In-Betweenness Cultural Hybridity and Identity Crisis in Camus and Bader: A Comparative Study

البينية والتهجين الثقافي وأزمة الهوية في أعمال كامو وبدر: دراسة مقارنة

Azhar Mohammed Hasan Hammood [1]

ازهر محمد حسن محمود

Abstract

This study sheds light on the concept of in-betweenness as a site of cultural hybridity and identity crisis in Albert Camus's The Stranger (1942) and Ali Bader's The Tobacco Keeper (2008). The paper conducts a comparative analysis based on existentialist, postcolonial, and trauma theory, investigating how both authors depict alienation as a fundamental aspect of contemporary consciousness. Camus's Meursault embodies existential indifference in the colonial environment of French Algeria, illustrating the moral folly of empire and the conflict between authenticity and complicity.

In contrast, Bader's Raheel lives in a postcolonial world of fragmentation, where identity is shaped by political unrest and historical tragedy. This research illustrates Homi K. Bhabha's concept of the "unhomely," Frantz Fanon's

١- جامعة اهل البيت عليهم السلام - كلية الاداب fakhirm998800@gmail.com

psychology of colonial alienation, and Cathy Caruth's trauma theory, showing that both characters exist in hybrid places where belonging is unavailable, yet meaning is constantly contested. Ultimately, the study concludes that in both colonial and postcolonial contexts, in-betweenness is not only a condition of estrangement but a crucial metaphor for the modern human struggle to establish identity amid historical dislocation

Keywords: Cultural hybridity, Identity crisis, Postcolonialism, Trauma, In-betweenness, Albert Camus and Ali Bader.

الملخص

تُسلّط هذه الدراسة الضوء على مفهوم الوسطية أو ما بينيّة الوجود بوصفه فضاءً للهجنة الثقافية وأزمة الهوية في رواية ألبير كامو الغريب (١٩٤٢) ورواية علي بدر حارس التبغ (٢٠٠٨) وتقدّم الدراسة تحليلاً مقارناً يستند إلى الوجودية والنظرية ما بعد الاستعمار ونظرية الصدمة، مستكشفةً الكيفية التي يصوّر بها الكاتبان الاغتراب بوصفه سمة جوهرية للوعي المعاصر. فجسدُ كامو الروائي، موسو، يمثل لامبالاة وجودية داخل بيئة الجزائر الفرنسية الاستعمارية، كاشفاً عمى الإمبراطورية الأخلاقي والصراع بين الأصالة والتواطؤ.

وعلى النقيض من ذلك، يعيش بطل بدر، رحيل، في عالمٍ ما بعد استعماري يتّسم بالتشظي، حيث تتشكّل الهوية تحت تأثير الاضطراب السياسي والمأساة التاريخية. وتستند الدراسة إلى مفهوم "اللا-ألفة" عند هومي بابا، ونظرية فرانتس فانون في الاغتراب الاستعماري، ورؤية كاثي كاروث للصدمة، لتبيّن أن الشخصيتين تعيشان في فضاءات هجينة يتعذّر فيها الانتماء، بينما يبقى معنى الوجود موضع نزاع دائم.

وتخلص الدراسة إلى أن الوجود في مناطق "الما بين" داخل السياقات الاستعمارية وما بعد الاستعمارية لا يُعدّ مجرد حالة اغتراب، بل يعدّ أيضاً استعارة مركزية للنضال الإنساني المعاصر من أجل تشكيل هوية في ظل الانقطاع التاريخي والاقتلاع.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الثقافة الهجينة، ازمة الهوية، الاستعمارية، الصدمة، الوسطية، البير كامو، علي بدر

I. Introduction

In-Betweenness, which means being between two or more cultural, moral, or existential realities, has become a major theme in both modern and postmodern literature. Writers that deal with issues of identification, belonging, and alienation often look at how people live in unstable areas of hybridity that make it hard to tell where one person ends and the other begins, or where one person is at home and the other is in exile. Albert Camus and Ali Bader are two of the

writers who have most forcefully depicted this crisis of identity. Their works, which were written fifty years apart and in two different countries, both look at the fractured self. In Camus's 1942 novel The Stranger, Meursault, a French Algerian, feels alienated from the world around him. He does this by being emotionally detached and breaking social norms, which shows how silly both human life and colonial morality are. Bader's The Tobacco Keeper (2008), on the other hand, tells the narrative of Raheel, an Iraqi-Jewish musician who has to change his name and identity to stay alive in Iraq's unstable political climate. Even though the two novels are set in different times, languages, and cultures, they both focus on characters who live between worlds: Meursault lives between European rationalism and Algerian colonial reality, and Raheel lives between his Jewish background and Iraqi national identity. This comparative analysis contends that The Stranger and The Tobacco Keeper elucidate the human toll of cultural hybridity and the existential state of identity crisis. Camus and Bader use Meursault and Raheel to look at how moral estrangement and historical trauma create broken selves that go back and forth between rebelling and giving up. In both novels, in-betweenness serves not just as a theme element but also as a structural principle, influencing narrative voice, chronological structure, and philosophical profundity.

