beside that, Marlow's view of the African nature is oppressive and lacking the comfort found in his own country.

It is shown that the superiority complex is embodied by the European colonizers who believe in their cultural superiority, their moral values as well as their way of life. This belief is also reflected in their dehumanizing treatment of the natives. The colonizers' sense of superiority justifies their exploitation and brutalization of the colonized Africans and reinforces the hierarchy that places the Europeans at the top and the Africans at the bottom. It is also shown that otherness can not only design Africans but Europeans who abandon their values and principles to pursuit their lust for money and power. Conrad says: "I went forward, and ordered the chain to be hauled in short, so as to be ready to trip the anchor and move the steamboat at once if necessary. Will they attack? Whispered an awed voice." (1899, 65) This quote represents the tension and fear that arises when the settlers encounter the natives who are called the "others", and the question "will they attack?" reflects how the unfamiliar other is often seen as dangerous and unpredictable, investigating two psychological and cultural phenomena; superiority complex and otherness.

## **2-The Representation of Superiority Complex and Otherness in Camus' *L'étranger***

Camus' novel deals with philosophical themes, such as existentialism, human condition and the protagonist's detachment from his environment. The latter was related by some scholars to absurdism and the search for the meaning of life. However, this may not be the only reason that explains or justifies this detachment. It might be related to a complicated phenomenon like the superiority complex or the view of oneself at the center while perceiving the rest of the world at the periphery or 'others'. This point of view can be explained by the colonial context of the novel which is the French occupation of Algeria.

In a way that parallels *Heart of Darkness*, the first thing that we have to take into consideration is that all the European characters in *L'étranger* view the native Algerians as primitive, indigenous, uncivilized and less than humans in the strict sense of the term. They exhibit a sense of superiority complex toward them in different ways which manifest in the lack of interaction between the two communities. In *Orientalism*, E. Said criticizes the way western cultures portray the eastern ones:

Orientals or Arabs are thereafter shown to be gullible, "devoid of energy and initiative," much given to "fulsome Hattery," intrigue, cunning, and unkindness to animals; Orientals cannot walk on either a road or a pavement (their disordered minds fail to understand what the clever European grasps immediately, that roads and pavements are made for walking); Orientals are inveterate liars, they are "lethargic and suspicious," and in everything oppose the clarity, directness, and nobility of the Anglo-Saxon race (Said 1978, 38-39).

Said relies on historical context and the relationship between west and the east, analysing the European literature in order to denounce the western view of the orient. Orientals are seen through the lens of dismissiveness and prejudice stereotypes based on a lack of consideration. Westerners consider everything related to the east as inferior and lacking energy and initiative. This explains the racist behaviors of the European characters in *L'étranger* and their disconnectedness from the natives' way of life.

The French characters follow the European norms and traditions which is noticeable in their clothing and dishes. Camus asserts: "Nous sommes montés et j'allais le quitter quand il m'a dit : « J'ai chez moi du boudin et du vin. Si vous voulez manger un morceau avec moi? »" (1942, 34). This shows the refusal to offer themselves the chance to learn about or understand the culture of the other community and their strong adherence to their own culture, even when it involves the smallest details. In addition the French engage in relationships outside marriage as Raymond's relationship with his girlfriend and Meursault with Marie. Camus says: "En mangeant, il a commencé à me raconter son histoire. Il hésitait d'abord un peu. « J'ai connu une dame... c'était pour autant dire ma maîtresse" (1942, 35). It is noticed that there is a huge

difference in building relationships and families between the two communities. From the French perspectives, engaging in extramarital relationships is a normal thing which reflects their dependence on the European way of living. However; it is not acceptable in Algerian culture; thus, in the few times where the French and the natives interact, we notice that the French settlers have a dismissive attitude at the Algerian culture.

