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BEING DIFFERENT: THE LIFE AND WORK OF ALBERT MEMMI

by

Michael Lejman

A Dissertation

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Abstract

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This dissertation is a study of the life and work of Albert Memmi, author of over twenty novels, essays, and other book length manuscripts as well as a consistent public commentator on subjects related to colonialism, Jewish identity, the sociology of race and oppression, and the postcolonial world. His work includes the widely acclaimed novel *The Pillar of Salt* as well as *The Colonizer and the Colonized* – a canonical text in the history of colonial society and power relations. A Tunisian Jew who immigrated to France following his home country's independence in 1957, both Memmi's work and his complex personal identity illustrate difficult questions and divisive issues stemming from decolonization as well as contemporary questions of identity and belonging in Europe, the Middle East, and former European colonies.

This project establishes and historicizes key elements of Memmi's body of work including his association of liberation from oppression with the assertion of culture, the development of secure representative institutions, and the ability to participate in the social construction of identity. This led Memmi to advocate nationalist formations as a step towards egalitarian democratic institutions wherein racial, religious, and cultural differences could give way to broader discourses on human rights and values. I confront the argument that Memmi's more recent critique of Islam and postcolonial states reflects a shift toward a Eurocentric perspective by arguing that Memmi's ideas and beliefs have remained consistent, exhibiting a universalism influenced by French Republican ideals which have themselves grown increasingly incompatible with contemporary discourse on postcolonial identity and the persistent legacies of colonialism.

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Introduction

A French Tunisian Jew possessing an identity and experience as complex as that description implies, Albert Memmi is also a renowned sociologist, novelist and philosopher. As a scholar and historical figure he is often compared to Frantz Fanon – whose work is often read in tandem with Memmi’s *The Colonizer and the Colonized* by students of colonialism along with essays such as Aimé Césaire’s *Discourse on Colonialism* – and interlocutors such as Sartre and Albert Camus.¹ At the same time both Memmi’s often vivid analysis of lived experiences and related fiction, in particular his first novel, *The Pillar of Salt*, reached a broad audience within and beyond the boundaries of the academy and the Francophone colonial world. Memmi’s extensive career and unique background shed light onto continuity and change from the colonial world to post-Cold War era and into the 21st century.

Existing studies of Memmi such as Judith Roumani’s 1987 monograph and Guy Dugas’ two volumes *Albert Memmi: écrivain de la déchirure* and *Albert Memmi: du malheur d’être Juif au bonheur sépharade* identify Memmi’s life and key texts and provide brief biographical details, though with more attention to Memmi’s Jewishness in the latter case.² In addition to these surface treatments, more incisive and scholarly

¹ Camus wrote a preface for *The Pillar of Salt*, however their relationship declined subsequently as Memmi critiqued the position of colonist claiming sympathy towards the colonized. See: Chapter 2.

² Judith Roumani, *Albert Memmi* (Philadelphia: CELFAN Edition Monographs, 1987); Guy Dugas. *Albert Memmi: du malheur d’être Juif au bonheur sépharade*. Paris: Alliance israélite universelle, 2001) and *Albert Memmi: écrivain de la déchirure*. (Sherbrooke, Québec: Editions Naaman, 1984).

studies have appeared in the form of reviews of specific texts and articles such as those contained in a 2011 issue of the *Journal of French and Francophone Philosophy* dedicated to Memmi, and a collection of articles on Memmi's fiction titled *Albert Memmi - Écrivain et Sociologue* from a 1988 conference at the University of Paris - Nanterre dedicated to Memmi's work. Most recently, Francophone literary scholar Lia Brozgal has produced the first book length manuscript analyzing Memmi's work in critical depth. Her essay, *Against Autobiography: Albert Memmi and the Production of Theory* questions a prevailing tendency to read Francophone fiction as overly autobiographical, excluding the theoretical contributions of Maghrebi writers.³

This dissertation seeks to further these conversations by examining Memmi's work from a historical perspective, deliberately engaging Memmi's literary and sociological contributions. Such a comprehensive approach is essential to understanding Memmi as a historical figure and his ideas within historiographical narratives. In doing so I also assess continuity and change over the course of Memmi's career, arguing that his central assertions regarding the meaning of liberation from oppressive conditions have remained consistent while these ideas as well as his qualifications as a commentator on the postcolonial world have increasingly come into question.

Albert Memmi was born in 1920 in a neighborhood bordering the *hara*, the Jewish ghetto of Tunis. Tunisia had been a part of France's North African colonial territory for almost forty years. A budding young scholar, Memmi entered schools funded by international Jewish support agencies and eventually the local French lycée,

³ Lia Brozgal, *Against Autobiography: Albert Memmi and the Production of Theory* (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 2013).

pursuing his studies despite feelings of guilt at leaving his father's leather goods shop. The young Memmi flirted with Zionist activism while pursuing interests in literature and philosophy, educational experiences undertaken via the French intellectual tradition which he contrasted with conservative religious traditions he associated with his parents' generation and the communal leaders of the ghetto.

His education interrupted by the Second World War and tumultuous experiences under the Vichy regime, Memmi returned to university study and eventually made his way to the Sorbonne where he would complete the initial drafts of his first novel *The Pillar of Salt* – the memoirs of a conflicted Jewish student's youth in Tunis. Returning to France in order to solicit a publisher following the conclusion of his studies in 1949, he would encounter and receive the support of Jean-Paul Sartre who by this time had risen to prominence as one of the foremost intellectuals in an era when such figures commanded national attention amidst the Cold War and anti-colonial struggles. Sartre provided Memmi an avenue through which to encounter other prominent intellectuals, including Raymond Aron and the phenomenologist philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty, as well as the opportunity to publish pieces of *The Pillar of Salt* in editions of Sartre's influential journal *Les Temps Moderne*. This and the subsequent print release of the novel in 1953 would win Memmi formal acclaim and a reputation as a budding literary talent.

However it was his 1957 essay on power relations, the construction of identity in the colonial world, and the choices facing the titular duo in *The Colonizer and the Colonized* that established Memmi as an compelling intellectual willing to undertake strong critical analysis of the colonial world while sparing neither the traditions of his heritage nor those of the European colonizer. *The Colonizer and the Colonized* found a

place in the conversations of French intellectuals, the prison cells of anti-colonial revolutionaries, the hands of those far removed from the North African context who found something of themselves in Memmi's portraits, and the reading lists of scholars from numerous disciplines for whom it remains a rigorous but accessible tool for examining the world Memmi confronted.⁴ Presenting anti-colonial nationalism as a necessary reassertion of social agency and cultural identity, Memmi depicted nationalism as a bridge between parochial tradition and the pursuit of democratic universalism. Published as the Algerian War approached its most violent period, the essay's success also coincided with Memmi's decision to immigrate to France permanently following Tunisian independence and amid concerns regarding his ability to live freely as Jewish public intellectual in Tunisia.

Relocating to an apartment on the Rue Saint-Merri in Paris, which remains his address at the time of this writing, he accepted a position at the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique and later as a member of the sociology faculty at the University of Paris – Nanterre. During the 1960s he produced examinations of Jewish identity, most notably *Portrait of a Jew* (1962) and *Liberation of the Jew* (1966), longer and more thorough essays than *The Colonizer and the Colonized*. Here he furthered discussions sparked by Sartre in *Anti-Semite and Jew* (1946) on the construction of Jewish identity while contemplating his own Jewishness and portraying the state of Israel as the mechanism through which to pursue liberation in a manner similar to the postcolonial nation-state. The incisive approach of these works attracted criticism from fellow Jewish

⁴ The essay appeared with a preface from Sartre that later be including in Sartre's 1964 collection *Colonialism and Neo-Colonialism*.

intellectuals – including Raymond Aron - and readers angered by Memmi’s often caustic treatment of Jewish institutions and culture.

During this period Memmi also embraced the diverse audience who related their own conditions to *The Colonizer and the Colonized*. He contributed articles to a wide-variety of publications and spoke to audiences in Europe and the United States on the colonial situation beyond North Africa, Negritude, African-American civil rights, and questions regarding women, migrants, and even French Canadians. In doing so he engaged the work of writers and activists such as Fanon, Kwame Nkrumah, Simon de Beauvoir, and Malcolm X. During his visits to the United States he struck up a relationship with James Baldwin for whom he wrote prefaces to French editions of Baldwin’s essays including *The Fire Next Time*. These and several examples of Memmi’s commentary on the former subjects were reprinted for a loose collection of articles published in 1968 as *Dominated Man: Notes Towards a Portrait*. Memmi also edited two volumes of Maghrebi literature during the 1960s and another in 1985 and has since considered the function of postcolonial writers and European languages in his commentary on the postcolonial world.⁵

Memmi’s work since the 1960s includes a 1979 study of relationship dynamics, *Dependence*, and his 1982 essay *Racism* - wherein he employed the term “heterophobia” in reference to describe the fear of difference – as well as further novels, retrospective pieces, and a collection of poetry.⁶ However, as a public intellectual and commentator,

⁵ These are *Anthologie des écrivains, maghrébins d’expression française* (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1964), *Anthologie des écrivains française du Maghreb* (Présence Africaine, 1969) and *Ecrivains francophones du Maghreb: une anthologie* (Paris: Seghers, Coll, 1985). See Chapter 7.

⁶ The novels include his stylistically innovative 1969 novel *The Scorpion*, the adventures of an ancestor attempting to recover his lost “Kingdom of Within” in *The Desert* (1977), and a

Memmi's interventions into contemporary affairs turned towards the struggles of the postcolonial world and questions pertaining to the Middle East. His first large published work on the subject was *Jews and Arabs* (1975), a collection of Memmi's print media articles, conference presentations, unpublished essays, and speeches from the 1960s and 70s on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the future of Israel. In both cases Memmi displayed a distrust of Arab leaders and concern regarding the sublimation of Sephardi perspectives into an Ashkenazi narrative of Jewish history in public discourse on Israel by both supporters and opponents of that state. His commentary on these subjects, the condition of postcolonial states, and immigration appears in his retrospectives and numerous articles and interviews featured in French publications ranging from *Le Monde Diplomatique* and *L'Express*, to the conservative leaning *La Figaro*, and *L'Humanite* - the daily paper of the French Communist Party – as well as numerous publications worldwide.⁷

This wide-range of material provides an opportunity to assess the thought of an, admittedly unique, anti-colonial writer through a progression of key turning points in the history of subjects central to his work such as decolonization, the collapse of the Soviet bloc, the September 11th attacks, the and the heightened prominence of questions regarding the nature of French society in light of European integration and postcolonial immigration. Memmi reemerged in these conversations not only through his commentary

fictionalized account of protagonist attempting to navigate post-independence Tunisia in *La Pharaon* (1988). The retrospectives are *Ce que je Croix* (1986), *La Testament Insolent* (2009) and *Le Nomad Immobile* (2000) - the most comprehensive and original of the three. The book of poetry is titled *Ah Quel Bonheur!* (1994).

⁷ Particularly, but not limited to, publications with a Jewish focus.

in interviews and print media but via his controversial 2004 essay *Decolonization*. This piece, a highly critical and pessimistic evaluation of postcolonial states and issues associated with immigration from primarily Muslim former colonies – exemplified by controversies such as the public debate over the wearing of the hijab – attracted almost exclusively negative reviews.⁸ While Memmi claimed, since *The Colonizer and the Colonized* and once again in the introduction to *Decolonization*, to write from between the worlds he observed – colonizer/colonized, North African/French, religious/secular – critics of *Decolonization* accused Memmi of abandoning this perspective for that of a suspicious leftist intellectual associating progress with democratic universalism defined by and associated with a Eurocentric tradition.

My study confronts the argument, prominent in criticism of *Decolonization*, that Memmi’s perspective and ideas have changed over the course of his career from the powerful message of liberation in *The Colonizer and the Colonized* to a dismissal of non-Western perspectives and refusal to confront the continued influence of the West on the postcolonial world. Critics of *Decolonization* have detected a shift in Memmi’s attitudes toward a more cynical and even eurocentric view of the postcolonial. For example. Historian Lawrence Schehr went so far as to suggest Memmi completed a process of *tikkun* – self-discovery through writing – by ultimately finding his identity in an insular Frenchness, while one reviewer, Lisa Lieberman, offered *Decolonization* as evidence that “he has found a home at last in the France of his youthful imaginings, the liberal and

⁸ Some of which are noted below, however, for a wider range of responses to *Decolonization* as well as the sources of the few positive reviews, see Chapter 7.

secular republic that promised so much to oppressed peoples and delivered so little.”⁹ Another, Sina Salessi, accused Memmi of a “recourse to myth” in which he revived or perpetuated the tropes he had once problematized and reframed.¹⁰ This criticism accompanied some praise from French historian Alain-Gérard Slama as well as European and American conservatives, suggesting that Memmi has in fact won approval from not only the “liberal and secular republic” but more reactionary elements in contemporary discourse.¹¹

However, I contend that Memmi’s concerns regarding the state of the postcolonial world as well as his skepticism of accusations of neo-colonialism are consistent with the full scope of his work. I establish this consistency by exploring how Memmi conceptualized oppression and liberation throughout the course of a career in which he has insisted that progress is symbolized by the pursuit of democratic universalism and a reconciliation between constructions of tradition and modernity. I then interrogate Memmi’s more recent work to reveal continuities and discontinuities while locating his ideas in relation to contemporaries and broader spectrums of thought on the subjects he addresses. In doing so I explore not only the questions key to my argument but Memmi’s array of contributions on these subjects such as his use of “portraits” as a mechanism for

⁹ Neocosmos, "Review: Albert Memmi's Decolonization and the Decolonized," 190. Schehr, "Memmi's Tricultural Tikkun," 77-8; Lisa Lieberman, "Albert Memmi's About Face," *Michigan Quarterly Review* vol. XLVI, no. 3, (Summer 2007).

¹⁰ Sina Salessi, "The Postcolonial World and the Recourse to Myth: a critique of Albert Memmi's Decolonization and the Decolonized," *Third World Quarterly* 34 no.5 (2013), 930.

¹¹ Alain-Gérard Slama, 'Le colonisé imaginaire,' *Le Figaro Magazine*. 20 July 2004.49. Slama was born in Tunisia and is a former cultural studies director of Sciences Po. See also: Sheila Walsh, "A Prophetic Voice?: Albert Memmi's Portrait du Décolonisé Arabo-Musulman et de quelques Autres," *Journal of Franco-Irish Studies* 3, no. 1 (2013), 6.

understanding constructions of identity and his conflicted utilitarian approach to nationalism. In addition, I present the story of Memmi's intellectual career from his earliest acquaintance with Sartre to his most recent thoughts on the Arab Spring revolutions of the 21st century.

I begin in the first chapter by examining Memmi's early career and *The Pillar of Salt*, which features a young Jewish protagonist, Alexandre Mordechai Bennilouche. A budding intellectual born to a lower middle class shopkeeper in Tunis' Jewish ghetto, he finds himself trapped between a conception of progressive modernity based upon his appreciation of the French intellectual tradition and his family's beliefs and expectations – a very different sort of tradition portrayed as self-limiting and contrasted with the colonizer's dynamic modernity. I argue the interstitial trap explored in *The Pillar of Salt* is a reoccurring theme that reappears throughout Memmi's work, providing a fruitful perspective but no secure conception of identity. While Memmi's "portraits" in *The Colonizer and The Colonized* feature a relatively well demarcated opposition between two groups with variations within each, *Pillar of Salt* examined the internal struggle specifically. Alexandre's quest self-definition between forms of tradition and modernity, religion and secularism, Europe and Africa, illustrates the lived experience of oppression and the limits imposed on those seeking opportunities beyond their restrains. In addition to material deprivation and persecution, Alexandre's story depicts the all-encompassing uncertainty of those denied a voice in their own social definition.

Chapter two addresses *The Colonizer and the Colonized*. Here I identify Memmi's teleological framework of oppression/liberation, his claim to authority via his interstitial position both within and outside of colonial categories, and his use of "portraits" as an

analytical mechanism – placing this text and Memmi’s methods in the context of other anti-colonial authors such as Fanon. Archetypes based upon identities imposed under colonialism and responses to the colonial experience, Memmi employed these “portraits” to discuss both the choices imposed upon individuals within relationships of dominance or dependence and the construction of identity. Memmi identifies cultural identity as a key site of oppression, arguing that oppressive conditions prevent individuals or groups from contributing to the social construction of identity – i.e. liberation does not mean the ability to entirely define the image of oneself, but the ability to participate in the process.

In addition to roles enforced by the colonial situation the colonized, denied social agency, are subject to a process of objectification that establishes a “mythical portrait,” an amalgamation of characteristics attributed to the colonized. Having established this and explored the mechanics of colonialism, Memmi then concludes that the assertion of cultural identity is a requisite for complete liberation, with anti-colonial nationalism serving a dangerous but necessary function. While Memmi ultimately believed in democratic universalism and the de-emphasis of cultural differences, in *The Colonizer and the Colonized* and elsewhere he insisted that the assertion or reassertion of cultural identity supported by representative institutions was necessary for the oppressed to freely pursue the universalism the colonial power hypocritically advocated.

In part two of the project, chapters 3 and 4 link the material from part one with Memmi’s work on Jewish identity wherein Memmi developed his framework of oppression/liberation in greater detail – in particular the responses of the oppressed, the need to assert cultural identity, and the necessity of concrete institutions for the oppressed to fully participate in the construction of identity and historical narrative. In this case it is

the state of Israel that represents Memmi's previously theoretical nationalist projects. Memmi's primary works on Jewish identity, *Portrait of a Jew* and *Liberation of the Jew*, are deeper and more personal evaluations of culture and social consciousness. Memmi brings a variety of sources – including Jewish religious traditions, European political voices, a wide range of literary sources from Shakespeare to modern cinema – to bear in considering the construction of an anti-Semitic “mythical portrait” of the Jew and Jewish responses that he assessed as defensive and excessively passive. In assessing Memmi's proclamation of support for a national solution as a path towards escaping the Jewish condition, I also situate Memmi in the historiography of Zionism.

In Chapter five I assess Memmi's commentary on the State of Israel and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict. Memmi's work on the subject – partially anthologized in *Jews and Arabs* - reflects his concerns regarding the persistence of authoritarianism and violence in the postcolonial world. In addition, Memmi drew attention to divisions within Israel and the Jewish diaspora not only between advocates for differing approaches towards Palestine and the Arab world but between Ashkenazi and Sephardic Jews. I present Memmi as an early voice in Western public discourse drawing attention to these distinction and demonstrate the continuity between Memmi's previous discussions of oppression/liberation and his views on relations between Jews and Arabs including his “socialist solution” to the Israeli/Palestinian conflict. I conclude by both establishing these similarities and questioning the limitations of Memmi's frameworks as applied to the Israeli-Palestinian situation.

The third section of this project focuses on Memmi's treatment of the postcolonial world. In chapter six, I identify Memmi's depictions of the immigrant experience and

engagement with contemporary debates regarding immigration and European identity. Memmi's treatment of immigration reveals a skepticism towards multiculturalism that sits uneasily with his calls for cross-cultural understanding. In his portrayals and discussion of immigrant experiences – in parts works such as his second novel *Strangers* (1955) and *The Scorpion* (1969) as well as numerous articles and the second half of *Decolonization* – he expresses familiar regarding the nature of culture creation and the fragility of identity unsupported by concrete institutions. This chapter employs questions related to immigrants and immigration to reveal tensions between Memmi's interstitial position and transnational claims of hybrid identity.

Chapter seven concludes the project with an assessment of Memmi's views on decolonization and the post-colonial world based upon Memmi's articles and interviews evaluating the results of the independence struggles in North Africa and future concerns as well as his arguments in *Decolonization*. I argue in detail that Memmi's views on the postcolonial world are grounded in long held beliefs including a suspicion of parochial claims, appeals to tradition, and the idea that the hybrid identity which underpins his own claim to authority can be a secure basis from which to pursue stability and combat heterophobia. Whether or not these are "French" or Eurocentric views, they do not reflect a change in Memmi's ideas and beliefs, even though *Decolonization* may lack the evenhandedness and intimate portrayal of social conditions characteristic of his previous essays. In my conclusion, I assess the meaning of this distinction and the real concerns raised by Memmi's objections.

During the research process I was able to exchange letters with Memmi as well as scholars in both United States and France, including former colleagues of Memmi at the

University of Paris-Nanterre, Guy Dugas, Lawrence Schehr, and other scholars who have published on Memmi's work. Thanks to a travel grant based on my preliminary research I spent the winter of 2010-11 in Paris examining datebooks, manuscript drafts, and professional correspondence housed at the Bibliothèque Nationale and the University of Paris as well as audio interviews at the BNF- Inathèque. My dissertation is informed by this research, Memmi's published manuscripts, interviews, newspaper articles, and secondary literature on Memmi by sociologists, literary scholars, anthropologists, philosophers, psychologists, and the French press. Secondary literature from several historiographical sub-fields has been critical to my analysis, including the history of modern France, North Africa, empire more broadly, colonialism, nationalism, postcolonial studies, Jewish history and philosophy, transnational and immigration studies. Finally this project is influenced by Memmi's own belief that academic study must never be divorced from the lived experience and that both must be pursued rigorously in order to bring about greater understanding of our world, ourselves, each other, and the future we hope to achieve.

Part One: Colonialism

Chapter 1

The Pillar of Salt: Portrait of the Colonized Intellectual as a Young Man

*“I arrived in Paris, with all the trembling one can imagine, with a large manuscript written on pages of a schoolbook.”*¹ - Albert Memmi

In *Le Nomade Immobile*, a combination of autobiography and social commentary published in 2000, Albert Memmi begins: “I was born on December 15th, 1920 at eight in the morning at 4 impasse Tronja, rue Vielle-Tronja, Tunis, in Tunisia.”² Identified so specifically by Memmi, this location on the edge of the *hara*, one of the North African ghettos introduced starting in the 15th century as compulsory Jewish districts, served as the primary vantage point from which he observed the colonial world during his youth.³ According to a 1906 report, an estimated 43,000 Jews lived in Tunis, representing a significant minority, 20-25%, of the city’s approximately 200,000 people.⁴ Memmi’s

¹ Albert Memmi, *La terre interieure: entretiens avec Victor Malka*, (Paris: Gallimard, 1976) 118.

² Albert Memmi, *Le Nomade Immobile*, (Paris: Arlea, 2000) 12.

³ Jane S. Gerber, “History of the Jews in the Middle East and North Africa from the Rise of Islam until 1700,” in Reeva Spector Simon, Michael Menachem Laskier, and Sara Reguer eds. *The Jews of the Middle East and North African in Modern Times* (Columbia University Press, 2003) 6. Over time, many of these ghettos were further impoverished as more prosperous Jews were able to move to other districts, particularly during the colonial period as noted by Harvey Goldberg in the case of Libya. Harvey Goldberg, “Libya,” in *The Jews of the Middle East and North African in Modern Times*, 438.

⁴ The remainder included approximately 78,500 Muslims, 18,600 French, and 60,000 other, mostly Italian, Europeans. The report was reproduced two years later by the Alliance Israélite Universelle, see: L. Guéron, “Comparisons between Tunisian Jewry and Other Groups in the Regency, 1908,” in Aron Rodrigue *Images of the Sephardi and Eastern Jewries in Transition: The Teachers of the Alliance Israélite Universelle, 1860-1939* (Seattle, Washington: University of Washington Press, 1993) 158-59.

father Francois (Fradji) was a Tunisian Jew with some Italian ancestry, while his mother Marguerite (Maira) Sarfati descended from the Kabyle – a Berber ethnic group who spoke a Judeo-Arabic dialect. Regarding the origins of his name, which means “baby” in Kabyle,⁵ Memmi has hypothesized that Memmi is a derivative of the Roman “Memmia,” suggesting a direct or indirect connection to decedents of the Roman colonization.⁶ A saddle-maker, Francois Memmi was part of a class of artisan shopkeepers - able to avoid extreme poverty and support Albert’s early education.

