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Epistemological moor-ing. Re-positioning Foucault, Bourdieu and Derrida theory to its Northern African origins

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ABSTRACT
The question of why the works of Michel Foucault, Pierre Bourdieu and Jacques Derrida are often attributed to France by HE lecturers and students when the origins or developments of their key ideas come from northern Africa is examined from critical and personal standpoints. The article joins the call for the decolonisation of the HE curriculum and describes how the theory of these oft-cited thinkers and philosophers comes ‘out of Africa’ through an examination of their experiences in the Moorish regions of Tunisia and Algeria. Reasons for the attribution of the ideas to France include Eurocentrism, Wikipedisation of theory and the mythologisation of France. The article combines theoretical debate with personal reflection on what it means to be Algerian and witness a homeland disenfranchised in teaching and learning at HE. It also provides a way of contributing to the decolonisation of HE syllabuses through accurate attribution of knowledge.

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Introduction
Foucault was, of course, French. This is made very clear in the introduction to Aubrey and Riley’s (2017) chapter on Foucault: ‘Michel Foucault … one of the most influential French philosophers … Published in French … born in Poitiers, France … Following the German invasion of France’ (93–94). It is also clear to our students: on asking a question to a class, ‘What do you know about Foucault?’ we received the (rather depressing) answer, ‘He was French’. In an undergraduate assignment in Education Studies set by one of the authors where Foucault’s work was central to the topic, out of 26 students, 16 responses mentioned France/French. In an assignment for an undergraduate module set by one of the authors on Public Relations which also used Foucault’s theory out of 58 essays, 31 mentioned France/French. Eribon’s (1991) biography of Foucault mentions France/French 159 times. His Frenchness is also known to HE lecturers; while observing an Education Studies lecture in November 2018 (and quietly working on this article) we heard the first words: ‘What do we know about Michel Foucault? He was French, obviously’. Frustrations about foregrounded Frenchness, personal experience of Algeria and epistemological concerns about the attribution of knowledge to a birthplace prompted us to write this article. It feels frustrating to us, not because we dispute the French nationality of Foucault,
but because in HE lectures and subsequently essays there is no or little reference to where the formative ideas were first created but many mentions of France. This even happens when a so-called ‘French thinker’ was born in Algeria, as in the case of Jacques Derrida. In this paper, we investigate the origin of the work of three key thinkers which affect arts, humanities and social science studies today and consider the reasons why it has been appropriated into the canon of French theory. We are interested in ‘epistemological mooring’ (see Goswami 2013) – returning the ideas to the area they were formed in. Given that this is in the Moorish or Maghreb region of Africa it is a more literal epistemological Moor-ing.

The chosen three – Michel Foucault, Pierre Bourdieu and Jacques Derrida – have become the part of, ‘The return of grand theory in the human sciences’ (Skinner 1990). The term ‘grand theory’ re-appropriated from Mills’s (1959) derogatory sense to mean: ‘individual thinkers who have played … a role of exceptional importance in helping to bring about … changes of theoretical allegiance’ (Skinner 1990, 6). These three have been among the most cited authors of the past 12 years: in 2007, Foucault, Bourdieu and Derrida respectively were the top three for arts, humanities and social science (Thomson Reuters quoted in THES 2007) and, in 2017, the most cited in all disciplines, Foucault at number one, Bourdieu at number two and Derrida at 28 (Webometrics 2018). These three thinkers often have their Frenchness foregrounded in lectures, essays, articles and online sources and the northern African influences minimised. We give some reasons why this might be, including Eurocentrism and the ‘Wikipedisation’ of information. With this paper, we join the call for those teaching in HE to be part of a decolonisation of academia (see also, SOAS 2017; PBRN 2019; Bhambra, Gebria, and Nişancıoğlu 2018) by acknowledging and celebrating the northern African origin of some key social science theory.

In writing this article we recognise in ourselves, and the practice of many of our colleagues at HE-level, the unequal treatment of scholarship by political forces that reduce the West to an entity that has existed in isolation and has led the way with no reference to its past or biographies of its driving forces. We situate ourselves in this process, recognising that when teaching at university-level in the fields of education and of culture and communication we have ascribed ideas not to the country of origin and its political and social circumstances but to the birthplace of the theorist. We are not, therefore, ‘standing on a balcony during a carnival’ (see Apple 2003, 223) but exploring reasons why we did this, with a view to sharing this with our students when we next approach the theorists’ work. What we are proposing in this paper is the application of thought pioneered by Young (1990, 2001) who upended the argument that ideas come exclusively from the West: ‘Structuralism came from the East, poststructuralism from the South’ (2001, 413). We believe that denying the existence of African-born theorists, or re-attributing theory to France, results in an ‘entire people, from a great civilisation, wronged, humiliated, denied their identity’ (Lyotard 1993, 170). We stand with Said (1978, 1983) in wanting to address the ‘regrettable political blindness’ (Revel 2013, 19) of our colleagues, students and selves. Along with Ahluwalia we question whether the ‘very belief in the superiority of the French on which the modern French nation has been constructed’ (2010, 138) is behind the false attribution of ideas to France. In order to investigate, we have used a genealogical approach looking at the ‘political reality that renders it true’ (Foucault cited in Dreyfus and Rabinow 1982, 204). In so doing, we recognise that to attribute
the theory to northern Africa is merely engaging in another ‘fiction’, another ‘truth’ but all we can do, is enter into the struggle for meaning and act against an unjust recolonisation of ideas.

