

ALBERT CAMUS' ABSURDISM AND AMBIVALENT VIEWS ON FRENCH
ORIENTALIST PREJUDICE AS REFLECTED IN *THE STRANGER*

A THESIS

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment to the Requirement

For the Degree of Sarjana Humaniora

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ENGLISH DEPARTMENT - FACULTY OF HUMANITIES

ANDALAS UNIVERSITY

PADANG

2013

APPROVAL PAGE

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By:

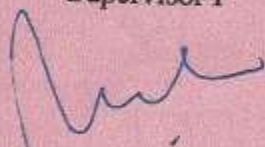
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God, I thank You for being always true...

For revealing Your promise in my life, I have unconditional love for You.

You are the hand that pulled me out of digression.

You showed me freedom, You brought me solution, when all I knew was to remain enslaved.

Thank You Lord...

There is a roof up above me, I've a good place to sleep. There is a food on my table, and shoes on my feet.

You gave me Your love, God, and a fine family.

I thank You Lord, for all Your blessings on me...

This Thesis is Dedicated to:

For all my lecturers of English Department: for four years I enjoyed all your classes in this university, it is so much enrich my knowledge and experience. Thank you for explaining every subject patiently, for the ability to make class fun, for correcting me when I was wrong, for encouraging me to do my best, and for lending an ear when I had things to ask and say.

For my dearest Mom and Dad: How come I can write a thank you for both of you while it is being unexpressed for me? But I thank you for protecting me when I had a fever since I was a child till this time, for showing me the difference between right or wrong, for giving me a family to be proud of, for spending times to learn me the things to find the real direction. Thank you for being my first coach and mentor while you never giving up, for being a strict when I was growing up, for supporting my dreams no matter how big or small, for praying me much prays every night and every day to God, for teaching me to obey the religion. Especially for Mom, thanks for letting me come out the home for finishing my studies far away from hometown, for Dad thanks a lot for you over there for funding me anything, for morale and material supports from a very far distance, it is more than anything. I always hope someday, I really can make you proud of me, Dad. The very best parents around the world ever after, for every simple things around my life till now my age, I found nothing to express and reply, but THANK YOU.

For my only young sister: the only one sister I've ever had, Elly Afrima, you are the most uncared and unpredictable person that I've ever known. Indeed you often make my anger comes out and often fusing me, but thanks for complying all my guidance, thanks for being always honest to me. For me, you are the closest girlfriend. For my beloved Grandma Samsinar and Grandpa Budiman (alm), thank you for being my second parents when I was a child, particularly for learning me much about religion and bring me nearer to the God, till now. **For my closest families:** Uncle Yonhartoni and Aunty Efteti Riani, my little cousins Arabella Putri Nurul 'Ain and Ambang Hari Laksana, you all are the most persons I miss at the hometown. Thank you so much. My gratitude for you has no end. I love you.

For my dearest Reski Kuantan: a very special thank you for being dependable source of comfort, for being cushion when I fall and give up, for helping in times of trouble, for giving the total respect, for teaching how to be patient and mature, and how to do not force the impossible condition. Thanks for your sincere love.

For my nicest friends: Words fail me to express my special thanks to my nicest friends **SeeSawSeen's girls:** Nandha, we are seems like always in the same 'boat', Yona, the most genius girlfriend that I've ever had, then Fauzia, Dewi and Wulan, another unforgettable friends around my life, and also Nice Ladona. **For my thesis advisor Bang Adek,** I hope we will find another absurd work to dismantle the absurd world. This work I especially dedicate for you all. My deepest love for all of you 😊😊

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my supervisors. I understand that this submission is my own work and to the best of my knowledge, it contains no plagiarized material.

Padang, October 29th 2013

Ella Juliyanti

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Alhamdulillahirabbil'alamiin. First and foremost I would like to reveal my Grateful to Allah SWT the Creator and the Guardian, for the wisdom, the greatest bless, the mercy in every piece of my prayers. He has given me the power to believe in myself, in my passion to the gate of success to accomplish this thesis and given me an opportunity in finishing this thesis. Furthermore, the great invocation and regard is addressed to the beloved Prophet Muhammad SAW, who brings this life into the enlightenment and knowledge universe.