In 1976, Memmi released a book length transcript of a long interview with French writer and radio broadcaster Victor Malka in which he discussed his early life and revisited key points from his analytical work. The title, *La terre intérieure*, evokes Memmi’s reference to an epitaph he ascribed to the *hara* - “my inner land” - and his conviction that “because of my subsequent history, I became a nomad, I have no ties, but at the same time, I am firmly anchored.”⁷ However, Memmi’s “inner land” is a community in which he did not technically live, even in this beginning he appeared along the border. Thus the *hara* and Memmi’s family also serve as the initial foundation of Memmi’s interstitial identity between classes and cultures.

⁵ Michele Robequain indicates this in a brief “Jalons Biobibliographiques” in a 2002 edited volume derived from a conference of the same name. David Ohana, Claude Sitbon and David Mendelson eds. *Lire Albert Memmi*, (Paris: Éditions Factual, 2002), 214-15.

⁶ Memmi, *Nomade Immobile*, 15. In addition to the ancient occupation of the region by the Roman state, Italians, 52,706, composed slightly over a quarter of the population of Tunis, including 3,000-4,000 Italian Jews called the Colony of Livorno. There is also a section of *The Scorpion* in which the eye doctor Marcel reads a detailed account of his brother Emile’s research into the history of the family name (also Memmi) in which Emilio considers detailed histories dating the family back to the Roman colonization of Africa or the Renaissance Italian painter Lippo Memmi. As with much of Emile’s writing, Marcel is highly skeptical. Memmi, *The Scorpion* 17-21

⁷ Memmi, *La terre intérieure*, 71.

In a 2011 special edition of the *Journal of French and Francophone Philosophy* dedicated to Memmi, Francophone literary scholar Debra Kelly approaches Memmi's career as "a life project from which the individual concerned and others who read the work can learn something, at both private and public levels, concerning the functioning of human interactions."⁸ A primary goal of this life project has been to understand how the opposed constructions that frame Memmi's identity as a French Tunisian Jew co-exist within himself and the broader relationship between culture and self - the "interstitial perspective" Homi Bhabha identified as a key paradigm of colonial anxiety.⁹

Several of the oppositions Memmi explored present a common theme of tradition versus modernity represented by the culture of the colonized and colonizer respectively – often also couched in terms of Islamic or Jewish culture versus a modernism represented by elements of the French intellectual and literary tradition. Rather than address tradition and modernism in the abstract – problematic terms questioned by numerous historians and critical theorists - Memmi presented specific contexts, distinguishing between religious/cultural/social identities while acknowledging the intersections between these forms.¹⁰ Thus, over the course of his career, when Memmi labeled the cultural practices

⁸ Debra Kelly, "How to Live? One Question and Six or Seven Life Lessons with Albert Memmi," *Journal of French and Francophone Studies* XIX, no. 2 (2011), 68.

⁹ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, (London: Routledge, 1994), 3. I say "Seemingly" since postcolonial scholarship regarding hybridity and the creole promotes the rethinking of colonialism as a monolithic contrast between colonizer and colonized, see: Homi Bhabha's own theories of hybridity as well as the discussion spawned by Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic*. However, the anxiety Bhabha describes is partially created by limited access to institutions but also by the tendency of colonial discourse to oversimplify and ignore hybridity. See: the discussion of communication via the dominant discourse in Stuart Hall, *Encoding and Decoding in the Television Discourse*, (Birmingham: Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, 1973), 17.

¹⁰ Historians of nationalism such as Eric Hobsbawm, Eugen Weber, Ernest Gellner, and Benedict Anderson have examined the constructed nature tradition. Recent scholars have also taken a more thorough approach to defining modernity and the discerning analysis of Frederick

of Islamic fundamentalists or Tunisian Jews “tradition” he identified a specific contrasting element – i.e. Enlightenment republicanism, socialist universalism, or communist materialism.¹¹ In the case of the French intellectual canon embraced by the protagonist of his first novel, *The Pillar of Salt*, modernity is, correspondingly, the colonizer’s guarded tradition.

In this chapter I present a close examination of *The Pillar of Salt*, considering the text in conjunction with Memmi’s early life, work, and intellectual influences – which I revisit specifically in the conclusion - in order to identify key themes in Memmi’s subsequent body of work. I identify constructions of cultural ambivalence, failed assimilation, and agency denied which presage Memmi’s analytical approaches to these subjects. Here I also provide insight into how a young Memmi became associated with Sartre and other intellectuals who served as influences and contemporaries during his early life and through the publication of his first novel. Literary scholar Lia Brozgal decries a tendency to treat *Pillar of Salt* - and North African literature in general - as

Cooper included along with he and Brubaker’s essay on identity noted above is a strong example and reflection of this development. Frederick Cooper, “Modernity.” in *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History*. (University of California Press, 2005) 113-51. A larger critique of modernity as a concept within and outside the academy may be found in Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, trans. Catherine Porter (Harvard University Press, 1993 [1991]).

¹¹ Memmi’s insistence on specificity is most apparent in his parsing of Jewishness (and Negritude) into three different terms reflecting the condition of being Jewish, Jewish cultural practice, and the Jewish people. Given this and his expressions of caution towards broader applications of his ideas (ex. His remarks on *The Colonizer and the Colonized* in the first chapter of *Dominated Man*) which I will explore in detail along with the aforementioned analysis of Jewishness and Negritude in subsequent chapters. The concerns expressed by Cooper and Brubaker in their essay on the weakness of the term “identity” and the need for more appropriate terms for different types of identity are very similar to Memmi’s own approach to terminology and specificity. See: Frederick Cooper and Rogers Brubaker, “Identity,” in *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History*, (University of California Press, 2005), 59-90.

autobiographical, obscuring the text's theoretical contributions.¹² This assertion of literary value challenges a tendency of both sympathetic and unsympathetic readings of colonial texts that emphasize their historical specificity.¹³

One goal of this study is to analyze Memmi's works both as a "life project" and a significant exploration of key themes in the multidisciplinary study of the colonial and postcolonial such as the construction of identity, the nature of agency, and the meaning of liberation. Identifying and exploring these themes will, along with the following chapter on *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, provide context for a discussion Memmi's work on Jewish identity and serve as the basis for my exploration of Memmi's commentary on the postcolonial. Memmi's initial narrative of a Tunisian Jew's youth, intellectual endeavors, alienation, and eventual exile introduces readers to Memmi's conflicted approach toward cultural identity, tradition, and the perils of self-understanding amidst oppression.

The Pillar of Salt

Completed during Memmi's time as a university student in France between the conclusion of the Second World War and his return to Tunisia in 1949, *The Pillar of Salt* was the first distillation of Memmi's views on the colonial world and the lives of those

¹² Brozgal, *Against Autobiography: Albert Memmi and the Production of Theory*.

¹³ An example of a sympathetic assertion of specificity would be the argument that postcolonial studies overvalues historical narratives that focus on the past rather than the fluidity of contemporary postcolonial identity. Professor of Caribbean Francophone literature Nicole Simek provides a summation of these arguments by scholars such as Michael Hardt, Antonio Negri, Frederic Jamison and Arif Dirlik which I will revisit in chapter 2 in relation to memory of Empire. Here I share Simek's belief in the value of "a literary and critical practice that attempts to reconcile historicism with an attention to the often divergent experience of history. To read literature for its ability to elaborate the ambiguous presence of the past in the present, but to read it with its explanatory limits in mind." Nicole J. Simek, "The Past is *passé*: Time and Memory in Maryse Conde's *La Belle Créole*," in Alex Hargreaves ed. *Memory, Empire, and Postcolonialism: Legacies of French colonialism*, (Landham, Maryland: Rowan and Littlefield, 2005) 51-62, 60.

who composed it. Memmi recounted his experience publishing the novel and his initial encounter with Sartre in *Le Terre Intérieure*. Arriving “in Paris with a large manuscript, written on pages of a schoolbook, with all the trembling you can imagine,” he developed a relationship with Nadeau, an editor for Corrêa. They reached an impasse when Nadeau requested he “prune” the text and “it seemed impossible to change anything, except for spelling errors and a few imperfections of style.” At this point

Nadeau had the excellent idea to take the manuscript to Sartre, for an eventual publication of some pages in *Les Temps Moderne*. Sartre read it and gave it to the philosopher Merleau-Ponty, who was then part of the Editorial Board of the journal. Merleau-Ponty told me later that more times he read it, the more chapters he found enlightening. Finally, in agreement with Sartre, they decided to publish sections in four or five successive editions.¹⁴

The result was a vivid narrative of a Jewish intellectual navigating the colonial world Memmi would soon map in *The Colonized and the Colonized* and finding himself trapped between that world’s loci of identity –Tunisian born Middle East scholar Isaac Yetiv called the novel “a document of universal scope about the marginal man, the cultural hybrid and his ambiguities.”¹⁵ It is the portrait of a colonized intellectual as a young man; not an autobiographical account, but a recasting of Memmi’s observations into a story of failed reconciliation between tradition and modernity leading to alienation and exile.

The Pillar of Salt is a first person account of the narrator, Alexandre Mordekhai Benillouche, in three parts. In the first section the young man recalls his early life on the edge of the *hara*, followed by a series of discoveries regarding his economic status and

¹⁴ Memmi, *La terre intérieure*, 71.

¹⁵ Issac Yetiv, “Albert Memmi: The Syndrome of Self-Exile,” *International Fiction Review* 1 no.2 (1974), 127.

relationship to his family's cultural traditions during his years in a Jewish primary school. The second part follows Alexandre's admission to a French lycée where he successfully embraces academic pursuits but fails to attain social acceptance as a student of French literature and philosophy. And the final section introduces a series of disruptions during and following the Second World War, concluding with Alexandre's self-imposed exile to South America.

Alexandre was born the eldest son of a saddle-maker near the *hara*, in Tunis on a street called the "Impasse Tarfoune," – highlighting his divided condition, Alexandre notes that "I was not born in the ghetto. Our alleyway was at the frontier of the Jewish corner of Tunis."¹⁶ Alexandre's three part name evokes his French/Tunisian/Jewish origins and conflicted identity. Sociolinguist Farida Abu-Haider points to Alexandre's name as a particularly strong device, "proof of the different cultures that can sometimes constitute the makeup of a single Maghrebian individual."¹⁷ Thus from his origin, Alexandre embodies heterogeneity. In *The Pillar of Salt*, tradition is Jewish and Tunisian, framed by the customs and values of Alexandre's parents. The first human interactions encountered in the whole of Memmi's published work are those between Alexandre and his mother in *The Pillar of Salt*. Alexandre depicts his mother as a constant presence in his childhood, intervening to impart lessons and often provide context for her son's concerns.¹⁸

¹⁶ Memmi, *Pillar*, 1, 20.

¹⁷ Farida Abu-Haidar, "Ascribing a Maghrebian Identity in French," in *Maghrebian Mosaic: A Literature in Transition*, ed. Mildred P. Mortimer, (Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2001), 13-27.

¹⁸ In his analysis of relationships in *Dependence* Memmi notes that by physical necessity this is the first relationship of any human being "everything begins with the child and for that reason

Alexandre's relationship with his father is somewhat conventional and more interpersonal, a blend of respect and rejection common to narratives of rebellious youth.¹⁹ Alexandre was the eldest child but the only one determined to pursue an education past elementary school and a career outside the home, while his younger siblings left school and worked in their father's shop despite Alexandre's half-hearted attempts to encourage their further education. Throughout the course of his studies Alexandre felt the burden of family expectations as his father reminded him of the family's sacrifices while disdaining his academic pursuits. In *Pillar of Salt* these expectations are represented by his father's hope that Alexandre will abandon his studies and apprentice in the family shop.²⁰

Memmi's relationship with his own father was tumultuous – “the conflict with my father began in my eighth year, and never ceased” - and the value of education versus labor were often at the heart of that conflict.²¹ Generational conflict is a common theme

the parent-child relationship will continue to be privileged” Memmi, *Dependence*, 25. And Memmi uses the example of a baby reaching for his mother's breast after he has been weaned to describe the initial experience of loss, a separation which is “only the first link in a chain that extends from birth to death.” Memmi, *Dependence*, 105.

¹⁹ Though he often turned references to his family's economic situation into more general statements regarding life in the colony, Memmi was clear regarding the effect of poverty on family life and in his 1985 collection of reflective essays, *Ce Que Je Crois*, he observed, in reference to the pressure on his own family “Between my parents and I, history had dug an impassable abyss.” For Memmi his own family exemplified the effects of poverty and uncertainty in the colony. Memmi, *Ce Que Je Crois*, 121.

²⁰ In his novel *Strangers*, this theme appears through a family's investment in their son's medical training and in *The Scorpion* through a conflict between two brothers who chose opposite paths. See: Section 3 particularly Chapter 9.

²¹ Memmi, *Nomade Immobile*, 20-25. Memmi does not delve into the particular effect of colonialism on the father's authority, however this is a significant theme in another classic postcolonial text, Driss Chraïbi's *Le Passe Simple* in which the author portrays the father in the (in this case Muslim) colonized family as a castrated tyrant who abuses his power at home because he lacks power in public. There are parallels in various discourses on the African-American family in the United States as well. Driss Chraïbi, *Le Passe simple*, (Paris: Denoel, 1954).

in Memmi's work – in his novels and analysis of oppressive conditions but also comments on the importance of the family as a social institutions – and there is little value in reading one particular fictional relationship as representative of Memmi's own. However, *Pillar of Salt* is Memmi's initial exploration of this theme in his published works.²²

The strain between Alexandre's ambitions and his father's intentions increased over though course of his academic study, which also serves as the locus of French culture in contrast to his family's religious and economic tradition. In the first section, Alexandre recalls the innocence of his childhood, playing in the neighborhood with other Jewish children and giving little thought to his advantages or disadvantages. However as the novel progresses, a series of encounters illustrate the differences that define his socioeconomic status in relation to his fellow Jews, Tunisian Muslims, and European colonials. In tandem with his account of early childhood is Alexandre's description of the family's home in the "blind alley." This epitomize the limitations facing its residents as well as young Alexandre's innocence.

Alexandre's parents shielded their children from the harshness of the world as best they could "I was being spared the extreme poverty of the ghetto" and, when confronted with the meaning of poverty for the first time "our life of confinement in the blind alley had scarcely prepared us to understand the world."²³ The normalcy and security of young Alexandre's childhood provided him with little incentive to question

²² In addition to generational conflicts in *The Scorpion*, *Strangers* and the main character's quest for a lost patrimony in *The Desert* see Memmi's analysis of the mother/child relation in *Dependence*, 17-20.

²³ Memmi, *Pillar*, 21, 2.

the customs and expectations of his family. Evocative experiences set the familiar rhythms of Alexandre's childhood – the family meals and Jewish rituals that would later become scenes of rebellion.²⁴ The process of interrogating and eventually condemning tradition began with the young man's initial glimpses beyond the reassuring protection of family life, leading to his discovery of the social and economic divisions of life in colonial Tunisia.

Discovering Difference – Constructing Portraits

Following this account of childhood and family life, two chapters depict encounters between with other Jewish children before Alexandre entered the French lycée. Without yet understanding the social distinction between rich and poor, he perceived changes in how the family had celebrated the Sabbath between his early childhood small child and his enrollment in a local Alliance Israélite Universelle school at age seven.²⁵ Though aware that the family made less money than they had in the past,

²⁴ In a succinct comment in *Portrait of a Jew* Memmi recalled of his own early life that “my childhood was marked by the rhythms of the weekly Sabbath and the cycle of Jewish holidays.” Memmi, *Portrait of a Jew*, 3.

²⁵ The AIU, the Paris based Jewish organization founded by Adolph Crémieux – the Jewish statesman and author of the Crémieux decree which opened citizenship to Algerian Jews in 1870 – is itself the center of some conflict between French culture and Sephardic Jewish tradition. Aron Rodrigue's 1993 volume *Images of the Sephardi and Eastern Jewries in Transition: The Teachers of the Alliance Israélite Universelle, 1860-1939* provides a wealth of primary source material on the mission of the AIU and its relationship to existing Jewish institutions as well as Sephardic revivalism and Zionism in the 20th century. Rodrigue's study was reprinted in 2003 as *Jews and Muslims: Images of Sephardi and Eastern Jewries in Modern Times*, which reflects the extent to which the historiography of Maghrebi Jews features the AIU and AIU sources. Some such as sociologist Sarah Taieb-Carlen, in her survey of North African Jewish communities, critique the AIU's relationship with Zionism by arguing that Zionism constituted an organic assertion of Sephardic Judaism while the AIU's ambivalence or opposition to Zionism reflected the AIU's dedication to a form of the French mission civilisatrice. Sarah Taieb-Carlen, *The Jews of North Africa: From Dido to De Gaulle*, (Lanham Maryland: University Press of America, 2010), 124-35.

two specific incidents abruptly brought this vague awareness of material conditions into social context. These and subsequent interactions following his enrollment in the AIU school introduced Alexandre to class differences as well as his treatment as a Jew in Tunisian society. Through specific incidents, Alexandre constructed images of himself and others based upon ethnic and socioeconomic distinctions.

Class

Through the first incident, Alexandre located his family's economic position. Realizing their mother was giving away his old clothes to Fraji, another young Jewish boy, the Benillouche children complained “why do you give him our clothes?” and their mother responded “because they poor.”²⁶ When Alexandre later noticed Fraji wearing one of his sweaters, he was unable to control his anger and publically insulted Fraji’s for his poverty. News of his outburst found its way to Alexandre’s mother who noted that many of their own clothes were handed down from more prosperous members of the family. When Alexandre continued to argue, she exclaimed “We're poor too. We're all like Fraji Choulam!”²⁷ Through this incident Alexandre discovered that “poverty is something to be ashamed of.” He felt the effects immediately “I despised the poor. Fraji had to pay with shame the price of his poverty and I too, if we were poor would have to pay with my own shame...I made that day a great and unhappy step forward.”²⁸ Alexandre’s mother blunted

²⁶ Memmi, *Pillar*, 23.

²⁷ Memmi, *Pillar*, 28.

²⁸ Memmi, *Pillar*, 28. For a study on the psychological impact of poverty and the awareness of poverty on children in an urban setting see sociologist Vincent de Gaulejac “Shame and Poverty,” *Sante Ment Que*, 14 no.2 (1989), 128-37. It is worth noting that Memmi introduces economic and racial/religious/cultural distinctions separately. Given the tendency of scholars to compare Memmi and Fanon’s work – *Black Skin, White Masks* was also published in 1952 – this and Memmi’s subsequent concerns regarding broader applications of his early work and attention

his pride by pointing out his similarities with Fraji, revealing another precarious middle - the family was comfortable enough to give away old clothes but poor enough to accept the hand-downs of others. In addition, this incident led Alexandre to view financial distress as a defining characteristic of his family.

A second incident introduced further class distinctions through the callous behavior of a more affluent child. One of the schoolchildren Alexandre associated with was Saul, a rich boy from a professional family. While other boys were given a few coins to buy what food they could afford, Saul bought chocolate instead. In addition, he had the added luxury of being wasteful, able to drop or give away a piece without concern, while Alexandre guarded his piece of chocolate carefully. And when Saul borrowed two pennies, later forgetting to repay “such a small sum....” Alexandre saw the relationship between rich and poor in a stark new way “I had never experienced the revelation of jealousy and envy. I had envied Saul his fine clothes and his pocket money, but it had been without real bitterness or animosity... Saul's self-centered lack of any awareness established the first link [between wealth and poverty].”²⁹ Saul also represented a wealthy Jew who acted selfishly, providing a supporting example for the anti-Semitic stereotypes Alexandre later encountered.

to specificity contrasts with Fanon’s insistence that “a subjective experience can be understood by all” in his critique of Octave Mannoni’s differentiation between different forms of racism as well as racism and economic oppression in Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, (New York: Grove Press, 2008 [1952]), 67.

²⁹ Memmi, *Pillar*, 39-40. Alexandre treats candy like a precious possession not to be eaten on several occasions. Memmi has mentioned his own love of chocolate on several occasions, comparing it to an alcohol addiction in *Dependence*, as a source of joy in the poetry collection – also published serially in *Le Monde - Ah Quel Bonheur!* and noting trips to buy chocolate in his diaries and datebooks: Albert Memmi, *Agendas Bibliothèque Nationale de France*. NAF 27873-27991 • IX-XLVI.

Memmi would later examine this reification and internalization of stereotypes in *The Colonizer and the Colonized*.³⁰ There and in subsequent works such as *Portrait of a Jew* he articulated a “mythical portrait” wherein negative characteristics are attributed to an oppressed group, generalized, and possibly internalized. Alexandre’s process of understanding the social construction of class and his Jewishness resembles these subsequent constructions - images developed through amalgamations of associated characteristics and circumscribed agency.³¹ Alexandre did not reach an understanding of his social condition all at once but piecemeal through a series of social interactions.

Anti-Semitism

In order to express independence from his family and conform to the expectations of his schoolmates, Alexandre determined to attend a summer camp and was permitted by his parents following a brief family debate.³² He soon regretted his insistence. The camp was operated by soldiers and divided socially between his fellow schoolboys and a group of tough orphans with a callousness born of their misfortune.³³ Here, Alexandre encountered anti-Semitic stereotypes via a French sergeant who punished a child named

³⁰ See chapter 2, particularly the section “the mythical portrait of the colonized.”

³¹ Memmi primarily engages this issue directly in *The Colonizer and the Colonized* and *Liberation of the Jew*. See: chapter 2 and the section titled “escape mechanisms” in chapter 4 respectively.

³² His mother was opposed but, while providing essential supplies for the trip was expensive, his father approved as, Alexandre commented sardonically, “he calculated the price of such a vacation in the mountains if one had to pay for it. The total amount was too big for us to be able to refuse, which would have been sheer waste. He probably reckoned also how much he would save while I was away.” Memmi, *Pillar*, 44.

³³ In the end, Alexandre begged his father to take him home, but his worries were dismissed and his plea to his father that “you must absolutely carry me up” became an oft repeated family joke and remained a bitter reminder of his helplessness. Memmi, *Pillar*, 54.

Mimouni for selling treats from his care packages and attributed Mimouni's behavior to the fact that, "Mimouni was a Jew and "all Jews are irresistibly drawn to commerce." For the first time in my life, I encountered the device of explaining a defect or a fault in an individual by referring it back to his Jewish faith." This introduction is the first direct reference to anti-Semitism in Memmi's published work. In a process reminiscent of the preceding encounters with his schoolmates, Alexandre internalized the incident, "so that I began to resent all Jews who dared engage in business."³⁴ Alexandre also encountered anti-Semitism through the French lycée, an anti-Semitic riot, and interactions with his friend Bissor during their teenage years.

Bissor in particular provides a study in contrast between Jewish reactions to anti-Semitism. A sense of latent Jewish difference accompanied Alexandre and Bissor's teenage forays in Tunis. Phillip Barbé, sociology professor at the University of Istanbul, characterizes Bissor, a large and tough youth born "in the heart of the ghetto," as the personification of "the insurmountable isolation of the Jewish community" in *The Pillar of Salt*.³⁵ Bissor serves as a cynical wholly Jewish peer, the foil to Alexandre's cross-cultural ambiguity. In a particularly revealing incident, the pair make their weekly pilgrimage to the Kursaal cinema which showed Westerns and other exciting films that appealed to the boys' tastes. Here, the darkness contributed to a brief moment of broad community stronger than any other evidenced in the novel "For a few minutes, we all

³⁴ Memmi, *Pillar*, 48.