The study aims to how both authors portray identity crises as a result of cultural hybridity and existential estrangement. Investigating how colonial and postcolonial conditions affect protagonists' morality, freedom, and belonging. Showing how existentialist and postcolonial ideologies explain estrangement and relocation. This study uses existentialist and postcolonial frameworks particularly Camus, Frantz Fanon, and Homi K. Bhabha to show that the contemporary self, whether in colonial Algeria or postwar Iraq, is fragmented. Meursault and Raheel can be regarded as prototypical “in-between” figures based on Bhabha's unhomely space and Camus's absurdity. This research furthers the scholarly conversation between European existentialist and Arab postcolonial thinking by illustrating how both traditions view alienation as the hallmark of modern consciousness. Said says, “Every empire tells itself and the world that it is unlike all other empires” (Orientalism 12), yet Camus and Bader, from within and outside empire, show that claim as unstable.

II. Theoretical Framework

The existential aspect of Camus's oeuvre serves as a vital pathway for comprehending Meursault's aloofness in The Stranger. Existentialism, as expressed by Camus, Sartre, and Kierkegaard, emphasizes the individual's relationship with an indifferent universe. In The Myth of Sisyphus, Camus characterizes the absurd as the instant "when man realizes the unreasonable silence of the world" (28). The absurd hero must exist without any appeal to transcendence, creating significance in a pointless existence.

Meursault exemplifies this situation by his resistance to conform. When a judge asks him if he believes in God, he only says, "No" (Camus 69). This negative, albeit small, has a lot of meaning for him—it separates him from the ethical norms of his civilization. The story and the prosecution show that his guilt is not murder but being honest. The prosecutor does not blame his actions but his indifference: "He did not cry at his mother's funeral" (Camus 85). So, Meursault's isolation comes not from guilt but from not wanting to feel anything. Camus's absurdism places freedom within this acknowledgment. To live truly, one must renounce illusion and accept the ludicrous. But when this philosophical point of view is put in the context of colonial Algeria, it has a political meaning. Jeremy Ahearne and Simon Gikandi, among others, have said that Camus's metaphysical abstraction could hide the truths of colonial power. Meursault's indifference reflects the colonial gaze, embodying a detachment that negates the subjectivity of the colonized other (Ahearne 157; Gikandi 351). Camus's existentialist, while rooted in Universalist philosophy, remains inextricably linked to the historical particularity of empire. Meursault's encounter with the ludicrous transpires inside a framework defined by racial hierarchy. His "clear acceptance of meaninglessness" becomes inextricably linked to the colonial privilege that enables his indifference.

Ali Bader's The Tobacco Keeper, on the other hand, is set in a postcolonial and postmodern world where identity is fragile, multiple, and performative. Postcolonial theory, particularly the writings of Homi K. Bhabha, clarifies the ways in which colonization creates hybrid identities. In The Location of Culture, Bhabha characterizes hybridity as the "third space of enunciation," wherein cultural meaning is perpetually renegotiated (37). This place, although productive, engenders uneasiness; it is, in Bhabha's terminology, "the unhomely world of the migrant and the exiled" (13).

Raheel, the main character in Bader's book, is a good example of this. He was born Jewish in Baghdad and subsequently became a communist thinker. After that, he became an exile, and finally, he became a ghostly figure made out of other people's recollections. His identity, dispersed between political and personal narratives, eludes resolution. Frantz Fanon says that the postcolonial subject "is doomed to oscillate between self-division and the dream of integration" (Black Skin, White Masks 154). Raheel's narrative illustrates this oscillation: his plurality serves as both his strength and his downfall. Bader's use of narrative strengthens this theoretical view. The novel's nonlinear structure, which moves between narrators and timelines, is like how postcolonial identity is split up. Ahmed Omar calls the different versions of Raheel's life "a mosaic of shattered selves" (629). Each one makes the others less stable. Hybridity in this context signifies fracturing rather than synthesis—a perpetual negotiation between past and present, self, and other, home and exile.

