

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

Faculty Publications, Department of History

History, Department of


2014

Albert Camus and the Anticolonials: Why Camus Would Not Play the Zero Sum Game

James D. Le Sueur

University of Nebraska-Lincoln, jlesueur@unl.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/historyfacpub>

 Part of the [Continental Philosophy Commons](#), [European Languages and Societies Commons](#), [French and Francophone Literature Commons](#), [History Commons](#), and the [Race, Ethnicity and Post-Colonial Studies Commons](#)

Le Sueur, James D., "Albert Camus and the Anticolonials: Why Camus Would Not Play the Zero Sum Game" (2014). *Faculty Publications, Department of History*. 192.

<http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/historyfacpub/192>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the History, Department of at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faculty Publications, Department of History by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

Albert Camus and the Anticolonials: Why Camus Would Not Play the Zero Sum Game¹

James D. Le Sueur, University of Nebraska, Lincoln

IN 1994, I RETURNED FROM PARIS TO HYDE PARK just in time to catch a lecture about Albert Camus that an esteemed colleague, the late Tony Judt, was giving at the University of Chicago. I was much younger then, eager to engage in debate, and I had just spent most of the past two years turning over the recently opened pages of Camus' private papers in Paris and trolling through the private papers of other prominent French intellectuals, as well as newly declassified state archives for what was to become my first book, *Uncivil War*.² I had also done dozens of interviews with Camus' friends and fellow travelers (Jean Daniel, Germaine Tillion, Jean Pélégri, etc.), as well as old adversaries (including François Jeanson). To the person, out of the many dozens of interviews I conducted, when asked about Albert Camus everyone agreed that he had died well before his time, that he was a deeply admirable and humane writer, and that he had paid much too heavy a price for efforts to achieve a peaceful solution to the bloody drama in Algeria. Moreover, when I conducted these interviews throughout the 1990s, every single interviewee I spoke with, including Claude Levi-Strauss, Pierre Bourdieu, and Jacques Vergès, also admitted that they had all modified their stances on Algerian nationalism and were far more critical of their unchecked anticolonialism having seen its failures in Algeria.³ Finally, they all agreed that Camus could not be understood without foregrounding Algeria and decolonization in any reading of him.

Yet, what they said about Camus contrasted remarkably with Judt's statements. I cannot remember what set me off, but I knew that I did not understand or agree with what Judt was saying about Albert Camus. Part of my objection to Judt's broader work on French intellectuals was the contrast between his emphasis on the Second World War and the Cold War and my own emphasis on decolonization. To be sure, decolonization was then a new and emerging field, but, there was enough known to suggest that decolonization had transformed France *and therefore Camus* in fundamental and indisputable ways. Hence, decolonization's role was not as minor as Judt had maintained. Legitimate and scholarly objections aside, I quite simply made a royal ass out of myself by criticizing him

so publically (something I later deeply regretted). This essay is a kind of posthumous apology to my colleague, Tony Judt.

My visceral over-reaction to Judt's talk 20 years ago reflects a continuing Camus debate. Why do Albert Camus and decolonization, a distant historical figure on the one hand and an intricate historical process on the other, continue to ignite such spirited disagreement among friends and colleagues?

THE POLITICS OF A ZERO SUM GAME

To begin, Albert Camus is not a minor intellectual figure in the history of twentieth-century France, intellectual history, or colonial history. He is and remains one of the most important intellectuals of the twentieth century. Therefore, what is said about him carries a certain gravitas. At the same time, he is also a very important figure in the history of French colonialism and decolonization in Algeria, and perhaps one of the most controversial. Nevertheless, our understanding of Albert Camus and the often nasty milieu of French intellectuals in which he circulated remains filtered through the lens of a zero sum game that is aberrated by many unexamined biases. Put simply, this zero sum world-view of French intellectuals in this contentious post-war period pitched one writer against another in often very public and very brutal debates. As a younger scholar, the high stakes intellectual game made perfect sense to me precisely because I was educated to play this assassins' academic game at the University of Chicago. Intellectuals in France during decolonization played to win and they played for keeps, and the way to win was to destroy one's opponent completely and publically. This is still true today, of course.

