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Guests, Hosts, Strangers: *Far From Men* and Camus’ Algerians

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Abstract:
I argue that David Oelhoffen’s 2014 film *Far From Men* (*Loin des Hommes*), while departing from the letter of Camus’ 1957 story, “The Guest/Host”, does remarkable cinematic justice to its spirit. Oelhoffen’s Daru and the Arab character Mohamed, it is suggested, represent embodiments of Camus’ idealised Algerian “first men”, in the vision Camus was developing in *Le Premier Homme* at the time of his death in January 1960. Part 1 frames the film in light of Camus’ “The Guest/Host”, and Part 2 frames Camus’ story in light of Camus’ agonised struggle to come to terms with the Algerian situation. Part 3 makes the case that Oelhoffen’s departures from Camus’ original story present in cinematic form Camus’ ideal of a post-colonial, post-ethnic solidarity between people, predicated on the overcoming of all arche-ideological fantasies of untainted prelapsarian community.

Keywords: Camus; Oelhoffen; The Guest/Host; *Loin des Hommes/Far From Men*; Algerian crisis; *The First Man*.

Pour le film, […] je suis donc parti sur l’idée d’un Daru étranger. Un étranger dans son propre monde. (Oelhoffen, 2014, p. 5)

Around 1935, a native worker in the Algerian desert was arrested on trumped-up charges and dragged by rope from his village to the colonial county court. The Marxist newspaper *Secours Rouge* publicized the scandal by printing postcards showing the prisoner being led by a horse.
and gendarme. The young Albert Camus was at this time going door-to-door in the working-class neighbourhood of Algiers where he grew up, recruiting Muslim workers to the largely European Communist Party. This image, which powerfully condenses the brutalities of French colonial rule in North Africa, left a very deep impression on Camus. The following year, the aspiring author would leave the Algerian Communist Party, largely on grounds of its turning its back on the issues surrounding the French treatment of the non-European Algerians, in order to combat the rise of fascism in Europe (Aronson, 2004, pp. 25–26; Lottman, 1979, pp. 147–160). Two decades later, in 1957, the primal scene of this postcard would become the premise of Camus' short story, “L’Hôte” (“The Guest”, as it is usually translated, but “The Host” would also serve, given the polyvalence of the French), published amid the Algerian war.

In our time of the rise of the neofascistic Right in Europe and the United States, director David Oelhoffen has in his turn made Albert Camus’ “L’Hôte” the basis for the 2014 film Far From Men (Loin des Hommes). Starring Viggo Mortensen as Daru, the main European character, and Reda Kateb as Mohamed, the film’s title Far From Men itself evokes several lines in Camus’ story. These lines come at two points in “L’Hôte” where, as in a filmic tracking shot, Camus stands back from the human action to describe its arid setting:

And suddenly this snow, without warning, without the foretaste of rain. This is the way the region was, cruel to live in, even without men—who didn’t help matters either. But Daru had been born here. Everywhere else, he felt exiled. (1962a, p. 67)

Decidedly, the weather was clearing and the light was increasing over the snowy plateau. When all the snow was melted, the sun would take over again and once more would burn the fields of stone […]. Where nothing had any connection with man. (1962a, p. 70)

As Bruce Ward (1990) has highlighted, Camus’ literary writing was unusually attentive to the natural world, amongst twentieth century authors. It is an attentiveness that responds to Camus’ larger philosophical criticism of forms of modern historicism that assign significance only to what humans do, say and make:

‘Only the modern city,’ Hegel dares write, ‘offers the mind a field in which it can become aware of itself.’ We are thus living in the period of big cities. […] Our most significant works show the same bias. Landscapes are not to

1. See also Jacques Ferrandez’ (2009) adaptation of the story as a pictorial comic-strip, L’Hôte.
be found in great European literature since Dostoevsky. History explains neither the natural universe that existed before it nor the beauty that exists above it. Hence it chose to be ignorant of them. (Camus, 1987a, pp. 149–151)

“L’Hôte” itself is a story set within what one critic has called a “symbolic”, but what we might call a cinematic “décor” (Fortier, 1973). At four decisive points, Camus cuts from the unfolding human drama to describe the landscape, far from men, that frames the action (Shurgot, 2017, pp. 76–88). This is a literary feature of Camus’ story that Oelhoffen has beautifully translated in the shots of the Moroccan hinterlands (within the diegetics, the Atlas mountains in Algeria) that frame the action of Far From Men. Alice Kaplan (2015) comments that in Far From Men, the landscape where the film was shot forms a virtual third character in the film. On the one hand, the cinematography features a series of close shots of the two main characters as they flee across the hinterlands (31:00–31:30; 32:50–34:20). In these, the sound of the men’s breathing, the crunch of rocks beneath their feet, and the howling of the wind is so intrusive as to prevent all communication: an over-proximity that reaches its highest pitch when both men tumble down a rocky hillside. On the other hand, there are long framing shots that punctuate the action, either silent or accompanied by the sound of the wind (1:00–1:30; 29:45–30:15; 32:30–32:50; 34:40–35:10; 35:45–26:02; 42:20–42:33; 54:47–55:15; 55:35–41; 1:22:30–1:23:12; 1:26:40–1:26:52; 1:32:22–1:32:35). As in the ancient philosophical exercise of the “view from above” identified by Pierre Hadot that re-contextualises and diminishes human concerns, these shots show the protagonists almost like insects – passing interlopers on a virtual moonscape, scarcely marking its surface (Hadot, 1996, pp. 238–250). These framing shots, together with the sparsity of the dialogue in the film’s first 43 minutes, and the evocative soundtrack by Nick Cave, go a long way to cinematically reproducing the mood of Camus’ short story. The mood itself is a reflection of Camus’ wider sense of humans’ limited place within the natural world, a view which anticipates contemporary ecological discourses:

The human scale? […] When a mind faces landscapes whose grandeur clutches him by the throat, each movement of his mind is a scratch on his perfection. And soon, crossed out, scarred and re-scarred by so many overwhelming certainties, man ceases to be anything at all but a formless