In the very first place I would like to express my very great appreciation to my beloved supervisors: Marliza Yeni, S.S, M.A as my first supervisor and Edria Sandika, S.S, M.Hum as my second supervisor, especially for the time, suggestion, support, consistent guidance, unparalleled knowledge, encouragement and patience during accomplishing this thesis. Without the kindness of them, this thesis would never have existed. Another deepest gratitude I convey to my proposal supervisor Seswita Zulva S.S, M.Hum who gave me the solution at the beginning I wrote my proposal. Gratefully thanks to all my beloved lecturers in English Department of Andalas University who have learned me multitude of knowledge that I did not know before. To academic staffs and all librarians in the Faculty, thank you so much for their assistances during collecting the data and completing the requirements.

The great gratitude goes to my family. For great parents around the world, my dear Dad Djamal Susilo and beloved Mom Rosnawati, what can I say? Without you I would not be the person I am today. I can barely find the words to express all the wisdom, love, unconditional support, patience and prayer you've given to me throughout my life. I could say nothing but thank you. My deepest love to my only young sister, Elly, to my beloved uncle Yonhartoni, aunt Efteti Riani. Other special thanks to English Department '09, especially Nandha, Fenny Trisiah and Ora, then to SeeSawSeen girls. A special appreciation then goes to Bang Adek for giving me the solution and suggestion. The last, my extraordinary thank you is addressed to Reski Kuantan as my best listener and my true best friend.

Padang, October 23th 2013

Ella Juliyanti

ABSTRAK

Skripsi yang berjudul “Albert Camus’ Absurdism and Ambivalent Views on French Orientalist Prejudice as Reflected in *The Stranger*” ini adalah sebuah analisis terhadap novel absurd berjudul *The Stranger* karya Albert Camus. Skripsi ini memaparkan sikap ragu-ragu Camus terhadap beragam prasangka negatif bangsa Perancis terhadap bangsa Arab di Aljazair. Dengan memakai pendekatan Paskakolonialisme, khususnya teori Orientalisme yang dipaparkan oleh Edward Said, penulis menemukan bahwa novel tersebut menunjukkan adanya prasangka negatif bangsa Perancis yang selalu memandang rendah bangsa Arab yang sebenarnya adalah penduduk asli di Aljazair. Namun, pemikiran absurdisme pengarang yang berpegang teguh pada penolakan terhadap konsep nilai, perbedaan, kebenaran dan kepastian yang ada di alam semesta, justru menunjukkan bahwa Camus sesungguhnya bersikap ambivalen atau ragu-ragu, terhadap sikap bangsa Perancis tersebut. Setelah menganalisis isu-isu Orientalisme didalam novel dengan menggunakan pandangan absurdisme sebagai ideologi dasar pengarang, hasil analisis menunjukkan bahwa pada akhirnya nilai-nilai dan prasangka buruk yang diciptakan serta dianggap benar oleh kaum Orientalist (Perancis) terhadap Timur secara tidak langsung ditolak, dibantah dan dipatahkan oleh konsep absurdisme Albert Camus.

Kata kunci: Perancis, Arab, absurdisme, orientalisme, sikap ragu-ragu.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1. The Background of the Research

Taken from the terminology of philosophy, absurdism is a belief standing at the intersection of confusion, hesitance, ignorance, distrust, pessimistic and despair of people to look for the meaning and the purpose of life. The word “absurd” refers to the lost of meaning, the lack of purpose, the world appears frightening illogically and there is no rational explanation to the universe. The big confusion about the use of running life in the universe becomes the basic motif of absurdism. The confusion finally points to the ignorance of its answer, and it then makes people lose their belief about the existence of meaning and purpose of life. The ideology of absurdism shows the things which are out of the normal logics and seems like intentionally distorted. The absurdist people believes that the beautiful things in the world are just an illusion and that dark senses such as grief, pain, sorrow, suffering, hurt and misery are the real things. As Camus states in *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1942) that, “in a universe that is suddenly deprived of illusions and light, man feels a stranger. He is an irremediable exile. This divorce between man and his life, the actor and his setting, is truly constitutes the feeling of Absurdity” (6).