This piece is written partly as a critical discussion about the northern African origin of social science theory and its attribution to France and partly as a reflective, meditative piece, informed by personal, familial and friend views. The reason for the two-handed approach is that the paper was motivated by two different experiences. John Keenan’s motivations were professional: frustration was generated by repeatedly reading about the country of birth of a theorist in essays without useful epistemological supporting commentary. For Karima Kadi-Hani, it was personal: the realisation that despite being having been born and brought up in Algeria she had not been aware that some of the theory she taught and treasured was conceived near her home. This discovery was made while visiting a small public lending library in Algiers in 2018 – prompted by reading ‘Nos richesses’, a novel about the origins of this library by Kaouther Adimi (2017). The librarian told Karima,

Algeria was key in the development of European ideas during the occupation. Remember, it was the capital of ‘France libre’ during the second World War, but unfortunately only French writers had the advantages that indigenous Algerians, no matter how gifted they were, could not have; so there was inequality from the start and in flagrant contradiction with the fight against fascism in Europe at the time; an inhuman double standard that led to the radicalisation of the colonised even more even in the domain of great ideas and anti-colonialist theory. (author’s translation)

Alongside this revelation, Karima was reading Rouben Valery’s work and was struck by these lines: ‘With total media indifference, the first black African Goncourt prize winner of 1921, Rene Maran, dies in Paris on 11th May 1960. Only his intellectual and literary friends, as well as a great many black thinkers will remember him as they saw in him the announcer of a literary movement destined to re-establish the honour of those who had been badly treated: the negritude movement’ (own translation from French of Valery [2014, 183]). Karima’s experience of reading about Maran led her to compare his work with Andre Gide’s ‘Voyage au Congo’. Both Maran and Gide were published in the same era and critical of colonialism, but Gide’s work is widely known and feted whereas Maran’s is rarely on the syllabuses of arts, humanities or social science university courses. The question Karima asked herself was: does it have to be a white intellectual bringing to the fore the injustice of colonialism? Equally, did it have to be white French men who could radicalise the thinking of many generations? Why not those who inspired them: Mouloud Feraoun, Mouloud Mammeri, Kateb Yacine and Jean Amrouche, to name but a few? These are some of the voices that Karima accesses in her reflection on what it means to be Algerian and to see and even teach the ideas from her own region of Africa as if they belonged elsewhere. In an age of supposed critical opening, the inequality and double standards seem to be continuing.

In order to reflect the different motivations of the authors, the article is written in two parts and styles. Firstly, there is a critical discussion of the reasons why France is so often cited by lecturers and students as a source of the theory then there is a personal reflection on the situation in which Karima accesses voices from her homeland, Algeria. The two parts are connected by a common call for a change to the practice of colonisation of
thought and joining those who call for a change in the way theory is presented as European. We both feel that there is an urgent need to counteract the simplified discourse of ‘alterity’ that can occur in academic teaching and writing which sees ‘otherness’ as an opposition to self, rather than something to which we have a deep ethical responsibility. The subjectivity of Foucault, Bourdieu and Derrida and their absorption of the work and views of the ‘others’ they met face-to-face, triggers in us an ethical responsibility to go back to the varied encounters that helped form them. This subjectivity is reflected in this article by the voices Karima recalls as she traversed the streets of Algiers in 2018, read Algerian authors and followed the millions of Algerians in their recent ‘renaissance’ protest marches in 2019.

Part one: the Northern African origins of the theories of Foucault, Bourdieu, Derrida and why they are attributed to France

In this section we examine the northern African origins of the theories of Foucault, Bourdieu and Derrida and consider reasons why they are attributed to France. The two main countries from which many ideas in social science originate, Tunisia and Algeria, share much in common including a history of French control – a direct or indirect cause of the theorists’ connections with the countries. Morocco, Tunisia and Algeria have a collective name of the Maghreb, sharing commonalities of being Arab/Berber-Islamic, having been occupied by France and become independent in the 1950s – 60s when the boundaries between them were fixed (see Charrad 2001). Although connected by history, rulers and trade there are differences in topography and the levels of control exercised by the Ottoman and other colonisers over the centuries (see Charrad 2001). We take each theorist separately to establish how the ideas of Foucault, Bourdieu and Derrida, which are so prominent in Western academic thought, were formed from this part of Africa.

