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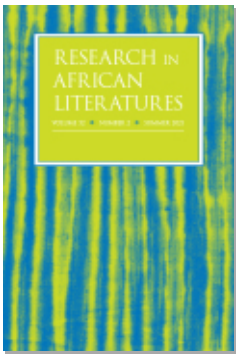

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Historiographic Metafiction and the Interrogation of Collective Memory in J. M. Coetzee's *Foe* and Kamel Daoud's *Meursault, contre-enquête*

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the problem of collective memory as a form of memorization that hinders the process of remembering in John Maxwell Coetzee's *Foe* (1986) and Kamel Daoud's *Meursault, contre-enquête* (2013). Drawing on existing research in the field of memory studies and narratology, I argue that the two novels, as historiographic metafiction, adopt a narrative strategy that embeds the previously established discourses of *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) and *L'Étranger* (1942) as false stories, then engage in an aggressive subversion. *Foe* as well as *Meursault, contre-enquête* access/borrow the canon, yet go beyond the colonial dilemma, highlighting the possibility of indulging in a counter-discursive strategy. While engaging European historical and fictional records, this strategy expands beyond the binary opposition of colonizer/colonized to turn the focus toward the national, the regional, or the local.

INTRODUCTION

Linda Hutcheon rightfully argues that the radical change witnessed by historiography as a result of postmodernist influence invites its inspection in relation to literature. She comments that "recent readings of both history and fiction have focused more on what the two modes of writing share than how they differ" (72), a notion that draws the "very separation of the literary and the historical" into question (72). Postmodernism rejects the idea that human perception and cognition are grounded in empirical reality and forwards the

notion that their essence is rather of a linguistic nature. When this line of thought was adopted in the study of history, the latter was claimed, in simple terms, as "nothing more or less than a story, a narrative construction" (Elias 298). However, history differs from fiction in terms of content despite their resemblance in form, as Hayden White draws a line between the two by stating that "The content of historical stories is real events, events that really happened, rather than imaginary events, events invented by the narrator. This implies that the form in which historical events present themselves to a prospective narrator is *found* rather than *constructed*" (105). The role of the historian is nothing more than investigatory. When commenting on the narrative account that the historian produces, White explains:

> [It] is not so much the product of [his] poetic talents … the form of discourse, the narrative, adds nothing to the contents of the representation…. And insofar as this representation resembles the events of which it is a representation, it can be taken as a true account. The story told in the narrative is a "mimesis" of the story *lived* in some region of historical reality, and insofar as it is an accurate imitation it is to be considered a truthful account thereof. (105–06)

However, the separation between historical and fictional stories does not neglect their resemblance in form. *Foe* and *Meursault, contre-enquête* adopt a similar position in regard to the role of the narrator highlighted by White. The two novels employ *Robinson Crusoe* and *L'Étranger* in their story-worlds as established historical accounts, then tell a different version of events. Consequently, *Foe* and *Meursault, contre-enquête* construct an imaginary space that allows the inspection of the interplay between narration and story with the latter becoming the memory that the reader recalls.

Against this background, this paper draws on the work of Paul Ricoeur to argue that a historical account is a form of memory that is susceptible to manipulation. Ricoeur regards memory as an act characterized by two overlapping approaches—one is cognitive while the other is practical (56). The cognitive side is recognition, the crowning of "a successful search" by reaching an "image" (56). This image can be either of a "fantastic" nature (deceitful) or of an "iconic" nature (truthful) (56). The practical side is the effort and the work put toward reaching the recognition (56). The act of remembering is the result of an overlapping of the cognitive and the practical, which is performed with the aim of acquiring a representation of the past in the form of an image.[1] Ricoeur distinguishes between remembering and memorization as two different categories of memory:

> [W]ith remembering, the emphasis is placed on the return to awakened consciousness of an event recognized as having occurred before the moment when consciousness declares having experienced, perceived, learned it.… Memorization, on the other hand, consists in the ways of learning relating to forms of knowledge, knowhow, capacities marked from a phenomenological point of view by a feeling of facility, ease, spontaneity, in such a way that these are fixed and remain available for activation.… In negative terms, this is an economy of effort, as the subject is dispensed from learning all over again in order to perform a task appropriate to specific circumstances. (58)

Memorization can hinder the practical approach of remembering and impede the effort and the work put toward reaching a recognition. Thus, the search for a specific memory that is eventually crowned with recognition is susceptible to manipulation by exerting an exterior control over memorization. Manipulation in this instance is not necessarily ascribed to a negative value; instead, it refers to the fact that an exterior intervention has taken place. The malicious effect, which manipulation can result in, is only possible if it is conducted for ideological reasons. When this occurs, the acquired image is, to use Ricoeur's words, an image of a fantastic nature, not an icon.