2. For analysis of “aerial view” or “view from above” in films, see Castro (2013, pp. 118–133) and Sharpe (2013, pp. 31–45).
stain knowing only passive truths, the world's colour or its sun. Landscapes
as pure as this dry up the soul and their beauty is unbearable. (Camus,
1987b, pp. 101–102)

Nevertheless, critics have so far not celebrated Oelhoffen’s *Far From Men*
as a faithful cinematic “hosting”, as it were, of Camus’ dark short story. As
the cinematic medium demands, and as the sheer length of a 107-minute
feature film suggests, *Far From Men* is only freely based on “L’Hôte”.
Oelhoffen adds characters, scenes and subplots to Camus’ short story, so
deeply rooted in the author’s own political dilemmas as a *pied noir*
Algerian, which we will accordingly recall in the next, second section of
the paper. Oelhoffen also reshapes both Camus’ protagonist Daru and the
nameless “Arab” character, and gives his film a quite different
denouement than Camus’ original story. For these reasons, critics have
seen *Far From Men* as “loin de Camus [far from Camus]” (Nouchi, 2015).
Kaplan proposes that *Far From Men* in effect brings “The Guest” into
the twenty-first century, into a world where living together through
differences can bring hope for reconciliation”, as opposed to the historical
world and political ideas of Camus (Kaplan, 2015, para. 17).

In the third and fourth sections of the paper, we will contest
these assessments that Oelhoffen’s *Far From Men* breaks with Camus’
ethico-political vision of and for Algeria, so as to retell “L’Hôte” in film for
our times. Even if we disregard the complex theoretical questions
surrounding whether and how a film could directly ‘represent’ a literary
story, Oelhoffen avows that he consciously afforded himself “a certain
freedom from [Camus’] text” (2014, p. 3). Echoing the language of André
Bazin, Oelhoffen tells us that his aim was to maintain a fidelity to “l’esprit”
of Camus: “the essence of the letter and the spirit”, rather than the letter
alone (Bazin, 2005, p. 67). The third section (“From inside to outside:
staging the real of violence”) examines how, far from breaking with
Camus’ preoccupations in the later 1950s, Oelhoffen uses the filmic
medium to stage, in external action, the Algerian war that shapes
the denouement in “L’Hôte” but which Camus leaves tellingly in the
background. In the fourth section (“Close to the last Camus: Oelhoffen’s
first men”), we contend that Oelhoffen’s filmic representation of the
relationship between the two leads, Daru and Mahomed, faithfully
represents the last Camus’ failed ethical vision of transcultural solidarity

3. *Pied noir*, literally “black feet”, was the term used for European and Jewish immigrants
living in Algeria until their expulsion in 1962, when most returned to mainland France.
4. On the literature-film adaptation debate, see for example Elliot (2003, pp. 133–183),
McFarlane (1996), and Maciernak (2007).
in a federated Algeria. This is a vision Camus tried to defend in the pieces now translated as Algerian Chronicles (2013) (in French, Actuelles III) and was in the process of exploring in his incomplete semi-autobiographical novel, The First Man (1996). Indeed, both in its direct staging of the political violence of the Algerian situation, and in its idealised sketches of the Algerian “first men” whom the hero, Jean Cormery, comes to understand as his own next of kin, we will show that The First Man is the second, key Camusian text for understanding Oelhoffen’s film and its ethics.

**Frames: From Camus’ Algeria, via “L’Hôte”, to Oelhoffen’s Far From Men**

Any critical understanding of Far From Men, and what it sets out to achieve as a filmic hosting of Camus’ “L’Hôte”, needs to begin with an understanding of Camus’ agonised position within the unfolding Algerian conflict from the 1930s to the 1950s, and the war of independence commencing in November 1954. This was a conflict that Camus would confide affected him as others suffer pain in the lungs (2013, p. 113). Post-colonial critics writing in the wake of the 1954–62 Algerian war have however not always been kind to Camus, critiquing both Camus’ literary representations of Algerians, and his political interventions in the conflict (Haddour, 2000; O’Brien, 1970; Said, 1994). For Peter Dunwoodie, to take one influential example, Camus’ sense of his Algerian identity cultivated “a highly selective past, of European suffering, sacrifice and poverty […] interpreted as a ground for an idealised future” (2008, pp. 48–49). For Edward Said, even Camus’ sparse literary realism is symptomatic of his alleged failure to come to terms with the historical violences founding his pied noir subjectivity:

> […] informed by an extraordinarily belated, in some ways incapacitated colonial sensibility, which enacts an imperial gesture within and by means of a form, the realistic novel, well past its greatest achievements in Europe. (1994, p. 176)

As Carroll and, more recently, the author have contended, these criticisms arguably cover over the complexity of Camus’ own evolving positions on his homeland, reaching back to the mid-1930s when Camus saw the Secours Rouge postcard (Carroll, 2007; Sharpe, 2015, pp. 375–392).5

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5. See: “Camus’s most severe postcolonial critics find nothing contradictory or impossible about his situation, […] and therefore do not just criticize the political inefficacy of his position but also treat it as a defence of colonialism itself.” (Carroll, 2007, pp. 109–110).
In fact, Camus had for over two decades been the target of criticism from the French Right, before being targeted by the Front de Libération Nationale and mainland French Marxissants after November 1954 (Camus, 2013, pp. 133, 205). Despite what some critics of his work have suggested, Camus held that the 19th century beliefs that “based colonial oppression on the necessity of saving the souls of infidels” were “mystifications” as pernicious as fascist and Stalinist ideologies of the 20th century (1979, p. 209). From his support for the 1936 Blum-Violette plan granting franchise to the Arabs forwards, Camus’ question was always how the injustices of European colonialism should be opposed: whether by reform and reparations or revolution and collective expiation (Camus, 2013, pp. 27, 31, 176). Camus consistently decried “the general contempt in which the colonist holds the unhappy people of this country” (2013, p. 56). Camus could even comment in 1946 to an Algerian audience that:

[…] I doubt that any amongst you assembled here could ever become this strange animal, unstable and excessive [démesuré], avid to know and taste all, living off his contradictions and mad for an impossible knowledge that we call a European. (2006, p. 689)