The Tobacco Keeper by Ali Bader is set in a postcolonial, postmodern world where identity is varied, performative, and changeable. Homi K. Bhabha's postcolonial theory shows how colonization creates hybrid identities. Bhabha calls hybridity the “third space of enunciation,” where cultural meaning is always renegotiated, in The Location of Culture (37). While creative, this area causes anxiety “the unhomely world of the migrant and the exiled” (Bhabha 13). Bader's protagonist Raheel illustrates this. Born Jewish in Baghdad, he becomes a communist thinker, exile, and ghostly apparition recreated from others' recollections. He resists closure due to his political and personal history. Fanon says the postcolonial subject “is doomed to oscillate between self-division and the dream of integration” (Black Skin, White Masks 154). His multiplicity is both his strength and his downfall in Raheel's story. This theoretical lens is reinforced by Bader's story. Narrators and timeframes change throughout the story, reflecting postcolonial identity. Each version of Raheel's life destabilizes the others, creating “a mosaic of shattered selves” (629). Hybridity is fracture—a constant negotiation between past and present, self, and other, home and exile.

III. Literature Review

A critical examination of The Stranger and The Tobacco Keeper uncover a continual tension with alienation as a philosophical and societal dilemma. Since the 1940s, scholars have looked at Camus's existential themes, but in the last few decades, there has been a rising effort to put his work in the framework of

colonial discourse. Studies of Bader have similarly concentrated on postwar identity and cultural hybridity within Arab modernism. Camus and Alienation in Existentialism. Some of the first critics, like Conor Cruise O'Brien, thought of The Stranger as a purely philosophical book. He called Meursault "the natural man, stripped of the pretensions of civilization" (Camus: The Algerian 113). However, postcolonial theorists eventually questioned this universalist reading since they saw ideological gaps in how Camus wrote about Algeria. Edward Said contends that the novel's "silence about the Arab" illustrates how colonial narratives obliterate the indigenous voice (Culture and Imperialism 210). Simon Gikandi says that Meursault's indifference reflects the "moral indifference of empire itself" (352). Modern critics have attempted to resolve these conflicts. Karen Glover sees Meursault's emotional restraint as a way to fight against moral and colonial authority. She says that "his indifference exposes the arbitrariness of colonial morality" (517). Oliver Richmond builds on this interpretation by focusing on Meursault's genuineness. He says that Meursault's inability to show emotion is an example of "existential honesty in a world built on pretense" (712). Jeremy Ahearne, on the other hand, places Camus between two worlds: "the universalist language of philosophy and the specific history of Algeria" (158). This shows how he was both a colonizer and a critic of colonization. Bader and Postcolonial Hybridity. The study of The Tobacco Keeper is newer, but just as deep. Abeer Al-Mahfedy puts Bader's work in the larger context of Iraqi cultural memory. She calls his characters "living archives of loss and displacement" (218). Mona Haddad sees the novel's broken structure as a sign of Iraq's breakdown, saying that "hybridity becomes a site of psychic trauma" (173). Ahmed Omar interprets Raheel as a "postcolonial ghost" who endures by embodying various identities yet fails to attain coherence (631). Bader's exploration of identity encompasses not just national trauma but also intellectual investigation. His heroes frequently exemplify Fanon's concept of the colonized individual as "a divided self, caught between imitation and rebellion" (Black Skin, White Masks 154). The many sides of Raheel's personality show both internalized oppression and innovative adaptation.

Approaches that are similar. Not many academics have directly linked Camus with Bader, yet there are certain similarities between existentialist and postcolonialism. Simon Gikandi and Ahearne assert that Camus's colonial context foreshadows subsequent postcolonial inquiries over identity and agency. Haddad contends that Bader's characters "inherit the existential burden of

meaninglessness but in a world fractured by history" (175). This study expands on these concepts by connecting existential alienation and postcolonial hybridity as two expressions of the same human struggle: the need for identity amid historical disruption. Meursault and Raheel both embody individuals navigating the intersection of moral frameworks and cultural contexts. By refusing or being unable to conform, they show how fragile identity is as a modern idea.

IV. Comparative Analysis: Hybridity, Identity Crisis, and Alienation

The experience of *in-betweenness* defines both Meursault and Raheel, yet their alienation arises from unlike origins and leads to different resolutions.

Meursault's existential disinterest reflects the moral absurdity of colonial life, while Raheel's fragmented hybridity embodies the historical trauma of postcolonial disillusionment. Both characters, however, symbolize the modern self's search for coherence amid the ruins of philosophy and empire.