³⁵ Phillip Barbé, "Jewish-Muslim Syncretism in the Writings of Albert Memmi." in Emily Benichou Gottreich and Daniel J. Schroetter eds. *Jewish Culture and Society in North Africa* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011), 109-10.

forgot our individual fears and hatred and became a single unit.”³⁶ However during this particular visit, the two were expelled from the theater following a scuffle with a Sicilian patron who dropped a lit cigarette into Bissor’s hair. The incident reinforced Bissor’s convictions and led Alexandre to acknowledge the tension:

“You see how they hate us?” said Bissor, hopelessly convinced. They: the young Sicilians the Arab policemen, the French newspaper owner, our classmates at the lycée, the whole city in fact. And it was true that our native city was as hostile to us as an unnatural mother.³⁷

This statement encapsulated the effects of prevalent anti-Semitism on a variety of relationships between Tunisian Jews and non-French Europeans, local authorities, French colonials - including schoolmates - and, with particular emphasis, the city itself. These tensions escalated in the years approaching independence as the role of the Jewish middle class as intermediaries between French and Arab elites or elites and working class Arabs became accentuated in an increasingly polarized society and Jews themselves voiced increasing concern regarding the future of their communities if and when the political situation shifted – noting a worrying increase of anti-Semitic propaganda in both colonialist and anti-colonial publications, Elie Nataf, a Tunisian delegate to the North African Jewish Congress of 1948, observed that the Jews were losing their importance as an “element of equilibrium” and were increasingly pressured to take sides.³⁸

³⁶ Memmi, *Pillar*, 100. For a detailed study of the liberating dimension of cinema in colonial contests see: Phille Barbé, “Hétérotopies et cartographié existentielle: des lieux de Marguerite Duras,” in Buford Norman ed. *Origins and Identities in French Literature* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1999). 183-196.

³⁷ Memmi, *Pillar*, 102-3.

³⁸ Laskier. *North African Jewry in the Twentieth Century*, 263.

A wide potential range of Jewish responses to anti-Semitism and instability run through the contrast between Bissor's wholly cynical outlook and Alexandre's conflicted perspective. Alexandre and Bissor both problematize Sartre's conceptions of "authentic" and "inauthentic" Jews in *Anti-Semite and Jew* – Bissor's cynicism abrogates the freedom Sartre associates with authenticity, but Alexandre's assertions of agency are stifled and accompanied by an air of youthful naiveté.³⁹ These two, ultimately unfulfilling, responses presage Memmi's later examination of attempts to escape or cope with Jewishness in *The Liberation of the Jew*.⁴⁰

Alienation

Amongst his fellow Jews, Alexandre was perplexed by his youth. Isolated, suspended between generations, he was unable to socialize effectively with his peers but too young to partake in the discussions and quiet rituals of older men. This was driven home at his bar mitzvah. On the one hand Alexandre was disappointed not to be the center of attention at what he expected would be his own acceptance into the world of adulthood. But the invasion of strangers, the hustle and bustle as his family prepared to receive guests, destroyed any hope of control or intimacy. He could not tell stories with the old men but he felt ill at ease with the dances of the youths "I belonged to neither group and understood none of their games."⁴¹ He realized that the Bar Mitzvah itself was the focus, each guest preoccupied with their own role while his family's honor dictated they remain busy preparing and entertaining.

³⁹ Sartre, *Anti-Semite and Jew*, 91-93.

⁴⁰ See chapter 4.

⁴¹ Memmi, *Pillar*, 71.

Alexander's distance from Tunisian Jewish institutions is similarly evident in his decision to pursue advanced studies in France. First he experienced a rewarding distinction: winning a paid scholarship to attend the French lycée in Tunis and obtaining the permission of his father who would bear the loss of his labor in the shop. Alexandre was both grateful to his family and irritated by reminders of the burden imposed by his achievement. Preparing to embark on this new journey, he noted that he might have been happier staying home "as a Jew of the ghetto, still believing confidently in God and his Sacred Books," but he chose the uncertainty of further education. He remarked that "knowledge was the very origin, perhaps, of all the rifts and frustrations that have become apparent in my life," and pursuing the knowledge exacerbated his break with tradition.⁴² In this respect, Alexandre's choice resembles Fanon's recollection – during a discussion of Sartre – that his own initial response to the illogic of racism was an embrace of the rational.⁴³

Sartre characterized the Jew as particularly inclined to seek rationalism as an escape from the Jewish condition through pursuit of the universal - "The best way to feel ones-self no longer a Jew is to reason, for reasoning is valid for all and can be retraced by all."⁴⁴ In *The Pillar of Salt*, Alexandre's pursuit of knowledge was not only the potential fulfillment of his own interests but an alternative to a debilitating existence in the *hara*.

⁴² Memmi, *Pillar*, 82.

⁴³ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 97.

⁴⁴ "There is not a Jewish way of mathematics; the Jewish mathematician becomes a universal man when he reasons." Sartre, *Anti-Semite and Jew*, 113. Sartre also introduces this idea of a rational universalist tendency as a prelude to dissecting the stereotype that Jews are not creative and possess "a destructive intelligence." Sartre, *Anti-Semite and Jew*, 114. Memmi would make a similar claim regarding the impact of anti-Semitism on Jewish creativity in *Liberation of the Jew*. See chapter 4.

However, the first section of the novel concludes with Alexandre's realization that entering the lycée did not represent an escape from the conservative materialism he associated with his father, but rather "the struggle had only just begun."⁴⁵ His scholarship did not translate to acceptance in the social life of the lycée, nor did excelling there diminish the criticism from his family.

Assimilation: A Failed Escape

The second section of *Pillar of Salt* opens "My name is Benillouche, Alexandre Mordekhai" as Alexander enters a classroom in the French lycée – the scene of Alexandre's initial encounters with non-Jewish students. His name was revealing: "Mordekhai" singled out his Jewishness "in this country, Mridakh is as obstinately revealing as if one shouted out 'I'm a Jew!'"⁴⁶ Benillouche spoke to his local origins and Berber ancestry proclaiming "'My home is in the ghetto,' my legal status is native African,' 'I come from an Oriental background,' 'I'm poor,'" while "Alexandre" was viewed as French affectation, a sign of either presumptuousness or stupidity on the part

⁴⁵ Memmi, *Pillar*, 91.

⁴⁶ Alexandre unsuccessfully attempted to avoid using his middle name, French professor Lawrence Schehr describes Alexandre's relationship with his middle name as a symbolic self-rejection similar to another reminder of identity "As the fore-skin of circumcision is always there in its absence, remarking the Jew as Jew, the name is there, again in an attempted absence, but it is a stub-born bit of skin that stays glued to the Jewish boy" Lawrence Schehr, "Albert Memmi's Tricultural Tikkun: Renewal and Transformation through Writing," *French Forum* 28, no.3 (Fall 2003), 59-83.

of his parents.⁴⁷ His name reflected the three aspects of his identity and the difficulty of reconciling them.⁴⁸

In school Alexandre was afforded greater access to European culture and scholarship, studying French history, philosophy and literature. He quickly became a top student, able to answer difficult classroom exercises - such as “which passage in a selection from *Andromache* is most typical of Racine's style.”⁴⁹ Met with both praise and suspicion from faculty and peers, he soon became an authority amongst the students - paid to write and edit papers for the sons of middle and upper class French families. All the while Alexandre grew more cognizant of the gulf between himself and his classmates. He could not become more like them by excelling at classes on French language and culture. This failed metamorphosis represents another central theme throughout Memmi's work – an attempt, as described in *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, by the oppressed “to change his condition by changing his skin.”⁵⁰ It is another key respect in which Memmi echoes Fanon's concerns in *Black Skin, White Masques* – as well as W.E.B. Dubois' notion of double-consciousness – and Memmi consistently regarded the potential assimilation of the oppressed with great skepticism.⁵¹

⁴⁷ Memmi, *Pillar*, 94.

⁴⁸ He was also one of the first Maghrebi novelists to use a given name as character description Farida Abu-Haïdar, “Inscribing a Maghrebian Identity in French,” in *Maghrebian Mosaic: A Literature in Transition*. ed. Mildred Mortimer (Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2001)

⁴⁹ Memmi, *Pillar*, 112.

⁵⁰ Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, 120.

⁵¹ I will return to comparisons between Fanon and Memmi in chapter 2, as the primary comparisons between Memmi and Fanon's work feature *The Colonizer and the Colonized*. Memmi's considers assimilation particularly directly in *Liberation of the Jew*, though almost all of Memmi's major publications touch on the subject to some degree, See: chapters 2, 4, and 6-7.

Issac Yetiv described Alexandre's attempted assimilation dramatically in a 1974 analysis of self-alienation in Memmi's novels:

The French philosophers supersede the Hebrew heroes of the Bible; the French language makes him despise the Arabic dialect spoken at home, and the slogans of the French Revolution make obsolete the religious teachings of his childhood. He watches, day by day, his own metamorphosis; he becomes a stranger to his family; he comes to hate the tribe and its backward traditions, and in the process, he hates himself too.⁵²

Presaging Memmi's sociological analysis of failed assimilation and the impossibility of maintaining a dual identity, Alexandre struggled to escape from a tradition he viewed as backward, stifled by poverty. He had yet to fully associate that condition with colonialism, but rather with the choice to accept ignorance and find comfort in ritual. In turn, his intense pursuit of French education replaced the religious beliefs and figures of his youth with the giants of French literary culture and their ideas – the only foreseeable possibility for a different life and acceptance into the world of intellectuals that only appeared to exist within the world of the colonizer.

Alexandre's relationship with his family grew increasingly strained, his physical and mental remoteness from home and tradition accentuated as he redoubled his academic efforts. His father's financial concerns, frustration with his son's distance from family life, and illness worsened as Alexandre's studies progressed and he lamented that "all his colleagues had put their eldest sons to work."⁵³ Alexandre also began to openly oppose customs and religious observations. Following the death of an uncle, Alexandre

⁵² Yetiv's use of the word "stranger" here, connecting this view of Alexandre to Memmi's *Strangers*, in which the narrator becomes estranged from his family through the pursuit of a French education and French wife. Issac Yetiv, "Albert Memmi: The Syndrome of Self-Exile," 127.

⁵³ Memmi, *Pillar*, 117.

returned home late and showed disdain for the histrionics of his family's funeral ceremony. During a meal the following day, his father contemplated the likelihood that his eldest son would not give him a proper funeral "he saw that I, his oldest son, his heir, would not render to him the last honors due, and would let him die alone."⁵⁴ His father's laments fostered a strong sense of guilt, as Alexandre felt responsible for the worsening asthma which accompanied his father's theatrical warnings that the business would fail as each asthma attack "further convinced me of my selfishness."⁵⁵

In another incident, Alexandre broke custom by turning off the lights during Shabbat. In order to reconcile a rule against making a fire on the Sabbath with modern electric lighting, building residents paid a young, non-Jewish, grocer's clerk to visit each flat and turn off the lights during the end of the Sabbath feast. For Alexandre, "this was too fine an opportunity, an additional proof of their hypocrisy and duplicity."⁵⁶ He turned off the light and made pedantic arguments regarding the nature of electricity versus oil lamps and the restrictions on the handling of fire - accusing his community of false compromise. His family retaliated by excluding him from a family gift-giving ritual. The mocking commentary of his family members epitomized Alexandre's alienation -

⁵⁴ Memmi, *Pillar*, 138.

⁵⁵ Memmi, *Pillar*, 124. Memmi later expounded on this form of guilt while discussing familial relationships in *Nomade Immobile*, using his own relationship with his father as an example "resentment transformed into compassion" and he began to feel "the tendril of guilt: I was responsible for my father's asthma, culpable for my mother's varicose veins." Memmi, *Nomade Immobile*, 26. There is some disagreement regarding Memmi's economic circumstances, most accounts refer to his father as a member of a lower middle class of artisan shop keepers, however the French author who has produced the most work on Memmi, the literary scholar Guy Dugas, is adamant that "poverty and the shame that accompanies it have thus denuded an essential part of Albert Memmi's childhood" Dugas, *Albert Memmi*, 17.

⁵⁶ Memmi, *Pillar*, 142.

“Everyone wants his Sabbath present except Mordekhai! It’s all the same to him, he’s not a Jew!”⁵⁷

At this point Alexandre’s interstitial isolation became clear. Confronted by his family, he began to realize that while attacking tradition, “I had nothing to offer in its stead.”⁵⁸ This discovery, that he could not substitute acquired knowledge for the cultural practices of his community, signaled a transition in which Alexandre grew to appreciate the significance of the rituals he derided.⁵⁹ Soon after, he attended an exorcism - the women of the family had concluded that his Aunt Maissa’s bad luck was caused by demonic possession. Though initially horrified by the superstition as well as the wanton dancing and shrill noise of the exorcism ritual, Alexandre admitted he was moved by the music and dance, “after fifteen whole years of exposure to Western culture, of which ten were filled with conscious rejection of Africa, must I now accept this self-evident truth, that all these ancient and monotonous melodies move me far more deeply than all the great music of Europe...yes, I suppose I am an incurable barbarian!”⁶⁰ Alexandre felt a

⁵⁷ Memmi, *Pillar*, 146.

⁵⁸ Memmi, *Pillar*, 151.

⁵⁹ In *Decolonization* Memmi discussed the malleability of culture in reference to the former colonized adopting aspects of the colonizer’s language and institutions “culture is a kind of curio shop where each of us can pick and choose according to our desires and fears.” Here he suggested culture is adaptable, however I believe this is distinct from Alexandre’s attempt to reject his Jewishness. Memmi, *Decolonization*, 41.

⁶⁰ Memmi does not identify it as such but this dance was the Stombali, a Tunisian healing dance, and a case study published in 2000 by two Israeli researchers on the Stombali as an example of dissociative trance healing uses Memmi’s description along with firsthand accounts transcribed by the authors’ interviews described key parts and aspects of the dance. Eli Somer and Meir Saddon, “Stambali: Dissociative Possession and Trance in a Tunisian Healing Dance,” in *Transcultural Psychiatry* 37 n. (Dec. 2000), 581-602; Memmi, *Pillar*, 165

connection to the ritual, horrified at both his inability to escape this connection and his failure to replace it with Western customs.⁶¹

Humbled by his inability to challenge the superstitions his family held so dearly, he was forced to admit his failure to replace them in his own life. He felt he could not appreciate the ideas he encountered through study in a comparable manner.

Contemplating the closeness of this bond while watching a group of boys mime the circumcision ritual, Alexandre pondered the physical binding of the people to god “can I ever forget the Orient? It is deeply rooted in my flesh and blood, and I need but touch my own body to feel how I have been marked for all time by it.”⁶² Like Fanon - who indicated that his own embrace of the rational failed to combat the illogic of racism and suggested an embrace of “irrationality” and “lose myself totally in negritude” –Alexandre discovered that the modern rationality represented by the French intellectual tradition offered neither escape nor protection.⁶³ He could not freely shape his own identity and embrace that of a French intellectual, despite his talent and dedication.

⁶¹ In his introduction to *Nationalism and Cultural Practice in the Postcolonial World*, Neil Lazarus invokes Theodor Adorno’s admonition “one must have tradition to hate it properly” because according to Lazarus “he believes it is only from the ground of this tradition that the thoroughgoing, preservative yet emancipator critique of its social conditions of possibility can be staged.” This was in reference to Western bourgeois tradition but I see parallels in Alexandre and Memmi’s rebellion and eventually reevaluation of Jewish tradition. Neil Lazarus, *Nationalism and Cultural Practice in the Postcolonial World*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 1-3 referencing Theodor W. Adorno, *Minimia Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life*, Trans. E.F.N. Jephcott. (London: Verso, 1992), 52

⁶² Memmi, *Pillar*, 169. While this reenactment of the circumcision ritual is presented as an uncomfortable subject for Alexandre and the boy “playing” the victim, it was an act in the end. Memmi has rarely addressed taboo sexuality outside of intermarriage, as opposed to another North African novelist, Rachid Boudjedra who scathingly critiqued “respectable” colonized society through a narrator’s account of being sexually pursued as a young boy by an upstanding member of the community. Rachid Boudjedra, *La Repudiation*, (Paris: Denoel, 1969).

⁶³ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 102-3.

Exile

As graduation drew near, Alexandre won an honors prize, allowing him to pursue university study in philosophy rather than medicine as had been the previous expectation of his family and patron Monsieur Bismouth. Combined with a position as academic supervisor over a dormitory at a boarding school, he could support himself – believing this would insulate him from his family and allow him to avoid poverty without succumbing to mundane materialism. His father argued that he would never earn a living from it and emphasized the importance of money for health, security, and social status. Alexandre rejected his father’s final reproaches and left home decisively, remarking: “had it taken such a quarrel to terminate this whole chapter of my life?”⁶⁴

In the third and final section of *The Pillar of Salt*, Alexandre's university studies are interrupted by the outbreak of the Second World War. After a desultory visit to the red light district with Bissor during which Alexandre awkwardly lost his virginity, the scene dramatically shifts as soldiers preparing to fight the Italians ransacked the Jewish quarter.⁶⁵ The incident left Bissor and most of his family dead – the cynical Jew of the inner ghetto is the only named character killed in the novel - while Alexandre’s family barred their doors and waited for the turmoil to subside.⁶⁶ Ruminating on the moments in his recently completed high school career when he became aware of “how painful it is to

⁶⁴Memmi, *Pillar*, 236.

⁶⁵ According to Barbé, “numerous critics have noted” that the incident represents a 1934 incident in Constantine, Algeria. Phillip Barbé “Jewish-Muslim Syncretism,” 109.

⁶⁶ Barbé characterizes Bissor’s death as “a symbol of the inability of Jews and Muslims to live together peacefully.” However Barbé also implies that *Pillar* ultimately depicts a relatively harmonious view of Muslim-Jewish relations thrown into tension by colonialism and suggests Memmi overplays the role of Muslims, as opposed to Europeans, in anti-Jewish incidents.

be a Jew,” Alexandre visualized street graffiti on and recalled the offhand anti-Semitism comment of a classmate.⁶⁷ He pursued these thoughts further to address his teachers’ disdain for African culture and customs, “which made me link race prejudice with authority,” as he developed a view that racism and “reactionary” politics ran hand in hand.⁶⁸ He began “to listen to the reasonings [sic] of Jewish nationalists when the war came to fill up our lives and postpone any solutions to these problems,” though there is no mention of Alexandre participating in any organized political activism.⁶⁹ However, racism and reactionary politics became an even more pressing feature of Alexandre’s life as Vichy and Axis authorities established themselves following the French armistice with Germany.

In response to the occupation and subsequent restrictions on Jewish political involvement, Alexandre resigned his academic position. Then, Vichy police began collecting hostages against potential resistance or nationalist uprisings and to enforce aspects of German anti-Jewish policies.⁷⁰ As Jews were rounded up and transported to

⁶⁷ Memmi, *Pillar*, 255.

⁶⁸ Alexandre noted this combination of “anti-Semitic, anti-Arab, and reactionary” among his history teachers in particular, *Pillar*, 259.

⁶⁹ For a discussion of Memmi’s own affiliation with Zionist youth organizations, see chapters 5 and 6.

⁷⁰ Memmi does not discuss the attitude of Muslims towards Jews in this part of the novel, however during the Second World War Tunisian nationalists were inclined to see France and Britain as traditional enemies while Nazi Germany, which lobbied aggressively for support in the Arab world, portrayed itself as a powerful ally with colonial ambitions concentrated in Eastern Europe. This did not mean full support for the Axis as Mussolini’s Italy could make neither claim Fayçal Cherif “Jewish-Muslim Relations in Tunisia during World War II: Propaganda, Stereotypes, and Attitudes, 1939-43.” in Emily Benichou Gottreich and Daniel J. Schroetter eds. *Jewish Culture and Society in North Africa*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011) 305-20.

labor camps, Alexandre sought refuge with a high-ranking official whose son he had tutored but was rejected. Still he refused to accept the realities of collaboration, “after all, weren't the policemen just as French as Racine and Descartes?”⁷¹ Local leaders reached a compromise with the Germans allowing them to organize exemptions for the old and medically unfit in return for a quota of labor from the community. Thanks to this policy, Alexandre received a medical exemption but realized this was an attempt to save local elites – “by some stroke of luck, as it turned out, most of the intellectuals were of the middle class. So the intellectual and the economic elites were confused.”⁷² He asked to join the camp workers instead. Alexandre attempted to organize working class prisoners, but met with distrust and skepticism due to his French education and intellectual background. However, as the Allies pressed into the area, German losses implied the potential liquidation of the camp.

The prisoners watched soldiers practice for what appeared to be a mass execution. With the area around the camp turning into a battlefield, Alexandre and a group of fellow workers became lost amongst panicking Italian soldiers and German officers. Their escape was hazardous and Alexandre's telling of it very fragmented - briefly recalling the anonymous death of a straggler and his companions longing for basic comforts. Prefacing the story of the camp, Alexandre apologized for his brief account of the experience,

⁷¹ Memmi, *Pillar*, 278. As in continental France, the Vichy regime in North Africa removed Jews from public positions and transported many to forced labor camps. For Jews on the continent, these camps were often in Germany, placing French Jews under the German war effort and the architects of the Final Solution. In North Africa transportation to Germany was unrealistic and forced labor was employed in the local fight to protect forced in Tunisia from the British moving westward from Egypt and the American forces landed in Morocco and Algeria during Operation Torch in November of 1942.

⁷² Memmi, *Pillar*, 282.

burdened by the later realization that his country was spared the complete horror of the final solution he lamented that “I don’t feel victimized enough, and it tortures my conscience.”⁷³ This is a comparatively disjointed section of the novel, and correspondingly the most tumultuous in the life of the protagonist.

Though neither Alexandre nor Memmi’s later commentary addresses the subject, Issac Yetiv comments that for Alexandre, “in 1942, the Germans invade Tunisia and the so-much-desired Western civilization appears in the Nazi uniform of the Wehrmacht.”⁷⁴ North African colonial administrators remained loyal to the Vichy government, with varying degrees of outside support and pressure from the Germans and Italians in Libya, following the defeat of the French army in Europe in July 1940.⁷⁵ While Memmi rarely wrote of this period in his own life, his friend the Tunisian sociologist Claude Sitbon indicates that a Nazi officer visited Memmi’s father in 1943 and forced him to carve a handbag out of a Sefer Torah, the remainder of which Memmi kept in memory of his

⁷³ Memmi, *Pillar*, 272. The experience of the camp, including volunteering in solidarity with poor Jews, appears consistent with Memmi’s own war experience. Like Alexandre, Memmi did not discuss the period between his escape and return to university study in detail. Issac Yetiv has indicated he fought with the Free French, however details on this period of Memmi’s life remain nebulous. Yetiv, “Syndrome of Self-Exile” 128. He did discuss the choices facing Tunisians during the war, noting the tendency to accept German occupation on the basis of “enemy of my enemy is my friend.” Memmi, *Nomade Immobile*, 62-3.

⁷⁴ Yetiv, “Syndrome of Self-Exile” 127.

⁷⁵ Though Charles de Gaulle’s free French forces rallied in French West Africa, French colonial administrators in the Mediterranean and Southeast Asia — notably including the colonies with the largest white settler populations - accepted Phillip Petain’s government as the legitimate authority. This was due to a combination of Petain’s personal authority as a First World War leader and political sympathies towards Petain’s conservative national revolutionary program. Alice Conklin, Sarah Fischman, and Robert Zeretsky, *France and its Empire since 1870*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 213. For a history of Vichy’s impact in the colonies see Eric Jennings, *Vichy in the Tropics: Pétain’s National Revolution in Madagascar, Guadeloupe, and Indochina*, (Stanford University Press, 2001). For a broader history of the Vichy years see: Julian Jackson, *France: The Dark Years 1940-1944*, (Oxford University Press, 2001).

father. According to Sitbon, he convinced Memmi to donate this piece to the museum of Yad Vashim.⁷⁶ Though I feel compelled to repeat Brozgal's admonition to avoid the tempting recourse to an autobiographical treatment, the hazy texture of this period in *Pillar of Salt* does resemble similar uncertainty regarding Memmi's own life in those years, evocative of the difficulties in depicting and historicizing the war experience.