Camus’ first journalistic writings on Algeria were published in June-July 1939. In a series of articles in Alger républicain on the appalling destitution of the Berbers in the Kabylia region, Camus proposed urgent political and economic reforms (2013, pp. 46–64). In 1945, after the Sétif massacres on V-E-day (involving brutal French actions against Algerians, duly raised in Far From Men as a key grievance underlying the revolt [58:40]), Camus made a plea in Combat to the paper’s French readers to grant dignity and real concessions to the non-European populations in Algeria. Camus had by this time come to endorse Ferhat Abbas’s “Manifesto” calling for an Algerian constitution guaranteeing immediate and effective political participation and legal equality for Muslims (Camus, 2013, pp. 128–129). (Abbas was imprisoned by the French for making these proposals). In 1955–56, a decade later, Camus wrote a last series of articles addressed to the now-warring parties, appealing to each to acknowledge “the reasons of the adversary” (2013, p. 133; see also pp. 133–137). However, in 1956, Camus’ attempt to broker a “civilian peace” in Algiers itself nearly caused a riot, with colonial Ultras throwing bricks through the windows (Parker, 1966, pp. 155–157; Zaretsky, 2013, pp. 82–83). By the time Camus came in 1958 to write the “Preface” for his Actuelles spanning two decades on the Algerian situation, he was aware that the work would “satisfy no one, and I know in advance how it will be received on both sides” (2013, p. 23). At the close of this “Preface”,

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Camus in effect signs off in words which his January 1960 death made prophetic: “this is my testimony, and I shall have nothing more to say” (2013, p. 35).

Camus’ 1957 collection *L’Exil et Royaume*, and the story “L’Hôte” within it that Oelhoffen has used as his primary source text for *Far From Men*, are impossible to understand without an awareness of Camus’ unfolding Algerian agony. As in *Far From Men*, the main character in “L’Hôte”, Daru, is a reclusive school teacher living in isolation on the plateau beneath the Atlas Mountains. Daru has been tasked by the French regime with bringing education to Arab children and grain to their families (Camus, 1962a, pp. 66–67). As the story begins with the arrival of his unwanted “guest”, Daru has the four French rivers scribbled on the blackboard. The Gendarme Balducci asks Daru to host the nameless “Arab”, led up the plateau by horse and rope. He is to take the man the next day to Tinguit to face French justice: “[a] family squabble, I think one owed the other grain, it seems. It’s not all clear. In short, he killed his cousin with a billhook. You know, like a sheep, kreezk!” (Camus, 1962a, p. 70). As things stand, the prisoner is now doubly an outlaw: on the one hand from his own community, and on the other, a potential rebel in the eyes of the colonial authorities (Camus, 1962a, p. 70). There could be few more poignant condensations of the conflict that was coming to a head in 1953, the year in which “L’Hôte” is set. As David Carroll comments in *Camus the Algerian*:

> Colonialism reverses the situation of host and guest, because those who should in theory be at home in their homeland and in the position of hosts offering or refusing to strangers are precisely those who are treated as strangers in a homeland no longer theirs. They are thus at the mercy of their foreign hosts, the occupiers and usurpers of their homeland. (2007, p. 74)

In Camus’s story, “the Arab” guest-host-hostage is unnamed. Camus does not tell us why he did what he did, nor anything much about him:

> The Arab looked away.  
> “He ran away. I ran after him.”  
> He raised his eyes to Daru again and they were full of a sort of woeful interrogation. “Now what will they do to me?”

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6. “Is he against us?”, Daru asks Balducci, who replies: “I don’t think so. But you never can be sure” (Camus, 1962a, p. 70).
“Are you afraid?”
He stiffened, turning his eyes away.
“Are you sorry?”
The Arab stared at him open-mouthed. Obviously, he did not understand.
(1962a, p. 75)

Daru hosts the Arab out of a sense of honour, like Oelhoffen’s Daru in *Far From Men*: “he was entrusted to me” (56:40). Initially, he has no sympathy for this guest-hostage. When Daru considers the man’s crime, Camus tells us, Daru “felt a sudden wrath against the man, against all men with their rotten spite, their tireless hates, their blood lust” (1962a, p. 70). It is the same sentiment that moves Jean Cormery’s father in Camus’ semi-autobiographical *The First Man*, when Cormery-père comes upon a dead comrade in the Moroccan war with his throat slit and his severed genitals stuffed in his mouth:

“A man doesn’t do that,” [he exclaimed] […] “There are Frenchman who do it”, said Levesque. “Then they too aren’t men.” And suddenly he burst out: “A filthy race! What a race! All of them, all of them […]” (Camus, 1996, pp. 51–52)

Three times in “L’Hoˆte”, Daru denies that the affair is any of his business, when Balducci brings him his uncanny guest. When for a moment Daru hears no noise from his hostage, he is “amazed at the unmixed joy he derived from the mere thought that the Arab might have fled and that he would be alone with no decision to make” (Camus, 1962a, p. 74). Impossibly, in this time of gathering political conflict, Daru wants only to be left alone:

He thought of Balducci. He had hurt him, for he had sent him off in a way as if he didn’t want to be associated with him. He could still hear the gendarme’s farewell and, without knowing why, he felt strangely empty and vulnerable […] That man’s stupid crime revolted him, but to hand him over was contrary to honour. Merely thinking of it made him smart with humiliation. And he cursed at one and the same time his own people who had sent him this Arab and the Arab too who had dared to kill and not managed to get away. (Camus, 1962a, p. 79)

Nevertheless, Daru shows the man a grudging hospitality. He kneels to untie him, breaks bread with him, and speaks a little Arabic:

“Eat,” he said. The Arab took a piece of the cake, lifted it eagerly to his mouth, and stopped short.
“And you?” he asked.
“After you. I’ll eat too.”
The thick lips opened slightly. The Arab hesitated, then bit into the cake
determinedly.
The meal over, the Arab looked at the schoolmaster. “Are you the judge?”
“No, I’m simply keeping you until tomorrow.”
“Why do you eat with me?”
“I’m hungry.” (Camus, 1962a, pp. 74–75; see also Shurgot, 2016, p. 79)