It is important to highlight that both *Foe* and *Meursault, contre-enquête* are presented as truthful accounts of the original events that *Robinson Crusoe* and *L'Étranger* drew on as their content and later altered. Accordingly, we are allowed a space to inspect the abuses of memory as we come to contemplate our adoption of the stories of *Robinson Crusoe* and *L'Étranger*, through an exercise of memorization. On the one hand, *Foe* is presented as Susan Barton's account of her search for her daughter, which was later on changed for commercial purposes by a contemporary novelist: (De)Foe. On the other hand, Haroun Ould El-Assasse alleges *Meursault, contre-enquête* to be a retelling of the real events that led to the death of his brother in *L'Étranger*.[2] According to Haroun, *L'Étranger* is nothing more than the confession of an ex-convict—Meursault.[3] The stories told through *Robinson Crusoe* and *L'Étranger*, to echo White's thesis, are a mimesis of the actual events that take place in the worlds of *Foe* and *Meursault, contre-enquête*. Adopting this narrative strategy paves the way for the reader to reconsider the truthfulness of both accounts presented in *Robinson Crusoe* and *L'Étranger*. As Amy Elias explains, this technique is characteristic of historiographic metafiction:

> [It] embeds intertextual references that locate the reader in a specific past historical moment, but then it uses metafictional techniques to defamiliarize that historical moment to expose its ideological character as a specific telling of history in relation to other possible narrations. (302)

Monika Fludernik rightly argues that multiple narratives can be produced from the same story. Therefore, it is possible for narratives to completely change a story to fill "the gaps that earlier versions of the 'same story' (fabula) left in their presentation" or to completely rewrite it (Fludernik 2–3). Her argument is built on the need to distinguish narration from narrative and story—the act (narration) produces the text (narrative) that tells a story. She comments:

> The first two levels of narrative can be classed together as the narrative discourse … by putting together the narrative act and its product, thus making a binary distinction between them and the third level, the story…. The story is then that which the narrative discourse reports, represents or signifies. (Fludernik 2)

Foe as well as *Meursault contre-enquête* adopt a similar approach. The two novels take the stories of *Robinson Crusoe* and *L'Étranger* as their starting point, embed their narratives, then by engaging in a subversive revision from an extradiegetic level, generate a different story in each case.[4] These stories are the memories that the narratives of *Robinson Crusoe* and *L'Étranger* falsified.

Foe and *Meursault contre-enquête* are part of the South African and the Algerian literary canons, respectively. Both nations endured a former colonial presence whose impact is part of their current social and cultural fabric. Helen Tiffin justifiably qualifies the cultures of postcolonial nations, such as South Africa and Algeria, as "inevitably hybridised, involving a dialectical relationship between European ontology and epistemology and the impulse to create or recreate independent local identity" (17). However, Tiffin's position becomes problematic when she limits the postcolonial decolonization process to "an ongoing dialectic between hegemonic centrist systems and peripheral subversion of them; between European or British discourses and their post-colonial dis/mantling" (17). This position risks a teleological take on postcolonial literatures/cultures that Ayobami Kehinde seems to share:

> The fundamental engagement of African literature is with the colonial presence in Africa, dismantling its dehumanizing assumptions and resisting its pernicious consequences. The African novel, in particular, reflects an evolving consciousness at once historical, cultural, and political. It strives to counter the negative picture of Africa and Africans promulgated by some European writers, including Joyce Cary, Graham Greene, Joseph Conrad, Ryder Haggard, Daniel Defoe, and William Shakespeare. (104)