Foucault, while a visiting professor of philosophy at the University of Tunis from 1966 to 1968 (see Afary and Anderson 2005), ‘lived like an ascetic’ (Defert, quoted in Gordon 2016, 228) giving him the time and ‘first hand knowledge of the rebarbative effects of colonialism’ (Ahluwalia 2010, 599) to write the lectures which became Archaeology of Knowledge (1972) (see Legg 2016, 268). It was a formative period for his greatest ideas (Miller 2000; Macey 1994; Young 2001) which turned him from the archaeology of ‘anonymous production of knowledges and discourses’ (Mills 2003, 23) where discourse is viewed in a fixed history to ‘genealogy’ where it was in a process of negotiation, formed by forces and in transition (see Foucault 1972). This change was ‘undoubtedly triggered by his residence in the postcolony of Tunisia’ (Ahluwalia 2010, 600). Foucault’s witnessing of the ‘necessity for a struggle’ (Foucault 1991, 138) with the year-long student protests in Tunisia (which he supported [Miller 2000]) left him ‘profoundly struck and amazed’ (Foucault 1991, 134) by the risks taken by the Tunisian students and the conclusion that it was because of ‘power’ (see Macdonald 2006, 103). Also, in Tunisia, a ‘vocally militant Foucault’ emerged (Macey 1994, 206) certain that it was, as he saw it, ‘vital to engage in work that had political meaning’ (Ahluwalia 2010, 148). On leaving Tunisia, the northern African influence continued as he maintained contact with students (Ahluwalia 2010, 568) through his friendship with the Algerian author Albert Camus and through his life-long partner, Daniel Defret’s Tunisian experience.
Bourdieu’s time in Algeria studying culture for the French government (who had a colonial view of changing ‘hearts and minds’) formed his theory and thinking (Driver 2011) and ‘prefigure(d) some of the most salient features’ (Peters 2016, 132) of his work. These included alienation (see the final chapter Sociologie de l’Algérie) a subject, ‘which would dominate Bourdieu’s work’ (Goodman and Silverstein 2009) and while he had not conceptualised and termed (see Swedberg 2011, 69) many of the other ideas which would lead to his worldwide academic recognition – habitus, field and capital – the origins are in the Algerian writings (see Davis 2011; Steinmetz 2011). Bourdieu’s Algerian work also started his lifetime fascination with key ideas of symbolic violence and power (see Calhoun 2006; Peters 2016). His first conceptual experience of the country would have been through his Algerian philosophy tutor Louis Althusser, then through first-hand experience of the ‘gruesome realities’ (Wacquant 2006, 215) of the Algerian War which prompted him to turn to ethnology and sociology in order to ‘make sense of the social cataclysm wrought by the clash between imperial capitalism and homegrown nationalism’ (Wacquant 2006, 215). From this ‘Algerian crucible, suffused by fear, risk, and ‘ambient fascism’” (Yacine 2004, 487) Bourdieu gained his political sense, positioned both against the forces of French colonialism and the idealism of revolution. As with Foucault, the political unrest generated a desire to make a change to society through ‘practice theory’ (Silverstein and Goodman 2009, 5) and this experience stayed with him through his life with Outline of a Theory of Practice (Bourdieu 2002) largely based on his studies in northern Algeria. Bourdieu was indebted to many Algerian sociologists including Abdelmalek Sayad, his ‘mentor, colleague, and friend’ (Goodman and Silverstein 2009, 31), the novelist and teacher Mouloud Feraoun and Mouloud Mammeri who acted as translator, mediator and contextualiser.

Derrida, being Derrida, complexified the ‘inadequate’ or ‘limited’ understanding of how context affects the text partly through the ‘absence of intention’ (see Derrida 1988) and the complexity of communications. The idea, then, of reading his work through the context of his Algerian upbringing would be imposing an ‘outside text’, on his work, giving an intention which he did not necessarily mean. Derrida avoided interviews as much as possible but on being ‘caught’ (Ahluwalia 2010, 143) he responded to a question about Algeria: ‘Ah, you want me to tell you things like, ‘I-was-born-in-El-Biar-in-the-suburbs-of-Algiers-in-a-petit-bourgeois-Jewish-family-which-was-assimilated’ but… is this really necessary?’. While it may not be necessary to introduce the origins of motives from his experience in the country to his work he was clear that being brought up in Algeria helped to form his worldview. The Algerian War had a major influence on his ideas – ‘As a child, I had the instinctive feeling that the end of the world was at hand’ (Derrida as quoted in Wood and Bernasconi 1988, 74) – to the extent that: ‘If “so-called poststructuralism” is the product of a single historical moment, then that moment is … the Algerian War of Independence’ (Young 1990 as quoted in Ahluwalia 2010, 138). Derrida’s ideas also formed from being ‘tattered of identity and rootless, neither here nor there’ (Ofrat, as quoted in Ahluwalia 2010, 146). In ‘Monolingualism of the Other’ Derrida ‘unequivocally presents himself as a Franco-Maghrebian’ (Ahluwalia 2010, 147) and a ‘very black, very Arab Jew’ (as quoted in Davis 2011, 137) who had a strong sense of non-belonging. Derrida could see how this ‘Judeo-Franco-Maghrebian genealogy does not clarify everything … But could I, explain anything without it? No’ (Derrida 1998, 71–72). As an Algerian Jew he was rejected by the French rulers his family worked for (see Ahluwalia 2010,
148) and from this feeling of being ‘displaced’ (Derrida as quoted in Ahluwalia 2010, 144) and an insider-outsider came the ability to deconstruct ‘the concept, the authority, and assumed primacy of, the category of “the West”’ (Young 1990, 51). Derrida began a ‘strategy of postcolonial retaliation, of overturning … (the) incredible discipline, a fable and bible’ (1998, 44) of French thought and history. This makes the appropriation of this work into the canon of French thought all the more unpalatable when it was, arguably, a means for intellectual liberation and decolonisation: a ‘surgical operation’ directed at ‘an ontological violence that sustains the western metaphysical and ideological systems with the force and actual violence that has sustained the western nations in their colonial and imperial policies, a structural relation of power that had to be teased apart if it was ever to be overturned’ (Young 2001, 416).