In seeming response to Daru’s hospitality, “the Arab” asks Daru to “come
with us” (Camus, 1962a, p. 76). He seems to mean to Tinguit. Yet the first
person plural leaves it open as to whether this is an invitation to join the
Algerians’ struggle, as the Front de Libération Nationale (FLN) Maquis,
Slimane, directly asks Daru in Far From Men (58:50–59:10; see Shurgot,
2016, p. 83). However, in the morning Daru takes the man towards
Tinguit. The culmination of the action comes when the two men reach the
crossroads above Tinguit:

Daru surveyed the two directions. There was nothing but the sky on the
horizon. Not a man could be seen. He turned toward the Arab, who was
looking at him blankly. Daru held out the package to him. “Take it,” he
said. “There are dates, bread, and sugar. You can hold out for two days.
Here are a thousand francs too.” The Arab took the package and the money
but kept his full hands at chest level as if he didn’t know what to do with
what was being given him. “Now look,” the schoolmaster said as he pointed
in the direction of the east, “there’s the way to Tinguit. You have a two-hour
walk. At Tinguit you’ll find the administration and the police. They are
expecting you” […] [Then] Daru took his elbow and turned him rather
roughly toward the South. At the foot of the height on which they stood
could be seen a faint path. “That’s the trail across the plateau. In a day’s
walk from here you’ll find pasturelands and the first nomads. They’ll take
you in and shelter you according to their law”. (Camus, 1962a, pp. 80–81)

Then, in a gesture of profound ambivalence, Daru leaves his guest-hostage
free to choose for himself:

[Daru] turned his back on him, took two long steps in the direction of the
school, looking hesitantly at the motionless Arab and started off again. For a
few minutes he heard nothing but his own steps resounding on the cold
ground […] He had already gone some distance when he again stopped and
looked. There was no longer anyone on the hill […] And in that slight haze
Daru with heavy heart made out the Arab walking slowly on the road to
prison. (Camus, 1962a, p. 82)

Camus’ sombre story has a final twist in store for the reader, nevertheless.
Balducci had ironically commented to Daru that after he had performed
his duty of being this “Arab” other’s keeper: “You’ll come back to your pupils and your comfortable life” (Camus, 1962a, p. 70). Yet unbeknownst to Daru, the unfolding drama of his ambivalent hospitality to “the Arab”, if not his offer of freedom to the man, has been watched by unfriendly eyes: eyes which conceive of this European not as a guest in their homeland, but an occupier. When Daru returns to the school:

> Behind him on the blackboard among the winding French rivers sprawled the clumsily chalked-up words he had just read. “You handed over our brother. You will pay for this.” Daru looked at the sky, the plateau and beyond the invisible lands stretching all the way to the sea. In this vast landscape he had loved so much, he was alone. (Camus, 1962a, p. 82)

There is arguably a great deal of Camus in this Daru: caught between hospitality and betrayal, Algerians who despise him as an intruder and a colonial system whose injustices he resents. Reviled equally by the colonial Right for his longstanding defence of Algerian rights, and by independence fighters for failing to support complete French withdrawal from Algeria, the former hero of the resistance press after November 1954 found himself in “a political no-man’s land” (Carroll, 2007, p. 108; Zaretsky, 2012, p. 121). The character Slimane in Oelhoffen’s Far From Men puts things to the Daru of the film in a way which equally describes Camus, after November 1954: “you’re on the wrong side this time” (58:45).

“I had to add a lot”, David Oelhoffen has admitted about his transformation of “L’Hôte” into his full-length feature film (2014). Far From Men is closer to what Gregory Wagner calls an “analogous” adaptation than a mere “transposition” – although perhaps the context here suggests that a “hosting” of Camus might be the best metaphor here (Wagner, 1975, pp. 221–231). However that may be, whereas Camus’ story spans one night and two days, the film narrates three days and two nights. As we commented above, entire sequences, dialogues and characters are added. Rather than making their way to the crossroads unmolested and silently watched by the FLN, in the film Daru and his guest-hostage are both captured, first by Algerian independence fighters, and then by French expeditionary force fighting against the rebels, with orders to “take no hostages”. Daru, about whom Camus tells us very little beyond the most basic information, is given by Oelhoffen a biography, a marriage, a military past, and an Algerian family history which clearly echoes Camus’ own, and to which we will return in due course (Oelhoffen, 2014, p. 3).
More importantly, Oelhoffen’s “Arab” has a name, whereas in “L’Hôte” Daru’s guest-hostage remains nameless, like the man Meursault shoots and is condemned for killing in The Outsider (L’Étranger). In terms of Camus’ post-colonial reception, this difference between original story and host film is freighted with a double significance. Firstly, it was Connor Cruise O’Brien who famously contended that by leaving his “Arab” characters in “L’Hôte” and L’Étranger nameless, Camus perpetuated colonial violence in literary form, as if they were “not quite men [sic.] […] The reader [of The Outsider] does not quite feel that Meursault has killed a man. He has killed an Arab” (O’Brien, 1970, pp. 25–26). Secondly, Oelhoffen’s “Arab” in Far From Men is named Mohamed (47:00). The name shared by the prophet immediately suggests this character’s symbolic status in Oelhoffen’s vision, standing for the Muslim Other per se, and imbricating the film in France and the West’s contemporary malaises (see Oelhoffen, 2014, p. 3).

Daru at the start of Far From Men, like Camus’ prototype, is resentful of the imposition his hostage represents. He accuses the Algerian of having neither honour nor courage, exactly projecting his own sense of indecision and impotence (37:25–37:48). Yet the abortive communication between the two in Camus’ story is transformed in Oelhoffen’s film into a genuine dialogue. It is on the second night, as the two men shelter against the elements, that we learn that this “Arab” has the name Mohamed. This scene of interpellation comes almost exactly half-way through the film (47:00–47:10). It artfully marks the reversal of the roles of guest and host between the two men that unfolds throughout the course of the film.