Indeed, the reading of European historical and fictional records is inescapably part of any postcolonial national heritage. Nevertheless, a postcolonial text can indulge in a counter-discursive strategy whose aim is the national, the regional, or the local despite its intertextual engagement with European literary canons. It is extremely limiting to regard J. M. Coetzee's literary contributions, including *Foe*, solely through the aforementioned lens. Furthermore, Kamel Daoud's *Meursault, contre-enquête* should not be regarded as a pastiche of *L'Étranger* (Kaplan 341). It is a novel that seeks to understand a "country whose national narrative has remained opaque with respect to the viciousness of the wars, both revolutionary and civil, and the victims who have not been memorialised" (Orlando 867). Its analysis encourages a reconsideration of how we approach literary texts as well as their "*ancrage*" in the world (Hiddleston 8). The African novel does indeed reflect an evolving consciousness, as Kehinde remarks (104). Nonetheless, the claim that its fundamental engagement is with the colonial presence in Africa is in itself misrepresentative of the potential of the African novel. The African author, to echo Sura Qadiri (184), is capable of envisioning a literature that is not limited to the binary opposition of colonizer/colonized.

The following three sections offer a comparative analysis to demonstrate how *Foe* as well as *Meursault, contre-enquête* access/borrow the European canon, yet go beyond the colonial dilemma. I argue that both novels "raise fundamental metafictional issues" (Radhakrishnan 443) that map new epistemological paths concerning the study of collective memory by highlighting *Robinson Crusoe* and *L'Étranger*'s abuse of memorization strategies. The reader, dispensed from the practical aspect of remembering due to the text being a form of an exterior intervention (Ricoeur 58), risks constructing fantastic images.

Indeed, the need for "new liberating narratives to free the colonized" from the disabling colonial legacy remains a desideratum (Kehinde 104). However, both

Foe and *Meursault, contre-enquête* make the case for liberating narratives that are not exclusively concerned with a colonial discourse. Moreover, the novels discourage a delimitating reading that places the colonial presence and its legacy, unequivocally, as the fundamental engagement of the African novel. The first section unpacks the strategies through which *Foe* and *Meursault, contre-enquête* establish an intertextual link with their counterparts as memory narratives, then proceed in challenging their stories as false memories. The second section divulges the utilization of both silence and narration as abusive forms of forgetting. The final section draws on the two novels' validation of the ambivalence of writing as an effective, yet unceasing, process for restoring the icon.

EMBEDDING THE NARRATIVE: *ROBINSON CRUSOE* AND *L'ÉTRANGER*'S STORIES AS FANTASTIC IMAGES

A thorough study of *Foe* and *Meursault, contre-enquête* requires a previous acquaintance with *L'Étranger* and *Robinson Crusoe* as they "share a repository of meaning, nuance and signification embedded in [their] common vernacular" (Karam Ally 262). Reading *Foe* and *Meursault, contre-enquête* as counter-testimonies invokes the possibility of the falsehood of their counterparts as fantastic images that readers of the original novels recall. This method allows an actual understanding of how narratives, as a form of memorization, are capable of constructing and sustaining a collective memory. Furthermore, it sheds light on the tendency of collective memory to move toward a unilateral version.[5]

From the opening lines of *Foe*, we are indirectly invited to read it carefully. As Susan introduces herself to us, she draws attention to the power of language in shaping the world. She explains that although her original family name is Berton, she has come to be known as Barton. Her name "became corrupted in the mouths of strangers" (Coetzee 10). Living in England has resulted in a constant mispronunciation of her family name, which eventually becomes a norm of how it is pronounced. What is noticeable about this statement is the notion of corruption that alludes to the idea of an enforced change. The mouths of strangers, regardless of the fact that they are unidentifiable, are able to determine to which family Susan could or could not belong. Furthermore, this enforced change masks a glaring mark that can easily identify her as someone who is not English, a stranger. What starts as an unnoticeable act of mispronunciation evolves into a force capable of altering bloodlines and family ties. Barton is of no relation to Berton, and Susan becomes alienated from whatever family connections she might have in France.

Susan is on a quest to find her missing daughter. After traveling to Bahia and receiving no help, she heads to Lisbon. Susan's misfortune commences with a mutiny on board her ship. The captain is killed, and she is cast away on an island. Even for "readers reared on travellers' tales" the island that she lands on is different, "quite another place," Susan comments, an island that has not been described in books (Coetzee 7). What we should take into consideration when reading this specific description is that this island is one that readers are supposed to be extremely familiar with. Any "readers reared on travellers' tale[s]" would say that it is detailed in one of the most famous novels in English literature: it is the island of Robinson Crusoe. This is another invitation to approach *Foe* with care, as it instantly calls Daniel Defoe's famous novel to our imagination. If we are familiar

with the island, why would Susan claim otherwise? She is aware of the ability of the mouths of strangers to corrupt, to distort, and to contort reality.