Writers like Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir, two of Camus' closest equals (in terms of intellectual stature), played this game to perfection. As it became increasingly clear that Camus held different positions from them on their most valued abstractions such as revolution, Marxism and anticolonialism, intellectuals like Sartre and de Beauvoir became increasingly brutal with Camus, and increasingly *ad hominem*. They aimed at his Achilles' heel: his settler roots in Algeria. Hence, what should have been an advantage because he simply knew more about Algeria and North Africa than Sartre and de Beauvoir did together, became for them an identity to attack. However, well before they began to attack Camus in earnest, when Camus was a much better known and more respected writer than they, he began to record his ambivalence and

misgivings about the increasingly acidic tone of Sartre's critiques. For example, on March 9, 1943, Camus noted in a letter to his friend and mentor, Jean Grenier:

I received *Cahiers du Sud*. Sartre's article is a model of "dismantling." Of course, in every creation there is an intuitive element which he doesn't envision. Intelligence doesn't play such an unimportant part. But in criticism, it's the rule of the game, and that's just fine, since on several occasions he enlightened me about what I wanted to say. I also know most of his criticisms are fair, but why this acid tone?⁴

A decade later, during the French-Algerian War (1954–1962), Sartre and de Beauvoir became even more caustic. Their reputation had also grown after WWII, and they were peers. Despite or perhaps because of Camus' international stature and his determination to find a peaceful solution to the Algerian crisis, Sartre and de Beauvoir evidenced a clear disdain for their former friend. By this time, anticolonialism had come in vogue, and this fit well with both their very honest concerns for human freedom and with their desire to highlight connections between a Marxist/socialist world-view and the emerging nationalist movements. Ironically, just as American policy-makers during the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s began to read these "Third World" revolts through the narrow lens of hegemonic Communism—something that led to foreign policy blunders by US presidents such as the 1953 CIA-MI6 coup d'état against Mohammed Mosaddegh in Iran, and the Bay of Pigs in 1961—radical anticolonial writers such as Sartre and de Beauvoir engaged in equally politicized and myopic appropriations of anticolonial movements as evidence of the emerging proletariat third world revolution.⁵ Moreover when it came to decolonization, Albert Camus' more nuanced views, as well as his personal background as a *ped noir*, were used to tarnish his legitimacy, and, for some, this kind of smearing was effective. It was also part of how certain thinkers, particularly those on the radical left such as Simone de Beauvoir and Jean-Paul Sartre played the zero sum game in France. To illustrate, Simone de Beauvoir offered one the best examples of this "acid tone" regarding Camus:

[. . .] I was revolted by Camus' refusal to speak [about the torture of Henri Alleg]. He could no longer argue, as he had done during the war in Indochina, that he didn't want to play the Communist's game; so he just mumbled something about the problem not being understood in France. When he went to Stockholm to receive

his Nobel Prize, he betrayed himself even further. [. . .] In front of an enormous audience, he declared: 'I love Justice; but I will fight for my mother before Justice,' which amounted to saying that he was on the side of the *piéd noirs*. The fraud lay in the fact that he posed at the same time as a man above the battle, thus providing a warning for those who wanted to reconcile this war and its methods with bourgeois humanism.⁶

It is essential to point out that de Beauvoir simply repeated the misquote of Camus, who really said, "People are planting bombings in the tramways of Algiers. My mother might be on one of those tramways. If that is justice, then I prefer my mother."⁷ The original misquote is attributed to *Le Monde* journalist, Dominique Birmann, who covered Camus while in Stockholm to receive his Nobel Prize and who inaccurately reported on the infamous December 12, 1957, incident. During this incident, Camus was rather discourteously heckled by an FLN representative at a gathering of Swedish students. Camus himself sent his own correction to this story, which was published on December 17, 1957, and noted the inaccurate accounting of what he said and explained that he also understood the young Algerian's "despair and unhappiness."⁸

So, while I also must confess that I find Camus' reluctance to engage in the Henri Alleg torture controversy surprising,⁹ I cite this particular and especially caustic passage of de Beauvoir's memoirs, *Hard Times*, because it reveals a few assumptions held by radical anticolonialists in France, the most important being that Albert Camus, guided by ethics, could have and should distanced himself from the *piéd noirs*; that his refusal to align with intellectuals like Sartre and de Beauvoir on anti-colonialism was symptomatic of "bourgeois humanism." The fact that he did not embrace their radical anticolonial stance and remained on the side of the *piéd noirs* undermined his claims to represent 'justice.' Obviously, this is not how Camus thought, nor was it how he played the intellectual game in France by this time. To be sure, he was in fact a *piéd noir*, but he was one the most vocal critics of an entrenched and uncompromising settler politics throughout the 1930s and 1940s, well before either Sartre or de Beauvoir took any interest in colonial issues. Hence, while de Beauvoir and Sartre played this vicious zero sum game out of the belief that they better understood the terms of the debate, the zero sum game regarding Algeria was neither fun nor frankly that relevant for Camus. The stakes, for him, were indeed real and personal. After all, was it wrong to be on the side of *piéd noirs* as inhabitants of French North Africa?