Camus does not tell us why his nameless “Arab” chooses to submit to French judgment at his story’s end –as little as he tells us about the motives for the initial crime. In Far From Men, Mohamed’s motives are explained to his host in the pivotal middle scene (43:20–48:20). Having killed his cousin for the sake of grain to feed his family, but without the ability to pay his cousins’ family blood money, tribal lex talionis demands that these cousins must kill Mohamed: “It’s the Law. You cannot escape it” (45:45). It is Mohamed’s cousins who pursue the two fugitives throughout the first half of the film, seeking the blood that is theirs by right. Mohamed tells Daru that he neither wants to be killed, nor for his little brothers to become honour-bound to have to kill in return. However, if the French police take him into custody and kill him, the requirements of the Law will be met. His brothers will be spared. “You planned it all,” Daru reflects appreciatively (46:45). Oelhoffen’s Mohamed has both courage and honour, as well as intelligence.

From this moment forwards, the power dynamic reverses between the two men. In the first half of the film, Oelhoffen’s Daru is what Camus’ Daru remains throughout the whole of “L’Hôte”: a begrudging bailiff or
host. It is he who asks all the questions, slowly learning about his charge’s religion, history, customs and character. This process culminates in his learning the “why” of Mohamed’s crime, in the same pivotal dialogue in which he also learns Mohamed’s name (43:20–48:20). Far From Men’s second half, by contrast, opens with Mohamed feeding Daru green berouaga (the leaves of these branched asphodels are “like bread […] but bitter” [49–20–50:10]), as Daru had fed Mohamed in the beginning. In the scenes that follow, it is Mohamed who initially protects Daru when the two are taken hostage by the FLN. Increasingly, Mohamed asks all the questions. Daru becomes the one called to account for himself. Slowly we learn, with Mohamed, of Daru’s past: his marriage, his upbringing at Berzina. “The two men explain themselves, and finally understand each other, help each other […]” (Oelhoffen, 2014, p. 7).

Oelhoffen’s ending then changes Camus’ in several decisive ways. At the crossroads above Tinguit, there is a symmetrical exchange of gifts, in contrast to Daru alone giving the Arab food, advice and money. In Far From Men, Mohamed first gives Daru a coin he found when he was eight years old: a deeply personal gift (1:21:50–1:22:30). Daru urges Mohamed to “not surrender”, and promises Mohamed that he will tell his people that Mohamed went to Tinguit where he was killed, thereby ending the cycle of revenge. Mohamed for the first time calls his friend “Daru”. Daru then cites the Koran back to him in Arabic: “Trust in the Creator. He will be there for you. Give to Him. He will give to you. Ask Him. He will provide” (1:24: 50–1:25–32). And when Daru turns around, in Far From Men, he sees Mohamed making his way South, away from colonial judgment (1:26:10–1:26:51).

No sinister message from the FLN awaits Daru on the blackboard when he returns to his isolated schoolhouse. In a final classroom scene, the names of the rivers of France on the blackboard at the start of the film have given place to a map of Algeria: “On habite dans l’Atlas” is double-underlined. Instead of fleeing the FLN, as “L’Hoˆte” implies, Far From Men’s Daru voluntarily chooses to leave this homeland. The last action of the film depicts him movingly, delivering his last lesson on the plateau, then bidding the children farewell.

From Inside to Outside: Staging the real of Violence

“Les questionnements de cinéma ont souvent consisté à s’éloigner de la lettre et à se rapprocher de l’esprit de ce que Camus a écrit par ailleurs.” (Oelhoffen, 2014, p. 4)

We can see then why some critics have questioned the fidelity of Oelhoffen’s film to Camus, and wondered whether Far From Men
represents a faithful cinematic hosting of the Nobel-Prize winning author's work. Isn't *Far From Men* rather a political rewriting of the latter's sombre 1953 story, aiming to preach a salutary message for "a world where living together through differences can bring hope for reconciliation" (Kaplan, 2015)? Doesn't *Far From Men* whitewash both Camus’ story’s ambivalences and the violent realities of colonialism, with which Camus himself never came to terms? Whereas the unnerving power of "L'Hôte" lies in its ambiguities and unsaid connotations, doesn't Oelhoffen’s *Far From Men* iron out these ambiguities, and thereby rob his cinematic adaptation of the original's power? In short, whereas Camus delivers us an existentialist tragedy, of men caught up in insuperable historical forces that drive them towards forms of isolation and exile, isn't Oelhoffen presenting his 21st century viewers with an unambiguous morality tale?

We want now to argue that things are not quite so simple, and that Oelhoffen has not strayed as far from Camus as the preceding queries, and some of Oelhoffen's critics have suggested. *Far From Men* does not shy away from the complex historical forces facing the main characters in Camus’ 1957 story. Yet in Camus, these complexities play themselves out silently and almost exclusively within Daru’s experience and reflections. By contrast, Oelhoffen uses the filmic medium to more directly stage the historical and political forces to which Daru and Mohamed are subject in “L'Hôte”, in the subplots that the director has added to *Far From Men*.

As Oelhoffen has commented of his situation, considering how to adapt Camus’ short story into cinema:

> The first questions I asked myself turned around the moral conflict evoked in this story, and its representation: how to transform with the mechanisms of cinema this internal moral conflict into an external conflict, of violence in this case, and how to approach this violence? These are problems of cinema, not philosophical problems. (2014, p. 3)

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7. Consider that, whereas Camus’ “Arab” asks of Daru warily, near the beginning of “L'Hôte”, “are you the judge?”, Oelhoffen's Daru warns Mohamed from near the start: “do you really understand? They will judge you” (26:15–26:30). Again: whereas we only discover at the very end of Camus’ story that Daru wishes “the Arab” to choose freedom, in *Far From Men* he is already telling Mohamed on the second night to “give Tinguit a rest” (43:30). Over a line of dead bodies of FLN fighters, Oelhoffen's Daru again appeals to his companion: “You want this to happen to you? […] You're alive!” (1:11:38–1:12:20).