Additionally, M.H Abrams in his book *A Glossary of Literary Terms* (1999) claims that Eugène Ionesco (French author of several plays and theaters of the absurd) has put that “the cut off from his religious (of man), metaphysical, and

transcendental roots, man is lost; all his actions become senseless, absurd, useless” (1). In the term of absurdism, to run the “useless” life without any result is not much different from a punishment, so that people only believe that life will always end in failure, no matter what. Running the life slowly coincides with pessimism and refuses a certainty, whether it is about God, human destiny, or the others become the characteristics of people whose lives rely on absurdity.

Historically, Absurdism starts to appear during World War II. This is a form of rebellions defying the beliefs and values in the society about the period, in showing human incredulity to the meaning of life. The emergence of this ideology is motivated by World War I and World War II, when people start to feel desperate about the poor condition of the universe that inclined to the ruined situations, full of cruelty and brutality. People only concern with the power that has blinded them, they hurt each other, the uncontrolled rage of war, and murders are everywhere. There is no sense of humanity and reconciliation among people. Even though it started to exist during World War II, but those destructions and violence of the world are certainly triggered by World War that has already happened before, the World War I. The atomic bomb that smashes Hiroshima and Nagasaki and the practice of genocide becomes the main causes of turning absurdism ideology. Genocide is the extermination of the Jews and other powerless clans in Europe around 1930-1940 by the Aryan race in Germany under the leadership of Hitler. At that time, the Aryan race in Europe feel that they are the best race around the world and aim to seize European countries, they kill off some races which they consider as the dangerous clans. Their main target is the Jews and the other dominant clans in Europe. The

methods of genocide is gathering the victims in one place and murdering in many forms, such as burning, giving euthanasia injection and so on.

During World War II, the ruin portrait of the countries involve in World War at that time which is complicated, craze, and almost collapse. There are no longer happiness and reconciliation within the life; there is only human cruelty happens between each other. If there is a flash of happiness, it is surely considered as an illusion and impossible thing, because no one believes anymore towards life. It happens because of the vicious life during World War I and II. On the contrary, the death becomes the only solution for humans to escape from the cruel nature of the world. Therefore, **the inhumanity and brutality of humans during the early 20th century until 1945 is the main drivers of the birth of Absurdism.**

Consequently, the Absurdist literary works come out as a reaction to the horrors of World War II. The genre of the Absurd grows of the Modernist Literature of the late 19th and early 20th century in Europe, particularly France. M.H Abrams in his book *A Glossary of Literary Terms* (1999) argues about absurd movement that “the current movement, however, emerged in France after the horrors of World War II, as a rebellion against essential beliefs and values of traditional culture and traditional literature” (1). The absurd genre in some literary works is often revealed in novels, plays or poems, focusing on the experiences of characters in a situation where they cannot find any inherent purpose in life. Additionally, it is also most often represented through plot, actions and events. Absurdist literary works are famous made by Franz Kafka, Albert Camus, Samuel Beckett, Edward Albee, Eugène

Ionesco and Luigi Pirandello are also some popular absurdist authors whose works known as the genre of the absurd. There is one of the most famous absurdist novel entitled *The Stranger*. It is written by an absurdist author, Albert Camus.