To be sure, Camus did not hold either Sartre or de Beauvoir in much esteem by this point, but the difference was that he kept most of his insults private. For example, in a letter written on May 26, 1959, to Jean Grenier, he described his contempt for France's high and mighty anticolonials:

The people of *14 juillet* contest everything, indeed, except themselves and their own ideas. Yet that would be the most urgent thing to do. But the Left is so eager to change the world that they forget to look and see what it is and what it is becoming. The result is that they make up the most backward district on the intellectual landscape and Paris smells provincial, very much so, because of these offensive lunatics. None of us loves truth enough. But at least we can make an effort. With them, no effort, their nature loathes truth. I have really suffered from this. But I could care less now, and my concerns are truly elsewhere.¹⁰

Camus did not deny the legitimacy of the public's rightful outrage over French politics vis-à-vis Algeria—the military's coup d'état that brought de Gaulle to power was, of course, problematical—he publically expressed his own outrage over the military abuses.¹¹ He also openly chastised the political incompetency of French leaders throughout *Algerian Chronicles* but did so only as means to work toward a legitimate solution to the current crisis. He had no patience for leftist abstractions about Marxism and radial anticolonialism during this era.

The trick, therefore, with Albert Camus today is not to read his writings on Algeria as a dogmatic public thinker and writer, i.e., a player of the zero sum game, but instead as an anticolonial thinker. That seems easy enough. But the problem, of course, is that when dealing with a topic such as French anticolonialism and the Cold War (in the 1950s especially), we are dealing with an era that produced dogmatic thinking and zero sum postcolonial realities. It is full of clichés, stereotypes, utopian fantasies and, most importantly, violence. Nowhere was the zero sum game, with its baggage of clichés, more lethal than in Algeria from 1954 to 1962. Most historians view this event as the most violent war of national liberation produced by the idea of anticolonialism, one that changed France and Algeria forever. In this war, the group to which Camus belonged, the French settlers of Algeria (the *pied noir* community) were the tragic losers, and in the abstractions and logic that many radical anticolonials sought to enforce, there was either very little room or no room at all for these European settlers in a postcolonial Algeria.

Nevertheless from 1954 to 1960 Camus tried to maintain his calm, to act rationally, to strive for peace, and ensure any dialogue he engaged in

with other writers about Algeria would be respectful and work towards a solution for his own community, for France, and for Algeria. He played an anticolonial game, but rationally, and he bet, like the contemporary economist John Nash, against the logic of a traditional zero sum game. The great insight of Nash, Camus' contemporary and future fellow Nobel Laureate, was to re-imagine the zero sum game. Nash did so in 1950 as a doctoral student at Princeton by advancing the simple and brilliant proposition: that each player makes moves independently but with the expectation that these moves remain rational and mutually beneficial. Camus thought about colonialism and morality in a similar fashion and believed that games ought not be ruled by the fallacies of a zero sum logic. Be that as it may, Camus' hopes were to be disappointed, and the "Nash Equilibrium" (as it was later called) or something like it,¹² could not be transposed onto Algeria, where each of the warring parties (especially the radical *pieds noirs* and the OAS) refused to act in mutually beneficial ways. The violence of the French military and the FLN had forced the war into the confines of a traditional zero sum game. Hence, each principal colonial and anticolonial player in the Algerian drama, the French State, the FLN, the OAS, etc., played a totalizing zero sum game with a terrifying logic of absolute violence. Moreover, it is vital to point out that for Camus, the war's resolution in 1962 remained completely unthinkable (because there had never been a colonial exodus of this magnitude before), and from Camus' perspective, mad; a history with no future, a time of unimaginable exodus.

THE *SUI GENERIS* BIAS: THE TELEOLOGY OF RADICAL ANTICOLONISM'S ZERO SUM GAME

One of the biggest problems of this war for French intellectuals was the lack of consensus on what anticolonialism meant and the resulting partisan nature of this debate.¹³ The current and ongoing political investment in this history obviously creates problems for historical understanding because we historians often view this war through the lens of a very simple unexamined bias that seems to exist *sui generis*. What is this *sui generis* bias? That radical anticolonialism was right, that the *pieds noirs* had no place in Algeria after independence, and that the radical, leftist anticolonial support for the FLN had proven to be on the right side of history. But does this phrase, in this instance mean anything? Do these violent wars of national liberation really have a "right side?" Was Camus really on the wrong side of history?