The strategy of embedding *Robinson Crusoe*'s narrative in *Foe*, as an extradiegetic narrative, is established with an emphasis on *Foe* being the "truthful" version. *Foe*'s narrative is constructed with an apparent transgression over the diegesis where the narrator engages in a constant revision of the preestablished narrative of *Robinson Crusoe*.[6] The aim is rewriting the latter's story. Following this approach, every time *Robinson Crusoe* demonstrates a misalignment with the events of *Foe*, as the "novel displays a series of tantalizingly obvious similarities to and divergences from its original" (Bongie 264), we are directed toward the consideration of a conscious act of corruption that Susan's story has been subjugated to. Not only are we invited to question how the island is described in Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, but as the events unfold, we are asked to entertain the possibility of the falsehood of the account in its totality. We are asked to consider that the story, the image we came to construct from the narrative of *Robinson Crusoe*, as an image of a fantastic nature. Just as Susan's name has been corrupted by "the mouths of strangers" for the sake of conformity, her story might have been subjected to the same fate.

Meursault, contre-enquête follows the same line of thought by establishing the narrative of *L'Étranger* as extradiegetic. The opening of the novel immediately recalls the story of *L'Étranger* through Haroun's declaration: "Aujourd'hui, M'ma est encore vivante" 'Today, my mother is still alive' (Daoud 11). It is well known that in one of the most iconic openings in literature, Meursault states that his mother is dead. The date of her death is not identified. It could be that specific day or the one before. Haroun's mother, however, is alive, and he is aware of her presence as well as her state. What is noticeable is her constant silence. Unlike Meursault's mother, who is deemed silent due to never being granted a voice, Haroun's mother is silent by her choice. Her silence renders her ability of narrating the many stories "elle pourrait raconter" 'she could tell' (Daoud 11) useless, including the one that Haroun is obsessed with and constantly remembering.

The strategy of embedding the previously established narrative in *Foe* is adopted in *Contre-Enquête* as well, but in a more overt manner. The story at hand, the reason of dispute between the two narratives, is that of a murder. Haroun comments that he keeps on revisiting that story over and over in his mind, to the extent that he starts to question his memory. He comments: "Contrairement à moi, qui, à force de ressasser cette histoire, ne m'en souviens presque plus" 'Unlike me, who, from trying too hard to dwell on this story, can barely remember it' (Daoud 11). Through juxtaposing the two novels' openings, Haroun forces readers to resort to memory as well. The recognizability of *L'Étranger*'s opening assures that the reader inescapably recalls Meursault's account.[7] The aim is not a mere exercise of remembering where "the emphasis is placed on the return to awakened consciousness of an event recognized as having occurred before" (Ricoeur 58), *Meursault, contre-enquête* challenges the fantastic image that readers came to construct through *L'Étranger*. As Haroun declares that he cannot rely on his own memory of an event that he himself lived, readers are lured to approach Meursault's account with care. If the act of remembering, exercising one's own process of recalling something one witnessed (Ricoeur 56), is fickle and untrustworthy, how can its reified version, its written form, in this instance the story of *L'Étranger*, be free of doubt? As Haroun's revision of the event and his constant attempt to make sense of it proved

inadequate, how can a one-sided written version of that event be accepted without questioning?

Haroun cannot hide his bafflement with the fact that people disregard the other important figure in Meursault's account—the Arab he shot dead.[8] His importance, his life rather, is turned insignificant to the extent that people never bother to search for him:

> Il y a quelque chose qui me sidère. Personne, même pas après l'Independence, n'a cherché à connaitre le nom de la victime, son adresse, ses ancêtres, ses enfants éventuels. Personne.
>
> There is something that bothers me. No one, not even after Independence, tried to find out the name of the victim, his address, his ancestors, his children. No one. (Daoud 14)

The person whom Meursault murdered was Haroun's brother, nothing remains of him. As the novel opens in a bar with Haroun on his own waiting for condolences, "que jamais personne ne me présentera" 'which no one is ever going to offer me' (Daoud 11), he is trapped in a state of remembering, denied mourning, and robbed of catharsis. Haroun points to his own subjugation to the corrupting powers of "the mouths of strangers"; a subjugation that exceeds a mere mispronunciation of one's family name.