Albert Camus (1913-1960), an Algerian-born French author, has been awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1957. He is the second-youngest recipient of the Nobel Prize in Literature, after Rudyard Kipling, and the first African-born writer to receive the award. Camus has died in a car accident in Villeblevin on January 5th, 1960, just over two years after receiving the award. His father is a French, has been died in early World War 1 and his mother is a Spanish descent. His origin and his experiences in Algeria during he settles his thirties over there has influenced in his thought and work. He is often cited as a proponent of existentialism - the philosophy that he is associated during his own lifetime - and specifically, his view is contributed to the rise of absurdism. Albert Camus is called as the Existentialist movement "absurdism", it is born out of him especially when he publishes his manuscript *The Myth of Sisyphus*. In his '*Myth of Sisyphus*' (1942), Camus defined human situation as basically meaningless and absurd, looking for clarity and meaning in a world that offers neither. His works, a novel *The Stranger* (1942) has become the quintessential work of fiction of the 20th century. *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1942) is an essay dedicated to the absurd. He also publishes two plays with the absurd theme: *Cross Purpose* (1944) and *Caligula* (1944). *Letters to a German Friend* (1945) is published with a number of other political essays, *The Rebel* (1951), and *Resistance, Rebellion, and Death* (1960).

The Stranger, one of Camus' influential literary works, is the novel used as the object of this research. *The Stranger* is a philosophical novel published in 1942 by Librairie Gallimard, France, it is initially published in French language entitled *L'Étranger* (as original title). Then it is translated into English language by Stuard Gilbert several years later. The style of the novel's plot is unusual and seems to contain the characteristics of the absurd genre. It tells about the life of the main character, named Meursault, who is also the only narrator of the novel. He is a Frenchman who alienates himself from concrete life in Algiers. Meursault is executed and gets a guillotine after a trial handled by French people, because of the murder case of an Arab, whom he shoots to death on the beach. Meursault claims that this is an accident. It happens because of the dazzling sunlight. Otherwise, in the trial, the case finally investigated is another unimportant case. It is caused by Meursault's indifference and his lack of emotion in his mother's funeral. He does not show mourning and feeling sad in her mother's funeral. Ironically, the Arabs are not even presented in the trial.

The novel presents characters from two different races, the French and the Arabs who are the inhabitants of Algeria, they have their own civilization within social life in a multicultural country like Algeria. In this novel, Algeria is a part of Third World countries as the general setting of the place around 1940. At that time, Algeria is described to be dominated by the French civilization, which looks like totally mastering Algerian civilization. In *Culture and Imperialism*, Edward W. Said quotes Camus says: "There has never yet been an Algerian nation.... The French of Algeria are also natives, in the strong sense of the word" (1993:179). It indicates that

Algeria seems like a French territory and it is positioned in the back-part when the whole story totally dominated by French characters.

There must be a reason why the two races above are presented in the novel. Since the both races are from two different sides of the world and have different cultures, the writer is interested to analyze about them more. Apart from the discussion about this novel as the absurd one, when it is viewed from French point of view, the writer feels a strong sense of French orientalist assumptions, such as imperialism, racial discrimination, racial superiority, French's stereotype, ethnocentrism, hegemony, slavery, oppression, lost of culture and identity, as the bias thoughts about the orient. On the contrary, the absurdity of the novel seems to dismantle all the orientalist perspectives about the Arabs. There is a kind of ambiguity presented in the novel, whether Camus is promoting or challenging French orientalism through this absurd novel. The writer assumes that the sense of ambivalence of the author is related to the genre of absurd. Thus, the writer entitled this research "Albert Camus' Absurdism and Ambivalent Views on French Orientalist Prejudice as Reflected in *"The Stranger"*".

1.2. The Identification of the Problem

The Stranger employs characters from two different races, the French and the Arabs, and the story sets in Algeria. In the novel, the time setting is around 1940 in Algeria and the country is under French colonization. In the novel, it is mentioned that the Arabs are the native of Algeria. However, the French seems to be more

dominant, as if the Arabs are the real natives. The French people have already set their underestimation toward the Arabs arbitrarily. Automatically they have racial prejudice toward the Arabs. The Arab characters are presented with all negative representation. Here, under the French perspective, the Arabs are described as uncivilized culture, barbarian, illogical, primitive, vulgar, rude, disabled bodies, and lack of knowledge. However, as an absurdist, Camus seems do not focus on the actual details in both of the races, but he keep standing at the absurdity of human life. Therefore, all of those negative images of the Arabs from the French perspectives become blurred. The writer believes that this absurdism of the author indirectly reflects his ambivalent views toward French racial prejudice who judge all the bad things towards the Arabs, arbitrarily.