Foucault, Bourdieu and Derrida therefore join ‘a long list of canonical ‘French’ thinkers who were impacted by events in Algeria: Louis Althusser, Pierre Bourdieu, Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, Hélène Cixous, Albert Camus and François Lyotard, to name a few’ (Davis 2011, 136). That their ideas formed in northern Africa has been well-documented yet still their Frenchness is often mentioned in lectures, essays and articles and too-rarely the experience which originated the theory. In the introduction we gave some anecdotal examples of Foucault’s work being positioned in France by lecturers and students and from our experience this is also true of Bourdieu and even Derrida. It is either the case that Bourdieu’s Algerian studies are overlooked (see Purser 2010) or not taken ‘seriously enough’ (Goodman and Silverstein 2009, 13) being of a different, “anthropological” genre … of interest mainly with regard to ‘traditional society’ (Calhoun 2006, 1409) and not relevant until applied to the West. Likewise, the work of Derrida gets attributed to France. He was, according to the Encyclopaedia Britannica (accessed 19.3.19), a ‘French philosopher … Educated in the French tradition … (who) went to France … welcomed in France’ and even his place of birth is called ‘French-governed Algeria’. The cliché is to call Derrida a ‘French thinker’ (the terms searched for in Google [on 18.3.19] yielded over 11,400 results while the equivalent search for ‘Algerian thinker’ brought 142 results).

The widespread attribution of the work of Foucault, Bourdieu and Derrida’s to France raises the questions of why place is attributed at all and how much validity is there in the concept of ‘place’ anyway? All three thinkers were part of the new world order of mobility, of rootless histories’ (Clifford as quoted in Ahluwalia 2001, 128) who were, ‘at home in motion’ (Ahluwalia 2011). Anyway, as Helene Cixous noted, ‘Algerian’ was an adjective before it was a noun (see Still 2010, 158) so to attribute anything to ‘Algeria’ is a ‘mutilation in advance’ (Derrida as quoted in Ahluwalia 2010, 137) as it has already taken on board the colonial lie that the country exists. The European settlers of Algeria were labelled ‘Algerian’, whereas the real indigenous Algerians were called ‘indegenes’ or ‘Arabs’, keeping them away from any notion of nationhood. While it may be problematic to define which country the writer is ‘from’ with globalisation (see Giddens 2000) and multiculturalisation, the origin of the author is clearly a matter of importance to those who seem to need to contextualise or make an epistemological point about nationhood. Perhaps this is why Salman Rushdie bemoaned: ‘Indian-born British writer’ has been invented to explain me’ (as quoted in Ahluwalia 2010, 137). Place is referred to in lectures, in essays and was a matter of importance to another ‘grand theorist’, Edward Said who contended that locatedness, or ‘affiliation’ of the text gives it ‘a material presence, a cultural
and social history, a political and even an economic being’ (Ahluwalia 2010, 141). If it is important to locate theory to a space then we should locate it to the place where it was first envisioned – to the immediate personal, social, cultural and geographical circumstances of its origin. In the case of the chosen theorists in this article, this is northern Africa. Ahluwalia noted how the ‘impact of colonial Africa on French theory is pervasive’ (2010, 297) – the well-chosen adjective speaking both of the way the situation of France in northern Africa spread through a community of thinkers and also making the implication that this was an unwelcome development by both the French government and later by an academic establishment in whose interest it was to promote Western thought.

France may also be cited as the location of the theory because it was the country which imposed the language the theorists used for publication (even Algerian Derrida was first published in Paris by Éditions de Minuit in 1967). Franz Fanon called French, ‘a key capable of opening doors that were barred … Mastery of language affords remarkable power’ (as quoted in Ahluwalia 2010, 146). Derrida to his frustration stated, ‘I concede that I have contracted a shameful but intractable intolerance … I cannot bear or admire anything other than pure French’ (Derrida as quoted in Ahluwalia 2010, 147). In this we might see a manifestation of ‘European cultural superiority’ (Driver 2011) – French above Arabic. More practically, by being written in French, the theory becomes available to the West and facilitates quick translation into other European languages, particularly English which is a route to America (see Sallaz and Zavisca [2007] for a review on Bourdieu’s popularity in America).