What *Foe* and *Meursault, contre-enquête* aspire to do first is to be placed as testimonies in opposition to the two well-established novels.[9] If *Robinson Crusoe* and *L'Étranger* are taken as examples of testimonies adopted on a collective level as a collective memory, their counter-testimonies allow the inspection of the process through which narratives eliminate all possible alternatives—the process of reducing language, to borrow Derrida's expression, to the "hegemony of the homogenous" (39).

NARRATION AND SILENCE AS CONSCIOUS ACTS OF FORGETTING

Both novels unpack the processes out of which narratives generate false memories. Haroun states that narratives are capable of erasing the past where the criminal can be pardoned and the victim can simply cease to exist. Meursault "savait raconteur, au point qu'il a réussi à faire oublier son crime" 'knew how to tell stories, to the point where he was able to make others forget his crime,' while the victim "était un pauvre illettré que Dieu a créé uniquement, semble-t-il, pour qu'il reçoive une balle et retourne à la poussière, un anonyme qui n'a même pas eu le temps d'avoir un prénom" 'was a poor illiterate whom God created solely, it seems, to receive a bullet and return to dust, an anonymous who did not even have the time to be named' (Daoud 11). Through this statement, Haroun introduces a clashing world of the named and the anonymous, decided on by narrative constructs, as one is celebrated while the other is forgotten. What is paradoxical about this remark is the contradiction language brings forth. The process of writing, the act of reification of memory and its preservation, becomes the actual cause of forgetting due to the manner in which it was implemented. Hence, the act of writing betrays its purpose and turns into an agent that nullifies memory.

Foe follows a similar line of thought by demonstrating how forgetting is turned into a weapon wielded by Cruso through his constant narration of different stories. Their plurality is only proof of his mastery of narrative.[10] Among the famous passages of *Robinson Crusoe* is the shipwreck that leads to Crusoe becoming a castaway. However, Susan's account makes a different claim. She comments that she is able to understand bits and pieces about how Cruso arrives on the island, but the problem that she encounters is the fact that he constantly changes his story. She comments:

> [T]he stories he told me were so various, and so hard to reconcile one with another, that I was more and more driven to conclude age and isolation had taken their toll on his memory and no longer knew for sure what was the truth, what fancy. (Coetzee 11–12)

She assumes that the reasons behind his inconsistent stories are the years of solitude he had to endure on this island. His lack of a strong memory is made worse by his unwillingness to keep any written records. Furthermore, dismissive of the fact that he is contradicting himself, Cruso takes liberty in telling different stories each time. However, when Susan asks him for the reasons behind not keeping any journals, he simply replies: "Nothing is forgotten.… Nothing I have forgotten is worth remembering" (Coetzee 17). Contradictory to her previous assumption where she links his constant alteration of his stories to his years of solitude, Cruso expresses a conscious act of forgetting whose legitimacy he attributes to the unimportance of the matters he chose to forget.[11] His strategy exposes one of the fundamental vulnerabilities of memory that Ricoeur warns against, which results from "the absence of the thing remembered and its presence in the mode of representation" (58). The isolated island offers a perfect opportunity for Cruso's past, and by extension that of the island, to be forgotten, despite his constant narration.

Meursault, contre-enquête suggests another possibility through which a conscious act of forgetting can be performed: silence. The novel does not offer any account of any shared memory between Haroun and his father. Instead, what Haroun recalls are the constant rumours that surround his disappearance: "Notre père avait disparu depuis des siècles, émietté dans les rumeurs de ceux qui disaient l'avoir croisé en France" 'Our father disappeared centuries ago, vanished in the rumors of those who said they came across him in France' (Daoud 18). Despite the physical absence of their father, for years, the news other people report back to the family makes the situation constantly tense between his brother Moussa and their mother. What happened between their parents is never revealed yet Moussa holds a grudge against her and to a certain extent blames her for their father's departure. Haroun comments on the long-whispered conversations he was kept out of:

> J'en étais exclu mais j'en comprenais l'essentiel: mon frère en en voulait à M'ma pour une raison obscure, et elle se défendait de manière plus obscure encore.
>
> I was excluded, but I understood the essential part: my brother was mad at my mother for some obscure reason, and she defended herself in an even more obscure manner. (Daoud 18–19)

What gives room for rumors is their mother's choice to remain silent. The incident that took place cannot be identified nor can the rumors be quieted. With Moussa's

death all means of knowing the truth are exhausted. *Réussir à faire oublier* in this instance is not the result of being able to write or to speak, it is rather through the choice of remaining silent. Just as Cruso succeeds in erasing his past and the memory of his island through narration, Haroun's mother subjugates his father's memory to the same fate. In both cases, Susan and Haroun, by means of an act of memorization performed through two different approaches, are subject to an abuse of forgetting.