The problem, of course, is that the bias of the “right side” of a zero sum anticolonial game has in fact generated a particular and clear teleology for understanding liberation during the French-Algerian War. Seeing the outcome (the exodus of *pieds noirs* in 1962) as inevitable, it directly affects how historians think about the decolonization of Algeria. To clarify, from the perspective of today, we know independence happened, we know that as a result roughly a million *pieds noirs* (including a very large Jewish population) were ferried to France across the Mediterranean in the summer of 1962 in a desperate panic. Yet this result, where European settlers frantically packed their suitcases (they were allowed only two!) was not in itself inevitable. Yes, it happened, but does that mean that the prophets of radical anticolonialism won the zero sum game? At the very least, the biases of their position obscure the actual historical contingencies of decolonization.

This is not to suggest that I think Camus was always correct or that he fully understood the desire of FLN and its supporters to win liberation at all costs. I do not believe he ever came to terms with the FLN, and, as a result, criticisms of his shortcomings on this issue by anticolonial Algerian writers such as Mouloud Feraoun are quite valid, as are the criticisms of FLN partisans such as Ahmed Taleb Ibrahimi.¹⁴ Yet, even though independence ended with the *pieds noirs* flight in 1962, one should not misread Camus’ efforts to propose an alternative outcome (as de Beauvoir would have it), as evidence of “bourgeois humanism,” which is to say of a colonist impulse. The evidence is in Camus’ writings, and the fact is that anticolonialism could have taken multiple paths during the decolonization of Algeria. Nowhere was it pre-determined that the *pieds noirs* were going to leave at the end of this war. Hence, Camus should not be read as being ‘morally wrong’ in working towards a solution that would have allowed for both Europeans and non-Europeans to continue living in Algeria together.

The problem with understanding Camus on Algeria is that the outcome (the exodus) in many way sets up a reading of him that is framed by the results of a zero sum game. Consequently, Camus is often read backwards today, and knowing that the unprecedented exodus of European settlers happened, this historical knowledge tints readings of him. It is therefore hard to discuss this war and Camus’ unique position within it without writing to this end (the exodus). Therefore, the re-insertion of Albert Camus in a specific place and a specific time and without premonitory reference to the end of the war/the exodus is important because he, more than any other writer, makes us question historical (but not historicized) biases and consequently question end game of decolonization in Algeria.

In other words, accepting the results of the war as evidence of the moral and logical superiority of the radical anticolonial position (which is exactly how radical anticolonials in France like Sartre and de Beauvoir and even Frantz Fanon argued) it creates problems for historians, at least it did for me earlier in my career, because it diminishes our empathy for intellectuals like Camus who were settlers/*pieds noirs* and anticolonial *à la fois*. And there's the rub.

French radical anticolonialism is different from other forms of European anticolonialism and even different strains of nationalist thought. Writers such as Jean-Paul Sartre defended it as a matter of principle, regardless of the outcome, because the abstractions he used to justify his position were morally and theoretically consistent with his notions of socialist/Marxist revolutions and with the kind of liberation that these ideologies anticipated. Whereas, and quite importantly, Camus held no such faith in Sartre's socialist/Marxist abstractions or in the type of radical anticolonialism that issued from these ideologies. Here it is extremely important to point out that by 1936 Camus had been disabused of the belief that Communism/Marxism was on the side of the oppressed and colonized Algerian nationalists, and he was in fact forced out of the French Communist Party (PCF) because, as he writes, he had recruited Algerian nationalists affiliated with the *Etoile Norde Africaine* to the PCF.¹⁵ It is also worth pointing out that it took another 20 years for one of the leading spokesman of anticolonialism, Aimé Césaire (author of *Discourse on Colonialism*), to break with the PCF because he had finally arrived at the same conclusions about communism and anticolonialism that Camus had in 1936, the conclusion being that the Communist Party was unresponsive to the anticolonial movement and indeed acting as a colonizing force itself.¹⁶

As a fervent anticolonial intellectual, Camus objected to how the effects of the zero sum game of radical anticolonialism—based in France on abstractions like Marxism and communism—would impact his own kin, the *pieds noirs*, and Algerians alike. So, rather than continue to play it, he chose silence because he was playing a different anticolonial game entirely, one like Nash's, one in which moves would be mutually beneficial, rational, and based on reality rather than on an imagined Marxist dialectic. Camus believed there could be more than one winner of anticolonialism; rather than winner-take-all, his Algeria was home to *pieds noirs* and Algerians who might work together toward a common, non-violent world of equality and brotherhood. The zero sum game of radical anticolonialism, on the other hand, could not account for because it refused to accommodate place of the *pieds noirs* in this new (also

imagined) world rid of colonial injustices. Historians must thus suppress the idea of the inevitability of independence in order to account for the forces of historical contingency and see variations in the anticolonial positions, especially Camus'.