Meursault, the protagonist, is depicted as a silent character who never addresses a word to the natives, except in a violent and oppressive way. He refers to them in dismissive words such as Meuresque and Marquese to Raymond's Arab girlfriend which enhance his feeling of arrogance, whereas every French person in the novel has name even the secondary characters such as Céleste, Masson and Salamano. Meursaults' attitudes differ from Marlow's because the latter interacts with the natives though in a limited way. He also acknowledges their suffering and harsh living and working conditions. Although the protagonists of both novels differ in their behavior toward the natives, they both exhibit a non consideration for the natives whatever their situation is due to their superiority complex. The two authors Joseph Conrad and Albert Camus and their protagonists portray the European prejudices, stereotypes and ethnocentric attitudes towards the Africans.

The French characters in *L'étranger* communicate in French language which is used in different institutions, such as schools and administrations. French is limited to a certain social class and hence could be considered as a linguistic barrier as well as a symbol of cultural and social difference that may lead to misjudging the Algerian culture and creating a tension and differences between the two communities. As long as there is a lack of communication between them, there would not be other peaceful ways to resolve the conflicts between them, giving way to violence.

The French characters Meursault, Raymond, Celeste create their own world in a country that is not theirs excluding the natives. They set-apart from them and consider them as 'Others'. Accordingly, the two communities were physically divided while the French characters live in more comfortable and well maintained zones. In the novel, for instance, we do not find French characters living in the same neighborhood with Arabs or an Arab frequenting the areas where French settlers stroll. The violent confrontation between the Arabs and the French did not occur in areas where the French lived, but rather in public spaces such as the train station and the beach. However, the Algerian people live in inappropriate places and poor neighbourhoods. The colonial situation provides the French with comfort reinforcing their ethnocentric and racist attitudes towards the Arabs who are 'othered' as Camus says: "Vous comprenez, monsieur Meursault, m'a-t-il dit, c'est pas que je suis méchant, mais je suis vif. L'autre, il m'a dit: « Descends du tram si tu es un homme" (1942, 34-35). This reflects the degree of disdain the natives faced and how they were regarded as inferior. Edward Said argues that: "an assumption had been made that the Orient and everything in it was, if not patently inferior to, then in need of corrective study by the West" (1978, 41). This means that Europeans were convinced that the oriental cultures were inferior, and need enlightenment to be on the same level as the European culture.

Another representation of the superiority complex in the novel lies in the socioeconomic disparities between the French characters and the native Algerians. This is depicted in roles occupied by the members of both communities. The natives are marginalized and have lower statuses in society; whereas, the European settlers represent the upper class and have important jobs where serious decisions are made, such as the judge that sentenced Meursault to death. The French government distributed lower jobs in society to the natives to avoid interaction with them; thus, the French community enjoys better living conditions and is economically stable, which reinforces their arrogance. On the other hand, the natives are

always struggling to live and find what to eat which also leads to an inferiority complex. For instance, Meursault works in an office and does administrative tasks, a job that provides him with a certain economic security and financial stability allows him to live in comfort and goes to luxurious places. In contrast, the Algerian characters do not have the same comfortable life and are more focused on how to survive under poverty and colonial oppression.

The protagonist, Meursault, manifests a sense of superiority toward the natives; he views them basically as inferior and strange. He describes several French characters physically in a positive way trying to show their beauty, kindness and good habits which reflect his pride to belong to the French community. Camus asserts that, “parce qu'elle avait une belle robe à raies rouges et blanches et des sandales de cuir” (1942, 40). For example, he describes his girlfriend Marie in an optimistic way focusing on her good qualities like her attractiveness, her beautiful smile, her energy and her pleasing outfits revealing that he enjoys her company though he does not feel anything toward her, as he says, “Un moment après, elle m'a demandé si je l'aimais. Je lui ai répondu que cela ne voulait rien dire, mais qu'il me semblait que non” (1942, 41). His aim from these positive descriptions is to draw a good image of the French women and to reveal their ‘superiority’ vis-à-vis the native women. The narrator’s attitude is nurtured by the superiority complex which contributes to racist behaviors and discrimination as he refers to the natives in a negative way full of humiliating words such as. ‘l'autre’ and ‘Mauresque’. For instance, he never pronounces his friend’s native girlfriend’s name, and he chooses to refer to her in inappropriate and racist words because she is an Arab. He describes his friend Raymond as powerful and fair person; however, he refers to the natives as ‘Arabs’ without saying their names. He makes prejudices about them as inferiors without trying to know them as persons. These behaviors are the result of a superiority complex.