RESTORING THE ICONIC IMAGE: TO SPEAK ON BEHALF OF THE DEAD AND THE SILENT

Foe and *Meursault, contre-enquête* adopt a counter-discursive strategy expected of postcolonial texts (Kehinde 104; Tiffin 17) yet go beyond the binary opposition of the colonizer/colonized. A simultaneous reading of the two novels highlights, on the one hand, the dangers embedded in the act of narration through the outcome of Friday's "non-narration." On the other hand, it suggests a path through which overcoming such dangers is possible in Haroun's particular use of French language.

Susan is shocked to understand that the reason behind Friday's inability to speak is the fact that he has no tongue (Coetzee 23). As Susan wishes to know more about the story behind Friday's injury, Cruso explains that those responsible are the slavers who captured him in Africa. The reason behind this cruel act can never be determined: "Perhaps they wanted to prevent him from ever telling his story: who he was, where his home lay, how it came about that he was taken. Perhaps they cut out the tongue of every cannibal they took, as a punishment. How will we ever know the truth" (Coetzee 23). Friday is indeed robbed of the possibility of ever telling his own story, thus enabling Cruso to narrate on his behalf.[12] Derek Attridge comments:

> Friday's tonguelessness is the sign of his oppression; it is also the sign of the silence, the absolute otherness, by which he appears to his oppressors, and by which their dominance is sustained. (86)

Friday's inability to narrate "renders [him] less than human" (Peterson 860) and assures that Cruso is capable of controlling the island's memory without challenge. The sole witness of what took place on the island is incapable of using language. Contrary to what Lewis MacLeod claims, that "Friday's silence prevents him from becoming the raw materials of someone else's narrative" (6), I argue that Friday's position hinders him from challenging Cruso's stories, thus becoming part of his narrative. The dangers of silence and the necessity of narrating the past is something Haroun understands well:

> Tu peux en rire, c'est un peu ma mission: être revendeur d'un silence de coulisses alors que la sale se vide. C'est d'ailleurs pour cette raison que j'ai appris à parler cette langue et a l'écrire; pour parler à la place d'un mort, continuer un peu ses phrases.
>
> You can laugh about it, but to be a seller of a backstage silence while the room is getting empty, is somehow my mission. In fact, this is why I learned how to

> speak and write this language; to speak on behalf of a dead person, to finish his sentences. (Daoud 12)

In an attempt to bring justice for his dead brother, Haroun believes that what has been imposed on Moussa can only be reversed through narration. Who has been silenced can be granted a voice and what was erased can be written again. Moussa's murder is not a regular murder, it is of a repetitive nature, an ongoing cycle sealed as a text. Every time an act of imagining is performed, the crime is committed in the form of gunshots. The generated story becomes the indisputable memory. When an incident is narrated in a certain version, it will be remembered accordingly. The playground is the power to narrate. Due to coloniality being the medium of interaction, it is dictated through Meursault's language, French, with everything it stood for during the time of his confession, a time of colonization. He wrote in French and built a world from it. This world collapsed with the independence of Algeria, yet its effect lingers long after. French is fixed as the arbiter and the sole solicitor of interaction. Thus, Haroun, fully aware of that, comments:

> [J]e vais faire ce qu'on a fait dans ce pays après son indépendance: prendre une à une les pierres des anciennes maisons de colons et en faire une maison à moi, une langue à moi.
>
> I'm going to do what has been done in this country after its independence: take the stones of the colonizers' old houses piece by piece and make a house of my own, a language of my own. (Daoud 12)

Meursault set two o'clock as the deciding moment when Moussa is killed again and again, "soixante-dix ans sans interruption, meme après son enterrement" 'seventy years without interruption, even after his burial' (Daoud 13). Haroun wishes he had called him "Quatorze heures" or "*Zoudj*" 'Two o'clock,' at least he would have been named by it, remembered by it. In the midst of his romantic adventure where he is the pillar around which the world revolves, Haroun wishes Meursault had put the effort to name his brother, like Robinson Crusoe who named "son nègre 'Vendredi,'" Friday (Daoud 13).[13]