The following chapter in *The Pillar of Salt* flashes forward to Alexandre preparing for a university examination after the war. Following the war, Alexandre's attempt to complete his studies was derailed by his resignation during the occupation, despite the approval expressed by his superiors at the time. Studying appeared to delay the inevitable question of whether it will ever be possible to find a place in colonial society. Unable to reenter the university, he accepted his friend Henry's invitation to leave Tunis for Argentina. Making his final preparations, Alexandre examined the result of his insistence on self-awareness and examination "I am dying through having turned back to look at my own self... God turned Lot's wife into a pillar of salt – is it possible for me to survive my contemplation of myself?"⁷⁷ After the collapse of Vichy, Alexandre refused to accept "the treason of France," as he felt it would be an admission that all of his immersion in Western culture was futile and "if I rejected what I was becoming would I be able to return to what I had been?"⁷⁸ In the end, he answered in the negative, accepting exile as an alternative to impossible metamorphosis or acceptance of an oppressed condition.

⁷⁶ Claude Sitbon, "Albert Memmi, un regard biographique," in *Kef Israël* 18 (November 2013). For the Yad Vashem description of the piece including a full length image see: http://www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/education/artifacts/north_africa.asp

⁷⁷ Memmi, *Pillar*, 335.

⁷⁸ Memmi, *Pillar*, 315.

Alexandre's exile is a stunted version of the choice presented to the figure of "colonizer who refuses" in *The Colonizer and the Colonized*. This is the liberal opponent of colonialism who, unable to establish himself in colony as either a voice of opposition among the colonizers or an ally of the colonized, finds he has no place in the colony and returns to the metropole.⁷⁹ However, unlike the "colonizer who refuses," Alexandre had no home to return to, his inability to reconcile his conflicted identity resulted in an irresolvable crisis leading to symbolic and physical exile. An autobiographical reading of *Pillar of Salt* could not satisfactorily equate Alexandre's journey to South America with Memmi's significantly more fluid movement between Tunisia and France – at the time of publication Memmi had actually returned to Tunis and would not permanently move to France until after Tunisian 1956 following Tunisian independence.⁸⁰ However Alexandre's exile is Memmi's first depiction of a figure struggling with his lack of agency and inability to contribute to the construction of his own identity, the portrait by which he is socially represented. These figures illustrate the complexity and diversity of human identity as well as the polarizing and essentialist systems which authority so often creates. The questions of how identity is constructed, agency is denied, and liberation can be achieved are foundational pieces of Memmi's work as a novelist and theoretician.

Moving Forward

⁷⁹ In the words of one French and African literature professor "the incapacity of the protagonist to achieve his integration into the pluralistic society of Tunisia" Edris Makward "The Multicultural Environment in Albert Memmi's Autobiographical Novels." in eds. Anthony Hurley, Renee Larrier, and Joseph McLaren, *Migrating Words and Worlds: Pan-Africanism Updated*, (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1999) 109-17.

⁸⁰ See: Chapter 2.

Alexandre's alienation, failure to assimilate, and ability to describe but not fully participate in the various worlds he navigates establish both foundational pieces of Memmi's oeuvre and suggest Memmi's own claim to authority as an interstitial observer, made explicit in *The Colonizer and the Colonized*. *The Pillar of Salt* achieved wide readership, winning Memmi the Prix Fénéon awarded by the University of Paris, and propelled him into "the first rank" of French language authors from the Maghreb. Sartre subsequently proposed a special edition of *Le Temps Moderne* dedicated to Tunisia.⁸¹ Responses from European and Tunisian residents of the colony were mixed. A critic for *La Presse de Tunisie* commented on February 6, 1953, that the novel "gives the feeling of scorched earth" written in the manner of the "new North African Literature which denotes...preoccupations and many problems, economic evolution and perhaps certain disorders generated by stress."⁸² In the months following publication, Memmi received "threats, anonymous letters, and the bitter protests of his coreligionists."⁸³ A scathing and pessimistic – though potentially empowering – critique, *The Pillar of Salt* introduced the intellectual world and a wide audience of lay readers to his view of colonial identity and the first glimpses of his developing literary style and intellectual philosophy.

The novel also directly references two corresponding early influences. Memmi has acknowledged that Alexandre's primary French interlocutors and academic mentors in *Pillar of Salt*, the French professor Marrou and the philosophy professor Poinsett,

⁸¹ Robequain, "Jalons biographie," 220. The Prix Fénéon was established in 1949 by the widow of the art critique Félix Fénéon.

⁸² Dugas, Albert Memmi, 39. *The Pillar of Salt* was released around the same time as the Algerian novelist Moulaud Mammeri's *La Colline Oubliée* and Driss Charaïbi's *Le Passé Simple*.

⁸³ Dugas, *Albert Memmi*, 40.

represent two figures who inspired his own intellectual pursuits: his literature teacher Jean Amrouche - to whom he dedicated an edition of *Portrait of a Jew* and his Philosophy teacher Aimé Patri.⁸⁴ In *La Terre Intérieure*, Memmi recalled that Patri nourished an interest in philosophy that persisted until his study at the Sorbonne. Memmi considered Patri “a philosopher but more, I believe, a psychologist and sociologist... at least I saw him as such because these were also my interests.”⁸⁵ Regarding his passion for philosophy as a young student, Memmi eventually gravitated towards social sciences, “but first I believed passionately in philosophy. It is the queen of disciplines, the discipline that allowed me to understand both myself and the world.”⁸⁶ Memmi changed focus to literature and the social sciences during his studies at the Sorbonne in the late 1940s.⁸⁷

His transition from philosophy toward the social sciences resulted from his concern towards what he regarded as the abstract nature of contemporary philosophy “and a great part of contemporary French literature... a professor of the Sorbonne, Canguilhem told me “philosophy is a game of concepts.” This left me distraught.”⁸⁸

⁸⁴ Memmi, *Nomade Immobile*, 58-59.

⁸⁵ Memmi, *Le Terre Intérieure*, 87-88.

⁸⁶ Memmi, *Le Terre Intérieure*, 88.

⁸⁷ He declared in *Nomade Immobile* that “I am a casualty of philosophy, and without a doubt writing literally saved me.” Memmi, *Nomade immobile*, 211. Alexandre’s comparable turn, originating from a panicked reaction to questions on a philosophy examination, is discussed briefly in *The Pillar of Salt*, however it is a noteworthy example of a specific reference to Memmi’s own life, particularly in difference between the degree of specificity in this parallel compared to more circumstantial similarities between Alexandre and Memmi that render an overly autobiographical reading problematic. Even here the catalyst for a change in study is completely different and the references to the two professors are exceptions support the rule.

⁸⁸ Memmi, *Le Terre Intérieure*, 88-9. Georges Canguilhem, a classmate of Sartre and Raymond Aron, was a philosopher of science and medicine, particularly biology. His *Le Normal*

Memmi felt that French philosophers “had sold out in puns, often obscure indeed, which also makes them unamusing.”⁸⁹ He claimed French philosophy had become “a reflexive philosophy, not interested in the concrete man.”⁹⁰ This echoes a consistent juxtaposition of active vs. passive responses to oppression, beginning with Alexandre’s refusal to accept his family’s Jewish customs and a career in his father’s shop, which Memmi developed more explicitly over the course of his career.

Memmi’s condemnation of French philosophy as overly introspective and concerned with abstract squabbles correlates with his criticism of the tendency amongst oppressed peoples to defend traditionalism and religious fundamentalism against all criticism at the cost of retarding the evolution of productive cultural mechanisms. He attributed this stagnation to oppressive conditions that discourage open dialog, refuse the oppressed a secure space to assert their difference, and encourage a reactionary conservatism that is ultimately counterproductive and further reifies their isolation.⁹¹ This

et le pathologique (1948) is a seminal text in medical anthropology. For a description of his work including Canguilhem’s assessment of biology as a science that had embraced a mechanical as opposed to a relationship conception of organic life, *La Connaissance de la vie* (1952), which Foucault identified as a significant influence see: Elisabeth Roudinesco. *Philosophy in Turbulent Times: Canguilhem, Sartre, Foucault, Althusser, Deleuze, Derrida*, (Columbia University Press, New York, 2008)

⁸⁹ Memmi went on to specifically identify Jacques Lacan with this tendency, however at this point in the interview he transitions from a discussion of his experience at the Sorbonne to retrospective comments on postwar philosophical trends more broadly. Memmi, *Le Terre Intérieure*, 89.

⁹⁰ Memmi, *Le Terre Intérieure*, 89.

⁹¹ While Memmi decries the tendency toward fundamentalism amongst both Jewish and Muslim colonized in *The Colonizer and the Colonized* and specifically Islamic fundamentalism in *Decolonization*. Memmi deals with this idea most directly in *Liberation of the Jew*. There he employs the term “encystment” to describe a process of taking shelter within tradition and “sanctuary values” regarding fundamentalism. See detailed analysis of *Liberation of the Jew* in Chapter 5.

cultural critique and Memmi's argument that the necessary response is an assertion of tradition and difference in modern political forms – i.e. nationalism, socialism, and Enlightenment universalism – is a centerpiece of Memmi's analysis of oppressive conditions and his political positions regarding Israel and the postcolonial world.

Scholars considering Memmi's early life and work have noted the influence of Jean Amrouche in particular. For example, Judith Roumani suggests that "Amrouche's concern with uprootedness was probably a factor leading the young Memmi toward a philosophical stance similar to existentialism."⁹² One of Roumani's sources, Abdelkadir Khatibi, author of a 1968 monograph on the Maghrebi novel, notes that the themes of "tearing and uprooting" appear in Amrouche's work beginning in 1935 when Memmi was his student. He then states that "the anguish in the writings of Sartre, the conception of freedom and engagement marked an example for Memmi," referencing both Memmi's encounter with Sartre's work and his preference for scholarship engaged with material and social conditions.⁹³ Addressing his initial response to encountering existential philosophy as a student, Memmi remarked that

There was a new philosophy, passionate, current, which began after my classmates: Existentialism, but there was in this doctrine something irrational, romantic, which I was wary, and then an element of scandal, Café de flore, taboo,

⁹² Amrouche was noted for his relatively brief but powerful record of publication as a poet from 1928-37 which includes the collections "Endres, poèmes (1928-1934)." (Tunis, *Mirages*, 1934) and *Étoile secrète*. (Tunis: Cahiers de barbarie, 1937) as well as his collection of Kabyle music and poetry *Chants berbères de Kabylie*. (Tunis, Monomotapa, 1939). However Amrouche is also acclaimed for his work as an editor of the Jewish magazine *L'Arche* in addition to his time as a producer and host for Radio France, in particular his series of interviews with André Gide (1949), Paul Claudel (1951), François Mauriac (1952-1953) and with Giuseppe Ungaretti (1955-1956). Tahar Djaout. "Amrouche Secret Star, The childhood of man and the world," in *Algeria News*. n. 921, June 1983, 21.

⁹³ Abdelkadir Khatibi, *Le Roman Maghrébin*, (Paris: Maspero, 1968) 71.

etc., which highly made me suspicious: a philosophy cannot be fashionable, at least that's what I thought then.⁹⁴

However, while at the Sorbonne, Memmi appreciated Sartre's commitment to engaged intellectualism and also pronounced Jean Wahl the other of the "two philosophers I greatly admired at that time."⁹⁵ He referred to philosophy as "prolegomenon to all future activities" – the examined introduction to the vital questions of human existence. However, Memmi's fascination lay with social interactions, systems, and the context through which the conscious mind interacts with the exterior world.⁹⁶

According to Fanon, colonialism "forces the people it dominates to ask the question constantly: 'In reality, who am I?'"⁹⁷ Memmi's first novel depicted a protagonist coming to an understanding of how colonialism framed his search for an affirming answer. In a 2002 interview with the Moroccan novelist and literary critic Salim Jay, Memmi stated that he wrote *The Pillar of Salt* with the idea of showing the colonized experience, "drawing on my own yes but more generally producing a novel that would show the experience of growing up in a colony."⁹⁸ Alexandre sought a socially liberating identity by rejecting the culture of his family and pursuing scholarly achievement in the world of the colonizer. His failure highlighted the precarious situation facing a young intellectual in colonial Tunisia. In his second book, *The Colonizer and the Colonizer*,

⁹⁴ Memmi, *Le Terre Intérieure*, 89.

⁹⁵ Memmi, *Le Terre Intérieure*, 94.

⁹⁶ Memmi, *Le Terre Intérieure*, 90.

⁹⁷ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 250.

⁹⁸ He also indicated his target audience as "any French who would read it." Albert Memmi, *interview by Salim Jay. Entretien radiophonique. Memmi, Albert, 1990* Institut national de l'audiovisuel, (janvier 12, 1990).

Memmi would turn a sharp critical approach those questions of identity and agency in an analysis of colonial society.

Chapter 2

Colonial Portraits: *The Colonizer and the Colonized*

“I was a sort of half-breed of colonization, understanding everyone because I belonged to no one” – Albert Memmi¹

In the Richelieu site of the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, amongst thousands of documents ranging from government records to baroque poetry, sit Albert Memmi's original drafts of *The Colonizer and the Colonized*.² While appropriate for a writer with a deep love of Montaigne, Racine, and the other giants of French literature whose engraved names surround the library's glassed paneled ceiling, this would have seemed an unlikely repository when Memmi's unflinching dissection of life in French North Africa was published in 1957. *The Pillar of Salt* brought Memmi new recognition and opportunities – including a meeting with Habib Bourguiba, future President of Tunisia then living in exile in France - and during this period Memmi became a public advocate for Tunisian independence as France grappled with the impending reality of decolonization.³

Following the publication of his second novel, *Agar* (translated as *Strangers*), he submitted the manuscript for *The Colonizer and the Colonized* in 1956, the year of Tunisian independence.⁴ Parts of the text appeared in February-April editions of *Les Temps Moderne* and *Esprit* as “Portrait du colonisateur de bonne volonté” – Portrait of

¹ Memmi, *Colonizer and the Colonized*, preface to the 1965 edition, xvi.

² Albert Memmi, *Bibliothèque Nationale de France* NAF 27865-27872 • I-VIII.

³ Dugas, *Albert Memmi*, 44.

⁴ I revisit *Strangers*, a story of a Tunisian medical student who returns to the colony with his French wife, in detail in chapter 6.

the “colonizer of good will” - a reference to his portrait of the “colonizer who refuses” and a title he had critically applied to Camus in a 1953 article for *Le Nef*.⁵

Supported by the success of *The Pillar of Salt, The Colonizer and The Colonized* appeared - with a preface from Sartre – at the height of the Algerian War. While Morocco and Memmi’s Tunisia achieved independence through comparatively peaceful rapprochement, the violent conflict in Algeria - with its large French settler population - embodied the persistence of anti-colonial liberation movements in the face of a European power initially determined to either preserve the colony or dictate the terms of decolonization.⁶ In 1957, only five years after the Battle of Dien Bien Phu precipitated the independence of French Indochina, the guerilla tactics of the Front Liberation Nationale (FLN) and notorious French counterinsurgency measures during the Battle of Algiers in particular, illuminated the Empire’s tenuous political and moral position. And in May of 1958 the collapse of the French Fourth Republic in the face of a threatened coup by *colon* “ultras” and elements of the military precipitated Charles De Gaulle’s return to power and the establishment of the Fifth Republic with its bolstered “imperial” presidency. These events – which Alistair Horne examined so thoroughly in his classic history *A Savage War of Peace* – exemplified the capacity for colonial upheaval to destabilize the metropole.⁷

⁵ Albert Memmi, "Camus ou le colonisateur de bonne volonté," *La Nef* (December, 1953), 95-6.

⁶ The naval base at Bizerte and nuclear testing sites in the Sahara were of particularly concern.

⁷ Alistair Horn, *A Savage War of Peace: Algeria 1954-62*, (New York: New York Review of Books, 2006 [1977]).

In this climate Memmi, in the words of Guy Dugas, “abandoned the deceptive transparency of the strongly autobiographical novel...to pursue writing in a new literary genre, a general reflection of colonial relations.”⁸ This was also a transitional period during which Memmi, his wife, and their two children moved to Paris where he obtained a research post at the French National Centre for Scientific Research (CNRS), under the aegis of sociologist Georges Gurvitch, and the family acquired an apartment on the rue Saint-Merri in the 4th arrondissement of Paris.⁹ In 1965 he reflected that *The Colonizer and the Colonized* “provided access to a problem that I posed at a precise moment in my existence: what was the meaning of the colonial drama in which I was engaged?” It would cement Memmi’s status as one of the premier intellectuals in the era of decolonization.

Poignant and accessible, *The Colonizer and the Colonized* became an inspiration for the oppressed as well as a canonical text in colonial and postcolonial studies, achieving widespread readership to an extent that surprised Memmi –

I must admit I was a bit frightened of it myself. It was clear that the book would be utilized by well-defined colonized people – Algerians, Moroccans, African Negroes. But other peoples, subjugated in other ways – certain South Americans, Japanese and American Negroes interpreted and used the book. The most recent to find a similarity to their own form of alienation have been the French Canadians. I looked with astonishment on all this, much as a father, with a mixture of pride and apprehension, watches his son achieve a scandalous and applauded fame¹⁰

⁸ Dugas, “Réception Critique des Premiers Ouvrages,” in *Lire Albert Memmi*, 27.

⁹ Where Memmi continues to reside at the time of this writing. Robequain, “Jalons Biographie,” 221. For Memmi’s commentary on the political climate during this period, see chapter 3.

¹⁰ Albert Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, Preface to the 1965 edition, in *Dominated Man*, 47.

Along with *The Pillar of Salt* it forms the foundation of Memmi's work and establishes a number of conventions essential to understanding his views on the postcolonial world, Jewish identity, and immigration. Predating Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961), Memmi's analysis helped shape personal, political and intellectual responses to colonialism in the Francophone world and beyond.¹¹ And his framing of colonialism as an ultimately self-destructive process that creates the colonizer and the colonized – a view of colonialism historian which Todd Shepard, in his 2006 essay *The Invention of Decolonization*, argues has been appropriated by the French state - influenced colonial and postcolonial scholarship.¹²

In this chapter I consider the following principal aspects of *The Colonizer and the Colonized*: Memmi's use of "portraits" including the "mythical portrait" employed to stigmatize the colonized as well as the colonized and colonizer's acceptance of or attempts to reject colonialism, and Memmi's conclusion that colonialism pushes the oppressed towards revolt and thus the system's own destruction. The choices of the colonized in this text resemble Alexandre's personal struggle in *Pillar of Salt* writ large, and Memmi's *The Colonizer and the Colonized* frames similar issues of identity, assimilation, tradition, and modernity, in a teleological construction with an open-ended conclusion: anti-colonial nationalism as a necessary engine for political liberation before the colonized may assert themselves and participate in the social construction of their identity. In subsequent work Memmi expanded upon this process of regenerative self-

¹¹ Roumani, *Albert Memmi*, 27.

¹² Todd Shepard, *The Invention of Decolonization: The Algerian War and the Remaking of France*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006), 15-6.

assertion as a condition for a future complete liberation in analysis of Jewish identity and the postcolonial world. Here I contend that Memmi first established the approach he would reapply throughout his studies of oppression and identity, along with an explicit claim to authority as an interstitial figure, in *The Colonizer and the Colonized*.

Portraits

In *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, Memmi addressed the mechanics of this system which had entered the forefront of Western public discourse, the world he had so vividly portrayed in *The Pillar of Salt*. He believed that, while people are not easily reduced to such clearly defined categories, the dynamics of colonialism worked to maintain the status quo by reducing all participants into colonizers and colonized. In turn, Memmi divided his essay into two sections – Portrait of the Colonizer and Portrait of the Colonized – each divided into three chapters. The section on the colonizer begins by considering whether the “colonial,” a European in the colony ambivalent toward or unaffiliated with the colonial project, could exist. After answering this question in the negative, Memmi then approaches the colonizer’s choice to accept his privilege or oppose the colonial project - represented by the figures of “the colonizer who accepts” and “the colonizer who refuses.”

The second section begins with a “mythical portrait of the colonized” wherein Memmi explores the image of the colonized in colonial discourse and the colonized subject’s lack of agency in construction his own identity. He then explores the “situations of the colonized,” the material conditions of oppression and stagnation in the colony, before articulating “the two answers of the colonized” which Memmi identifies as acceptance leading to continued oppression or revolt and rebellion. In the end Memmi

argued that revolt was the only viable option – an observation seemingly in line with contemporary events as the Algerian War escalated in mid-1950s.¹³ In a concluding chapter, Memmi ended the essay by urging both colonizer and colonized to move beyond a system which was self-destruction and warned that the process of liberation would next require the former colonized to construct their own institutions and avoid recreating the oppressive conditions of colonialism within their own societies. Memmi’s concern with self-definition and identity was reflected in an analysis of life in the colony that highlighted the importance of lived social relations and daily choices influenced by a governing dynamic that functioned to perpetuate the colonizer/colonized hierarchy.

The result was a series of what Memmi termed “portraits;” not specific individuals provided as examples or idealized forms, but archetypical constructions of colonizers and colonized based upon their role in the structure of colonialism and their responses to the imposition of these roles. Memmi’s “portraits” thus consist of a socially constructed figure or type a choice that is either heavily determined by conditions or made with some degree of agency. Memmi titled the portraits in *The Colonizer and the Colonized*: the colonizer who accepts, the colonizer who refuses, and the mythical portrait of the colonized. He then concluded with an evaluation of the situation facing the colonized and two potential means of escape – assimilation, which he found largely impossible, and national liberation, which he believed was the only feasible alternative to eventual destruction.

¹³ The Phillipville Massacre of 1955 and the 1956-57 Battle of Algiers having occurred while Memmi was completing and published the manuscript.

Memmi explored the intricate relationships underpinning the colonial condition via a series of archetypal constructions. While the influence of *The Colonizer and the Colonized* illustrates the utility of Memmi's portraits, less common are discussions of how these portraits were constructed, what renders them so appealing, and whether these applications are valid. Initially, Memmi's portraits served as an innovative approach to colonial relations, a sociological discourse - contemporary with Octave Mannoni and Frantz Fanon's psychological analysis – that represented an attempt to depict the colonial condition through relatable constructions but with greater complexity than colonial stereotypes, Manichean anti-colonialism, or a simplistic material dialectic.

In a 1971 appraisal of colonizer/colonized relations, French sociologist Remi Clignet described Fanon and Memmi's writing as an analysis of the *results* of colonialism. Their work added complexity to narratives of oppression since “although exploitation is a universal consequence of certain types of structural arrangements, it gives birth to patterns of interaction and ideological representations which vary both with the nature of the particular group to be exploited and with the processes by which individual actors internalize the conflicting demands imposed upon them.”¹⁴ The portraits in *The Colonizer and the Colonized* are not collages of stereotypes, but positions dictated by a colonial system which imposed the roles of colonizer and colonized. In this world of restricted agency stereotypes served as a well-practiced shorthand as long as the mechanics of oppression restrained social interaction – a testament to Memmi's lifelong

¹⁴ Remi Clignet, “Damned If You Do, Damned If You Don't: The Dilemmas of Colonizer-Colonized Relations,” *Comparative Education Review* 15, no.3, Papers from the Comparative and International Education Society Conference, San Diego, California, March 21-23, 1971 (October, 1971), 296-312.

insistence that cross cultural exchange cannot flourish until the oppressed assert their identity independently.

Memmi's portraits have proved a useful method for identifying these “patterns of interactions” and “ideological representations.” They have been employed by other scholars, and by Memmi himself later in his career, to consider not only other examples of colonial oppression but the condition of marginalized groups of varying scope including women, African-Americans, French-Canadians, other colonized peoples in Africa, and black South Africans under apartheid.¹⁵ Similarly, one goal of my subsequent analysis of Memmi’s work regarding Jewish identity and immigration is to address the continuities and discontinuities between Memmi’s constructions in *The Colonizer and the Colonized* and his subsequent commentary.