8. On Camus’ distinction between tragedies, morally complex confrontations of partially legitimate and conflicting perspectives, and morality tales, see Camus (1987d).
Camus’ story is related through Daru’s standpoint. Much of the text unfolds an inner monologue not readily reproducible on screen, and in any case insufficient to populate an entire feature film. Readers then only see at the very end of “L’Hôte” to what extent Daru has always been an unwelcome guest in a warzone, who had falsely supposed himself at home (Camus, 1962a, p. 81). The ominous line scribbled on Daru’s blackboard (“You handed over our brother […]”) inscribes in a single, visceral instant all the historical violences that have framed the unfolding drama, and which render Daru ultimately no less of an exile or fugitive than the man he has hosted (Camus, 1962a, p. 82). Hitherto, these violences have at most been hinted at, when Balducci tells Daru near the start: “things are brewing, it appears. There’s talk of a forthcoming revolt. We are mobilised, in a way” (Camus, 1962a, p. 69).

In Far From Men, by contrast, what we might by following Frederic Jameson (1982) call this historical unconscious that rumbles away darkly beneath the surface of Camus’ “L’Hôte” is in effect rendered openly manifest. The revolt has begun, and the characters stumble into its no-man’s-land, becoming hostages or refugees of both sides. Here, as in other features Oelhoffen adds to “L’Hôte”, the closer comparison in the later Camus’ oeuvre is The First Man. In this incomplete novel, in contrast to “L’Hôte”, the main character Cormery’s homecoming to Algiers is shaken, at its very inception, by the real of historical violence:

The explosion resounded at the very moment Lucie Cormery came back to the room. It sounded very close, enormous, as if it would never stop reverberating. It seemed that they had long since stopped hearing it, but the bulb in the dining-room was still shaking behind the glass shell. His mother had recoiled to the back of the room, pale, her dark eyes full of a fear she could not control, and she was unsteady on her feet. ‘It’s here. It’s here,’ she was saying [...] (Camus, 1996, p. 58)

The new diegetic content that Oelhoffen brings to the Camus comes almost wholly in the film’s second half. Far From Men gives us, in particular, one extended scene of open battle, unlike anything anywhere in Camus (1:05:10–1:06:50). The Frenchmen’s victory sees the fugitives, Daru and Mohamed, pass from the custody of the Algerian forces into that of the colonial forces. In telling contrast to the developing friendship between Daru and his hostage, the battle is followed by the French soldiers’ execution of their unarmed hostages (1:07:15–1:07:20). Daru’s idealistic protest – “That’s a war crime!” (1:10:00) – calls to mind the terms of Camus’ 1956 call for a moratorium against the killing of civilians. It likewise falls on deaf ears.
The dialogue Oelhoffen has written for Daru and Slimane, the Maquis of the FLN militants who take Daru and Mohamed hostages on the second morning, expresses poignantly the ethical ambiguities that beset the characters in *Far From Men* – differently, but no less than Daru or “the Arab” in “L’Hôte” (57:35–59:35). Slimane turns out to be an old war comrade of Daru in the struggle against the Nazi occupiers a decade ago. It is a struggle in which Oelhoffen’s Daru appears to have acted with heroism, like the historical Camus in France. As the two old friends talk, one of Slimane’s soldiers addresses the now-captive Daru tenderly as “my commander” (58:10), reflecting their now-defunct past allegiance, and condensing poignantly how much has changed. The climax of the conversation between the two old friends comes when Slimane advises Daru grimly: “we’re throwing you out”. To this, Daru replies indignantly: “You! I was born 20 kilometres away. My parents are buried here” (59:00–59:15).

The entire second half of *Far From Men* thus makes every bit as clear as Camus’ ending in “L’Hôte”, in its different medium, how ethics and politics, friendship and group allegiances were being forced apart in Algeria by 1953. Personal friendship and individual culpability increasingly no longer signify in the larger historical dialectic of friend and enemy, violent actions and reprisals staged in the second half of *Far From Men*. As Slimane comments grimly: “it’s war. You have to choose a side […] Daru, I love you like a brother. But if I have to kill you tomorrow, I will” (59:05–59:35). It is certainly then true, as Kaplan (2015) argues, that Oelhoffen wanted in *Far From Men* to present an ethical ideal of inter-cultural solidarity in his Daru and Mohamed, a relationship to whose Camusian credentials we will turn presently. But it is a solidarity set against a background of ethical complexity and political violence no less real than those which frame Camus’ “L’Hôte”. *Far From Men* is no whitewash of Camus or of his Algeria, any more than it is far from the last Camus’ vision of the warring peoples of his homeland.

Close to the last Camus: Oelhoffen’s first men
How then should we interpret *Far From Men’s* representation of the growing solidarity between Daru and Mohamed, in relation to Albert Camus’ position on Algeria in the last years of his life? A critical understanding of these questions, we want to claim, needs to place *Far From Men* in relation not simply to “L’Hôte”, which was not Camus’ last word on this historical conflict. It must also consider Camus’ political writings spanning three decades on Algeria which we epitomised above, as well as the incomplete novel *The First Man* on which Camus was working when he died. Oelhoffen’s attempt to remain faithful to Camus’ esprit sees
him leaving the letter of “L’Hoˆte” and departing onto “new terrain”, as we have now detailed (Oelhoffen, 2014, p. 4). But to the extent that Far From Men enacts this departure, the equality it depicts between his Daru and Mohamed (Oelhoffen 2014, p. 4), gives cinematic form to something very like the last Camus’ vision of Algerian “first men”. These are the peoples whom Jean Cormery, Camus’ alter ego in The First Man, comes unwittingly to realise are his only genuine kin, when he returns home after over a decade in Europe: “[t]he poor and ignorant Berber peasant. The settler. The soldier. The white with no land. He loves them, these people […]” (Camus, 1996, p. 255).