Otherness creates another barrier that prevents French characters to interact with the natives. This is evident in Meursault's encounter with the Arab man at the beach. As soon as he sees him, he recognizes him as 'other' and immediately considers him as a danger that threatens him, and as a result shoots him in order to feel safe. This act of using a weapon is viewed as an affirmation of power over someone he perceives as inferior or less important, and the fact that he has an access to weapon proves his dominance and his authority over the natives. Camus writes,

On a d'abord entendu une voix aiguë de femme et puis Raymond qui disait : « Tu m'as manqué, tu m'as manqué. Je vais t'apprendre à me manquer. » Quelques bruits sourds et la femme a hurlé, mais de si terrible façon qu'immédiatement le palier s'est empli de monde. Marie et moi nous sommes sortis aussi. La femme criait toujours et Raymond frappait toujours. Marie m'a dit que c'était terrible et je n'ai rien répondu. Elle m'a demandé d'aller chercher un agent, mais je lui ai dit que je n'aimais pas les agents. (Camus 1942, 41-42)

In the quotation above, Raymond has exercised violence against the Arab lady and the protagonist refused to call for help despite her loud screaming. Meursault's indifferent behavior represents the apathy and disinterest of the French in the Arabs. In other words, Meursault represents the colonial dynamics and reflects the imperial control over the Algerian people, and the violence exercised against them. He also underlies disregard for their lives and their dignity even though he seems more preoccupied with his personal life than politics. Meursault killed an innocent Arab without mercy or any real motive. The murder can be interpreted as an outcome of his superiority complex and his act of 'othering' the natives. As a French settler, he has got power and dominance which he uses to abuses the natives. His moral and physical violence towards the Arabs is driven by his superiority complex and racist attitudes.

The protagonist is not the only character who demonstrates superiority complex toward Arabs, but all the French characters in a way or another. For instance, Raymond says,

Vous comprenez, monsieur Meursault, m'a-t-il dit, c'est pas que je suis méchant, mais je suis vif. L'autre, il m'a dit : « Descends du tram si tu es un homme. » le lui ai dit : « Allez, reste tranquille. » Il m'a dit que je n'étais pas un homme. Alors je suis descendu et je lui ai dit : « Assez, ça vaut mieux, ou je vais te mûrir. » Il m'a répondu : « De quoi ? » Alors je lui en ai donné un. Il est tombé. Moi, j'allais le relever. Mais il m'a donné des coups de pied de par terre. Alors je lui ai donné un coup de genou et deux taquets. Il avait la figure en sang. Je lui ai demandé s'il avait son compte. Il m'a dit : « Oui. » Pendant tout ce temps, Sintès arrangeait son pansement. J'étais assis sur le lit. Il m'a dit : « Vous voyez que je ne l'ai pas cherché. C'est lui qui m'a manqué. » C'était vrai et je l'ai reconnu. (Camus 1942, 34-35)

Raymond also considers the Arabs as 'Others', and he shows it explicitly, even though he knows the name of his girlfriend's brother he prefers to call him Arab to demonstrate his difference from them and to show that he has an issue with the natives only. This character is important in the novel because Meursault's life has changed seriously after he knows him.