It is crucial to keep in mind that that Albert Camus did not have the opportunity to reformulate his ideas. His untimely death in 1960 sealed his ideas and perhaps our views of them in the time capsule of permanent critique and in the logic of this very brutal war of national liberation, a logic that ultimately cast the *pieds noirs* (from the point of view of radical anticolonial thinkers) as colonialism's reactionary losers and which also characterized Camus' views as *depassé*. Hence, his critics' labeling of his views as neo-colonial stuck to him, despite his efforts to shake those representations. Perhaps the time has come to open and explore the contents of this capsule, all the while recalling a self-observation Camus once made: "I don't have the imagination to want to be someone else."¹⁷ Indeed, since Camus confessed his limitations in this regard, it is crucial that we do our part in not trying to imagine him wishing to be other than who he was.

The problem, of course, is that many of his closer friends and most vehement adversaries imagined that Camus should have wanted to be other than what he was precisely because he was a leading anticolonial writer, the most informed on the abuses of the French state and the colonial lobby in Algeria, and had stood for justice during WWII. His actions in this regard were heroic and unique. Perhaps only Simone Weil comes as close in tone to criticisms of French colonialism more generally during the interwar period. Hence, that his very vocal anticolonialism did not radicalize to accommodate the new nationalist conception of revolution that emerged after 1954 pained French anticolonialists. Their pain regarding *his* anticolonial views was intolerable to Camus. After the publication of *The Rebel* in 1951, when he criticized the sacred meta-narratives of the French left, one of them being that revolutions liberate man, he quickly fell out favor with many wartime friends. Hostility was already palpable especially after the debate sparked by *The Rebel*, but after the Stockholm controversy in 1957, Camus was openly derided by many French intellectuals. He described the pain of this period in another letter to Grenier written on July 28, 1958: "As for me, I am finding it more and more difficult to live facing a wall. And difficult for an artist to work, alone, without being supported by anything."¹⁸

As a reform-minded anticolonial who argued for an end to colonial domination but also for a future in Algeria where both European and non-European communities would work democratically together, Camus

refused to justify the extreme violence of the FLN, although he was appalled by the repression of the French military. Re-reading Camus today, especially *Algerian Chronicles*, a sadness and an agony resonate in this moderate anticolonial position. To better illustrate the term “radical French anticolonialism,” imagine that Camus had been born in a different colonial setting, say in Southern Rhodesia or South Africa, where there were also large numbers of European settlers that went back generations. In this setting, it is doubtful that he would have been so violently attacked by the Left. In fact, an apartheid government would have considered his open criticisms and calls for reform as anticolonial heresy. He may have, as did many Afrikaner writers who opposed apartheid, gone to jail for his criticisms of European abuses and could have been banned. For instance, Camus openly criticized the metropolitan government’s stupid and brutal repression of nationalists. His comments, if made against the Afrikaner regime, likely would have rendered him an anti-apartheid hero, like many South African writers who were banned and persecuted for their opposition to the status quo. Breyten Breytenbach (South African), Doris Lessing (Southern Rhodesian), Nadine Gordimer (South African), J. M. Coetzee (South African) and most especially André Brink (South African) come immediately to mind as European settlers with comparable politics and stature as writers.

In fact, like Lessing, Camus opposed the colonial abuses of natives, wrote about these abuses, and left the colonial world because of its institutionalized racism and violence. (After all, he was asked to leave by the government in Algeria in 1940 because he was perceived to be a threat to its security as a journalist at *Alger-Républicain*, though he did return to Oran the next year, where he completed *The Stranger*). Why is it, then, that European settlers who opposed the abuses of the colonial system in Southern Africa are anticolonial, even though these same Europeans would have disputed that all settlers are bad and that they needed to leave with two suitcases? Not all committed anticolonial intellectuals of the same stature of Camus argued that all African nationalist movements deserved unqualified support or that all of their methods were acceptable. Yet these nuances are ignored in the case of Algeria and Camus. Why does a thinker of Camus’ notoriety, who is openly critical of the colonial/settler status quo end up in such a quandary in which it was deemed offensive by leftist French intellectuals to talk about his own origins as a *pied noir* intellectual? One of the great ironies, of course, is that while members of the French left like Sartre and de Beauvoir derided Camus for his origins, calm, and efforts to reconcile the European and non-European populations in Algeria, Afrikaner writers struggled to achieve

the same kind of democratic and humane justice in South Africa (despite massive intimidation and threats).