Another reason for the Frenchification of the theory may be system overload which can lead to simplification in an information-rich, time-limited academic environment. The result is, what might be called, Wikipedisation of theory: it becomes a series of soundbites, headlines and ‘facts’ and ideas which are simplified to non-specialist level. With Bourdieu’s ‘sprawling oeuvre’ (Wacquant 2006, 263) of 37 books and over 400 articles, ‘oft couched in a difficult technical idiom, Bourdieu’s thought might seem on first look dispersed and daunting, if not intractable’ (Wacquant 2006, 263). Likewise, even Foucault accused Derrida of academic terrorism: ‘He writes so obscurely you can’t tell what he’s saying, that’s the obscurantism part, and then when you criticise him, he can always say, “You didn’t understand me; you’re an idiot.” That’s the terrorism part’ (as quoted in Reason 2000). When information is complex, humans tend to simplify in a heuristic manner (see Gilovich, Griffin, and Kahneman 2002) and ‘Africa’ may not form part of the, what they call in news selection, ‘consonance’ (see Galtung and Ruge 1965) aspect necessary to make information easily understandable. It is easier to conceive of Foucault, Bourdieu and Derrida’s theories as embedded in a linear narrative of French philosophy because France is often mythologised (see Barthes 2014) as a place of philosophical thought – another White Mythology (see Young 1990)? Perhaps this is also why the Wikipedia entry [accessed on 3.3.19] for Claude Levi Strauss states, ‘Claude Levi Strauss was a French anthropologist …’ while listing his birthplace as Belgium. That university students are using online sources such as Wikipedia is well-documented (Sook 2009; Lim 2009; Bansode 2013) despite the lack of ‘testimonial acceptance’ (see de Laat 2012) and the ‘epistemic consequences’ (Fallis 2008, 1662) of so doing; these simplified guides often orient the reader towards France. For example, the start page of the Wikipedia (accessed 14.11.18) entry for Foucault reads: ‘Michel Foucault (French: [miʃɛl fuko]), was a French philosopher’ and the article goes on to mention France/French 67 times.
France also had the material and political circumstances to publish. It was possible to publish in Algeria (as Camus did with Charlot, in Algiers – until the publishing house was burned to the ground by French white conservative settlers) but censorship plagued African publishing during the colonial period. Novelist Rene Maran was ‘placed in considerable difficulties with colonial officials and French literary critics, because of his naturalistic depiction of the material deprivation which French colonialism visited on Africans’ (Onoge 2007, 464). Aime Cesaire declared ‘Under a colonial society … everything goes well so long as nothing happens to disrupt the hierarchy’ (as quoted in Onoge 2007, 464). Those who resisted the colonial powers, like Sayad, who refused French citizenship and remained an ‘homme frontière’ until his death in 1988 (Goodman and Silverstein 2009) gained little of the academic fame and success afforded to Foucault, Bourdieu and Derrida. Feraoun, author of semi-autobiographic ethnographic novels such as ‘Le Fils du Pauvre’ (1950) fared worse – assassinated by a far-right French paramilitary squad on 15th March 1962, in Algeria (see McNair 2018).

It might be that such authors as Fanon (1986) who supported violence (in ‘Black Skin, White Masks’) to move people from ‘abjection’ to ‘agency’ do not conform to the myth of the Enlightenment Humanism of Western academia (see Nayar 2011). Equally, a Western culture grounded in its own sense of importance may not be willing to sacrifice it no matter how (neo)liberal and humanistic it claims to be. Perhaps it is also uncomfortable in the West to admit that the ideas of Foucault, Bourdieu and Derrida are the result of French oppression of African people. Their presence in Africa was because of, or in aid of, French colonisation and, in the case of Bourdieu, to allay the government’s fear of: ‘a real invasion and a berberisation of whole neighborhoods’ (1947 as quoted in Conelly 2002, 12). To admit this would open up the idea of the vicious slavery Western countries created for many African people, and, by the time the Algerian War finished in 1962, the million-plus civilians and freedom fighters who were dead, along with nearly 40,000 French soldiers and ‘pieds-noirs’. In 1921, Maran, in his novel ‘Batouala’, stated that the colonisers were ‘intellectually anaemic’ and unable to see the horror – and this may be the case today.

Perhaps this was a reason why the theorists themselves may have wanted to ‘whitewash’ the history. Foucault, Bourdieu and Derrida perhaps knew they were ‘public intellectuals’ (Goodman and Silverstein 2009) good at the ‘media game’ (Wacquant 2006, 263) and did not want to jeopardise their role as France’s ‘intellectual reference’ (The Guardian 2002). Foucault did not write about his experiences of Tunisia, keeping a ‘scrupulous silence on such issues and has, as a result, been widely criticized for Eurocentrism’ (Young 2001, 397). This is something we might see with his later (Foucault 1991, 144) statement that ‘without May of ’68, I would never have done the things I’m doing today’ (May being the French student riot date – although elsewhere, Foucault cited the Tunisian riots date of March 1968 [see Luxon 2013, 245] as the origin of his thought). So, Tunisia became a ‘backdrop’ (Afary and Anderson 2005, 141) or in Legg’s (2016, 265) words both an ‘absent presence’ and a ‘haunting presence’ to his work. Perhaps, though, this was because Foucault was part of the ‘tourist culture’ (see Afary and Anderson 2005, 141) who were out to get what pleasures they could from the country and leave. ‘Coloniser guilt’ or ‘survivor guilt’ may have affected how much all three theorists referred to the African countries as they all, when the reality of the war threatened their lives, were safely removed from danger. However, as with Derrida and Bourdieu, Foucault had a
postcolonial centre: ‘if one does not deconstruct the Western pretence to make history the yardstick of all things, the unit of every event, the background to every difference, one will never get out’ (Revel 2013, 20). Even in the event that Bourdieu, Derrida and Foucault may have used Western power for their own success, their actions resulted in the widespread ability to deconstruct it.