1.3. The Scope of the Research

The term of Orientalism as the scope of the research is needed to make the analysis clear and focuses on the topic of the research. Here, the writer concentrating on the three following points:

1. Brief elaboration about the basic thoughts of Albert Camus' Absurdism by looking at the elements of absurdism in *The Stranger*, and it is completed with the relation of character Meursault in *The Stranger* with the character Sisyphus in Camus' essay *The Myth of Sisyphus*.
2. The presentation of French racial prejudice toward the Arabian native in the novel *The Stranger* as the reflection of French Orientalist ways of thinking.

3. How basic thought of Absurdism reflects Albert Camus' ambivalent views about French racial prejudice.

1.4. The Objective of the Research

The aims of this research are to show the absurdity of the author by examining the elements of absurdism in *The Stranger* and looking at the essay *The Myth of Sisyphus* as the birth of Camus' absurdism. The character Meursault in *The Stranger* indeed seems as a reflection of Sisyphus hero in the essay *The Myth of Sisyphus*. Both of them explained as the absurdist characters. Besides, it is also to reveal the French Orientalist prejudice toward the Arabian people as described through the two different characters in the novel *The Stranger*. However, the main objective of the research is to prove, examine and show how the absurdism ideology of Camus has been used to cover reveal about Camus' ambivalent stance about Orientalism itself.

1.5. The Reviews of Previous Studies

In conducting the research, the writer provides several researches as comparison of her research. *The Stranger* is one of Albert Camus' most popular philosophical novels that reap many overviews and strictures from many literary critics and other communities. The research about this novel is multifarious. Some previous researches are used as sources.

Matthew H. Bowker from Medaille College, Department of Interdisciplinary Studies in Buffalo, New York, conducts a research entitled “Meursault and Moral Freedom: The Stranger’s Unique Challenge to an Enlightenment Ideal” (2009). In this research, Bowker applies a new one, by discussing about multi-disciplinary interpretation of *The Stranger* to the philosophy of the absurd and the politics of modern freedom. Here Matthew H. Bowker argues by contrasting Kant’s *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals* with Meursault’s apparent lack of moral freedom, that Meursault is the main character posing a powerful challenge to modern moral philosophy, a challenge that is denied, suppressed, and rebuked with varying degrees of hostility (Bowker: 23). Bowker argues that between Meursault and moral freedom is summarizing the complex relationship between *The Stranger* and the absurd itself. Bowker explores the sources and consequences of this ambivalence about freedom while raising questions about contemporary critical reactions to Meursault. According to Bowker’s interpretation, Meursault as a controversial character forces his audiences to contend with an ambivalence of uncomfortable emotional about freedom. It seems like he is merely forced to be free because Meursault has lack of freedom. He says then, in the story, the efforts that are made by the prosecutor, judge and jury in the trial try to makes Meursault and attempt to force Meursault to be free. Forcing Meursault to be free is to interpret Meursault’s lack of freedom as an illness, insanity, or even a reflection of a social or cultural alienation.

The second research can be related to the research is an article written by Md Ziaul Haque, entitled “Comparing Camus *The Stranger* and Becketts *Waiting for*

Godot” (2012). According to Haque, in *The Stranger*, Camus portrays Meursault, the book's narrator and main character is detached and unemotional. Its theme and outlook are often cited as examples of existentialism. In fact, its content explores various philosophical schools of thought, including absurdism, as well as determinism, nihilism, and stoicism. Through *The Stranger*, Camus explores his own philosophy: absurd. In short, absurdism says the world is devoid of rational meaning. While in *Waiting for Godot* Haque says, it is an absurdist play that explores the themes of existentialist philosophy. As Haque says the sheer emptiness and randomness of the plot causes the audiences or the readers to wonder if anything is going to happen and whether there is any meaning in anything play, or in life. In this research, Haque compares dissimilarities and resemblances between *The Stranger* and *Waiting for Godot*. In each story, the characters are very dissimilar from their society and simultaneously, they are very analogous to each other. If Meursault in *The Stranger* does not has any aim to pray for God to save his soul when he is in prison, contrasting Vladimir and Estragon in *Waiting For Godot*, who hang around several years just for their God. Then Haque argues that, to hang around for someone who is not going to appear is as meaningless as doing nothing by any mean, just similar to Mersault who lives at the split life. It means we do not find making any significant targets in life by any of them.