At the heart of Memmi’s various portraits are a series of “duos” broken into constituent elements. In *The Colonizer and the Colonized* the central duo is colonizer/colonized, the relationship framed by colonialism. Memmi then asserts that colonizer and colonized, having been created, now are faced with the choice of accepting or rejecting the system - with their degree of agency curtailed by the system itself. Memmi has been credited for his innovative use of dualities to discuss key relationships, to the extent that French scholar of Mediterranean literature Guy Dugas referred to

¹⁵ Albert Memmi, “Un Révolte Totale” preface to *Le Feu Prochain*, by James Baldwin. Paris: Gallimard, 1963; Albert Memmi “Are the French Canadian Colonized? A discussion with students of the Ecole des Hautes Etudes Commerciales” published the school review, December 1957, reprinted in *Dominated Man*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968); Dickson A. Mungazi, "Application of Memmi's Theory of the Colonizer and Colonized to the Conflicts in Zimbabwe." *The Journal of Negro Education* 55, no.4 (Autumn 1986): 518-34; and Nadine Gordimer’s introduction to the 2003 Earthscan edition of *The Colonizer and the Colonized* respectively.

Memmi as “the philosopher of duos.”¹⁶ Memmi emphasized these dualistic relationships in order to consider how the individuals and groups in question shape one another within the context of a larger system such as colonialism.

Derived from a social framework imposed or accepted to varying degrees, “the duo is not a simple encounter, accidental and without consequences, between two partners or two adversaries: it transforms them both.”¹⁷ While Memmi and so many of his characters tend to defy these distinctions through their existence in the interstices and on the margins of societies, the “duo” allowed Memmi to articulate the opportunities and choices that shaped identity under oppressed conditions. Memmi’s use of the duo is also an expression of his broader insistence that examining relationships between individuals is central to understanding groups with greater specificity. While, like any such construct, Memmi’s duos may appear overly reductive, they reflect the real tendency of systems of oppression – and social systems generally - to essentialize identity.

Whether these archetypes effectively represent the lived experience is a significant question. A 1957 reviewer of *The Colonizer and the Colonized* skeptically remarked: “one might say that in establishing the attributes that characterize the colonise and the colonisateur he obtains types seldom encountered in full dimensions in real life.”¹⁸ I believe this reviewer’s concerns have been balanced by Memmi’s scholarly

¹⁶ Guy Dugas, *Albert Memmi, écrivain de la déchirure* (Sherbrooke: Naaman, 1984), 31.

¹⁷ Albert Memmi, *Testament insolent* (Paris: Odile Jacob, 2009), 34.

¹⁸ Jeanne d'Ucel, “Review: The Colonizer and the Colonized” *Books Abroad*, Vol. 32, No. 1 (Winter 1958), 46.

impact and the popular embrace of *The Colonizer and the Colonized* by the colonized of North Africa and beyond. As Memmi recounted in his preface to the 1965 edition:

So many different persons saw themselves in this portrait that it become impossible to pretend that it was mine alone, or only that of colonized Tunisians, or even North Africans. I was told that in many parts of the world the colonial police confiscated the book in the cells of militant nationalists. I am convinced that I gave them nothing that they did not already know, had not already experienced; but as they recognized their own emotions, their revolt, their aspirations, I suppose they appeared more legitimate to them.¹⁹

Public engagement and the use of *The Colonizer and the Colonized* in academic settings over the past fifty years evidences its persistence and utility as a productive lens through which to examine colonial relationships. An emerging intellectual, Memmi also risked alienating rather than empowering a broader audience through his portraits. In a 1985 interview, Edward Said observed that “the act of representing (and hence reducing) others almost always involves violence of some sort toward the subject of representation, as well as a contrast between the violence of the act of representing something and the calm of the representation itself.”²⁰ Isaac Yetiv has ascribed that sense of violence to Memmi’s work – specifically referring to his representation of Jews, his “own people.”²¹ And, in a 1978 survey of Maghrebi literature in French, Jean Dejoux, literary scholar and friend of Memmi, referred to Memmi’s body of work as a literature of “unveiling” in

¹⁹ Albert Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, Preface to the 1965 edition, ix.

²⁰ Edward Said, “In the Shadow of the West,” interview with Jonathan Crary and Phil Mariani (1985) in Guari Viswanathan ed. *Power, Politics, and Culture: Interviews with Edward W. Said* (London: Bloomsbury, 2004), 40-1.

²¹ In a study of alienation in Maghrebi literature Yetiv, who also included Memmi in a brief article “Iconoclasts in Maghrebian Literature.” *The French Review* 5, no.6 (1977), 858-64, wrote that in Memmi’s work there is “a certain intellectual enjoyment in seeing oneself, armed with a sharp surgical lancet, slitting up the wounds of one’s own people and of “others”” *Le Theme de l’aliénation dans le roman maghrébin d’expression française. 1952-56.* (Sherbrooke, Quebec: CELEF, University de Sherbrooke, 1972), 154.

which he exposed the effects of oppression hidden to preserve the hegemony of the oppressor, but also to protect the dignity of the oppressed.²²

However Memmi somewhat resembles both the anti-colonial apologist excusing the violence of the colonizer and the “colonizer who refuses” – his term for a European who attempted to reject privilege. Though he believed he offered an even-handed critique, condemning excesses as counterproductive to the longer term goals of liberation, Memmi did accept their necessity. And his status as a Jewish intellectual with ties to the French academic community afforded him unique opportunities. However he felt he could credibly support *and* criticize the anti-colonial struggle due to his perspective, an interstitial mirror unavailable to the colonizer who refuses.

In a reappraisal of *The Colonizer and the Colonized* included as a preface to the 1965 edition, five years after the death of Camus, Memmi compared the colonizer who refuses to himself. There he rhetorically challenged his own credentials - “How could I have permitted myself with all my concern about personal experience, to draw a portrait of the adversary?” He then responded, echoing Sartre’s ascription of his authority to his being both within and outside multiple worlds - “Here is a confession I have never made before: I know the colonizer from the inside almost as well as I know the colonized.” He then elaborated on his family's status as Arab Jews, distinct from the Muslim majority and thus useful to the French colonial government as local intermediaries who could be

²² The specific term Dejeux uses is “dévoilement” Jean Dejeux. *Litterature Maghrebine de langue française*. (Sherbrooke, Quebec: Editions Naaman, 1978) 301.

played off against the majority due to religious differences but never integrated into French society.²³ This is a direct claim to authority based on his interstitial position.

It may be that Memmi succeeded because within the duos he constructed he was a partial member of all groups and spared none the violence of representation. His declaration that “I was a sort of half-breed of colonization, understanding everyone because I belonged to no one” - resembling Nehru’s 1936 reflection that “I have become a queer mixture of the East and West, out of place everywhere.”²⁴ While this fluid identity may be problematic, Sartre, in his introduction to *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, presented Memmi’s ambiguity as his primary qualification: “he *represents* no one, but since he *is* everyone, he will prove to be the best of witnesses.”²⁵ As such *The Colonizer and the Colonized* is an anti-colonial text which addresses both groups and the fate of those who, by effort or simply their background, existed amid the divide.

Sartre suggested that “the whole difference between [himself and Memmi] arises because he sees a situation where I see a system.” He also wondered if “perhaps it is Memmi who is right in expressing his ideas in the order of discovery; that is, starting with human intentions and felt relationships, he guarantees the genuineness of his

²³ Memmi, *Colonizer and Colonized*, preface to the 1965 edition, 5. Memmi did not address this status in main text. For his commentary on the legacies of such divisions, see: chapter 3. For an examination of the legal position of Jews in French North Africa, see Taïeb-Carlen, *The Jews of North Africa*, 114-125.

²⁴ Memmi, *Colonizer and the Colonized*, preface to the 1965 edition. Jawaharlal Nehru, *An Autobiography: with Musings on Recent Events from London* (London: John Lane) 597. Nehru’s complaint that [Gandhi’s] language was sometimes incomprehensible”, 73, resembles Memmi’s concerns with the French left and French philosophy. Robert Young related Nehru’s complaint to critiques of Bhabha and indicates that the complexities of Bhabha’s work derive from the context of Indian anti-colonialism, specially Gandhi and response to Indian Marxism. Robert Young. *Postcolonialism*. 349.

²⁵ Sartre, *Colonizer and the Colonized*, Introduction to the 1965 edition, xxii.

experience.”²⁶ Here Sartre spoke to Memmi’s insistence on the primacy of material conditions and complex social dynamics a psychological condition. Memmi in turn indicated, in a 1960 lecture on Fanon, that “what separates me from Sartre is the importance which the *objective conditions* [Memmi’s emphasis] of oppression have for me.”²⁷ Memmi imbued his analysis with an air of authenticity qualified by a self-conscious distrust of meta-narratives and tidy resolutions.

The Colonizer’s Choice

He began with a portrait of the colonizer – a type defined by European origins as well as the political and social privileges Europeans enjoyed in the colony. According to Memmi, the European settlers who relocated to the colony were presented with a choice of accepting or rejecting the colonialism. In this construction, the establishment of the colony via a combination of metropolitan policy and imported constructions of difference created both colonizer and colonized – as opposed to Fanon’s assertion that “it is the *settler* who has brought the native into existence.”²⁸ Memmi portrayed the colonizer as a self-consciously illegitimate product of imperialism, he did not build this creation and occupied a position of privilege derived from external power:

It is moreover, a double illegitimacy. A foreigner, having come to a land by the accidents of history, he has succeeded not merely in creating a place for himself

²⁶ Sartre, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, introduction to the 1965 edition, xxv.

²⁷ Memmi, “Frantz Fanon and the Notion of “Deficiency”” in *Dominated Man*, 87. This article originated as a lecture at the Sixth Symposium of the International Association of French-speaking sociologists at Royaumont in October 1965, and the comment on Sartre is likely in reference to his characterization of the colonial condition as one of psychological alienation in which the oppressed are systematically estranged from other members of their peer groups. See: Jean-Paul Sartre, *Critique of Dialectical Reason, Volume 1* (London: Verso, 2004 [1960]), 716-21.

²⁸ Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 30 or Sartre “it is the anti-Semite who creates the Jew” Jean-Paul Sartre, *Anti-Semite and Jew* (New York: Schocken Books, 1995 [1946]) 143.

but also in taking away that of the inhabitant...he thus appears doubly unjust. He is a privileged being and an illegitimately privileged one; that is, a usurper.²⁹

Arguing that the colonizer was far from blind to the injustice of his position, evidenced by the need to rationalize his status, Memmi addressed the “colonial,” a term he ascribed to poor Europeans without an apparent role in colonial institutions. Claiming this represented a type put forth by those who would distinguish between “neutral” and “bad” colonizers, Memmi indicate that, in theory, the colonial would possess some inherent sympathy with the colonized based on class solidarity and a degree of distance from the imperial machine. However Memmi was adamant that the colonial did not exist in theory or practice.³⁰

First, according to Memmi all colonists were inherently privileged as a function of the relationship between colonizer and colonized. If they did not need or make use of legal and social institutions which excluded the colonized, they remained entitled to access which they could afford to take for granted. Memmi did believe that as the oppressed are not beyond oppressing others, the colonizer was not beyond being oppressed. However the colonizer retained his advantages over the colonized since “every act of his daily life places him in a relationship with the colonized and with each act his fundamental advantage is demonstrated.”³¹ Furthermore, Memmi insisted that all

²⁹ Memmi, *Colonizer and Colonized*, 9.

³⁰ Ibid., 10-11.

³¹ Ibid., 11-12.

pied noirs were markedly privileged regardless of class, a judgment which led to a break with Camus, who had written a preface for *Pillar of Salt*.³²

Memmi extended this characterization beyond the French to include Italians and Maltese laborers living in the colonies whose poverty “is such that it may seem ludicrous to speak of privileges in connection to them” yet even the “small crumbs automatically accorded to them” differentiate them from the colonized.³³ For Memmi, this recourse to imperial privilege represented an unbridgeable divide – the colonizer possessed the ability to accept or reject colonialism. His ability to choose was a key example of his privilege. And when rejection proved impossible – which Memmi believed inevitable – he could leave the colony. Thus Memmi could accept the presence of good men amongst the colonizers, but reject any hope of reform.

The Colonizer Who Refuses

Memmi offered two portraits of Europeans: the colonizer who accepts and the colonizer who refuses. Rather than depict the colonizer from the colonized point of view, Memmi examined the questions the colonizer must ask himself, his options, and the outcomes of his choices. Like contemporaries such as Frantz Fanon and Aimé Césaire, he viewed colonialism as a destructive force for all parties involved; however he was more willing to except the existence of truly concerned colonizers.³⁴ This does not mean

³² See: Debra Kelly, 'An unfinished death': the legacy of Albert Camus and the work of textual memory in contemporary European and Algerian literatures," *The International Journal of Francophone Studies*, 10 (1&2) 217-235.

³³ The status of Jews, who received sparse treatment in *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, he briefly described as one of “painful and constant ambiguity” in which they are encouraged to imitate the colonizer but denied his privileges. Memmi, *Colonizer and Colonized*, 13-15.

³⁴As opposed to this sympathy arising from a concern for French moral purity. Fanon explored this theme in *A Dying Colonialism* but provides the most graphic example in *Toward the African*

Memmi identified a host of allies among the French community in Tunisia. Rather, Memmi portrayed European opposition within the colony as well-intentioned but fraught with impossible choices – analogous to Alexandre’s somewhat Kafkaesque experience in *The Pillar of Salt*.

The “Colonizer who refuses” was Memmi’s portrait of a European sympathetic to the plight of the colonized and/or opposed to the methods of imperial administration. Memmi included several such figures in his novels, for example the officials in *Pillar of Salt* who refused to take risks or make exceptions for Alexandre. In *The Colonizer and the Colonized* Memmi assessed the options available to the colonizer who refuses, concluding that the structures of colonialism rendered their continued presence within the colony impossible.

Like the poorest European living in the colony, the colonizer who refuses always retained the option of exercising his privileges “whether he expressly wishes it or not, he is received as a privileged person by the institutions customs and people.”³⁵ This status was awarded upon entrance into the colony or inherited by birth. If he wished to refuse or attack this privilege, the colonizer possessed only two stark choices: “withdrawing physically from those conditions or remaining to fight and challenge them.”³⁶ Fanon’s assertion that “the colonist derives his validity, that is his wealth, from the colonial system” may appear obvious, however in the context of Memmi’s “colonizer who

Revolution. He discussed an article in *Le Temps Moderne* by a M. Mattei who described French soldiers' indifference to torture and concentrated exclusively on the effects the soldiers own psyches. Fanon, *Toward the African Revolution*, 74.

³⁵ Memmi, *Colonizer and Colonized*, 17.

³⁶ Memmi, *Colonizer and Colonized*, 19.

refuses” it is also a reminder that the sympathetic colonizer’s very ability to support the colonized derived from privilege.³⁷ And it is this this complexity which has led both contemporary and recent French critics to associated *The Colonizer and the Colonized* with Fanon’s work as presenting a broader framework for the psychological examinations of colonial trauma in *Black Skins, White Masks* and the chapter on violence in *The Wretched of the Earth*.³⁸

One parallel Memmi identified between colonizers and colonized was an inability to fully repudiate these identities or become authentic members of their counterpart in the duo. The colonizer could only fully “refuse” by giving up everything, and even then there would be no guarantee of acceptance. His speech, mannerisms, etiquette, the signs and symbols of privilege, worked to prevent the “colonizer who refuses” from entering this other world. He personified the rights and opportunities denied to the colonized. If, out of carelessness or frustration, he slipped and spoke poorly of “this meal or that custom,” his otherness was accentuated.³⁹ Nor “can he converse with the colonized, asking questions or asking for assurances. He is a member of the oppressors and the moment he makes a dubious gesture or forgets to show the slightest diplomatic reserve, he draws

³⁷ Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, 2.

³⁸ See for example two articles in *Le Monde Diplomatique*: and discussion of Irene Gendzier, *Frantz Fanon, A Critical Study* (Panthéon Books, Random House, New-York, 1973), Juliette Thin. “Théoricien ou éveilleur de consciences?” in *Le Monde Diplomatique* (August 1973), 4. And a piece on Algerian activist Mehdi Ben Barka, René Gallissot, “Mehdi Ben Barka et la Tricontinentale” in *Le Monde Diplomatique* (October 2005), 21.

³⁹ “It is like “torture by suffocation,” he says humorously. Or if he does like *couscous*, he cannot stand that fairground music” which seizes and deafens him each time he enters a café.” Memmi, *Colonizer and Colonized*, 25.

suspicion.”⁴⁰ To be trusted, the colonizer who refuses must abandon the very thing which could make him particularly useful in the liberation struggle: his privilege. His associations with family, friends, coworkers, and political associates were suspect. Without privilege, the colonizer who refuses would not be a savior, but a mercenary.

Memmi’s colonizer who refuses was also weakened by his own political beliefs. The principles that inspired his sympathy clashed with the colonizer’s tactics. Here Memmi displayed a glimpse of his disdain towards what he perceived as the naïveté on the part of the French anti-colonial left toward the appeal and necessity of nationalism and violence. A contemporary French reader of *The Colonizer and the Colonized* identified Memmi as a refreshing voice from a left “disoriented” by European nationalisms which they had come to identify in European contexts as late arriving relics from the 19th century and obstacles to European integration.⁴¹ Later in his career, Memmi would be accused of harboring similar expectations toward postcolonial societies, but here he maintained that “to expect the colonized to open his mind to the world and be a humanist and internationalist would seem to be ludicrous thoughtlessness. He is still regaining possession of himself.”⁴² And gradual reforms scarcely addressed questions posed by the growing independence movement, revealing the colonizer’s ignorance of a conclusion which colonized peoples had reached and begun to act on: that colonialism itself was the problem; nothing could be achieved without independence.

⁴⁰ Memmi, *Colonizer and Colonized*, 102.

⁴¹ Guy Hérod. “L’abolition des souverainetés au profit du fédéralisme faciliterait un règlement en Europe occidentale” in *Le Monde Diplomatique*, (May 1968).

⁴² Memmi, *Colonizer and the Colonized*, 135. See: Critique of the Left in Chapter 3.

French attempts to improve infrastructure and educational opportunities in North African cities were met with skepticism. Camus – whose ambivalence towards independence stemmed from a concern for non-elite pied noirs rather than a belief in the good faith of the imperial state – dismissed such efforts taxpayer funded showpieces for “tourists and commissions of inquiry.”⁴³ The attitudes of a nascent revolutionary movement were expressed succinctly by a Muslim student in the Algerian Mourad Bourbonne’s novel *Le mont des genets*, published in 1962, “It is not with you but against you that we are learning your language.”⁴⁴ Memmi claimed that colonialism resolves itself through either through self-destruction or the removal of those persons representing one element of the duo.

Memmi’s colonizer who refuses was a perpetual outsider supporting a cause that could never be his own, while rendered politically ineffective by his failure. Pursuing acceptance, this figure must blindly adhere to the necessities of a foreign liberation. Meanwhile his political principles were violated in the name of that struggle to such a degree that “his demands, compared to those of the colonized, or even those of a right-wing colonizer, are not solid.”⁴⁵ Constantly apologizing for the revolutionaries’ religious fanaticism and terrorism, he could either accept these means as necessary evils since “surely later on they will shed this and embrace socialist concerns,” or risk further suspicion.⁴⁶

⁴³ Albert Camus, *Actuelles III Chroniques algériennes 1939-1957* (Paris, 1958).

⁴⁴ Mourad Bourbonne, *Le mont des genets* (Paris: Julliard, 1962).

⁴⁵ Memmi, *Colonizer and Colonized*, 41.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 33.

Memmi derided this balancing act as a taxing “perpetual compromise” with little hope for acceptance or reward. He believed the only eventual alternative for the colonizer who refuses was to “put an end to his contradiction” and leave the colony, either through direct action or by agitating publicly until authorities removed him - thus saving a portion of his pride, a resolution resembling that of the protagonist in Georges Simenon’s 1933 novel *Le Coup de Lune*.⁴⁷ For the “colonizer who refuses” the endgame was thus to either share the hardship of the colonized, but with none of their solidarity, or to leave the colony. The risks taken by the colonizer who refuses are exemplified by incidents during the Algerian War such as the All Saints Day 1954 killing of the Monnerots - French teachers in rural Aures region - and the case of two Algerian Muslim boys, age thirteen and fourteen, who murdered a thirteen year old European classmate “because he played with us.”⁴⁸ However, once again, the colonizer’s option to return home underscores his privilege. There is no metropole for the colonized.⁴⁹ But, according to Memmi, this was a similarly impossible position within the colony. Like Alexandre’s failed assimilation “there are, I believe impossible situations in history, and this is one of them.”⁵⁰ The remaining option was to accept, exercise privilege, and become a colonizer.

The Colonizers who Refused: Memmi’s Critique of the French Left

⁴⁷ The novel features a main character who confronts a lover who is being tried for the murder of a black man in Gabon but is ignored by the colonial court and shipped back to France. Georges Simenon, *Le Coup de Lune* (Paris: Librairie Générale Française, 1933).

⁴⁸ Horne, *Savage War of Peace*, 91-6.

⁴⁹ Memmi, *Colonizer and Colonized*, 43-4.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 39.

Memmi presented two pre-requisites for fully moving beyond colonialism: “the European must annihilate the colonizer within himself, the colonizer must rise above his colonized being.”⁵¹ Regarding the colonizer, Memmi expressed a certain sympathy regarding the daily choices of all participants in the colonial situation, however he was correspondingly frustrated regarding European leftist who he found overly abstract and removed from colonial realities. In his preface to *A Dying Colonialism*, Fanon accused sympathetic “democrats” of naiveté in their criticism of revolutionary violence in Algeria, invoking the image of a seven year old “marked with deep wounds with which he had been bound while French soldiers mistreated and killed his parents and sisters” who told a Swedish journalist in a refugee camp that “there is only one thing I want: to be able to cut a French soldier up into small, tiny pieces.”⁵² In one respect Memmi was more damning, he accused the French left of naiveté and self-interest. However, this criticism was leveled not only at their inability to accept the inherent violence of revolutionary challenge to an inherently violent and destructive system. Memmi also called upon the left to condemn the excesses of anti-colonial revolution, to risk a hazardous political middle ground that Memmi believed represented loyalty to socialist principals and true support of the independence struggle.

In his 2004 history *Uncivil War: Intellectuals and Identity Politics During the Decolonization of Algeria*, James de Sueur refers to Algeria as “a crucible for intellectuals” which challenged French thinkers’ notions of universalism, the other, and

⁵¹ Memmi, *Colonizer and Colonized*, 151.

⁵² Fanon, *A Dying Colonialism*. 23, 26.

France's role in the world.⁵³ Sueur's study provides especially fruitful context for Memmi's commentary upon this period as it features relationships between the French left, the colonized, and the other as a term of discourse. Sueur traces a narrative of intellectual engagement with the civilizing mission through which a hopeful embrace of "reconciliation" with the colonized gave way to an acceptance of separation, presaging contemporary French debates over the virtues of multiculturalism versus the dangers of particularism.

Grounding his work, Sueur invokes Alice Conklin's study of the civilizing mission in West Africa wherein she detailed the methods by which French colonialists embraced ostensibly liberal projects – i.e. provision of services, displays of respect for local cultures, and recognition of local institutions – as a means to strengthen their position, eschewing universalist principles while embracing scientific racism.⁵⁴ Conklin's explication of this self-serving recasting is a nuanced case study of a self-justifying colonial perspective in which the colonized were subjects worthy of help, but not greater agency, is reminiscent of Memmi's mythical portrait. His consternation with the potential metropolitan allies of the colonized, French leftists, concerned a similar tendency to insist on self-serving interpretations of universalism rather than accept colonized peoples as the oppressed within a discrete colonial system.