Albert Camus's *The Stranger* presents Meursault as a man whose defining superiority is his denial to lie to himself, to others, or to society. His fairness begins in the novel's opening lines: "Mother died today. Or maybe yesterday; I can't be sure" (Camus 3). This opening encapsulates Meursault's estrangement from human agreement. He detects life with sensory immediacy but without moral interpretation. His emphasis on the "glare of the sun" and "the smell of salt and leather" during his mother's funeral represents an existential promise to experience rather than meaning (Camus 6).

However, places him at odds with colonial society. In a world that demands emotional traditionalism, Meursault's honesty becomes subversive. His refusal to express grief is interpreted by the prosecutor as evidence of evil. The court's outrage is not moral but cultural it rises from Meursault's failure to perform the signs of belonging. As Richmond notes, "He is punished not for the crime but for the truth of indifference in a world that survives on illusion" (713).

Yet this moral alienation is close from colonial ideology. The unnamed Arab whom Meursault kills remnants voiceless and faceless, identified only by ethnicity. As Gikandi observes, "The novel's silence on the Arab body transforms him into the void against which the European subject defines himself" (351). The scene of the murder—described as "the sun glinting off the knife" (Camus 58) turns violence into a metaphysical event, but one that

indirectly echoes colonial erasure. Meursault's existential detachment, thus, mirrors the colonizer's structural indifference.

Camus's philosophical aim is to depict Meursault as a "stranger" to the human condition, yet this estrangement also tells the paradox of colonial modernity: the colonizer himself becomes alienated from his own moral system. Ahearne reads this as "the tragic irony of empire—where the privileged man, in rejecting hypocrisy, discovers his own emptiness" (159). Meursault's trial, in which his atheism and apathy overshadow his violence, becomes a presentation of social morality; his execution reaffirms the shared illusion of meaning.

At the end of the novel, Meursault's acceptance of death—"I opened myself to the gentle indifference of the world" (Camus 122) signifies an existential liberation. He achieves authenticity through acknowledging absurdity. However, from a postcolonial standpoint, this tranquility is morally ambiguous. His explanation is acquired at the cost of others' invisibility. As Fanon argues, "The colonizer's freedom is built upon the subjection of the colonized" (*Black Skin, White Masks* 117). Meursault's realization thus develops both heroic and complicit: he exceeds his society's hypocrisy but remains surrounded within its silence.

Camus's genius lies in his duality. Meursault is both an everyman confronting mortality and a colonial subject exemplifying the illogicalities of empire. His alienation is universal in its existentialism yet particular in its historical blindness. The tension between these philosophical and political dimensions creates the lasting complexity of *The Stranger*.

In Ali Bader's The Tobacco Keeper, Raheel's identity dilemma arises not from moral rejection but from historical imperative. He was born Rahim, a Jewish singer in Baghdad. To survive in a society torn apart by political turmoil, he takes on many names and nationalities. Bader's transformations show how postcolonial identity falls apart, making it hard to belong and making memory itself unreliable. Bader starts his book with the discovery of a body, which introduces Raheel through absence and rebuilding. People who say they knew him put together his identification by giving testimony. This narrative method exemplifies what Caruth refers to as "the repetition of the unassimilated event" (5): trauma manifests as fragmented narrative.

The many voices friends, lovers, and political acquaintances show how broken postwar Iraq is, where truth and history become rumors. Raheel's mixed identity means he is always in exile. "I have lived under three names," he says

in one part, “and each time I died a little” (Bader 112). His change from being a Jewish scholar to a communist artist to a secular exile shows how unstable one's identity can be when politics are involved. Omar calls this "a self-reconstructed through erasure; hybridity becomes the language of survival" (633). Meursault denies meaning as an illusion, whereas Raheel urgently looks for coherence but can't discover any. His estrangement is not a choice he made, but something that history has forced on him. Raheel embodies Bhabha’s concept of the “third space” for cultural negotiation (37). He is not completely Jewish or Iraqi, and he is not completely an artist or a political actor. Bhabha calls this "the unhomely" (13), which is a space where belonging falls apart and identity is always changing. Bhabha sees hybridity as something that could be useful, whereas Bader sees it as sad. Haddad says that "Bader changes the hybrid subject from a place of creativity to a place of psychic disintegration" (173). Raheel's multiplicity does not free him; instead, it breaks apart his mind. His art form, music, is the one place where he feels a brief sense of unity. He briefly brings together his two identities by performing. Al-Mahfedy says, "Raheel's music is both a way to remember and a way to fight back; it turns pain into fleeting beauty" (223). But even this peace won't last long. The political violence around him keeps getting in the way, stifling his creativity, and forcing him to leave again.