Camus’ notes for The First Man invoke these unlikely figures in an extraordinary outpouring which also gives voice to his increasingly hopeless hopes for his homeland:

Give back the land, the land that belongs to no one. Give back the land that is neither to be sold nor to be bought […]. Give back the land to the poor, to those who have nothing and who are so poor that they never desired to have and to possess, to those in this land who are like her [Cormery/Camus’ mother], the immense herd of the wretched, mostly Arab and a few French who live and survive here through stubbornness and endurance, with the only pride that is worth anything in the world, that of the poor, give them the land as one gives what is sacred to those who are sacred. (Camus, 1996, p. 255)

We commented above on how Camus’ post-colonial critics have seen in such Camusian depictions of the Algerians so many expressions of pro-colonial ideology (Dunwoodie, 2008; Haddour, 2000). However, this kind of reading of the last Camus arguably misses the stakes of his idiosyncratic, failed “Algerianism”, if that could be the word. Such understandings of Camus also close the door to seeing Far From Men’s deep proximity to Camus’ final ethico-political vision. For one thing, as the cited passage underscores, the “first men” to whom Camus proposes to “give back the land” are children of penia, not póros: dispossession, not rootedness or entitlement. “For me honour in the world is found among the oppressed, not those who hold power, and it is from that alone that dishonour arises […],” another note for The First Man reads (Camus, 1996, p. 230). Secondly, neither can these “wretched” of “the land” claim any divine or destined sanction for their communities and humble possessions. Another Camusian note reads, in the first person plural: “we were children without God or father […] we lived without legitimacy – Pride” (Camus, 1996, p. 256; see also pp. 148, 152).

As Camus’ Daru discovers at the end of “L’Hoˆte”, so his Jean Cormery in The First Man learns when he returns home to Algeria that he does not
simply belong, in any untroubled way, in this divided country sparking into conflagration. Cormery fails to find anything substantial at all about his father from those who must have known the man. It is almost as if this “first man” had never been. Camus’ Algeria, as it is depicted in *The First Man*, is a place of forgetting: where the poor do not have the means to enshrine their memories in physical keepsakes and even the Council buildings Cormery will visit in search of his father’s name keep no records of births and deaths (Camus, 1996, pp. 62–63, 213, 251; Dunwoodie, 1997, pp. 51–52). Through the childhood memories that surge up within Cormery in place of the absent father, he instead becomes increasingly aware of himself as “tossed, as if he were the first inhabitant” into the midst of “a world where the law of the jungle still prevailed, where justice was intended to punish without mercy what custom had failed to prevent […]” (Camus, 1996, p. 216). This is far from the triumphalist ideology of the ‘civilizing’ colonizers (Camus, 2013, p. 195; see Said, 1994, pp. 178–180).

As we might say, the last Camus’ Algeria is a ‘place that is no place’. It is a land of colliding cultures, half-breeds, outcasts and exiles. It is a nation whose majestic, inhuman surrounds make it forever inhospitable to any particular people’s claims to autochthonous beginnings and belonging. If neither Camus’ Daru nor “the Arab” mattered in this denuding Algerian landscape, Camus tells us in “L’Hôte” that “outside of this desert neither of them, Daru knew, could have really lived” (1962a, p. 74). This is a sentiment Oelhoffen’s Daru echoes to Slimane in *Far From Men* (59:15). But if both Camus’ and Oelhoffen’s Darus feel at home in Algeria’s “wastelands peopled only by stones” (Camus, 1962a, p. 73), the desert in Camus’ symbolic geography also signifies inhumanity: a kind of ‘zero degree’ of history and politics, as far from men and their endless strifes as can be imagined (Camus, 1987c, pp. 109–133; Camus, 1987e, pp. 73–79).

“L’Hôte”’s setting, vividly reproduced on film by Oelhoffen’s *Far From Men*, is a waterless expanse of searing days and bitterly cold nights. Within it, human settlements come and go, leaving no memorial behind them, like the abandoned settlements between which Daru and Mohamed trudge in torrential rain in *Far From Men* (41:20–43:05). “No one in this desert, all men, neither he nor his guest, mattered”, Camus’s narration in “L’Hôte” comments (1962a, pp. 73–74). And in *The First Man*, there is this characterisation of the Algerian desert, so redolent of Oelhoffen’s cinematography:

The history of men, that history that kept on plodding across one of its oldest territories, while leaving so few traces on it, was evaporating under a constant sun with the memory of those who made it, reduced to paroxysms of violence and murder, to blazes of hatred, to torrents of blood, quickly
swollen and quickly dried up, like the seasonal rains of the country […] (Camus, 1996, p. 151; see also Rey, 2009, p. 127)

What solidarity could possibly arise in such an environment, and who could be its rightful claimants? This was the last Camus’ ethico-political question about his homeland. It would for him have to be a solidarity allergic to all claims to primordial, exclusive belonging or autochthony; the solidarity of peoples in the interstices between religions, cultures, and races, and their competing claims to absolute belonging. It would be a solidarity of people like Jean Cormery, whose familial memories barely span two generations; or a solidarity like that to which Camus’ Daru unwittingly awakens, as the Arab sleeps beside him in “L’Hôte”:

A sort of brotherhood he knew well but refused to accept in the present circumstances. Men who share the same rooms, soldiers or prisoners, develop a strange alliance as if, having cast off their armour with their clothing, they fraternized every evening, over and above their differences, in the ancient community of dream and fatigue […] (Camus, 1962a, p. 77)

Camus’ “Prière D’Insérer” of 1957 to Exile and the Kingdom thus explains that the “royaume” his title asks readers to envisage is “a certain free and naked life which we have to recover, if we are to be reborn” (2008b, p. 123). But he adds that “exile in its own manner shows the way to this kingdom, so long as we know how to refuse at the same time servitude and possession” (Camus, 2008b, p. 123). A draft for “L’Hôte”, in this vein, includes a revealing vision of Daru and “the Arab” as two exiles trudging across the Algerian landscape, alone with these inhuman surrounds and each other:

Something united them, Daru and this Arab, across time and space always pushing them forwards; a solidarity of men across the generations, under the same vast sky, isolated on their immense island between the sand and the water, similar to their country, different from the rest of the world, accomplices and brothers even when they killed each other […] (Camus, 2008a, p. 122)

One could plausibly suppose that Oelhoffen’s cinematic depiction of Daru and Mohamed in Far From Men, au bord du plateau, was modelled as much on this vignette as on the published version of “L’Hôte”. Here already in Camus’ sketches, we find an almost cinematic vision of the two men, thrown together by circumstance, opposed by upbringing, history, religion and race. Yet they are united as they trudge between the representatives of rival claimants to exclusive control of Algeria. Indeed,
they are united because they are thus thrown together, accomplices in a precarious royaume of exile.