A key embodiment of the intellectual conflict in Sueur's narrative is the anthropologist turned colonial administrator Jacques Soustelle, whose policy of

⁵³ James Sueur, *Uncivil War: Intellectuals and Identity Politics During the Decolonization of Algeria* (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska, 2005) 3, 13.

⁵⁴ Conklin. *A Mission to Civilize*, 247-50.

reconciliation through a more benevolent colonialism at times gained him support of both Algerians and European settlers, the *pied noirs*. Sueur explores this new politics of reconciliation further in a chapter on Camus which begins “perhaps even more than Jacques Soustelle, Camus challenged the dominant paradigm of intellectual commitment and fought tooth and nail against the idea that that being an intellectual meant being a full-fledged anti-colonialist.”⁵⁵ In the case of both, and ultimately French Algeria, reconciliation fails.

Derived from this polarizing failure of reconciliation, Sueur identified a process of French intellectual engagement with the politics of othering in which a rejection of universalism – as a construct that subsumes the identity of the oppressed - was applied by both colonialist and anti-colonialists to dismiss the civilizing mission and justify extreme violence on both sides.⁵⁶ According to Sueur, Memmi, via *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, “presented an especially influential case for separation as the only means of reestablishing identity,” rendering “the outdated politics of integration and pacification (Jacques Soustelle and Robert Lacoste respectively) purely illusory.”⁵⁷ Following the publication of *The Colonizer and Colonized*, he further developed this skepticism toward leftist supporters of reconciliation and various condemnations of the revolutionary movements.

In 1958 essay, “The Colonial Problem and the Left,” Memmi chided leftists for assuming the colonized sought the same cultural and social advancements as themselves,

⁵⁵ Sueur, *Uncivil War*, 98.

⁵⁶ Sueur, *Uncivil War*, 284-5.

⁵⁷ Sueur, *Uncivil War*, 269.

insisting on a narrow class-based vision of progress. While, like his critique of Camus, this piece appeared prior *The Colonizer and the Colonized* and in a Marxist periodical Memmi later chose to reprint the piece in the 1968 edited volume *Dominated Man*. He claimed that anti-colonial leftists refused to accept a liberation based on national – or religious - formations out of a restricted view of universalism which maintained a civilizational litmus test wherein “on the basis of his reasoning for himself in terms of *class*, he infers what is good for the colonized.”⁵⁸ Thus he accused anti-colonial intellectuals of insisting that the colonized transition directly from a system which repressed their identity towards an acceptance of universal forms, a transition Memmi believed could only be undertaken on their own terms as an independent people.

While a similar critique, Memmi’s point of emphasis differs slightly from comparable accusations leveled toward the European left in contemporary postcolonial scholarship. In his 1990 discussion of Spivak and Bhabha’s interventions, *White Mythologies*, Robert Young examined the work of Subaltern Studies in questioning the eurocentrism of classical Marxist models – opposing the category of the subaltern, derived from non-European anti-modernity, to that of class.⁵⁹ In Memmi’s view the key was that, whatever the form and source, particular oppressed peoples must create or establish ownership of functional revolutionary principles. At no point does he claim the category of class or its application to be ineffective because it is fundamentally

⁵⁸ Albert Memmi, “The Colonial Problem and the Left” in *Dominated Man*. Originally published in a 1958 issue of *Arguments*.

⁵⁹ See: Young, *Postcolonialism*, 352-3.

Eurocentric, but rather that it is a term not applicable to the *colonial* situation. His assertion is no rejection of a modernity narrative.

Memmi also qualified his critique by attributing leftist concerns to a healthy skepticism of religious and chauvinist national rhetoric.⁶⁰ And he noted the apparent lack of broad support among rank and file French voters - for example, an August 1954 poll indicated that Algerian independence lacked strong support from respondents of any party affiliation except the Communists.⁶¹ However, Memmi also accused the Communist party of a confused opportunism, confused because “the hour of national liberation has come earlier than the hour of world revolution,” raising the possibility that nationalist colonial revolutionaries would “turn toward America, or in other words, towards a bourgeois society, for help.”⁶² This foreshadows his skeptical view of neo-imperialist claims in *Decolonization*, but also a tendency to avoid challenging European ideas even while excoriating various Europeans.

And the assertion that anti-colonial leftists were too quick to locate the colonized in their own narratives could be applied Memmi’s own teleology. In *The Colonizer and the Colonized* Memmi emphasized the role of the colonial setting in creating the figures of colonizer and colonized. His subsequent commentary further revealed a tendency to

⁶⁰ Memmi, “The Colonial Problem and the Left,” 63-4. This intellectual savior conception is certainly useful outside a white/non-white or European colonial context – relatable to the evangelism of successful Marxist revolutions in China or Cuba and subsequent relations with neighbors or potential partners.

⁶¹ With 50% supporting complete intendance and an addition 11% “autonomy while safeguarding French interests.” Next were the socialists with only 18% for independence and 20% for autonomy. "Proposals for Policy in Tunisia: Responses to the Question: In your opinion, what would it be necessary to do in Tunisia? Percentage Distribution of proposals, August, 1954." *Sondages* 16, no.4 (1954), 12-14.

⁶² Memmi, “The Colonial Problem and the Left,” 64-5.

associate the excesses of French imperialism that environment – deemphasizing metropolitan France. But any differentiation between “colonial” and “French” in Memmi’s early work is obscured by the controversy surrounding his portrait of the “colonizer who refuses” and his rejection of a truly anti-colonial pied noir.

While Memmi’s critique mainly concerned the Socialist Party and politicians of the left, the Algerian War’s escalation and the future of the pied noirs placed many French intellectuals in an awkward position, forced to choose between Algerian independence and Algérie Française. No longer could metropolitan French intellectuals and political figures be at once for the “good” colonizers and the “good” colonized. They were faced with the impossible dilemma of “the colonizer who refuses.” Camus was particularly troubled by the position of working class pied noirs who composed the majority of the 1.2 million Europeans in Algeria, fearing their fate at the end of a revolution led by the FLN, “the most relentless military leaders of the insurrection.”⁶³

But while he rebuked Camus, Memmi also condemned unreserved support for these leaders, the belief that “we have no right to judge them” for atrocities during the revolution.⁶⁴ Memmi located anti-colonial Europeans in an uncertain position, vacillating between paternalism and an unlimited sanction of the revolution, whereby they forfeited intellectual authority rather than risk criticizing both sides while supporting liberation. Refusing to differentiate between support for the revolution and its most violent excesses, Memmi believed that “left-wing intellectuals, among others, have done little to help the

⁶³ Albert Camus, *Resistance, Rebellion, and Death*, Translated by Justin O'Brien. New York: Modern Library, 1960).

⁶⁴ An attitude he attributed to “(ex. Sartre: *Le Temps Moderne*)” Memmi “The Colonial Problem and the Left” in *Dominated Man*, 60.

colonized define his position.” Without naming specific individuals, he accused openly anti-colonial intellectuals of undermining their own universalism by unreservedly “endorsing the nationalism of the colony, and, in consequence, taking an “everyone for himself” attitude.”⁶⁵

Memmi believed that the French left lost its identity through the colonial crisis – a claim resembling Sueur’s crucible metaphor - and thus could only accept that France had no right to judge. While he acknowledged violence as an unavoidable side product of revolutionary struggle, he also urged intellectuals in France and the colonies to remain both strong advocates and vigilant critics since one aspect of true liberation would be an escape from the cyclical violence of the colonial system.⁶⁶ This is the tenuous position of the colonizer who refuses – but that portrait was only “impossible” *within* the colony.

In summation, Memmi judged that “on the whole the answer is that the French people reacted in a negative way. Rightly or wrongly, they believed themselves victimized when the colonies were abandoned.”⁶⁷ He accepted that French socialists were beholden to a populist constituency sharing some degree of the conservative parties’ xenophobia and fear of job competition from a mass migration of pied noirs. However he also attributed this hesitance to an inability to abandon paternalistic apologies for colonialism at the critical moment – i.e. the “reconciliation” to which Sueur refers – and

⁶⁵ Memmi “The Colonial Problem and the Left” in *Dominated Man*, 62-3.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 63-4.

⁶⁷ In a footnote to the version published in *Dominated Man* he clarified that this observation derives from the fact that the left was disempowered and de Gaulle entrusted “with the task of resolving their colonial difficulties.”

be true to their own principles.⁶⁸ He did not, however, question the nature of those principles. And his discussion of the interplay between intellectuals and populism is an illustration of the role and responsibility Memmi ascribed to intellectuals in shaping public discourse. In this respect, this critique resembles his claim – scathingly elaborated in *Decolonization* – that “ex-colonized” intellectuals failed to challenge the oppressive postcolonial regimes.

The Colonizer who accepts

More convenient, in Memmi’s estimation, than this long and ambiguous route of refusal was the decision to become a “colonialist.” The “colonialist” is the colonizer who accepts, an advocate for colonial legitimacy who rationalizes the position he assumed - “a colonialist is, after all, only a colonizer who agrees to be a colonizer.”⁶⁹ Since the neutral “colonial” did not exist and the “colonizer who refuses” was cast as a temporary figure, Memmi concluded that acceptance was the only viable choice for Europeans in the colony over the long term. Aware that his status and prosperity exist in proportion to the suffering of the colonized, the colonialist reinforced a dependent bond formed at the colony’s establishment and supported by its institutions.⁷⁰ In this duo both are defined by their relationship to each other which frames their struggle to gain or maintain agency and legitimacy. According to Memmi, the colonizer who accepts understood and internalized his own illegitimate dependence on the colony – embracing the civilizing mission while discouraging actual progress. The colonizer attempted the impossible: to

⁶⁸ Memmi “The Colonial Problem and the Left” 55-6.

⁶⁹ Memmi, *Colonizer and Colonized*, 44.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 53-4.

maintain colonialism while relations with not only the colonized, but also the metropole, degenerated.

For the “colonizer who accepts,” his legitimacy was grounded in the history and tradition of a powerful nation state, thus he mythologized the imperial metropole. Struggling to reify the memories of a fading dominance, Memmi’s colonizer created a mythical image of his home country as well as of the colonized. The home country existed in the colonizer's memory in a state of stasis while he simultaneously attempted to maintain stasis in the colony.

Becoming disconnected from metropolitan developments, the colonizer – like the colonial subject hoping to assimilate - feared his illegitimacy rendered him inauthentic. His cultural institutions never appeared as strong as in the metropole, he was unable to be fully “French,” that is if his exposure to the colonized had not completely rendered him “a colonist.”⁷¹ As historians of empire such as Maya Jasanoff have observed, the military parades and public ceremonies that comprise the trappings of imperialism served multiple purposes: projecting strength, but also reassuring the colonizer of not only his superiority toward the colonized, but also his unbroken connection to France.⁷² Therefore, “it is necessary, then, not only that the home country constitute the remote and never intimately

⁷¹ Memmi, *Colonizer and Colonized*, 60-7.

⁷² Ibid., 59. Jasanoff constructs a similar argument regarding a colonial identity British colonists in India – with a comparable material/ceremonial fetishism via antiquities collecting. Maya Jasanoff, *Edge of Empire: Lives, Culture, and Conquest in the East 1750-1850* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005) 307-21.

known ideal, but also that this ideal be immutable and sheltered from time; the colonialist requires his homeland to be conservative.”⁷³

In Memmi’s work, the relationship between the colonialist and the metropole resembles the colonial subject’s own relationship with tradition as explored in *The Pillar of Salt* and his portraits of the colonized. However, the metropole ultimately existed as a concrete presence which not only failed to correspond to exceedingly abstract memories, but began to act directly against the colonialists interests.⁷⁴ Over time, the drawbacks of maintaining colonies became more apparent as their capacity for disruption and the limits of their economic potential were realized. Memmi argued that these changes made Europeans more reliant on their position within the colony – i.e. they became alienated from the metropole while attributing their inability to reconstruct Europe in the colony to the inadequacy of the colonized. He believed conservative and mediocre leadership in

⁷³ Memmi, *Colonizer and Colonized*, 61. This static memory of the colonizer’s homeland has been addressed, albeit in a more meta-critical form, by scholars such as Michael Hardt, Antonio Negri, Frederic Jameson and Arif Dirlik who associate late 20th and early 21st century globalization with the fragmentation of memory and fungible nature of history. Their claim that postcolonial studies overly fixate on the imperial in a manner which draws attention away from the fluidity of postcolonial identity informs my own remarks regarding Memmi’s lack of engagement with postcolonial scholarship in his later career. See: Frederic Jameson, “Notes on Globalization as a Philosophical Issue” In *The Cultures of Globalization*. Ed. Frederic Jameson and Masao Miyoshi (Durham N.C.: Duke University Press, 1998), 54-77, 25 and Arif Dirlik, “Is there History after Eurocentrism? Globalism, Postcolonialism, and the Disavowal of History” in *History after the Three Worlds: Post-Eurocentric Historiographies*. ed. Arif Dirlik, Vinay Bahl, and Peter Gran (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000) 25-47, 25.

⁷⁴ In the context of the colonizer’s frozen memory in *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, Hardt and Negri’s statement that “Empire presents itself...as an order that effectively suspends history” could serve as a prescient observation regarding the colonizer’s perspective in addition to a critique of Empire in postcolonial studies. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Harvard University Press, 2000) xiv. See also their characterization of Empire as a “new regime,” 26

the colony resulted from fears that success in the colony - derived from a system that is manifestly illegitimate – lacked weight in the metropole.⁷⁵

Memmi was far from sympathetic, believing that the colony became an all too safe wager for elements of the French middle and upper class unable to attain wealth and status in France - “spontaneously, better than language scholars, our traveler will come up with the best possible definition of a colony: a place where one earns more and spends less.”⁷⁶ Of course, this profit came at the expense of the colonized. Memmi concluded that the colonizer’s logic would eventually lead to the conclusion that the colonized must be expunged - “he tries to dismiss him from his mind, to imagine the colony without the colonized” – and if not through assimilation, than by violence in what called, in the preface to a subsequent edition, the colonizer’s “Nero complex.”⁷⁷

Portrait of the Colonized - Situations of the Colonized

“The most serious blow suffered by the colonized is being removed from history”⁷⁸

In constructing portraits of the colonized, Memmi began by addressing the relationship between socioeconomic relations and the colonial power structure in a section titled “situations of the colonized.” He drew particular attention to a lack of effective representative institutions – while the poorest Europeans were comparatively well represented - and access to civil society. Thus the colonized were both oppressed and indebted, either refused access to institutions of all kinds or reliant on the colonizer to

⁷⁵ Memmi, *Colonizer and Colonized*, 48.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 3-5.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 65-9 and Ibid., preface to the 1965 edition, xi.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 91.

allow them into schools, desirable jobs, religious, and formal or informal social and cultural institutions. Thus the removal of the colonial subject from history included not only the denial of culture and exclusion from public discourse, but also the reduction of private discourse to immediate needs. Under such pressures “he must therefore limit himself to the present...planning and building his future are forbidden.”⁷⁹ Others in the larger society controlled by the colonized, in Memmi’s analysis the colonized resemble passengers on a foreign ship, differentiated from each other by various mechanisms but none with access to true power.⁸⁰

Memmi argued that potential advantages of a hybrid existence – acquiring two separate cultural and linguistic vocabularies - were consequently negated not only by a crisis of identity, but the colonial subject’s poverty and imposed social limitations.⁸¹ Memmi referred to this as a case of “colonial bilingualism” in which “the two tongues are in conflict,” limiting rather than providing access.⁸² He believed that the requirements of operating in multiple worlds restricted the development of culture, claiming, for example,

⁷⁹ Memmi, *Colonizer and Colonized*, 102.

⁸⁰ Octave Mannoni, in his pioneering analysis of colonialism from a psychological perspective, argued that the colonized are inculcated into the symbolism and language of the colonial world through developmental experiences in childhood. Rather than being taught to be like the colonizer, they are taught they should be but are not. Octave Mannoni, *Psychologie de la Colonisation* (Paris: Le Seuil, 1950).

⁸¹ A seminal text on the subject of colonial hybridity is Homi Bhabha’s 1994 essay *The Location of Culture*. Bhabha also characterized hybridity as a condition which threatens the colonizer by virtue of challenging the colonizer/colonized duality.

⁸² Memmi, *Colonizer and Colonized*, 107. Bilingualism in the literal sense Memmi mentions in example has been a prominent topic of study by historians and sociologists of Francophone Africa. See for example: Bokamba, Eyamba G. “French Colonial Language Policies in Africa and their Legacies” In David F. Marshall ed. *Language Planning: Focusschrift in Honor of Joshua A. Fishman Vol. III*. (Philadelphia: 1991) 175-213.

that colonized painting “is balanced between two poles. From excessive submission to Europe resulting in depersonalization, it passes to such a violent return to self that it is noxious and esthetically illusory” - and created a new layer of social complexity that restricted creativity.⁸³

Similarly, the colonized were rarely denied all access to higher level education. Rather, obstacles were placed in their path and care was taken to insure that the education they received reflected colonialist orthodoxy – i.e. possible candidates for assimilation in Alice Conklin’s 1997 book on the packaging of French republican ideals with colonial authority, *A Mission to Civilize*.⁸⁴ In theory this allowed the colonizer to develop an educated class from the ranks of the colonized who could then be, in the words of political scientist Crawford Young, “vessel[s] for conveying “civilization””⁸⁵ The combination of an administration seemingly open to promoting loyal subjects and a tradition of revolutionary thought in France also encouraged intellectuals who hoped that a France removed from the methods and racism of the colonizer existed on the continent.

⁸³ Memmi, *Colonizer and Colonized*, 140. Though he did not address the effect on culture and the arts with much specificity, he did mention one creative profession briefly: “the material conditions of the colonized would suffice to explain the rarity of writers.” Memmi, *Colonizer and Colonized*, 108. Writing about similar conditions impacting Jewish culture and religion in *Portrait of a Jew* and *Liberation of the Jew* he attempted to examine specific cultural form such as the plastic arts and philosophy in greater detail. See: Chapter 4.

⁸⁴ Conklin, *A Mission to Civilize*. For other examinations of French colonial education see: Dominic Thomas, *Black France: Colonialism, Immigration, and Transnationalism*, (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2007) and Remi Clignet, "Damned if You Do, Damned if You Don't: The Dilemmas of Colonizer-Colonized Relations" *Comparative Education Review* 15, no.3 (1971): 296-312.

⁸⁵ Young asserts that primary education was provided to improve basic living conditions and expanded as part of the paternalistic justification for colonialism while secondary education served to promote potential allies. Crawford Young, *The African Colonial State in Comparative Perspective* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994), 203.

The possibility that one could be a part of the idealized vision of, in Memmi's own words, "The France I so eagerly came to seek," encouraged the pursuit of ephemeral opportunities and assimilation.⁸⁶ As with Alexandre Benillouche, the French Enlightenment served as Memmi's introduction to intellectual history in his youth. A common theme in Memmi's work the expectation that the colonialists did not truly represent France reflected the very real regard Memmi and others felt toward the French intellectual tradition.⁸⁷ However the stereotypes associated with the colonized extended beyond the colony. Memmi proposed that, in the absence of the ability of the colonized to assert their own identity, a mythical portrait served to represent them. This amalgamation of often contradictory characteristics served not to represent the colonized so much as to support the power relations of colonialism. In presenting this portrait, Memmi drew attention to the manipulation of social relations and denial of cultural development under conditions of oppression.

Mythical portrait

Ensnared in a well-defined position of power, the colonizer capitalized upon any weakness to perpetuate the system. Without regard for contradictions in the absence of effective discursive opposition, stereotypes could be cast as both essential traits and redeemable faults. Framed by conceptions of racial difference, the colonized were portrayed as redeemable but perpetual others and so "racism appears then, not as an incidental detail, but as a consubstantial part of colonialism. It is the highest expression

⁸⁶ Memmi, *Le Nomade Immobile*, 67. The quotation above comes from Memmi's description of his first time traveling to France.

⁸⁷ See for example: Tahar Ben Jelloun, *The Last Friend* (Paris: Editions de Seuil, 2004).

of the colonial system.”⁸⁸ Memmi characterized colonial racism as a self-legitimizing praxis.

He termed the image of the colonized by which the colonizer justified his paternal relationship and privileged identity the “mythical portrait.” By calling this a “portrait” as well, Memmi placed it on similar footing with his other archetypes, though the adjective “mythical” also creates a contrast: this is an image possessing meaning and use value, but lacking in nuance or context. As a historian discusses myths, Memmi did not dispute that elements of truth existed within this portrait, but he argued that these elements were framed, distorted, and decontextualized for the colonizer's purposes.⁸⁹ The colonized are unable to provide a response to counter or reshape this construction.

In an article concerning Sartre’s views towards race and his impact on race studies, Jonathan Judaken refers to Memmi’s portraits as “clearly modeled on Sartre’s intersubjective dialectic of the gaze.”⁹⁰ If so, the mythical portrait is the most prominent example of Sartre’s influence. In a section of *Being and Nothingness* titled “the look” Sartre argued that the Other is constructed as a reflection of its *effect* on the self. The mythical portrait Memmi presented in *The Colonizer and the Colonized* is a chimeric amalgamation of stereotypes reflecting the colonizer’s own self-image and insecurities.⁹¹

⁸⁸ Memmi, *Colonizer and Colonized*, 74.

⁸⁹ Similarly, in his 1982 book *Racism* wrote that racism derives from differences which can be real or imagined, but that these differences are then used by racists to make value judgments regarding groups and to assert the superiority of the racist.

⁹⁰ Jonathan Judaken, “Sartre on Racism” in Jonathan Judaken ed. *Race after Sartre* (Albany, State of New York Press, 2008) 35.

⁹¹ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 259. Judaken also notes the similarity of Memmi’s situations of the colonizer to Sartre’s portrait of the anti-Semite in *Anti-Semite and Jew* and that Memmi’s

Memmi offered laziness – a trait ascribed to the colonized that “seems to receive unanimous approval of colonizers from Liberia to Laos”- as an example of the tropes which constitute the mythical portrait. The utility of this accusation is multifaceted. The image of the lazy native promoted European employment and lower wages for non-Europeans, delegitimizing the labor of even the most accomplished colonialized subject. The portrait could be incongruous, with the colonized subject derided as both “a coward who is afraid of suffering and a brute who is not checked by the inhibitions of civilization etc.” Here Memmi suggested that the schizophrenia of the colonizer's logic was itself projected onto the colonizer to scientifically prove their unpredictability.⁹² Memmi recognized a common feature in characteristics of the mythical portrait - reinforcement of “the colonizer's economic and basic needs, which he substitutes for logic.”⁹³ Even putting aside its explicit paternalism, the agents of the French civilizing mission were those with the least incentive to pursue its ostensibly uplifting aims. At some point, to paraphrase Achille Mbembe’s analysis of colony sovereignty in Sub-Saharan Africa, a “lack of distinction between civilizing and ruling” developed within or was inherent to the colonial project.⁹⁴

Regarding the colonial subject’s agency, Memmi acknowledged that at some point in the process a degree of consent is required – i.e. they must choose to follow the

portrait of the colonized “overlaps with Sartre’s portrait of the Jewish situation.” Jonathan Judaken, *Jean-Paul Sartre and the Jewish Question* (University of Nebraska Press, 2006) 155.

⁹² Memmi, *Colonizer and Colonized*, 80.

⁹³ Ibid., 83.

