



Preface

This issue of *Critical Currents* is the result of the author's three-month stay at the Dag Hammarskjöld Centre in Uppsala between July and September 2007. As a scholar in residence, he used the creative period to complete the fundamental introductory chapter to his German translation of a groundbreaking work by Ashis Nandy¹ and furthermore drafted the three essays presented in this volume.

These highlight in different ways aspects of a political philosophy that remains a meaningful discourse today. At the same time, the contemporary thinking of both Mahatma Gandhi and Albert Camus as presented in these essays – while inspired by different points of departure and political practices – relates to some of the more substantive political-philosophical elements guiding Dag Hammarskjöld's perspectives and commitments, even though the parallels might not be immediately visible. There are no direct (in the sense of explicit) links that can be identified between the articulated views of Mahatma Gandhi (1869–1948), Albert Camus (1913–1960) and Dag Hammarskjöld (1905–1961). But when one takes note of their postulates with regard to a true humanism, they are at times surprisingly close to each other.²

1 Ashis Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy – Loss and Recovery of Self Under Colonialism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press 1984 (in German as *Der Intimfeind. Verlust und Wiederaneignung der Persönlichkeit im Kolonialismus*. Nettersheim: Verlag Graswurzelrevolution 2008; translated and with an introduction by Lou Marin: 'Einleitung: Zur Rezeption von M.K. Gandhis libertärem Anti-Kolonialismus', pp. 7–62).

2 As a banality, one only needs to 'google' the three names together. The result is an astonishingly wide panorama of collected words of wisdom, which all offer quotes from the three men (and especially from Camus and Hammarskjöld) on related issues.

Hammarskjöld had a very different social background and never presented himself as a person guided by political convictions. Instead he cherished the concept of a meticulous international civil servant abstaining from daily party politics. His fundamental values and principles, however, which provided him with guidance throughout his life, were anything but remote from those of Gandhi and Camus. Although he almost certainly disagreed fundamentally with the latter's existentialism, which was devoid of any religious spirituality, he shared Camus' strong moral integrity and uncompromising loyalty to fundamentally humanist principles.

It is striking that Hammarskjöld – who was extraordinarily conversant with philosophy and the arts, in particular creative writing – hardly ever acknowledged the work of Camus. The reason for this might lie not only in the fundamental differences over religion, but also in Hammarskjöld's relentless campaigning for the French diplomat Alexis Leger (who published his poetry as St. John Perse) as a Nobel Prize Laureate for literature. This ultimate honour was bestowed upon Albert Camus before Hammarskjöld's declared favourite, which was certainly not a decision that Hammarskjöld himself – as a member of the Swedish Academy – would have opted for. On the other hand, as strikingly, Gandhi's visions did not seem to play any prominent role in Hammarskjöld's views either, even though he had a great interest in India's cultures and religions.

Before Dag Hammarskjöld became the United Nations' second Secretary-General,

Gandhi after landing at Folkestone (UK), 12 September 1931.

Camus had already been publicly critical of the shortcomings of the United Nations System, which he had welcomed when it was established among the ruins of war-bombed Europe. As a follower of cosmopolitan ideas he was a supporter of the World Citizen Movement and observed with reservations the all too obvious limitations of the state-centred new world body and emerging global order. Sensitised among other things by the violence of the Spanish civil war, he refused in 1952 to remain personally affiliated to UNESCO after it accepted Franco's Spain as a member state.

Gandhi and Camus both occupied positions as practical as well as theoretical proponents of a new historical phase after World War II and before the international revolutionary spirit of the students' movement that emerged some two decades later, culminating in the revolts of 1968. The impact both Gandhi and Camus had on the struggles for social emancipation was not confined to their lifetime; the inspiration their ideas and thoughts had offered since the mid-20th century also had a significant impact on the new social movements emerging after their deaths.