Consider the case of André Brink. In his memoir, *A Fork in the Road*, he writes:

And then there is Camus. Who promptly became, and still is, one of the Baudelairean *phases* of my life. I do not merely admire Camus, I love him. And one of the most profoundly moving pilgrimages of my life, more than twenty years after first reading *La peste*, was to Lourmarin in the Vaucluse, to stand at the simple slab of his grave overgrown by rosemary in the uncompromising sun of Provence. Camus: the indefatigable persistence of Sisyphus, the revolt-without-end, the struggle, literally to death, against injustice, against the lie, against unfreedom. He provided not only a map for my exploration of Paris, of France, but a blueprint for the rest of my life.¹⁹

Like Camus, Brink openly criticized the racist and undemocratic regime that was destroying his country, and like Camus, Brink constantly returned to fiction and essays, written in Afrikaans, as a weapon against apartheid and racism. Finally, like Camus, Brink never argued that in order to overcome colonialism the settlers (Afrikaners or any others) would have to accept the zero sum game that culminated in an exodus of whites from South Africa.

Camus and Brink shared the same basic belief that Africans and Europeans could live together in a postcolonial world of economic and racial equality. In fact, it is clear that Camus' efforts to work towards justice and equality in Algeria, a justice and equality that did not eliminate the settlers/*pieds noirs* made perfect sense to Brink, who was studying literature in Paris as a graduate student during the French-Algerian War:

And then Camus, who had been my Bible, made vade mecum, died in that absurd car accident, at Pont-sur-Yonne, just north of Sens, on the highway to Paris, at 13:54 on 4 January, 1960. Just when the gloom of depression which had surrounded him ever since he received the Nobel Prize, and even before, seemed to be lifting; just as he seemed to be finding his way back into writing; just as life seemed to be becoming, if not meaningful by any means, but worthwhile again—that is, an absurdity worth living for—a wholly gratuitous death had the last word. For me, in those circumstances, at that moment in my life, nothing could have confirmed the significance of Camus in a more definitive—more final—manner as his death. It lent a solemnity, even

a profundity, to every reading and rereading of Camus I made over the nearly fifty years that have passed since then. It meant that for the rest of my life I would never be without his shadow, or the shadow of his light.

Seventeen years later another man died, with much the same devastating effect on my mind and my life, even though the manner of it was totally different, and the circumstances incomparably so. This was Steve Biko. And in a curious way there was a line running from the first to the second.²⁰

Like Camus, Brink did not believe that his compatriots in South Africa were a lost cause and that they could not be brought to reason. In fact, Brink deliberately used Afrikaans to express his dissident ideas. He needed to address his fellow Afrikaners in their own language. For Brink, change, real change, had to come from within.

Likewise, for Camus, the *pieds noirs* had a chance in Algeria, a real chance, but they would have to accept equality and equal rights for all inhabitants of Algeria. As Camus explained in his article, “The Political Malaise”: “But our Algerian policy is so distorted by prejudice and ignorance that to offer an objective account based on accurate information is already to render an important service. That is what I intend to do . . .”²¹ The stakes were high:

In this lovely country, now glorious with spring blossoms and sunshine, people suffering from hunger are demanding justice. We cannot remain indifferent to their suffering, because we have experienced it ourselves.

Rather than respond with condemnations, let us try to understand the reasons for their demands and invoke on their behalf the same democratic principles we claim for ourselves.²²

We thus confront a puzzle: while an inspiration to an Afrikaner writer and staunch critic of apartheid like André Brink, Camus was dismissed and derided by French radical anticolonial intellectuals? In their defense, part of their criticism of Camus came from an honest lack of understanding about Camus’ anticolonial politics. His anticolonialism did not require the removal of the European settler, either by force or by choice from Algeria. Moreover, his refusal to see revolution as a panacea transcended the Algerian problem because, as he had already written in *The Rebel*, the revolutionary utopian impulse put aside facts to “remain faithful to the prophesy.”²³ The difference between Camus and his radical anticolonial opponents is that he distrusted the revolutionary impulse and did not see

the necessity of coupling anticolonialism with a Marxist/socialist view of revolution. Hence his effort to decouple anticolonialism from revolution. From Camus' perspective, revolutionary and radical anticolonialism was doomed to certain and bloody failure: "Every revolutionary ends by becoming an oppressor or a heretic. In the purely historical universe that they have chosen, rebellion and revolution end in the same dilemma: either police rule or insanity."²⁴

Camus foresaw Algeria's path, and he grasped earlier than most the outcome of radical anticolonialism. Algeria did, in fact, become a police state after independence. The FLN dictatorship lasted for decades, and even today, the corrupt revolutionary-era elite that came to power after independence continues to rule the country through an oppressive and all-powerful police and military-security apparatus. There is no question, therefore, that on the level of historical postcolonialism, Camus' predictions were correct about where radical anticolonialism and the zero sum game it produced would take the country.