⁹⁴ Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony* (University of California Press, 2001), 31.

rules of colonialism. However Memmi qualified this by arguing that consent occurred only after occupation when, following the establishment of his authority, the colonizer sought a token of legitimation. In this Memmi identified the origins of the mutually constitutive relationship at the heart of colonialism:

The bond between colonizer and colonized is thus destructive and creative. It destroys and re-creates the two partners of colonization into colonizer and colonized. One is disfigured into an oppressor, a partial, unpatriotic, and treacherous being, worrying only about his privileges and their defense; the other, into an oppressed creature, whose development is broken and who compromises by his defeat. Just as the colonizer is tempted to accept his part, the colonized is forced to accept being colonized.⁹⁵

The mythical portrait, not only stigmatized the oppressed but also supplied an essentialist narrative which ran counter to the promises of the civilizing mission and criminalized resistance. This conception of an assimilationist message disseminated from metropolitan elites contrasted with a polarized and stratified society in the colony resembles both the work Conklin and others on the civilizing mission and studies of oppressive conditions such as American slavery – particularly literature seeking more sophisticated understandings of slave resistance.⁹⁶ In addition, scholars have applied Memmi’s mythical portrait directly to contexts as diverse as Native American encounters with European missionaries in the Pacific Northwest, conflicts in colonial and postcolonial Zimbabwe, and Anglo-Irish relations.⁹⁷ Within Memmi’s own work, the

⁹⁵Memmi, *Colonizer and Colonized*, 89.

⁹⁶ See: Stephanie M.H. Camp, *Closer to Freedom: Enslaved Women and Everyday Resistance in the Plantation South* (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 2004). John Hope Franklin and Loren Schweninger, *Runaway Slaves: Rebels on the Plantation*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999) and Marie-Jenkins Schwartz *Born in Bondage: Growing up Enslaved in the Antebellum South*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000).

⁹⁷M. Rutherford. “Revisiting Colonization through Gender: Anglican Missionary Women in the Pacific Northwest and the Arctic, 1860-1945” *BC Studies* 4 (Winter 1994-95): 3-24; Mungazi,

mythical portrait reappeared as a function of anti-Semitism in *Portrait of a Jew* and his 1982 study, *Racism*.⁹⁸ In those texts as in *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, Memmi concluded that revolt and the establishment of a nation-state were the only available conduits which could link the colonial past to a postcolony truly liberated from imperialism and its legacies.

The Two answers of the Colonized

*“The two historically possible solutions are then tried in succession or simultaneously.”*⁹⁹

Memmi’s teleology of colonialism allowed for only two possible means for the colonized subject to liberate himself and escape his colonized identity: assimilation or revolt. Memmi dismissed the former as an impossible, perhaps antiquated, hope - “Could assimilation have succeeded? Perhaps it could have at other periods of history” encouraged by the colonizer but increasingly unattainable.¹⁰⁰ He believed this to be a particular shock when realized by intellectuals whose attempts were “seen as poor parody by colonizers or cute imitation.”¹⁰¹ A seemingly more accessible potentiality was the

Dickson A., “Application of Memmi's Theory of the Colonizer and the Colonized to the Conflicts in Zimbabwe,” 534 and P. F. Sheeran, “Colonists and Colonized: Some Aspects of Anglo-Irish Literature from Swift to Joyce.” in *The Yearbook of English Studies* Vol. 13, (1983), pp. 97-115 and John Wilson Foster. “Culture and Colonization: View from the North” in *The Irish Review* (1986-) No. 5 (Autumn, 1988), 17-26.

⁹⁸ See, Chapter 4 and 5. As well as pieces of a lesser known work co-authored and co-edited by Memmi in 1965: P.H. Maucorps, Albert Memmi, and J.F. Held. *Les Français et le Racisme*. (Paris: Payot, 1965).

⁹⁹ Memmi, *Colonizer and Colonized*, 120

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 126

¹⁰¹ This is reminiscent of Alexandre’s observation that his name was perceived as an affectation bestowed by overly ambitious parents Memmi, *Colonizer and Colonized*, 126. *Pillar of Salt*, 94.

logic of blood sacrifice through military service as proof of authentic citizenship, exemplified by the fate of the *harkis* of Algeria.¹⁰² This expectation is not unique to the conditions of European imperialism by any means, common among oppressed peoples and domestic minorities including European Jews, African-Americans, and undocumented immigrants.¹⁰³ However, Memmi did not address this specific situation – the subject of several recent histories on the French Empire - focusing rather on assimilation in broad terms or via other institutions.¹⁰⁴

While Memmi ultimately dismissed both assimilation and the choice of the “colonizer who refuses” as “impossible,” his comment that assimilation might once have been achievable presaged his more nuanced analysis of attempts to escape a Jewish condition.¹⁰⁵ In *Portrait of a Jew* and *Liberation of the Jew* he would qualify that acculturation, religious conversion, and mixed marriage are possible, but so difficult as to be nonviable for the vast majority of an oppressed group.¹⁰⁶ However, in *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, Memmi was adamant that “within the colonial framework,

¹⁰² In addition to hopes for assimilation or protection, many entered French service for economic motives or potential personal prestige (See author’s analysis and interviews with *Harki* families in France in Vincent Crapanzano, *The Harkis: The Wound that Never Heals*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2011).

¹⁰³ See: Ronald R. Krebs, *Fighting for Rights: Military Service and the Politics of Citizenship* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2006) in which Krebs compares and contrasts African-Americans in early 20th century America with the Druze minority in Israel.

¹⁰⁴ For an example of history on French colonial soldiers see: Gregory Mann, *Native Sons: West African Veterans and France in the Twentieth century* (Duke University Press, 2006).

¹⁰⁵ Memmi, *Colonizer and Colonized*, 123.

¹⁰⁶ See: my reading of *Portrait of a Jew* in chapter 3 and *Liberation of the Jew* in chapter 4 - particularly the sections “assimilation,” “mixed marriage,” and “conversion.”

assimilation has turned out to be impossible.”¹⁰⁷ Such attempts bookend an embrace of religious formalism and tradition which Memmi regarded as a vain attempt to mythologize the past or “recapture what was lost.” Assimilation represented the opposite for Memmi, action without substance, the abandonment of tradition in pursuit of the unattainable.¹⁰⁸

If he cannot become French or improve his condition through an embrace of cultural or religious tradition, Memmi pondered, “what is there left then for the colonized to do?” In way of response, Memmi believed that “revolt is the only way out of the colonial situation and the colonized realizes it sooner or later.”¹⁰⁹ While he later characterized the rejection of colonialism as a natural response to material conditions - i.e. “the poor revolt instinctively” – in *The Colonizer and the Colonized* Memmi evidenced this by noting how vigilantly colonialists guard against such action.¹¹⁰ To have a chance of success the colonized must retain a great deal energy and appeal to a substantive portion of the population. The mechanisms of colonial society and the imperial state were designed to destroy both.

To fight was to risk everything. By rebelling the colonized accepted his role as the agent of instability, reinforcing negative stereotypes of violence and illicit cunning but destroying the illusory image of a loyal progressive colonial subject. However, Memmi

¹⁰⁷ Memmi, *Colonizer and Colonized*, 123. For a similar conclusion regarding assimilation in the colony and in postcolonial Europe see: Robert Bernasconi, “The Impossible Logic of Assimilation,” *Journal of French and Francophone Philosophy*. Vol XIX, no. 2 (2011)

¹⁰⁸ Memmi, *Colonizer and Colonized*, 120.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 127.

¹¹⁰ Memmi, Interview with Salim Jay (1990).

could imagine no other means for the colonial subject to advance their interest other than rebellion -“his condition is absolute and requires an absolute solution: a break and not a compromise.”¹¹¹ Memmi argued that both figures cannot proceed past a certain point: the colonizer cannot fully refuse, and the colonized cannot accept his condition without accepting domination.¹¹² Underpinning these impossibilities is the suggestion that both can pursue an authentic and politically progressive assertion of cultural identity outside, but not within, the colonial milieu. For the colonizer this is possible only through his return to the metropole - the only true refusal of the colonialist role. The colonized must create a locus of authenticity, first through eliminating the colonial system, then by constructing a *state* that represents their interests.

While presenting a case for inevitable revolt in *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, Memmi consistently dismissed the prospect of compromise due to the colonizer’s inability to risk the privilege that defined his status. This intransigence would in turn require an “absolute solution: a break and not a compromise” either through abandonment of the colony by the metropole or anti-colonial revolution.¹¹³ Memmi believed the revolution was necessarily nationalistic and violent. Nationalistic because national identity represented the primary viable unifying strategy for anti-colonial leaders able to subsume, for a time, ethnic, religious, and class difference. Violent due to the combination of anti-colonial grievances and the colonizer’s determination to defend his

¹¹¹ Memmi, *Colonizer and Colonized*, 127. Here his conclusions resembles Fanon’s in *A Dying Colonialism* and *Towards an African Revolution*.

¹¹² Memmi, *Colonizer and Colonized*, 132.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 127.

privilege, but ultimately necessary for the colonized to discard roles shaped by oppression and regain agency in the construction of cultural identity.

Conclusion – Defining Liberation

In *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, Memmi constructed frameworks through which he articulated the mechanics and progression of an oppressive condition, contending that the colonial power structure established the duo of colonizer and colonized through economic, political, and cultural dominance, constricting the agency of all participants in construction their own identity. These portraits illustrate how images of self and other are constructed via social interactions and the exercise of power. Memmi also portrayed colonialism as a self-destructive cycle through which the oppressor’s privilege becomes more tenuous and patently illegitimate, engendering increasingly desperate attempts to protect the system, up to and including destroying the colonized – i.e. the “Nero complex.” Memmi’s teleology concludes either with this self-immolation or when the oppressed rise up to destroy colonialism and thus the system which defined them.¹¹⁴

The Colonizer and the Colonized also debuted Memmi’s views towards the meaning of liberation – the ability to participate equitably in the social construction of one’s own identity, with cultural assertion, here represented by anti-colonial nationalism, as a necessary step. Through the elimination of a discernable condition which restricted cultural development and self-assertion, Memmi believed the colonized would be free to create – in time - their own societies and regain the potential to move beyond the

¹¹⁴ Memmi did not provide an example of the latter, though it is not unreasonable to suspect he had the Holocaust in mind. An example worth considering in this respect could be the relationship between the American frontiersman and Native Americans.

violence, polarization, and defensive parochialism Memmi associated with oppressive conditions. However, Sartre's comment that Memmi sees a "situation where I see a system," raises an issue I believe persists over the course of Memmi's work – a tendency to identify a construction such as colonialism and proceed inward, to the neglect of forces above or beyond that situation. I contend that this construction underpins Memmi's subsequent work concerning Jewish identity, the postcolonial world and other oppressive situations he subsequently addressed along with his linking political agency with cultural agency.

While referencing the colonial Maghreb, in *The Colonizer and the Colonized* Memmi avoided a fixation with specific racial or religious delineations and contextualized relatable elements of the lived experience. Accessibility and erudition are not mutually constitutive, but in postcolonial studies - which Robert Young praises as a field "united by a common political and moral consensus towards the history and legacy of western colonialism" - the combination of these two elements is critical.¹¹⁵ As such, *The Colonizer and the Colonized* remains a valuable tool for exploring other systems of difference and one which has been embraced by many who have felt Memmi's framework helped them better understand their own struggle.

In his conclusion, Memmi expressed hope for the future following anti-colonial revolutions. He also anticipated many difficulties of the postcolonial state, stipulating that national revolution was a first step towards a true liberation. This would require the former colonized to become "free in relation to that nation, free in relation to the religion of his group which he can contain or reject, but he must stop existing only through it" and

¹¹⁵ Robert J.C. Young, *Postcolonialism, an Historical Introduction*, 5.

to “cease defining himself through the categories of colonizers.”¹¹⁶ If these conditions were achieved then “having reconquered all his dimensions, the former colonized will have become a man like any other. There will be the ups and downs of all men to be sure, but at least he will be a whole and free man.”¹¹⁷

Memmi portrayed colonial society as a polarizing, highly determined world of impossible decisions which was “accountable only to itself for its suicide.”¹¹⁸ As such, the hoped for liberation, fraught with peril though it may be, represented a necessary path to an idealized future. At the time Memmi urged caution, concerned that “the same passion which made him admire and absorb Europe shall make him assert his differences...Of course there is considerable risk that the means become the end. Assigning attention to the old myths, he regenerates them dangerously.”¹¹⁹ Here Memmi warned against the replication of oppressive colonial mechanics garbed in local the ethnic or religious language. However his subsequent evaluation of decolonization over the course of his career reveals a disappointment in the extent of these conflicts as well as the recreation of an oppressive political structure by new regimes in contrast to his hope that postcolonial societies would reject the politics of suspicion, violence, and essential difference.

In *The Colonizer and the Colonized* Memmi also offered his own interstitial perspective as a credential for his assertions regarding the conditions and mentality of both

¹¹⁶ Memmi, *Colonizer and Colonized*, 152.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 153.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 112.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 132-3.

figures. In subsequent chapters concerning Jewish identity I further explore how Memmi hoped a national liberation would help reconcile the conflict between various examples of tradition and the modern associated with Jewish culture. And in the concluding chapters of this project I explore how, in Memmi's later work such as his 2006 essay *Decolonization*, Memmi grew frustrated and cynical toward the limitations of postcolonial societies. Juxtaposing his qualified hopes for a future of postcolonial democracies with postcolonial realities, Memmi's later assessments of the postcolonial world would meet accusations that he had abandoned his interstitial perspective for that of a neo-colonialist.¹²⁰ However, before proceeding to subsequent concerns, an additional comment by Sartre regarding *The Colonizer and the Colonized* is worth mentioning in closing – “Let us stop haggling. The work establishes some strong truths.”¹²¹ Many of the frameworks Memmi established in that essay, he would further develop in *Portrait of a Jew* and *The Liberation of the Jew* during the 1960s.

¹²⁰ See chapter 7.

¹²¹ Sartre, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, introduction to the 1965 edition, xxv.

Part Two: Jewish Identity

Chapter 3

The Jew in the Mirror

Following his permanent move to France in 1957, the focus of Memmi's writing shifted to explorations of another aspect, perhaps the central and most unshakable, of his identity. While maintaining a strong interest in the continuing story of decolonization and the emergence of the postcolonial world, through the first fifteen years of his residence in France Memmi's writing addressed Jewish identity and the role of the state of Israel. During the 1960s Memmi served as Professor of Cultural Studies at the Paris *Haute Étude Commercial*. By this time he had moved most of his family to Paris – his father died in 1963 at the home of his sister Mado on the rue du Temple.¹ In 1962, Memmi traveled to Israel for the first time, followed by several trips in the 1960s and 70s to attend academic conferences and produce articles on developments in the Middle East.

His work during this period included most of the articles that would later appear in *Dominated Man* (1968) and *Jews and Arabs* (1975). However, his most prominent works consisted of two non-fiction manuscripts – *Portrait of a Jew* and *Liberation of the Jew* - which I consider in this and the following chapter. Many of the ideas developed in Memmi's depictions of colonialism are present here – the mechanics of oppression, the choices facing the oppressed, the interplay between political power and culture – but these accounts are longer, more detailed, and unavoidably personal.

¹ *Professeur responsable de l'enseignement culturel*, Robequain, "Jalons Bio-Biographiques," 223.

Sartre's 1948 essay *Anti-Semite and Jew* is the primary contextual work for Memmi's analysis.² *Portrait of a Jew* is partially dedicated to Sartre and he is the only contemporary Memmi engages with any regularity in the work. In his 2006 examination *Jean-Paul Sartre and the Jewish Question*, Jonathan Judaken states that "Memmi's analysis of the Jewish condition uses Sartre's *Réflexions* as a subtext for his own essays and creates "an intertextual dialogue with his arguments."³ Memmi's primary contention via-a-vie *Anti-Semite and Jew* is that while Jewishness is far more than the construction of anti-Semitism that Sartre depicts, a Jewish condition exists which *is* imposed. As Judaken shows, Sartre's relationship to Jews and the Jewish condition extends far beyond *Anti-Semite and Jew*. Similarly, Memmi's examination of Jewish identity extends far beyond this base. Thus I note Memmi's arguments in relation to Sartre, however I am particularly concerned with the *Portrait of a Jew*'s place in Memmi's broader oeuvre and his dynamics of oppression and liberation.

In her 2010 essay *The Figural Jew*, Sarah Hammershlag argues that, in *fin-de-siècle* French discourse, the Jew represented a contested delineation between rootlessness and belonging. Debates on Jewish identity and the capacity of Jews to be or become French occurred during a crucial period in discourses on nationalism, the modern state, and race. Hammershlag also observes that the Jew is a primary example employed in examination of the objectified, figural, nature of identity by scholars such as Maurice

² This is title of the English editions of *Réflexions sur la question juive*.

³ Judaken, *Jean-Paul Sartre and the Jewish Question*, 266. The citation is from Judith Morganroth Schneider, "Albert Memmi and Alain Finkielkraut: Two Discourses on French Jewish Identity," *Romantic Review* 81, no. 1 (January 1990): 130–36, 130.

Blanchot and Jacques Derrida.⁴ In similar terms, Memmi believed oppressive conditions objectify the dominated by imposing a mythical portrait. This mythical portrait is not the sum of the Jew, but rather a layer that stunts the development of authentic or freely evolving culture. *Portrait of a Jew* resembles a more thorough version of Memmi's mythical portrait of the colonized and an equally valuable testament to his engagement with conceptions now associated with Postcolonialism. It is also intensely personal, in many places a distinct self-analysis.

In this chapter I consider how Memmi defined and contextualized the Jewish condition in *Portrait of a Jew*, supplemented by examples from the full scope of his commentary. I assert that, by addressing the Jewish condition and drawing comparisons to other forms of oppression, Memmi further developed many of the mechanisms he identified through the colonizer/colonized duo, establishing both continuity into this period of his work and further detailing his conception of oppression and liberation as a renegotiation of how identity is produced. These mechanisms include the use of the "portrait" to emphasize the primacy of social relations and in the construction of cultural identity and a similar teleology of nationalism as an enabling force for the exercise of agency by the oppressed. As Memmi insisted, *Portrait of a Jew* is first and foremost a book *about* Jews rather than *by* a Jew.⁵ It is also book about Albert Memmi exploring his own identity and the processes that shape his own portrait.

Decolonization and Tunisian Jewry

⁴ Sarah Hammerschlag, *The Figural Jew: Politics and Identity in Postwar French Thought* (University of Chicago Press, 2010), 1-11 and 14-16; Jacques Derrida, "La mythologie blanche," in *Marges de philosophie* (Paris: Minuit, 1972), 247-324.

⁵ Memmi, *Portrait of a Jew*, 7.

Memmi's major works on Jewish identity coincided with French withdrawal from North Africa and the increasing geopolitical significance of Israel. His attention would shift towards these events by the conclusion of *Liberation of the Jew*, however *Portrait of a Jew* approaches its subjects via the general language of the *Colonizer and the Colonized* with additional personal depth and historical, if not contemporary, context. Outside of occasional references to the ancient past and the potential origins of his own family, Memmi made few references to the broader history of Jews in the Maghreb. In 1973, he noted the lack of "a really exhaustive book on our life in Arab countries," with the exception of "an excellent little book from an Egyptian Jewess who uses the pen name "Yahudiya Maria" [that] can provide useful information on *The Jews in Egypt* (l'éditions de avenir, Geneva, 1975)."⁶ Thus Memmi's view of Jewish history at this time is heavily informed by European history.⁷

In a June-July 1967 article for *L'Arche* entitled "The Colonized Jew," wherein he affirmed the place of Jews in colonial society, he claimed that "the situation of the North

⁶ Albert Memmi, "Questions for Colonel Kadhafi" in *Jews and Arabs*, 37. However at the time a small volume did exist concerning the the *hara* of Tunis, by French-Tunisian historian and sociologist Paul Sebag, a former resistance fighter and journalist affiliated with the Tunisian Communist Party. This volume contains an assortment of details regarding material conditions and cultural derived from AIU reports and French data. Sebag also included a detailed map of the *hara* with an overlay of the subdivisions and a number of photographs of everyday scenes. Paul Sebag, *La Hara de Tunis: l'évolution d'un ghetto nord-africain*, (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1959). In 1990, Sebag also published a study which combines parts of the English secondary material cited above and data from his previous volume. Paul Sebag, *Histoire des juifs de Tunisie: des origines à nos jours*, (Paris: l'Éditions Harmattan, 1991).

⁷ The history of Tunisian Jews is most often written as part of a wider examination of Jews North Africa, See: Andre Chouraqui's 1968 volume *Between East and West: A History of the Jews in North Africa* and Taïeb-Carlen, *The Jews of North Africa: From Dido to DeGaulle*, or included in broader surveys, such as Martin Gilbert, *In Ishmael's House: A History of the Jews in Muslim Lands*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010) as well as Norman Stillman. *The Jews of Arab Lands in Modern Times*, (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1991).

African Jew is also that of the colonized man” and asserted that “the colonial condition is by no means accidental and secondary; on the contrary, it is indispensable to an understanding of Judaism in the Maghreb.”⁸ Jewish communities in Tunisia, particularly the southern Berber communities, maintained a relatively high level of internal cohesion and external economic integration.⁹ Historically, Tunisian Jews experienced fewer outbreaks of anti-Semitic violence than Moroccans or Algerians. However, as in other parts of the Maghreb, Jewish relations with Arabs and Berbers were affected by French efforts to promote disunity and anti-colonial activists’ questions regarding the nature of a future state.

Beginning in earnest with the founding of the original Destour party in 1907, Tunisian nationalists debated whether or not Jews could be citizens of an independent Tunisia. While anti-Semitic violence flared in Libya, Egypt, and Iraq during the Second World War, Tunisia more closely resembled the relatively peaceful transition of Morocco’s large Jewish population. Tunisian independence thus occurred without war or reprisals on the scale of Algeria.¹⁰ On the one hand, the Tunisian leader Habib Bourguiba pursued moderate tactics; however French governments made a calculated decision to

⁸ Memmi, “The Colonized Jew” in *Jews and Arabs*, 38.

⁹ See: Shlomo Deshen, “Southern Tunisian Jewry in the Early Twentieth Century” in Shlomo Deshen and Walter P. Zenner eds. *Jews Among Muslims: Communities in the Pre-Colonial Middle East* (New York University Press, 1996) 133-43.

¹⁰ Historian Walter L Laqueur suggests that tensions between Jews and nationalists in these more peaceful states were aggravated by Zionist appeals for immigration from those countries. Walter L Laqueur, *A history of Zionism: From the French Revolution to the establishment of the State of Israel* (New York: Schocken, 2003) xv.

focus on Algeria due to its economic significance and unique relationship as an integral part of France in the eyes of its colonial citizens and many leaders in the metropole.¹¹

When Memmi published *Portrait of a Jew* in 1962, Jewish communities still existed to varying degrees in North African states. In Tunisia, where independence was achieved under less tumultuous conditions than in Algeria, approximately fifteen percent of Tunisia's 85,000 Jews left during the four years following the creation of the state of Israel in 1947, while the greatest level of emigration occurred in 1967 following the Six Day War.¹² Memmi commented on the exodus of Jews from Tunisia after the war, noting the relatively quiet relations between Jews and Arabs, as well as Jews and Europeans, in Tunisia and Morocco. He attributed the exodus of Jews in these countries to the inability for Jews to form a cohesive connection their home countries or with the revolution and to a general suspicion of coming uncertainty as "the Tunisian experience, was not directed against the Jews, but neither was it made with the Jews, it was made without them."¹³ This lack of agency – Jews' exclusion from both sides of historical narratives – that represents a fundamental concern in *Portrait of a Jew* and *Liberation of the Jew* and provides one of many links between these texts and *The Colonizer and the Colonized*.

Memmi's Departure

Regarding his own move to France in 1956, Memmi "left Tunisia for professional reasons, admittedly, because I wanted to get back into a literary circle, but also because I

¹¹ Kenneth J. Perkins, *A History of Modern Tunisia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) 68-74.

¹² Perkins, *A History of Modern Tunisia*, 144-5. I consider relationships between Israel and the postcolonial Maghreb further in Chapter 5.

