

Albert Camus & Algeria.

It all brings to mind Nietzsche's still relevant warning that those who stare into the abyss to fight monsters may also become monsters. Specifically, in relation to modern terrorism one also thinks of Albert Camus' remark that in the name of liberty if a bomb was placed on a bus which his mother was travelling on then he would not support liberty but rather his mother. He saw no justice in such an action that would leave his mother – a bystander in the war between the Algerian liberation movement and the colonial French - dead. As an Algerian of French heritage he wanted an Algeria that was free of the colonial vices inflicted upon Algerians by the French but also desired that Algeria be a part of France as he was both a Frenchman and an Algerian. To speculate: seemingly it was not that Camus the humanist still wanted France to dominate Algeria but that he thought ordinary Algerians could benefit by still being in the orbit of France rather than outside it and for any Algerian to be as an equal to any French person which would truly be an exemplary justice ideally based on moral principle rather than on national identity. Perhaps Camus did not have faith in an independent Algeria accommodating to its citizens a full spectrum of civic and human rights as was he felt could exist in France but as a French-Algerian (or *pierd-noir* to use the local term which means 'black foot' referencing either the black boots of French soldiers or coal covered feet of sailors on ships in the Mediterranean) he sought after a humanizing pluralism in response to competing nationalist instincts that were seemingly bringing on only violent injustices. As Camus also came from a poor background he perhaps also did not sense as much of being part of a privileged colonial minority as the *pierd-noirs* were perceived by those who fully opposed the French presence in Algeria. Of course, everything I have just said maybe wrong as in Algeria itself Camus is not held in the highest regard due to his opposition to independence but his opposition was not due to taking on board a colonial bias but rather that there could be an advantage in taking on board - rather than resisting - the benefits that could be made available by remaining in a relationship with the coloniser and the injustice that had to be fought was to breakdown the oppressive barriers that the coloniser still chose to keep in place that would keep Algerians as second-class citizens and perhaps to become fully French would certainly be a civic pathway to a full civil equivalence. For any Algerian to equally enjoy any perceived privilege that Albert Camus also enjoyed by the accident of birth of being a *pierd-noir*.

Ideally, after independence there should remain the same possibilities for the once colonized afforded to them by the former colonizer who had materially benefitted from its previous exploitation; to have some *right* come from so much *wrong* and thus – and to again speculate - for Camus it was perhaps such an ideal he had in mind but chose to be silent and not express due to the deeply polarizing aspect of the Algerian war by which the French in their counter-terrorism strategy did behave monstrously leading to the death of many hundreds of thousands of Algerians. It was a brutal time and not a situation in which the pleasantries of pluralism could be coolly discussed.

Yet Algerian independence certainly would have been an ambition that Algerians could not have been dissuaded from achieving so perhaps it was wise for Albert Camus to keep quiet (although he was criticized as for some his 'silence was deafening') and yet one can also see why he abhorred the violence and could see no moral benefit in it and so –ideally speaking - it is also why there is always a need for both coloniser and colonised to seek out some resolution that befits each particular circumstance before violence is seen as the only approach to guarantee one's interests especially when history shows that both colonial violence and revolutionary violence leaves any so called eventual victory coming at too often a too high human cost which leaves open also some unwanted scope for long lasting intergenerational trauma.

Algerian War. Wikipedia

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Algerian_War#:~:text=The%20war%20caused%20the%20deaths.million%20Algerians%20to%20concentration%20camps.

Highly recommend viewing *The Battle of Algiers* directed by Gillo Pontecorvo which is a 1966 movie that still remains relevant today. (In recent times I saw it by way of a streaming service for free by use of my local library membership). As for Algeria politically it has had a troublesome time since independence being a one party state from the early 1960s through to the 1980s when a multi-party system was adopted but with the political rise of an Islamist party there would be a civil war which again cost hundreds of thousands of lives from 1992 to 2002. The following link provides one overview:

Sixty 'Glorious' Years After Independence, Can Algeria Withstand the Challenges Ahead? Andrew Farrand. Democracy in Exile. 2022.

<https://dawnmena.org/sixty-glorious-years-after-independence-can-algeria-withstand-the-challenges-ahead/>

In regards to Albert Camus in relation to the issues discussed here are some introductory links:

Videos.

An Ethical and Humanist Perspective on Civil War: Albert Camus and the Algerian Chronicles. (2021).

https://youtu.be/_SHC73uGgEQ?si=OFX8O2CLa8J3VT4H

Man of our times: Why Albert Camus matters. France 24. (2020).

<https://youtu.be/gNTUkPjy1dQ?si=wAQ7qNqCJHJ6Wi3d>

Camus and Algeria: "He praised nuance and that's always been seen as cowardice"

https://youtu.be/AuVZ_4v3VYQ?si=sPBMEYBPImC4IRNN. France 24. (2020).

Albert Camus, Algerian Chronicles. Harvard University Press. (2012)

<https://youtu.be/BjDkXnOjnfM?si=YCNIsJUbkDo5qT9h>

Articles.

The Colonist of Good Will: On Albert Camus. The Nation. (2013).

<https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/colonist-good-will-albert-camus/>

Why is Albert Camus Still a Stranger in His Native Algeria?

<https://www.smithsonianmag.com/innovation/why-is-albert-camus-still-a-stranger-in-his-native-algeria-13063/>

Albert Camus, the outsider, is still dividing opinion in Algeria 50 years after his death. The Guardian/Observer. (2011).

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2010/feb/28/albert-camus-algeria-anniversary-row>

Camus's Stance on Algeria Still Stokes Debate In France. NPR. (2013)

<https://www.npr.org/sections/parallels/2013/11/07/243536815/on-his-100th-birthday-camus-algerian-ties-still-controversial>

Camus and France's Algerian Wars. The New Yorker. (2012).

<https://www.newyorker.com/culture/richard-brody/camus-and-frances-algerian-wars>

A general overview of Albert Camus (which does include a section on Algeria).

Albert Camus. (1913-1960). Internet Encyclopaedia of Philosophy. IEP.

<https://iep.utm.edu/albert-camus/#H7>

A commentary on a play written by Albert Camus which is also commonly titled *as the Just Assassins* looking at the issue of terrorism and morality.

The Just by Albert Camus (1949). Books an Boots. Reflections on Books & Art.

<https://astrofella.wordpress.com/2017/09/23/the-just-albert-camus/>