The Tobacco Keeper's structure shows that it's impossible to have a consistent narrative identity. Its changing times and points of view are like Raheel's mental breakdown. Vickroy's idea of trauma fiction as "a disrupted temporality that mirrors the disintegration of the self" fits well here (Trauma and Survival 9). Bader's nonlinear narrative resists conclusion, and Raheel's story is still not done, just like Iraq's history is still not ended.

Meursault's estrangement leads to acceptance of existence, while Raheel's leads to erasure. His ultimate absence indicates the depletion of postcolonial subjectivity the disintegration of identity under unyielding historical strain. The narrator says at the end, "He became a story told by others, a rumor that refused to die" (Bader 287). His survival is textual rather than personal, living only in fragmented recollection.

The comparison of Meursault and Raheel shows how alienation changes from rebellion against existence to disintegration after colonialism. Meursault's indifference is derived from metaphysical insight—the acknowledgment of life's absurdity—whereas Raheel's multiplicity originates from past trauma. But both

represent the same human struggle: to live truthfully in a reality that doesn't make sense.

For Meursault, the ludicrous gives him freedom. His rejection of societal conventions affirms individual authenticity; meaning is self-constructed. For Raheel, being a hybrid means survival but not freedom; meaning is always put off. One attains existential clarity via isolation, while the other encounters existential sorrow through plurality. This contrast illustrates the transition from the modernist to the postmodern condition: from alienation as rebellion to alienation as disintegration.

Both individuals also show how moral systems can be unstable during times of change. Meursault's trial shows how colonial morality punishes honesty and lets violence go unpunished. Raheel's exile shows how postcolonial nationalism takes one type of control and replaces it with another. In both instances, identity is politicized characterized by societal prohibitions rather than endorsements. From a philosophical standpoint, Meursault's recognition of absurdity aligns with Kierkegaard's concept of the "leap of faith," but Camus rejects transcendence. He is still a part of the human condition. On the other hand, Raheel's experience fits with Fanon's postcolonial view of the colonized self: "The black man's soul is a white man's artifact" (Black Skin, White Masks 120). External elements, including religion, politics, and history, also shape Raheel's self, making it seem that he has little control over his own life. The common "in-betweenness" of both main characters is what brings all the different circumstances together. Each exemplifies what Bhabha refers to as "the interstitial passage between fixed identifications" (38). For Meursault, this interstitially results in enlightenment; for Raheel, it culminates in dissolution. But both show that it's impossible to have perfect identity in a world that is broken. Camus and Bader use these two personalities to show how alienation has changed from the colonial to the postcolonial age. Meursault's stillness and Raheel's many voices show two different kinds of modern estrangement: one is based on existential isolation and the other on cultural fragmentation. In both, identity has ceased to be an essence and has become a performance, molded by historical violence and the individual's resistance or incapacity to conform.

Conclusion

The Stranger by Albert Camus and The Tobacco Keeper by Ali Bader together show how the crisis of identity is universal but also shaped by history

in the contemporary age. Meursault, the outrageous man, and Raheel, the hybrid refugee, inhabit opposite ends of the twentieth century yet confront the identical existential quandary: how to live truly in realms that negate meaning.

Camus's existentialism shows how silly moral systems based on lies are, while Bader's postcolonial vision shows how painful it is to build nations on erasure. Meursault's unwillingness to lie and Raheel's need to change himself are two different ways of dealing with the same state of being in between: one is philosophical and the other is historical. Both deny fixed identity, substituting it with ephemeral consciousness.

By reading these works together, we see how alienation changes from a metaphysical problem to a historical pain. Camus asserts that the ludicrous engenders freedom, but Bader contends that hybridity results in loss. But both of them have the bravery to live in a world of uncertainty. Bhabha says, "To be unhomed is to find oneself in the margins of identity, where new meanings are born" (Location 13). Meursault and Raheel, in their alienation, exemplify this tenuous inventiveness. The conversation between The Stranger and The Tobacco Keeper shows that the modern subject, whether they are colonial or postcolonial, is doomed to live in liminality. Their narratives affirm that identity is not a fixed endpoint but an ongoing conflict between self and history, silence and memory, mortality, and existence. Camus and Bader demonstrate that the authentic state of mankind is, and possibly has perpetually been, a state of in-betweenness, through alienation and hybridity.

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