In a second, decisive moment of anagnorisis in Oelhoffen’s Far From Men, when we learn from whence his Daru comes, it is hence deeply telling that Oelhoffen makes him someone ‘in between’ clashing civilizations, as much Camus himself (or Jean Cormery) as Camus’ Daru in “L’Hôte”. Camus was a French pied noir with Spanish blood on his mother’s side: the child of a family without heritage or established name, outsiders both in mainland France and in their Algerian homeland. Just so, Oelhoffen’s Daru’s parents were Spanish caracoles, escargots who carried their livelihoods on their backs and worked the halfah harvest: “for the French, we were Arabs; now for the Arabs, we are French […]” (1:13:50–1:14:55). Oelhoffen tells us that he started writing Far From Men with the idea of his Daru as “a stranger in his own world” (2014, p. 5). Evoking a different Camusian title, he might equally have said that he ended with the idea of his Daru and his Mohamed as Camusian first men: “not men on the wane as they shout in the newspapers, but men of a different and undefined dawn” (Camus, 1996, p. 256).

**On Hosting Camus Today**

It would be easy to see Camus’ last vision of a kingdom populated by such solidary strangers as Far From Men depicts as an ideological rationalisation of the French-Algerian author’s awareness that the Algeria of his childhood was soon to perish: “at the same time it [The First Man] should be the history of the end of a world” (Camus, 1994, p. 252). It is difficult to see how Camus’ nostalgic celebrations of this world of the dispossessed could have animated any program for viable political community: “especially once armed insurrection, terrorism, severe military repression, deportations, and the systematic torturing of prisoners had begun” (Carroll, 1997, p. 547). It is telling that the only possibility of lasting sanctuary offered to either Daru or “the Arab” in “L’Hôte” lies beyond the horizon. Such hospitality comes from “nomads” about whom we learn nothing, except that they will offer an unconditional welcome to the fugitive, of a kind foreclosed to either him or Daru in historical Algeria (Camus, 1962a, p. 81).

Two years after Camus’ death in January 1960, the Evian Accords brought the end of the Algerian war. What followed was nothing like the kind of multi-cultural, federal solution coupled with French reparations that Camus hoped and advocated for as late as 1958 (2013, pp. 175–184). Instead came the expropriation of the over one million pied noirs: both the wealthy, bigoted colons whom Camus had opposed “for twenty years, first in Algiers itself, and later in France, at a time when the public
[...] systematically ignored Algerian realities” (2013, pp. 133, 205), and the humble people he affectionately depicts in *The First Man* and elsewhere. The question raised by David Oelhoffen’s *Far From Men* and its cinematic depiction of the “Camusian” friendship between Daru and Mohamed, however, is whether Camus’ last, failed vision for his divided homeland harbors a dignity and pertinence worth recalling today. Indeed, Oelhoffen’s film prompts us to ask whether Camus’ kind of perspective on the way forward for his embattled homeland might proffer orientation for our time, wherein the violent interdependence between European and Muslim peoples that Camus grew up amidst has become a much wider reality. “There is a community of hope”, Camus could claim in his appeal in Algiers for a Civilian Truce in January 1956, in another passage it is possible to suppose was close to Oelhoffen’s thoughts as he composed *Far From Men*:

> Sharing the land are a million Frenchman who have been settled here for more than a century, millions of Muslims, both Arab and Berber, who have been here for many centuries, and any number of strong and vibrant religious communities. These people must live together where history has placed them, at a crossroads of commerce and civilisation [...] Our differences should then help us rather than drive us apart. In this as in other things, I for one believe only in differences, not uniformity, because differences are the roots without which the tree of liberty withers and the sap of liberty and creation dries up. (Camus, 2009, p. 153)

In many ways, the Algerian war that preoccupied Camus’ last decade has become a harbinger of much of recent history: from the “war on terror” to the rise of nativist parties who play upon fears of the Islamic guest/stranger/other, who remain as unwelcome in many parts of today’s Eurosphere as Mohamed is at first for Daru in *Far From Men*. In the contemporary world, thinkers on the Right will underline, it is not a question of the struggle for independence of Muslim-majority nations in their own historical homelands. It is a question of hosting emigrants from these homelands in Europeans’ nation-states. Yet all the while, as in 1950s Algeria, the whole situation is continually aggravated by the West’s continuing military presence in the Middle East: a presence used by Islamists to justify terrorist violence directed against civilians in France and elsewhere. On each side, as in the 1950s, inflammatory rhetoric depicts the Other as wholly alien, and wholly responsible for the conflict. And so, as in Camus’ 1950s, the warring parties remain united in an “infernal dialectic” or “casuistry of blood” (Camus, 2013, pp. 28, 153) which looks set to escalate from reprisal to reprisal, absent some
mediating vision like that proffered to viewers in Daru and Mohamed’s friendship in *Far From Men*.

Camus’ and Oelhoffen’s vision of what such a genuinely post-secular solidarity might look like in these surrounds, as in the Algeria of the 1950s, is however in no way saccharine or simplistic, although it is generous and cosmopolitan. In all likelihood, as in the Algeria of the 1950s, it asks too much, not too little. The precondition for such peaceable multi-cultural fraternity, the last Camus and *Far From Men* suggest, will lie in the renunciation by all parties of claims to exclusive belonging in a given place, or on the grounds of some absolute secular or transcendent ideology. We must all become, or admit that we have become, like Oelhoffen’s Daru and his Mohamed. This is the “exile” of Camus’ *“exile and the kingdom”*. At issue is a kind of *kenōsis* of our cultures of the siren-songs to religious and national Greatness that are today resounding loudly again: a *kenōsis* for which Camus saw the inhuman sublimity of the Algerian desert, showcased so beautifully by *Far From Men*, as an abiding symbol and setting.

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