Part two: a personal and political reflection on the colonisation of the Northern African origin of the works of Foucault, Bourdieu and Derrida by Karima Kadi-Hanifi

I have a portrait of Franz Fanon above my desk but everyone asks, ‘Who is he?’ even those who specialise in inclusive educational practice. When I explain who he is, their eyes seem to glaze over and no follow-up questions are asked. 'Decolonisation is the veritable creation of new men, new language and new humanity' wrote Fanon (2001, 28). Fanon, a Martinique black man, was radicalised by what he saw in Algeria and wrote the inspired ‘Wretched of the Earth’, a universal classic in any course on colonisation, imperialism and their devastating impacts. I want there to be a new wave which speaks the voice of the suppressed majority, whether they are labelled ‘subaltern’ (see Spivak 1988) or ‘indigene’, ‘colonised’ in the South and East, or ‘serfs’, ‘slaves’ or, more recently, ‘disadvantaged’ in the West, such as those who perished in Grenfell Tower, or the 34,361 ‘migrants’ who drowned in the sea trying to reach Europe since 1993 (The Guardian, 2018). Today, even more than at any other time, I feel that there is an urgent need to resist and counteract the discourse of a simplified ‘alterity’ – that simplified othering which can affect Africa negatively from those who are working in Western academia. On reading Nothias’s (2018) analysis of Western media reports of Africa and how the themes of darkness and tribalism are still prevalent, along with a use of Western sources, and, the treatment of this whole continent as a homogenous whole, I wondered whether academic work, as it is seen at the ‘chalk face’ of the lecture theatre and the essay, was similarly affected. Instead, I want there to be a deeper understanding of humanity that transcends national borders and acknowledges the unequal treatment of scholarship by political forces with no reference to its past or the biographies of its driving forces. No West has ever existed without the conscious presence of the East and the South. We owe it to our students to begin to redress the balance and deconstruct ‘European’ thought by revealing the past of French colonisation, of fascism in Europe, and how both were resisted and gave birth to new grand theory that burgeoned in north Africa, then in France (from the 1960s onwards) before it spread all over the world.

It is arguable that Foucault, Bourdieu, Derrida and others of today’s ‘superstars’ of philosophy, literature and social science would not be the pantheons of knowledge today if they had not been given the French language and the easy access to English translation. But equally, I contend, that if they had not been given the Algerian special circumstances of a ruthless colonisation and the near annihilation of a free people, they would never have been the radical ‘French’ thinkers that we all think they are. They are ‘French’ of a certain category – one that encompasses thinking against conservative French values of slavery, imperialism, exploitation and colonisation. In that sense, I see them as African-French, inextricably so. Denying this vision to our students, perpetuates the racism and colonisation of the curriculum which aims to establish that enlightenment is only possible in the
West and divorced from any possibility of European influence from or on the black continent.

I am so obsessed with post-colonial literature that the first thing I did when I leafed through a new book, ‘Education Studies: the Key Concepts’ (Trotman, Lees, and Willoughby 2017) was check the entry on ‘racism’ and was heartened to find that Parminder Assi, who was the author of that section, had mentioned Fanon – in fact, I was jubilant! But there needs to be more of this. And, I shouldn’t be nervously awaiting the emergence of such worry about the representation of post-colonial thought! Not in this day and age, surely? None of our students ever mention the Algerian roots of some of the best progressive thinking of Althusser and Derrida. On the reverse, the reading lists are all about the writings of white, mainly Anglo-Saxon, and mostly, men. Still to this day, only Camus is considered an Algerian when he is even mentioned by any of the lecturers.

I read Camus’s ‘Carnets’ (1942) and feel his angst as he says that ‘we must get rid of all past states [i.e. ‘states of being’] and use all our strength for not unlearning anything, and then patiently continue learning’. At the same time, though, I read Kamel Daoud’s novel ‘Meursault, Contre Enquete’ (2013) who talks of Camus as ‘a man who can write and who killed an Arab who doesn’t even have a name’. Daoud responded to this: ‘The absurd is my brother and I who carry it on our backs, or in the heart of our lands, not the Other’. The protagonist ‘Haroun’ in Daoud’s novel clearly states that he is writing this sequel to ‘L’Etranger’, not wholly to vent his anger about his brother’s absurd death nor to try and redress this old crime in a court of law but to establish an equilibrium. This imagined scenario captures my imagination, at a time, where like countless others, I too want to find a way to balance the knowledge about colonisation and its eradication of the ‘other’ that such acts attempt. With that, also comes my obsession with, as Rodney (2012) wrote: ‘how Europe underdeveloped Africa’. And it continues to do that, through education.