Another related study is a thesis by Rany Syafrina, an English Department student of Andalas University Padang. Her thesis is entitled “Orientalist Discourse in Joseph Conrad’s *Almayer’s Folly: A Story of an Eastern River*” (2010). This research analyzes the images about Indonesia and Malaysia which are told by Joseph Conrad

through the main character Kaspar Almayer. She also shows the relationship between the direct experiences of the author toward his work and also the Orientalism issues. According to Rany, there are negative images toward Indonesia and Malaysia: Indonesian and Malaysian people are groups of primitive people, Malaysia and Indonesia as unpleasant places, Indonesia and Malaysia as “European’s Others”. Rany considers that Joseph Conrad is one of the Orientalist writers who use his literary work as a tool to tell and deliver his Orientalist ideologies.

1.6. The Theoretical Framework

In doing this research, the writer applies Post-colonial criticism focusing on Edward Said’s theory of Orientalism. Post-colonial studies stands at the intersection of debates about race, colonialism, gender, politic and language. The term Post-colonial is used to find out the impact of colonization to the present day. Post-colonial literary criticism is a method of investigating, analyzing and evaluating work of literature written by people which is talk about post-colonial. In other senses, it deals with the reading and writing of literature written in previously or currently colonized countries, or literature written in colonizing countries which deals with colonization or colonized peoples. It can also deal with the way in which literature in colonizing countries shape the language, images, scenes, traditions and so forth in colonized countries. It focuses on the way in which colonizing culture distorts the experience and realities, and inscribes the inferiority, of the colonized people. According to Bill Ashcroft’s book *Empire Writes Back* (2002), Postcolonialism

consists of a set of theories in philosophy and various approaches to literary analysis concerning with literature written in English in countries that are still colonies of other countries.

Historically, the beginnings of Postcolonialism's theoretical and social concerns can be traced to the 1950s. The terms postcolonial and postcolonialism firstly appear in scholarly journals in the mid-1980s as subtitled in texts such as Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin's previously mentioned powerful work, and in 1990, in Ian Adam and Helen Tiffin's *Past the Last Post: Theorizing Post-Colonialism and Post-Modernism*. According to Ashcroft, Griffith, and Tiffin in their book *Key Concepts in Post-Colonial Studies*, Post-Colonialism includes definitions of diaspora, fanonism, imperialism, manicheanism, mimicry, negritude, orientalism, settler-colony, transculturation, and hybridity. In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon argues that an entirely new world must come to overcome the binary system in which black is evil and white is good. This is a work that highlights the tensions or binary oppositions of white versus black, good versus evil, and rich versus poor. One of the major discussions on postcolonial criticism is colonialist ideology. Tyson says, "Colonialist ideology is as colonial discourse to mark its relationship to the language in which colonialist thinking was expressed, was based on the colonizers' assumption of their own superiority" (2006:419). It means colonialist ideology containing the thinking of colonizers (Western) toward the colonized (Eastern). One of postcolonial issues that are often discussed by some people is Orientalism, and it is the term what the writer will use as theory of this research.

Orientalism

In this research, the concept of Orientalism is used as the basic to reveal and to dismantle the strong issues in *The Stranger* which directly presents characters from two different races, the French and the Arabs. The concept of Orientalism is an important term in Postcolonial theory, this is the term popularized by Edward Said's book *Orientalism*, in which he examines the processes by which the 'Orient' is, and continues to be constructed in European thinking. The concept of Orientalism is a study concept of the discussion around the differences between West and East, where it started from the birth of Western Pride. People of European society are proud toward their civilization and knowledge, they feel that they are covered by the whole perfection as super power countries, the major and the right one around the world they are already progressed, prosperous and never colonized. They have more things in every way such as physical, race, knowledge, class, and all features of life.