Haroun's experience with Meursault's confession makes him suspicious of any form of testimony.[14] He is aware of the power of narration, as both he and Moussa were exposed to it, "un moment du jour" 'a moment of the day' as a name for his brother would have been an equivalent for "un jour de semaine" 'a day of the week' (Daoud 13). He sees no difference between Meursault's account and that of Robinson Crusoe. Meursault wrote in French, in a language that is articulate and precise enough to fascinate the public and exonerate himself for years to come. What story would the person that Cruso named Friday be able to tell if he were able to speak and write? What if Friday had a brother who mastered English and wrote *Crusoe's Counter-investigation*? What was Friday's actual name? Haroun cannot provide these answers nor can Susan.

Haroun clarifies that the fantastic image that Meursault's text generated requires an alteration. The act of memorization that succeeded in hindering the search for an icon needs to be reversed. Haroun suggests that the path is "simple: cette histoire devrait donc être réécrite, dans la même langue, mais de droite à gauche" 'simple: this story needs to be rewritten, in the same language, but from

right to left' (Daoud 16). Haroun sees that the restoration of memory requires a challenge from within the narrative discourse, through the same language, thus referring to French. However, the challenge can only be achieved from *right to left*. Noting that French is a language written from *left to write*, he forwards an interesting message. The world Meursault's language built and the fantastic icons it created can only be challenged by someone whose world moves from *right to left*. Given that Arabic is a language written from *right to left*, the world it generates is bound to its rules; thus, Haroun implies that a challenge can only be exercised by an "Arab." Finding a space for the two worlds, the two texts, to converse with one another requires someone who has insight into both. Stripping one element means the obstruction of the process.[15] Haroun puts forward the idea that the total abandonment of a significant part of Algeria, as somber as it is, will prolong the vicious cycle.[16] The texts that this attitude generates are bound to be flawed. *L'Étranger* adopted this approach and the story it generated was a false memory whose impact was immense. This by implication sheds light on the dangers of trying to construct a world based on difference, on a language of exclusion and strict opposition.

CONCLUSION

As historiographic metafiction, both *Foe* and *Meursault, contre-enquête* lay the ground for the inspection of collective memory by highlighting the possibility of generating fantastic images through a malicious act of memorization. Through a carefully architected embedding of the previously established narratives of *Robinson Crusoe* and *L'Étranger*, the novels engage in an aggressive subversion of the said discourses. The stories the narratives of *Robinson Crusoe* and *L'Étranger* generated proved to be deceptive. *Foe* and *Meursault, contre-enquête* highlight the fact that constructed narratives are capable of erasing one's past, absolving the guilty, or functioning as an agent that nullifies memory. The process is conducted through two, supposedly, different approaches: The first is a constant narration that hinders an access to a truthful version of past events; the second is a conscious choice of silence. However, *Foe* and *Meursault, contre-enquête* do not offer a permanent solution to memorization whose intent is not steered toward the recall of an iconic image. What the novels suggest instead is that as long as narrative constructs are produced, the struggle for an icon is a never-ending process.

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NOTES

1. Ricoeur comments that "the phenomenology of memory finds itself at the outset confronting a formidable aporia present in ordinary language: the presence in which the representation of the past seems to consist does indeed appear to be that of an image." This "image" is of visual or auditory form (5).

2. It is important to note that Ould El-Assasse means son of the watchman. The A in El-Assasse (العسّاس) is pronounced (ʿa). A transliteration of the word would

be Al-ʻassās, which has a completely different meaning from that of Al-Asās (الأساس). In Arabic, Al-Asās means the basis of, the source, or the pillar of something, while Al'assās means the watchman. Their pronunciation is completely different so is their spelling in Arabic. Valérie Orlando reads it as A instead of 'A. See Orlando.

3. Alice Kaplan comments that Haroun is "delirious" as he seems unable to understand the difference between Meursault and Camus. She states that "his delirium is summed up perfectly by this comic name, Albert Meursault," a name Haroun uses to refer to the author/narrator of *L'Étranger*. See Kaplan (343).