The Algerian writer and Lawyer Wassyla Tamzali made me feel so proud as, for once, I was reading someone, and a woman of substance, who was actually there during the construction of Algeria at ‘year zero’ (as she calls it) of its independence. She vividly explains the complexities of the national reconstruction project, in ‘Une Education Algerienne’ (2012). She is right to write that Algeria had been through 130 years of ‘dispossession’ and that in 1962, at independence, everything had to start being reversed – no mean feat. The French conquest of Algeria (according to Algerian writer Wassyla Tamzali) could well have been about freeing the land from the Muslims that had conquered it in antique times and punishing the country of St Augustine (as, after all, Algeria had been a place of Christianity well before Rome) for having embraced Islam. This is an interesting proposition, but whatever the reasons were for the colonisation of Algeria, as I walk through the Algiers of today, it is visible that the architecture is a mix of French, Italian, Spanish styles – still, though, with the Casbah in the background! Tamzali states that, however, nothing has ever altered Algiers’s soul (its habitus?), despite the different historical offensives on its fabric, as it had always been conquered by various people in the past. I feel the immanence of that soul, as it is in the complexity of its physical appearance, but also in its resilience in the face of worst pain ever inflicted on a people in my more recent memory of it. Is this why I often metaphorically speak with those who fought the war of independence (having been 3 years old when the country became independent)? Is this why I re-watch the film of Larbi Ben M’hidi about a commander of the underground guerrilla war of
independence in the Casbah (well documented in ‘The Battle of Algiers’ film) who was tortured and then summarily executed by the French in 1957?

M’hidi was not the only one. My own father was part of that movement, sentenced to death and tortured too, in 1945, but luckily, eventually pardoned. It is no wonder that people felt alienated, that the men and women of Algeria who survived the horrors of that war, often suffered from ridiculously long periods of physical and mental breakdowns, documented by Fanon. I witness it even today when Algerians cannot survive for a day without mentioning the war. There is also reference to the Algerian war in French films; it is engrained in both nations’ psyches. As the current events unfold with mass demonstrations of Algerians against a totalitarian regime that has further enslaved them since independence in 1962, I listen to free radio stations, such as Al Maghribiya, or watch Youtube videos of the demonstrations, speeches and debates, and collect images and thoughts from my family and friends’ Whatsapps who are there ‘on the ground’ waving the flag for which this country sacrificed a lot in the bloodiest war of independence Africa ever witnessed. I recognise that the words and the symbols for liberation now in 2019 are of the same ilk as those at independence in 1962. Phrases like ‘I was hypnotised, now I am awake’ uttered by an activist send shivers down my spine. Or, when a radio caller says ‘Since the Emir Abdelkader lost his first insurrection against the French invasion of 1830, Algeria has had bad eggs laid upon her. Now we understand’. The movement in 2019 is unprecedented in the history of a free people in that it is organised, massive and peaceful. The ‘rumblings’ started from the ground and are staying there, resisting the hegemony of a regime deemed too ‘colonial’ still. Indeed, it is interesting that French President Emmanuel Macron is accused by the demonstrators of having written the letter for the ailing president Bouteflika – now deposed – to address his people as they revolt, urging them to accept a way of re-organising top-down again. To me, it is the continuation of what has always been the Algerian condition – a hotbed of radical ideas either against fascism in the 1940s, colonialism in the 1950s and 1960s, and now neo-colonialism and corruption in the 2010s. I feel that perhaps that is what the history of colonialism has done to me, in my present state of recognising its past amplitude, but not letting that stop me from continuing to learn (Camus, again) just as my people are asking on the street today. The abuse of racism and colonisation must not freeze one from moving forwards, no matter how painful!

By resisting the Frenchification of theory we also stop assuming that we can reduce the identity of complex human beings (see also the Liquid Modernity of Bauman, [2000]) to one homogeneous nationality, as if alterity through history (not just through recent colonialist periods) has not exerted any influence on anyone, and in particular, on such wandering, open-minded and radical thinkers as those we tackle in this article. Here, I call on the ideas of Levinas – responsibility to the other – resisting the violence imposed on north Africa by denying its position in creating the theory used so widely today. Such a sense of alterity helped to bring the theory in the first place – such as the Algerian who gave money to Edmond Charlot when his lending library was destroyed in the early 1960s by the OAS (a secret fascist paramilitary organisation of ‘French pieds noirs’ who were against the independence of Algeria). Without this selfless act by a ‘dispossessed indigenous Algerian, simply called Momo, and a poet from the poor district of the Casbah of Algiers, who gave all his savings to Charlot because he saw the worth of such an independent thinking place’ (own translation) as the librarian of Nos Richesses said to me in 2018, the works of the
greats of French literature and philosophy, such as Camus, Rables, Gide and others, might have been lost to humanity.