These prides bring them in shaping the dark judgments and images toward East in many parts, especially Arab and Islam countries, which are considered as low quality, passive, uncivilized, exotic, uneducated, barbarian, undeveloped, and so forth. Meanwhile, Europeans automatically become active, rational, civilized and sophisticated. In his book *Orientalism*, Edward Said reveals that there is a very thick barrier between West and East, where the barrier is intentionally made on the basis of their belief in defining themselves and Eastern (Oriental) that "we are different" or "between us and them". This pride and confidence are shown through the literary work, scientific, and other media sources.

Edward Said, a politically active scholar of Palestinian in the United States focusing his analysis about the process of Orientalism throughout his book *Orientalism* (1978). The practice of Orientalism is pioneered by France and Britain as the Old conquerors where they try to dominate their colonized by using colonial discourse. According to Said (1978), Orientalism is the creation of non-European stereotypes that suggested so-called Orientals were indolent, thoughtless, sexually immoral, unreliable, and demented. Said notes, the European conquerors believe that they accurately describe the inhabitants of their newly acquired lands in “the East.” Most broadly, Said discusses Orientalism as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient ‘dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it. In short, Orientalism is as the Western style for dominating, restructuring and having the authority over the Orient’ (Said 1978:3). In this sense, it is a classic example of Foucault’s definition of a discourse. It means that Orientalism is about European strategy to dominate the colonized.

In this concept, Said divides Orientalism becomes two major sorts which are called Occident and Orient. Occident refers to European countries especially the Old conquerors that then dominate the Orient. Orient refers to European colonized countries, and Islam, which is then assumed as the “Others”. Here, Orientalism constructs the West (Occident) as a binary opposition towards the East (Orient). The Orient is not an inert fact of nature but it is a phenomenon constructed by generations of intellectuals, artists, commentators, writers, politicians, and, more importantly, constructed by the naturalizing of a wide range of Orientalist assumptions and

stereotypes. The relationship between the Occident and the Orient is a relationship of power, domination, varying degrees of a complex hegemony. As a result, the Orient is always considered inferior. Said discuss Orientalism as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient, which means “making statement about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, teaching it, settling it, ruling over it” (Ashcroft 167). Consequently, Orientalist discourse, for Said, is more valuable as a sign of the power exerted by the West over the Orient than a ‘true’ discourse about the Orient.

1.7. The Methods of the Research

Research is a process of collecting, analyzing and interpreting information to answer the questions and to find the truth. In conducting the research, the writer will follow three steps. They are:

1.7.1. Collecting the Data

In collecting the data, the writer uses library research method to collect two kinds of data. The first is the primary data and the second is the secondary data. The primary data are taken from the literary work itself, *The Stranger* by Albert Camus and secondary data is any information taken from literary theory books, some journals and articles concerning the novel that are available in the libraries and internet.

1.7.2. Analyzing the Data

In analyzing the data, the writer uses descriptive method by using some books and other sources that deals with the Orientalism literary theory, also using other sources and books that deals with Post-colonial literary theory. The descriptive method is used to identify Orientalism issues, especially the concepts of Arabian's dark depictions through French perspective which is viewed by Orientalism approach, to see how French people in Algeria (as the West or occident) consider Arabs and Algeria (as East or Orient), and to examine how the author's ideology concept of Absurdism reveals through his novel and influence the finding meanings of the novel. This Edward Said's theory is used to conduct this analysis.

1.7.3. Presenting the Result Analysis

In presenting the result of analysis, the descriptive method is applied since the research is a qualitative one. In *Qualitative Research for Education*, Robert C. Bodgan and Biklen said, "Qualitative research is descriptive, the collected data is in the form words or pictures rather than numbers. The written result of the research contains quotation from the data to illustrate and substantiate the presentations...". (2006:20). It shows that the data are elaborated through words, not in form of pictures or numbers.