Both were at times grossly misinterpreted, and perceptions of their posthumous relevance changed with the different readings of their positions. The essays in this volume bring this forcefully to the fore, particularly so in the case of Albert Camus. Criticised, ridiculed and denounced as a petty bourgeois liberal humanist since the mid-1950s³,

Camus would not be fully recognised for his radically anti-violent and truly humanist stance without the careful exploratory work of the likes of Lou Marin.⁴

After World War II the shocking truth about the forms of mass violence and the devastating impact it had – also on its survivors – gradually emerged. It showed what human beings and organised violence on the part of states can do to other human beings both in the Holocaust and the Gulag, but also elsewhere and under other circumstances. Gandhi and Camus personified in their particular, individual ways the alternatives to the deadly and devastating logic of violence and counter-violence, which destroys and dehumanises. They resisted the pragmatism of a ruthless utopian notion that those who want to change the world for the better have to accept that this necessarily entails sacrificing and compromising certain principles that are central to the humanist notion. Both refused to accept this kind of pseudo-revolutionary dictum, which in their view was an excuse for not taking up the true challenge: that of humanising the world without abandoning or betraying fundamental love for people and respect for human dignity – in oneself and others. They both in their different ways, during different times and in different social and historical contexts showed that living according to these convictions can have a real impact, and need not involve personal or political compromise.

3 It was in the main hall of Uppsala University (where the annual Dag Hammarskjöld Lecture is delivered these days) that in early December 1957 Camus – after having received the Nobel Prize for Literature – came under heavy attack by the students in the audience for his views on the anti-colonial war in Algeria and his efforts to seek a solution beyond the destructive forms of mass violence.

4 Cf. Lou Marin, *Ursprung der Revolte: Albert Camus und der Anarchismus*. Heidelberg: Verlag Graswurzelrevolution 1998. See also Henning Melber, “‘Die Welt hat den Sinn, den man ihr gibt’”. Das Herz als Mass aller Dinge: Albert Camus und die Menschlichkeit. In: *Ethnopschoanalyse 7. Solidarität, Individualität, Emanzipation*. Edited by Roland Apsel. Frankfurt/Main: Brandes&Apsel 2006, pp. 201-222.

Mahatma Gandhi shaped a particular empathy related to the processes of decolonisation early in the second half of the last century. Albert Camus contributed with his notion of revolt as a permanent human condition and act, creating a different form of emancipation from that offered by various totalitarian regimes, which ultimately brought about further repression and alienation rather than liberation.

Ashis Nandy, in his sensitive response to Mahatma Gandhi's thinking, which is the main focus of the third essay, draws much attention to the related aspect of internal colonisation. This is an integral part of the processes of domination and subjugation in the 'domestication of the savages', perceived from the Eurocentric-imperialist perspective as a 'civilising mission'. The emphasis on this aspect is reminiscent of the work of B. Traven. As an anti-militarist anarchist he fled after a narrow escape from execution in post-World War I Germany to spent most of his creative life in Mexico, where he published several widely read novels dealing with this phenomenon of an inner colonisation.⁵ This focus on structural and mental aspects of subjugation reminds us of the fact that violence always has a dimension beyond the

visible physical impact, which is at times at least as devastating. While external wounds might heal, internal wounds can continue to fester for the rest of a lifetime and destroy the individual's original identity.

In the meantime the views of both Gandhi and Camus have become less en vogue although anything but irrelevant. In the light of the new wars, which have had such an impact on the early years of the 21st century, it is more than an obscure historical-philosophical interest to revisit the relevance of their thinking. Being so different at first sight, they have more in common than one might originally assume. The essays in this volume will certainly illustrate this point. By doing so, they touch at the same time on issues that relate to relevant aspects of Dag Hammarskjöld's life and legacy. Camus and Gandhi shared a strictly anti-violent and anti-authoritarian approach to the execution of political power and the resistance to oppressive socio-political structures. They had much in common in their uncompromising, life-long humanist commitment. This resonated with the convictions of Hammarskjöld. It is a sad if not tragic irony that the lives of all three protagonists came to an end through violent death.

Henning Melber

⁵ See Christoph Ludszuweit, *B. Traven: Über das Problem der 'inneren Kolonisierung' im Werk von B. Traven*, Berlin: Karin Kramer Verlag, 1996. The true identity of Traven remained for a long time an object of speculation. See, for a concise and respectful portrait, 'Traven – an anti-biography', as posted on 22 May 2007 on the website <http://libcom.org/library/b-traven-anti-biography> (accessed on 23 March 2008). Traven himself once stated, 'The biography of a creative man is completely unimportant'. This attitude is shared by the author of the following essays, who prefers to be known under the pseudonym Lou Marin (a name which, for those aware of the stages of Albert Camus' all too short life, should ring a bell).