By way of conclusion, let us measure the ethical chasm between Camus' reformist anticolonialism and Sartre's radical anticolonialism. In "Colonialism is a System," first published in *Les temps modernes* (1956), Sartre writes: "I would like to put you on guard against what might be called 'neocolonialist mystification.' Neo-colonialists think that there are some good colonists and some very wicked ones, and that it is the fault of the latter that the situation of the colonies has deteriorated."²⁵ Not only must the French rid themselves of this delusion, Sartre exhorted, but they must also draw the proper lesson:

Colonialism is in the process of destroying itself. But it still fouls the atmosphere. It is our shame; it mocks our laws and caricatures them. [. . .] Our role is to help it to die. Not only in Algeria but wherever it exists. People who talk about the abandonment of Algeria are imbeciles. There is no abandoning what we have never owned. [. . .] But above all let us not allow ourselves to be diverted from our task by a reformist mystification. The neocolonialist is a fool who still believes that the colonial system can be overhauled—or a clever cynic who proposes reforms because he knows that they are ineffective.²⁶

Camus' reply to this zero sum logic comes in his essay, "A Clear Conscience":

The gulf between metropolitan France and the French of Algeria has never been wider. To consider the metropole first, it is as if

their long-overdue indictment of France's policy of colonization has been extended to all French living in Algeria. If you read certain newspapers, you get the impression that Algeria is a land of a million whip-wielding, cigar-chomping colonists driving around in Cadillacs. This is a dangerous cliché. To heap scorn on a million of our fellow Frenchmen or to quietly disdain them, indiscriminately blaming all for the sins of a few, can only hinder rather than encourage the progress that everyone claims to want [. . .]

[. . .] Yet these same ordinary people are the first victims of the present situation. They are not the ones placing ads in the papers, looking at property to buy in Provence or apartments in Paris. They were born in Algeria and they will die there, and their hope is that they will not die in terror or be massacred in the pit of some mine. Must these hardworking Frenchmen, who live in isolated and rural towns and villages, be sacrificed to expiate the immense sins of French colonization? [. . .] It is easy to allow others to be sacrificed, and if the French of Algeria bear their share of responsibility, the French of France must not forget theirs either.²⁷

Let us be clear: Camus did not desire the full independence of Algeria from France and he proposed a formal relationship between the two countries. As a public intellectual, he argued for a federated Algeria in which the *pièdes noirs* would have a place. But privately, and again in a letter to his most trusted friend, Jean Grenier, Camus reveals he was resigned to a different future: "I believe as you do that it is undoubtedly too late for Algeria. I did not say that in my book because *lo peor no es siempre seguro* [sic] (the worst is not always a sure thing)—because historical randomness must have its chance—and because one does not write to say that everything is screwed up. In that case, one remains silent. I am preparing myself for that."²⁸

Did Camus' complex stance on Algeria make him a neocolonist, as Sartre would have one believe? I think not. We have seen the consistency of his anticolonial positions, based on the conviction that a fair and equal democratic partnership between non-Europeans and Europeans in Algeria could be built. In Camus' anticolonialist vision, there could be justice and equality for all men and women in Algeria—Muslims, Europeans, Jews, Berbers, and Arabs alike. His anticolonialism—like André Brink's and the other "whites" who opposed apartheid as "whites" in South Africa—would not have been a zero sum game anymore. Unfortunately, for Camus, this is how the game of decolonization is remembered because that is how it was played out, as a zero sum anticolonial game in Algeria.

NOTES

1. This essay was first presented at the Clough Center for the Study of Constitutional Democracy at Boston College in November 2013 as part of the Albert Camus & Algeria conference. I want to thank my colleagues at Boston College for asking me to present this in a shortened version, and I would like to thank my distinguished colleague and fellow Camus scholar, Robert Zaretsky, for including the essay in this edited collection honoring Albert Camus.

2. See my chapter on Camus, “The Unbearable Solitude of Being: The Question of Albert Camus,” in *Uncivil War: Intellectuals and Identity Politics during the Decolonization of Algeria*, second edition (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005).

3. For a striking example of the reversal of support for postcolonial Algerian leaders, see: Jacques Vergès, *Lettre ouverte à des amis algériens devenus tortionnaires* (Paris: Albin Michel: 1993).