Learning from the other (and here I am using the term in Foucault’s historically – specific interpretation) has always been a natural phenomenon that was enlightening Europeans well before colonialist interests took a few countries by surprise and occupied them for centuries. Indeed, the search for the ‘Orient’ (see Enard 2015) and learning from it, is almost as old as the world. Now we need to find a middle and, whilst able to recognise the terrifying violence of colonialism, a new vision that does not see Islam and ‘Africa’ as ‘alterity’; one that recognises that Europe and the Orient cannot be separated – ‘we are one world without a civilizational other’ (see Ahmed 2010). Or, at the very least, sees this ‘other’ as someone to whom we have a responsibility for. European artists, writers and thinkers, such as Wagner, Kafka and Beethoven were heavily influenced by the East, including Islamic culture; Rimbaud, driven to the point of insanity in his thirst for an ‘illuminated’ world of ‘Wonders’. Others frequented the European capitals – ‘what a world was the start of the nineteenth Century, when Orientalists visited princes, Balzac and talented musicians’ (Enard 2015, 113). However, what happened is that the ‘other’, ceases to be the better half and was either erased from collective memory or deemed to be less able than his/her European counterpart.

I was avidly reading the fascinating ‘Noir Blanc Rouge’ by Valery (2014) in which 35 black men and women are given due regard and celebrated for the way they shaped French history, arts and philosophy, among them Paulette Nardal, Aimee Cesaire and Josephine Baker. This is very much similar to the amazing ‘Black British’ (Olusoga 2016) and the subsequent documentary that illustrated the influence of black people on British history (BBC 2018). The issue of distorted representation is well-known now through the work of writers such as Said. The ‘Prix Goncourt’ winner of 2015, Mathias Enard’s ‘Boussole’ (2015) is testimony of this new wave as it champions the ‘enlightened East’ and shows that artists and philosophers such as Schubert and Nietzsche were far more open to and respectful of the East than is often acknowledged. Such disregard happened afterwards and was politically motivated. Slavery also did not help, nor the pseudo-scientific research of anthropologists who proclaimed that ‘white’ brains were superior to black ones. And, hence, a period of colonisation was legitimised and the civilizational West became the norm. In ‘Boussole’, the girlfriend of the protagonist contends, that ‘Orientalism is humanism’. In essence, yes, if it is not corrupted by the ideology of the colonisers. I really like Enard’s analysis of Kafka’s work, for example, when he says that in his short story entitled ‘Jackals and Arabs’, Kafka tackles ‘displacement’ as a symptom of his hybrid-identity (like Derrida perhaps?) born out of a decaying Austrian empire and the necessity to accept ‘alterity’ as being an integral part of his being, and consequently, a fertile contradiction. This means that creativity could thrive in the most unusual circumstances, but ultimately, it needs the ethical embedding of the ‘other’ into who we are.

**Conclusion**

This article has presented an issue we feel is pertinent in HE today – the mis-attribution to France of the most commonly used theory in the human and social sciences. The authors have re-examined their practice and hope that the article might offer a way for others to do so. It is worth asking what is lost from, say, ignoring Bourdieu’s north African roots. We
lose the colonial nature seen in the ‘participant objectification’ (see Bourdieu 2004), the absence of awareness of the role Islam was playing in the societies studied. We also cannot see that the way his idea of a collective habitus ‘conflated oral texts gathered across a hundred-year period by different individuals and in diverse locations and claimed a unique Berber cultural heritage’ (Goodman and Silverstein 2009, 108). The ‘Mediterranean universals’ (which are ‘almost determinedly Eurocentric’ [du Toit 2018, 1091] suggesting what happens in Africa does not matter until applied to the West – see Said [1983]) therefore came from flawed ‘data’, as it were. So, ‘habitus’, ‘capital’ and ‘discourse’ come from ‘partial and fractured understandings (and) … systematic misconstrual of … thought’ (Wacquant 1993, 238–239) and therefore must be questioned further. What results from ignoring the African origin of the theory is that notions start becoming ‘theoretically thinner’ (see Calhoun 2006) from complex source to sound-bite to: ‘Read in English narrowly as texts in the sociology or anthropology of education’ (Gorski 2013, 44).

What is also lost is the humanity and humility of the West in acknowledging that knowledge is global. Camus wrote about the ‘fear’ the colonisers had while walking around colonised Africa: ‘with veils covering half their faces and their beautifully soft and sensual eyes above the white mask. Though fatalistic and exhausted, they were so numerous in the neighbourhoods where they clustered that there hovered an invisible threat which you could sniff in the air’ (as quoted in Aldrich 1996, 141). We suggest that, perhaps unconsciously, Western academics can smell the fear from ideas and literature that does not come from Europe. Racism and European elitism are still with us today when we do not acknowledge the African roots of theory. Then, we confirm Said’s suspicion that, ‘contemporary criticism is an institution for publicly affirming the values of our, that is, European, dominant elite culture’ (1983, 25). This article, we hope, is another small step in the right direction and it would start in the lecture hall with the words, ‘What do we know about Foucault? His ideas were developed in Tunisia, obviously’.

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References