The novel is also an example of the ethnic hierarchy characteristic to the period of the French colonization of Algeria. It portrays the European settlers' sense of superiority to the local population. Many examples from the novel demonstrate the French peoples' behaviors with the natives and their behaviors with the other French settlers. For instance, when the colonizers refer to the natives, they use violent words such as 'Punie' 'Battue' 'Tapais' 'Marquer'. However, the French do not use these words to refer to another French person. Another example of the ethnic hierarchy is during the trial, the judge gave much importance to Meursault and was interested in his personal life more than he was concerned about the victim. The first thing that the colonial authority asked about after Meursault committed the crime was to ask him questions of identification to see if he belongs to the French or Arab community. Meursault says,

La première fois au commissariat, mon affaire semblait n'intéresser personne. Huit jours après, le juge d'instruction, au contraire, m'a regardé avec curiosité. Mais pour commencer, il m'a seulement demandé mon nom et mon adresse, ma profession, la date et le lieu de ma naissance. (Camus 1942, 68)

The judge was also interested in his behavior during his mother's funeral which was qualified as an act of indifference and a total absence of grief. Camus says, "j'ai été un peu surpris. Pour moi, c'était une histoire finie et j'étais venu la sans y penser" (1942, 65). Meursault did not expect to be asked about his mother because for him, it was a story from the past. However, the French legal authorities were interested in every single detail especially when it is related to French social norms. Meursault's act was disapproved by the French legal authority. The trial turned into judging him for not aligning with their social values rather than for killing an innocent Arab. Giving more importance to French norms at the expense of the crime against the Arab demonstrates the racial and cultural discrimination of the French administration, and shows its partiality with people who do not conform to its social norms.

In the novel, the natives are profoundly affected by the injustice of the French legal system, and by the discriminatory acts of the colonial administration, and are marginalized and 'othered' by the Europeans in general. Marginalization in society is expressed in different ways; the native characters, for instance, exist in the novel only when the French refers to them like in this scene Camus asserts,

Il m'a dit que je n'étais pas un homme. Alors je suis descendu et je lui ai dit : « Assez, ça vaut mieux, ou je vais te mûrir. » Il m'a répondu : « De quoi ? » Alors je lui en ai donné un. Il est tombé. Moi, j'allais le relever. Mais il m'a donné des coups de pied de par terre. Alors je lui ai donné un coup de genou et deux taquets. Il avait la figure en sang. (1942, 35)

They are present in a dismissive manner; otherwise, their presence would never be felt and they would not have the right to appear. Their presence is seen also through their few scenes of interaction when tension is raised with the French. Another example is that the natives were not present at the court and rarely mentioned except negatively or when the judge asks the criminal about the reasons that led him to commit a murder. The victim is not given a name or identity in Albert Camus' novel and the natives are not given a voice or a significant consideration to witness or defend the killed Arab man or to report the events that happened

that day at the beach. However, for the police officers and the judge, it was enough to rely on the testimonies of the French.

The Algerians were portrayed as secondary characters who occupy a position of ‘Others’ in society, whereas the European colonizers including the police and the judges have superior positions and act according to their supposed superiority. Consequently, they believe that they are more important than the natives, and their norms and values are the standards by which they judge people. This explains their lack of empathy toward the killed Arab man in particular and the natives in general, and this is the reason why they judge Meursault for not conforming to French social norms rather than for the barbaric murder he commits. Meursault says,

Il a dit enfin que son devoir était douloureux, mais qu'il l'accomplirait fermement. Il a déclaré que je n'avais rien à faire avec une société dont je méconnaissais les règles les plus essentielles et que je ne pouvais pas en appeler à ce cœur humain dont j'ignorais les réactions élémentaires. (Camus 1942, 107)

This quote shows Meursault’s detachment from the social norms of the French community. Hence, it is evident that the judge’s decision was driven more by the violation of the norms of his community than by the barbaric act of the criminal.

Taking into account the political context during the French colonialism in Algeria, we find that Meursault’s judgement was also executed mainly however his affaire became a public issue and the French government needed to show to the world the fairness of the French legal system and its social values highlighted in sentencing a French citizen by murdering a colonized subject. In other words, Meursault was tried only to prove the French legitimacy and its integrity in applying justice on all people without taking into consideration their race or ethnic group.