4. Camus, *Correspondence, 1932–1960/Albert Camus and Jean Grenier*, ed. Marguerite Dodbrenn; trans. Jan F. Rigaud (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2003), 66.

5. I make this point about the abstract and theoretical quality of Sartre and his colleagues throughout *Uncivil War* but most especially in chapter “The Politics of Othering.” It is worth pointing out that Michel Foucault suffered from the same leftist delusions and appropriations when he (as a foreign correspondent) celebrated the arrival of the Ayatollah Khomeini in Iran in 1978/1979. It is also worth pointing out that Simone de Beauvoir saw the dangers for women’s rights that Khomeini regime represented; whereas Foucault is astonishingly if not shockingly ignorant of the dangers that Khomeini’s revolution held for democratic activists. See: Janet Afary and Kevin B. Anderson, *Foucault and the Iranian Revolution: Gender and the Seductions of Islamism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

6. Simone de Beauvoir, *Hard Times: Force of Circumstances—the Autobiography of Simone de Beauvoir*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Putman, 1963): 105–06.

7. For the original correct quote, see footnote 10 in Albert Camus, *Algerian Chronicles*, ed. Alice Kaplan, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013), 216.

8. See Camus’ December 27, 1957 “Letter to the Editor” of *Le Monde* in *Algerian Chronicles*, 215–16.

9. See Henri Alleg, *The Question*, trans. John Calder (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006).

10. Camus, *Correspondence*, 193. *14 juillet* was short-lived journal founded by leftist anti-Gaullist intellectuals who opposed the war. Its members included Margaret Duras, André Breton, Daniel Guerin, and Maurice Blanchot, among others.

11. For more on Camus’ response to de Gaulle, see *Uncivil War*, 132–33.

12. See John F. Nash, Jr., “Non-Cooperative Games,” Facsimile of Ph.D. Thesis, in *The Essential John Nash*, ed. Harold W. Kuhn and Sylvia Nasar (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 51–98, and “Two-Person Cooperative Games,” 99–114. For more on Nash, see Sylvia Nassar’s indispensable biography, *A Beautiful Mind* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1998).

13. The issue of what I called orthodox anticolonialism and divisions among anticolonialists was treated at length in *Uncivil War*.

14. See Mouloud Feraoun, *Journal 1955–1962: Reflections on the French-Algerian War* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000) and Ahmed Taleb, “Lettre ouverte à

Albert Camus in *Lettres de prison* (1957–61).” (Algiers: Société Nationale d’Éducation de Diffusion, 1977). Also see my discussion on both Feraoun and Amed Taleb Ibrahim in *Uncivil War*.

15. In a letter to Jean Grenier dated September 18, 1951, Camus explains his bafflement with Grenier’s encouragement of him to join the French Communist Party while Grenier himself refused and had also written against Communism. Camus explains:

While on the subject, let me explain how I left the party. [. . .] I was put in charge of recruiting Arab militants and of having them join a nationalist organization (*L’Etoile Nord-Africaine*, which later became the PPA.) I did it, and those Arab militants, whose comportment and loyalty I admired, became my friends. The turning point of ’36 came. These militants were charged and imprisoned and encouraged by the CP. The few who escaped the police came to me to ask if I would allow infamy without saying anything. That afternoon remained imprinted on my mind; I still remember that I was shaking as they spoke to me; I was ashamed; I did then what was necessary. I recognized that you were right in what you wrote. But then you could not have been right in what you advised me; I did not understand. I can swear, however, that I never held it against you. I was only disappointed in friendship, as others are disappointed in love. Since then I have understood: first, because I know you better, and also because I have better assessed all that I learned then, which I would never have learned otherwise. (*Correspondence* 152–153)

16. Césaire only broke after the Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1956.
17. Camus, *Correspondence*, 193.
18. *Ibid.*, 185.
19. André Brink, *A Fork in the Road: A Memoir* (London: Harvill Secker, 2009), 132–33.
20. *Ibid.*, 137–38.
21. Camus, *Algerian Chronicles*, 101.
22. *Ibid.*, 91.
23. Camus, *The Rebel: An Essay on Man in Revolt* (New York: Random House), 188.
24. *Ibid.*, 249.
25. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Colonialism and Neocolonialism*, trans. Azzedine Haddour, Steve Brewer, and Terry Williams (New York: Routledge, 2001), 30.
26. *Ibid.*, 47.
27. Camus, *Algerian Chronicles*, 125–26.
28. Camus, *Correspondence*, 187.