4. A theory of narrative levels introduced by Gérard Genette, which offers an alternative to "the traditional notion of embedding." By systemizing "thresholds" between one diegesis and another, Genette argues that "One narrative can scarcely 'embed' another without indicating the operation and, therefore without designating itself as the first narrative." The first diegesis (*Extradiegesis*) is in charge of the second diegesis through the generated narrative. See his chapter "Levels" in *Narrative Discourse Revisited* (84–96).

5. Jacques Derrida states that it is characteristic of culture in general: "All culture is originarily colonial … through the unilateral imposition of some 'politics' of language." He remarks that the process "operates by relying upon … a sovereignty whose essence is always colonial, which tends, repressively and irrepressibly, to reduce language to the One, that is, to the hegemony of the homogeneous. This can be verified everywhere, everywhere this homo-hegemony remains at work in culture, effacing the folds and flattening the text." See Derrida (39–40).

6. Genette introduces the concept of *metalepsis*, "when an author (or his reader) introduces himself into the fictive action of the narrative or when a character in that fiction intrudes into the extradiegetic existence of the author or reader, such intrusions disturb, to say the least, the distinction between levels" (88). Through the act of "embedding" *l'Étranger* and *Robinson Crusoe*, the narrators of *Meursault Contre-Enquête* and *Foe* introduce themselves to the extradiegetic levels of the first two narratives as means of disturbance.

7. As Kaplan refers to him, "the indifferent character known by all and towards whom no one is indifferent" (338).

8. The murder of the "Arab" in *L'Étranger* has been subject to a lot of criticism, most famously that of Edward Said in "Representing the Colonized: Anthropology's Interlocutors," in which Said makes the claim that the murdered Arab was a literary artefact through which Camus "used as background for the portentous European metaphysics" (223).

9. It should be noted that both narratives are considered, according to Fludernik, as first-person narratives or homodiegetic, which means that the narrative discourse is the narrator's discourse—the narrator is present in the story-world. Adopting this strategy insures that "the narrative discourse simulates the situation of a storyteller telling the story to his/her listeners," without any medium in between (Fludernik 21).

10. *Foe* offers a different spelling of the name of Robinson Crusoe. David Attwell remarks that "history" in Coetzee's works is a target of competition where fictionality attempt to claim its own authority over the latter. See Attwell, *Doubling the Point* (6–9). Cruso's constant "aggression" toward the "content" that history takes as its source demonstrates the extent of influence "fiction" can have in challenging history's authority.

11. Maher comments that the position that Cruso occupies "has come to signify authority. He is supreme creator of his island, dominant subject of his narrative" (34).

12. It is worth noting that Coetzee initially envisioned Friday as capable of speaking and attempts to teach Susan his language. When she does not put enough effort into the learning process, Friday starts imitating her. Coetzee believed that the idea of mimicry was redundant in decolonization literature, hence why he settled for mutilation. See Attwell, *J. M. Coetzee and the Life of Writing* (155–57).

13. It is important to highlight that Daoud uses the word *Zoudj* in his novel and not *Zawdj*. The first word is Algerian Arabic while the second is standard Arabic. The word Zoudj, spelled in French, is Algerian Arabic. It means two, an actual reference to the time his brother was killed; whereas Zawdj, in both standard Arabic and Algerian Arabic, stands for pair or double. Haroun is not stating that he is his brother's double, he was simply wishing for a name, calling him Zoudj is an attempt at marking his Algerian identity. Both Strand (455) and Qadiri (186), who references Hans's *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic* to translate the word, read Zoudj as Zawdj.

14. Sami Alkyam expands on this line of thought and argues that "questioning the reliability of any narrator, Harun challenges historiography itself" (469).

15. Boukhalfa Laouri goes a step further and comments that the use of multiple languages, including French, Arabic, and *Daridja*, is inevitable due to the cultural hybridity of postcolonial Algeria. The appropriation of the language of the colonizer is a necessity to address its cultural specificity. See Laouari (58).

16. It is worth noting that Haroun's take on French language does not steer away from that of Kamel Daoud, as Kaplan rightfully comments: "what is most moving in *Meursault, contre-enquête* is the language Daoud makes his own—not the French of the colonizers, but a utopian French, a language of literature, liberty, and justice.… [H]is proposal is not to choose one language or another, but to claim the benefits of translation, to go back and forth between French and Arabic. This is neither a neo-colonialism, nor nostalgia, for it is only as a native speaker of Arabic that Daoud makes his audacious claim for French" (345).

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