When comparing Meursault and Kurtz, we deduce that Meursault passed through the European legal authorities and was judged primarily for his detachment from the French

social norms, rituals and traditions rather than for the crime he committed. The judge demonstrates his anger toward him in way that reveals a contradiction between his behaviour and attitudes and the French social values of democracy, fairness and justice. By opposition, Kurtz was also a murderer, who may have killed a hundred of blacks, was not sentenced or punished for any of his various crimes because he represented the European legal authority in the Congo. Indeed, at the end of the novel Meursault did not regret his actions towards the Arab even though he knew that he was sentenced to death. He did not accept to pray at his last moments which symbolize a deep indifference to social norms. This disconnection could be seen as a critique of the dehumanizing attitudes of colonial powers toward the colonized. Kurtz, on the other hand, regretted everything he did in the Congo, and this symbolizes a realization of the barbarism and exploitation inherent in colonialism.

To conclude, the superiority complex of the European characters was reinforced by their colonial mindset and colonial practices towards the natives. This belief affects the characters' interactions negatively in both novels, especially in the way they perceive each other. The discourse of cultural superiority influences the way western settlers behaved towards the eastern populations, and it is expressed through the superiority complex and the process of othering. The colonial background of Africa was helpful to understand the power dynamics since it explains that the European characters' actions and attitudes were influenced by their adherence to the colonial system that places them at a higher position. Despite the fact that the two novels, *L'étranger* and *Heart of Darkness*, represented different periods of time, a different setting, yet the European characters exhibit the same ethnocentric attitudes towards the Africans, and the Orient in general. They display a sense of superiority and rely on othering to maintain their feeling of 'innate' racial and cultural superiority. Their practices and actions depict a discourse of cultural superiority which is built on the basis of racial hierarchization, cultural superiority and otherness.

## V. Conclusion

This piece of research has allowed us to investigate the issue of *The discourse of cultural Superiority in Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness (1899) and Albert Camus' L'Etranger (1942)*. Throughout our investigation of the issue under study, we had attempted to make study on the two novels at the extent of characters, themes, and historical background. To reach our goal, we have relied on different concepts; William Graham Sumner's Ethnocentrism, Alfred Adler's Superiority complex and Edward Said's Otherness. The concepts used have helped us to understand each author's view of colonialism and his interpretation, also to discover both works from different perspectives.

Throughout our analysis of the novels, we concluded that the two authors have justified the cruelty of colonialism by the myth of civilizing mission, both of them were ethnocentric, they believed in their superiority as Europeans. *Albert Camus* was a pied noir who was born in colonized *Algeria* while *Joseph Conrad* went to Congo to work as a captain on a riverboat for a Belgian trading company. Their experiences with colonialism have impacted them to create the two works; *Heart of Darkness* (1899) and *L'Etranger* (1942). In the first chapter, we have focused on the representation of ethnocentrism in both novels, in themes and characters. Through the analysis, we have understood different aspects of colonialism that are mentioned in the novels, the ethnocentric view of the authors and how they applied it in their works. Meursault and Kurtz are characters who represent the Eurocentric attitudes; their behavior with the natives it cannot be well interpreted, both of them ignored and dismissed the existence of the Africans. In *Heart of Darkness* and in *l'Etranger* the Africans are often presented in an animalistic way, they have less voice contrary to the European characters that are depicted as educated and civilized. Both writers had devoted their works to denounce the darkness of Africa and highlighting its negative impact on the colonizer.

Whereas in the second chapter, we have dealt with the concepts of superiority complex and otherness by emphasizing on the attitudes of the colonizers towards the natives and how their complex of superiority have affected their identities and the society in general. The colonizer's belief in his cultural superiority and the crises of the self and the other have created many conflicts between the colonizer and the colonized.

To conclude, as students of general comparative literature, this master's dissertation has allowed us to discover the two novels; *Heart of Darkness* and *l'Etranger* from various perspectives and to fully understand the authors' point of view towards colonialism and ethnocentrism. We had explored the connections and similarities between the two works and the divergences. These two novels can be interpreted from different sides; therefore we suggest other students would carry on other studies about them.

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