¹³ Memmi, *Portrait of a Jew*, 245-8.

could not have lived much longer in that atmosphere of masked, and often open, discrimination.”¹⁴ Memmi acknowledged that post-independence governments, particular that of his native Tunisia, did not undertake directly anti-Semitic measures initially. However, he argued that wider social pressures, institutional bias, or the eventual need for scapegoats left tensions exceptionally high - “Bourguiba was probably never hostile to the Jews, but there was always that singular “delay” that meant that the police didn’t arrive on the scene until after the stores had been looted and burned.”¹⁵ However, Memmi’s own relationship with Bourguiba was more complex.

Several high ranking members of Bourguiba’s administration were colleagues from Memmi’s work as co-founder editor of the culture section for the weekly *Afrique-Action* – later called *Jeune Afrique*.¹⁶ Memmi had the opportunity to meet Bourguiba on a few occasions and in *La terre interieure* (1975) recalled him, uncritically, as living in the manner of a bourgeois Tunisian while mindful of his appeal to the Tunisian people – “dressed in European style but wearing a fez.”¹⁷ However though Memmi referred to cordial exchanges with the President - while noting the “popular attachment for founders of nations” in reference to Bourguiba’s continuing hold on power – he believed that, in

¹⁴ Memmi, “Who is an Arab Jew?” *Israel Academic Committee on the Middle East*, February (1975). This is the origin of the comparably titled article in *Jews and Arabs*, however this sentence is only found in the original whereas the version included in *Jews and Arabs* places greater emphasis on social pressures in Tunisia.

¹⁵ Ibid., 26. The most notable example being anti-Jewish riots in 1967, following the Six-Day War, which included the destruction of Jewish shops and the burning of the Great Synagogue in Tunis. Maurice Roumani, "The Silent Refugees: Jews from Arab Countries" *Mediterranean Quarterly* 14, no. 3 (2003): 41-77.

¹⁶ Robequain, “Jalons Bibliographics” 220 and Memmi, *La terre interieure*, 125-6.

¹⁷ Memmi, *La terre interieure*, 124.

contrast to the other co-founders of *Afrique-Action*, he was offered no public position primarily because he was a Jew.¹⁸

Portrait of a Jew

Published six years after his move to France, shortly following the birth of his son Nicolas in 1961 and his first visit to Israel in 1962, *Portrait of a Jew* reflects Memmi's ability to productively combine topical analysis with self-exploration.¹⁹ One American rabbi believed that *Portrait of a Jew* "is what would have been Rousseau's *Confessions* had he lived after Sartre and Joyce and had he been Jewish."²⁰ I do not seek to draw conclusions regarding Memmi's private life from this text; however the humanity of Memmi's personal anecdotes adds not only aesthetic richness but human context through stories of growing up, encountering racism, and his concerns regarding the impact of the Jewish condition on the next generation.

Memmi's preface to the original edition and translation consists of a brief biography - "as this book is to a great extent a self-portrait, it would be well for me to give at least a brief account of myself" - with wider commentary on the history of Jews in society including, more generally, those events which affected Memmi and young Jews of his generation. He portrayed himself as an enthusiastic Jewish youth, "dispensing Jewish culture both traditional and reformed" while "trying stubbornly to convince my co-religionists of the beauty, importance, and necessity of the Zionist movement at a

¹⁸ Memmi, *La terre interieure*, 125-6.

¹⁹ The first edition was dedicated to Jean Amrouche who died in April of 1962. Memmi also published a "Hommage à Jean Amrouche" in *Présence Africaine*.

²⁰ This comment was reported by Memmi, who did not identify the rabbi's name, in a letter to Issac Yetiv. Yetiv, "Syndrome of Exile," 131.

period when that movement appeared to be nothing but an adventure.” While embracing secular universalism – and eventually accepting Zionism and other nationalist movements as steps toward that ideal - as his studies progressed, by his own account he did not reject Judaism per se but parochialism.²¹

The next stage in Memmi’s exegesis of his own identity, his quest “to understand myself and to understand other men in relation to me,” entailed coming to terms with “the other aspect of myself: I am a Jew.”²² *Portrait of a Jew* was the result of that process and his determination to “draw *my own portrait*, but only my portrait as a Jew” while reaching general conclusions about the Jewish experience others might find valuable. He acknowledged the difficulties of this project: his limited authority as one individual and the dangers of being explicit regarding the extent of anti-Semitism and its internalization.²³ While realizing this would invite criticism, he believed that “if this portrait is to have that new, and in a way decisive, value, it must be ruthless” since “It is only because I will tell *everything* that I shall be able to impose my conclusions.”²⁴ This perspective links Memmi’s colonial framework and his analysis of Jewish identity – a determination to reveal uncomfortable truths. In *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, this

²¹ This is very much in line with Memmi’s beliefs at the time of publication and subsequently, however in more remembrances of the first 30-40 years of his life, particularly *Le Nomade Immobile*, his internal debates appear much less tidy than in this four page summation. Albert Memmi, *Portrait of a Jew*, 3-5.

²² Memmi, *Portrait of a Jew*, 8.

²³ He notes that conditions have made it difficult for Jews to provide an honest assessment of themselves or share such assessments with others.

²⁴ Memmi, *Portrait of a Jew*, 10-11.

perspective was informed by his interstitial position, in *Portrait* and *Liberation* by his conflicted relationship with and early attempts to reject his own Jewishness.

Portrait of a Jew is divided into four parts: a historically informed description of the Jewish condition, Memmi's construction of a "mythical portrait" of the Jew by anti-Semites, an analysis of Jewish social roles, and commentary on the endurance of Jews as a people – setting the stage for *Liberation of the Jew* where he would approach Jewish responses to persecution.

Memmi's Construction of Jewishness

"The first thing that strikes me when I think of myself as a Jew is that I do not like to consider myself in that light."²⁵ With this initial statement Memmi identified a distinct lack of pride in his own Jewishness. It is this identity and its failure to inspire the pride he associated with other forms of belonging that Memmi examined in the greatest detail.²⁶ Continuing with general ruminations upon this statement, he dismissed any implication that he was simply a "self-hating Jew," responding to rhetorical protests from Jewish readers that "I've never been ashamed of it [being a Jew]" by countering that that pride does not preclude anxiety and shame.²⁷ Memmi devoted a significant portion of *Portrait of a Jew* to historical and social pressures he identified as the source of Jewish anxiety, shame, and pride. Recounting various historical difficulties from the Torah to the

²⁵ Memmi, *Portrait of a Jew*, 15. Asked in 1975 if "Is there thus a happiness to being Jewish?" Memmi replied "Happiness and sadness at the same time" Memmi, *La terre interieure*, 181.

²⁶ In this respect, Guy Dugas compared Memmi's attitude towards his Jewishness with that of Greek Jewish novelist Albert Cohen. Guy Dugas, *Albert Memmi*, 13.

²⁷ "And would I not like to protest myself?" Memmi, *Portrait of a Jew*, 15.

Holocaust, he concluded that Jewish history is primarily negative, “what is called Jewish history is but one long contemplation of Jewish misfortune...punctuated by ghastly catastrophes.”²⁸ Here, to be Jewish is to be on “continual alert,” aware of past misfortune, anticipating future threats.²⁹ This resembles what Salo Baron termed “the lachrymose conception of Jewish history” which he argued overshadows substantial Jewish historical contributions and cultural developments.³⁰

Relations between Jews and Muslims in the region have fluctuated depending on the nature of the ruling group. While attitudes of Islamic rulers shifted before and during the Ottoman period, Jews under the Ottoman Empire were accorded status of *dhimmi*, “protected citizens” under Islamic law subject to varying restrictions. While *dhimmi* status also entailed restrictions on legal rights, access to property, and participation in public life, historian Robert Wistrich, after noting the wide extent and severity of these restrictions, surmises that “despite the servitude and discrimination implicit in the *dhimmi* status of the pre-modern era, Jews under Islam were nonetheless in a relatively better position than their coreligionists in Christian lands.”³¹ Doubtless Memmi was aware of

²⁸ Memmi, *Portrait of a Jews*, 21, 19.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 22-23.

³⁰ Salo Baron, *A Social and Religious History of the Jews* quoted in Marc Cohen, *Under Crescent and Cross: The Jews in the Middle Ages* (Princeton University Press, 1994), 3.

³¹ Robert S. Wistrich, *Muslim Anti-Semitism: A Clear and Present Danger* (New York: American Jewish Committee, 2002) 4. and Robert S. Wistrich, *Antisemitism: The Longest Hatred* (New York: Pantheon, 1991), 202-3.

this surface history and the position of *dhimmi* was as fluid and interstitial as any conception in Memmi's work.³²

Particulars of Jewish relations with ruling groups aside, Memmi attempted to locate a specifically Jewish identity and answer the questions "Who am I? What is a real Jew, in his life, in his sufferings, in his joys?" In doing so he determined that "the best approach to understanding my actual life would have been to describe its positive aspects" he "quickly realized that the life of the Jew is as remarkable for its limitations and its lacunae as for its positive characteristics."³³ While far less inclined to dispute the conception than Baron, Memmi expressed a similar fear that this history had become a self-reinforcing narrative conflated with anti-Semitic stereotypes which constitute a mythical portrait of the Jew comparable to his mythical portrait of the colonized. He believed that an objective condition of being Jewish was sociologically distinguishable from the cultural practices of Jews and the specific experiences of a given group of Jews.

Memmi found the terms employed to express Jewishness (*juif*, *juive*) scarcely adequate to unambiguously differentiate between these aspects. In turn he proposed alternatives to denote separate meanings of Jewishness, addressing this perceived lack of specificity via a three part conception of Jewish identity: *Judaïcité*, *Judaïsme*, *Judéité*.³⁴ He employed these terms to represent, respectively, the Jewish condition, the

³² See: the chapter titled "The Legal Position of Jews in Islam" in Mark R. Cohen, *Under Crescent and Cross: The Jews in the Middle Ages* (Princeton University Press, 1995).

³³ Memmi, *Portrait of a Jew*, 183.

³⁴ Albert Memmi. "Présentation de l'enquête" *Revue française de sociologie*, 6, no. 1 (Jan. - Mar., 1965) 68-9. In 1995, Memmi represented each term as points of a triangle, describing *Judaïcité* and *Judaïsme* as components of *judéité* Albert Memmi. *Le Juif L'Autre*, 133

religious/cultural practices of Jews, and the Jewish community.³⁵ This three part framework served to develop conceptions of Jewish identity beyond the vague and all-encompassing image of Jews deployed by anti-Semites in order to envision a future where Jewish culture and communities achieved liberation from the Jewish condition:

Judaïcité is all the Jewish people; it is, in the broadest sense, all of the Jews dispersed across the world; either in the most narrow sense, one given Jewish group, geographically located, for example: being Jewish French or being Jewish in New York.

Judaïsme is the set of doctrines, beliefs and Jewish institutions, fixed or not, written or oral; in all, the values and institutions, which constitute and govern the life of a Jewish group. Or even Jewish culture in the broad sense: traditions, rites and practices: religion, philosophy, law and art.

Judéité is the condition and the manner of being Jewish; all of the features, lived and objective, sociological, psychological and biological, which creates the Jew.³⁶

Memmi felt compelled to differentiate between these aspects of Jewish identity in order to understand not only why Jews are different but how that difference is articulated and employed to stigmatize Jews.³⁷ At the heart of this framework was a two-fold assertion that the Jewish condition reflects an anti-Semitic mythical portrait, but that *judéité* is neither the sum of the Jew nor beyond reclamation.

Jews and Anti-Semites

Memmi came closest to establishing a duo comparable to colonizer/colonized in his discussion of Jewish identity with the relationship between Jews and anti-Semites. In

³⁵ Either in a worldwide sense or specific examples in a particular location.

³⁶ Albert Memmi. "Présentation de l'enquête," 69.

³⁷ In a 1964 article in *African Arts*, Memmi argued that Negritude, while an attempt to accomplish similar work by defining the scope of black identity, possessed similar problems due to a lack of specificity. Albert Memmi, "The Negro and the Jew/Negritude et Judéité." *African Arts* 1, no. 4 (Summer 1968): 26-9.

Anti-Semite and Jew Sartre examined the Jewish question in terms of this relationship. Arguing that the anti-Semite creates the Jew, his analysis provoked numerous critical responses from authors such as George Bataille, Céline, and Emmanuel Levinas.³⁸ Memmi's differentiation between *Judaïsme* and *Judéité* follows in a similar vein, responding to Sartre's assertion that the anti-Semite creates the Jew by contending that the Jewish condition has largely been constructed by the anti-Semite, but that the Jew is more than this condition of oppression. Regarding the relationship between Memmi and Sartre, Jonathan Judaken states that in *Portrait of a Jew*, Memmi "serves to redress the limits of Sartre's *Réflexions*, by considering the role not only of anti-Semitism, but the impact of the multifaceted dimensions of history and culture on the construction of Jewish identity."³⁹ According to Memmi the very fact that the Jew exists beyond the mythical portrait renders him all the more dangerous, just as the potential for the colonized to assert themselves threatened the status of the colonizer.

In *Portrait of a Jew*, the anti-Semite/Jew duo is not as pervasive as the colonizer/colonized, because while Memmi argues that the Jew is fundamentally a Jew, the anti-Semite is a response to the Jew. Sartre portrays the anti-Semite as a more defined figure who has "chosen hate because hate is a faith."⁴⁰ Thus in the context of 20th century Europe the anti-Semite is "an enemy of constituted authority...he adores order, but a *social* order." Sartre characterized the anti-Semite as a reactionary byproduct of the

³⁸ Jonathan Judaken, "Interrogations, Jewish Speculations, Spectres Juifs" in *Tympanum: A Journal of Comparative Literary Studies* 4, (2000).

³⁹ Judaken, *Jean-Paul Sartre and the Jewish Question*, 266.

⁴⁰ Sartre, *Anti-Semite and Jew*, 32-3.

evolution towards a more democratic society, “floating between an authoritarian society which has not yet come into existence and an official and tolerant society which he disavows.”⁴¹ Memmi agreed that racism in modern democratic states is partly a reaction to the inclusive nature of democracy and socialism representing, as in socialist arguments against multiculturalism, “precisely the inverse process, since it is a temptation to exclude and the legitimization of exclusion.” For Memmi anti-Semite and Jew will exist in any society, regardless of trajectory and character, as long as fear of the other – what he would later term “heterophobia” – persists *and* the Jew is unable to positively assert his existence.⁴²

A comparison to the construction of the titular duo in *The Colonizer and the Colonized* provides additional context for Memmi’s analysis of anti-Semitism. According to Memmi, colonialism created the figures of colonizer and colonized - the colonial condition was distinct from, though certainly acting upon, preexisting or concurrent cultural, social, and religious developments. Colonialism created both the colonizer and the colonized - “The bond between colonizer and colonized is thus destructive and creative. It destroys and re-creates the two partners of colonization into colonizer and colonized” - but colonialism was an imposed condition which Memmi believed could ultimately be escaped through a process of liberation.⁴³ However, though anti-Semitism may create Jew and anti-Semite in a similar sense – thus *judéité* resembles a condition

⁴¹ Sartre, *Anti-Semite and Jew*, 32-3.

⁴² Memmi, *Racism*, 158-60.

⁴³ Memmi, *Colonizer and the Colonized*, 89.

like “colonized” - the Jew, like various colonized groups, exists beyond this situation. The difference is that he remains a Jew, but *judéité* is no longer a state of oppression.

Reflecting on Jewish identity in a 1966 series of lectures in the United States, Memmi remarked “A famous philosopher, Jean-Paul Sartre, has written that a Jew is a man considered as such by other people. In my opinion, a Jew is above all a man *treated* as such by other people.”⁴⁴ Thus Jew is not only a label but a social condition - “The Jewish fate is an *objective* fate” – which is imposed.⁴⁵ Memmi’s “portraits” are especially valuable here: the Jew is a figure observed by himself and others, the characteristics of the portrait are socially determined, and *judéité* remains a state of oppression so long as Jewish agency is restricted.

Memmi sometimes feared that, in distinguishing between the identity of the oppressed and imposed conditions, he overemphasized the voluntary aspect of identity and solidarity. However, the inability to choose his own identity was central to Memmi’s frustration:

Like most young animals, I believed for a long time that I had to begin with, a great and marvelous freedom at my disposal. When I discovered that the Jewish fate was restrictive I began to rebel. I hesitated between a systematic revolt and an impassioned claim; I fluctuated between not being a Jew at all or being one insolently and provocatively.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Memmi, “What is a Zionist?” in *Jews and Arabs*, 82. This article was the basis for both Memmi’s series of lecture in the United States during the summer of 1966 and a chapter entitled “Small Portrait of a Jew” included in the first edition of *Dominated Man* (1968) but not included in any subsequent editions or foreign editions.

⁴⁵ Memmi, *Liberation*. 227-28.

⁴⁶ Memmi, *Portrait of a Jew*, 22-3.

The philosopher and feminist scholar Sandra Lee Bartky, reflecting on being Jewish in America, observed a contrast between many American hyphenated identities she encountered and her view of her own Jewishness. Expressing similar feelings in terms reminiscent of the active/passive dichotomy common in Memmi's analysis, she surmised, "I believe then that what I disliked most about being Jewish was the fact that I had not chosen it; I had been chosen by it."⁴⁷ Being a Jew, being chosen, may thus be described as both a gift and a curse. But chosen by whom?⁴⁸

Mythical Portrait of the Jew

Contemplating "The Mythical Jew," Memmi "found myself before a mythical portrait of myself; like the mythical portrait of the colonized native which I have described."⁴⁹ In contrast to Sartre, Memmi argued that the Jew will retain Jewish culture and identity in the absence of anti-Semitism. If, as Sartre wrote, the anti-Semite *chooses* "hate because hate is a faith," the anti-Semite both chooses his own identity and ascribes characteristics to Jews who are unable to construct a broadly accepted counter-narrative.⁵⁰ This distinction is fundamental to Memmi's assertion that "the "Jewish condition" is not the sole definition of the Jew. In the context of Memmi's work, this also reflects a significant link between the Jewish condition and the colonial, foreshadowing his belief that national liberation is the necessary response of both Jew and colonized

⁴⁷ Sandra Lee Bartky, "Phenomenology of a Hyphenated Consciousness" in *Jewish Locations*, 37.

⁴⁸ Memmi directly addressed the social implications of the Jews as God's chosen people in *Liberation of the Jew*. See chapter 4.

⁴⁹ Memmi, *Portrait of a Jew*, 165.

⁵⁰ Sartre. *Anti-Semite and Jew*. 32-3.

subject. In order to assert that, like the colonized, the Jew exists beyond a condition of oppression, Memmi interrogated specific aspects of the mythical portrait, including those influenced by the same Enlightenment writers he esteemed for their universalist ideals.⁵¹

The first element of the mythical portrait Memmi addressed was the accusation of hypersensitivity, an inordinate awareness of a Jewish condition. Beyond self-serving anti-Semitic claims, scholars critical of work such as Emmanuel Levinas' early writings have also accused Jewish scholars of a Eurocentrism that elevates Jewish suffering over others or characterizes the Jew as an exemplar of human suffering.⁵² While acknowledging that Jews are far from the only oppressed peoples, Memmi disputed the accusation that they are inordinately fixated upon their oppression. Likening this complaint to a doctor telling an amputee he is no worse off than another maimed patient, Memmi asserted that "far from thinking I am the only victim I think that racial discrimination is more widespread than anything in the world."⁵³ Claiming "racism is a lived experience" that "finds its genesis and nourishment in ordinary experience... its opacity and tenacity are enhanced by the banality of its sources," Memmi attributed the virulence of racism to its grounding in ordinary experience.⁵⁴

⁵¹ On the connections between Enlightenment universalism and fin de siècle socialist anti-Semitism in France, see: Hammerschlag, 41-54.

⁵² Salvador Slabodsky, "Emmanuel Levinas' Geopolitics: Overlooked Conversations between Rabbinical and Third World Decolonialisms" *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* XVIII.2 (2010), 147. Slabodsky cites for example: Howard Caygill, *Levinas and the Political* (London: Routledge, 2002); Robert Bernasconi, "Who is My Neighbor? Who is the Other?" in *Ethics and Responsibility in the Phenomenological Tradition: The Ninth Annual Symposium of the Simon Silverman Phenomenological Center* (Pittsburgh: Simon Silverman Center, Duquesne University, 1991), 1-31.

⁵³ Memmi, *Portrait of a Jew*, 29.

⁵⁴ Memmi, *Racism*, 22.

At the same time he argued that, in contrast to most religious and cultural identities, discrimination was a fundamental aspect of the Jewish condition as “hostility is the common denominator of our life. In other words, the misfortune of the Jew concerns all Jews, who are called Jews largely because of that gloomy peculiarity.”⁵⁵ Referring to a history filled with persecution and displacement, “the truth is that we were never even partially at ease unless we were on the move...because movement took us from a place we were in to some other place which was better only because we had not reached it yet.”⁵⁶ In Memmi’s view discrimination imposed a fluidity upon the oppressed which is often juxtaposed with the more established identity of dominant groups.

This is a sociological image of the “wandering Jew,” of medieval Christian lore – the “eternal Jew” as depicted in 19th and 20th century discussion of the Jewish question - characteristics of which resemble Memmi’s portraits of the colonized.⁵⁷ Hammershlag asserts that Sartre “first valorized Jewish rootlessness precisely because it calls into question the value of roots.”⁵⁸ However, Memmi claimed such rootlessness was primarily the result of anti-Semitism, insisting that rootedness is a characteristic, or choice, denied to Jews.

⁵⁵ Memmi, *Portrait of a Jew*, 35.

⁵⁶ Memmi, *Portrait of a Jew*, 35. Maurice Blanchot references this passage in a chapter titled “Being Jewish” in Maurice Blanchot. *Infinite Conversation* 82 (University of Minnesota Press, 1992).

⁵⁷ And in artistic representations of the Jewish condition such as Samuel Hirszenberg’s 1899 painting *For a history of the wandering Jew representation including in reference to Dreyfus see: Richard I. Cohen, “The “Wandering Jew” from Medieval Legend to Modern Metaphor,”* in Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett and Jonathan Karp eds. *The Art of Being Jewish in Modern Times* (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007).

⁵⁸ Hammershlag, *The Figural Jew*, 67.

Beyond the contrast between wandering Jew and Zionist pursuit of a physical homeland, the belief that an end to “wandering” can be achieved through national liberation features prominently in Memmi’s work. In his analysis of colonialism and racism, Memmi focused on political solutions as the foundation of cultural development and progressive universalism amongst liberated peoples – the possibility that independent representative states would promote the acceptance of cultural differences.⁵⁹ Memmi’s pattern of condemning passive or gradualist responses to oppressive situations appears early in *Portrait of a Jew* via those who neither promote nor condemn anti-Semitism. Following his general account of Jewish suffering he asked if “those who stand by and not partake in anti-Semitism really make a difference? Certainly the result of colonization and the views of the colonizer are little aided by the perhaps sizable minority who acted civilly towards the colonized.”⁶⁰ Mirroring this critique of passivity towards anti-Semitism, manifestations of collective guilt may produce avoidant responses rather than genuine attempts to confront racism. With a sense of hopelessness, Memmi observed how quickly stories of the war irritated non-Jews in the postwar period. Europeans appeared far more concerned with avoiding any accusation of guilt.⁶¹

As sociologists Daniel Levy and Natan Sznaider observe in their analysis of Germany, Israel and the United States, Holocaust memory has been both localized to

⁵⁹ Memmi, *Racism*, 160.

⁶⁰ Memmi, *Portrait of a Jew*, 42.

⁶¹ Numerous scholars have addressed German memories of the Holocaust. In *Postwar*, Tony Judt’s history of Europe after 1945, in which he specifically identified the Holocaust and its memory as the central issue of European politics and culture following the Second World War, Judt discusses silence regarding the Holocaust in postwar Central Europe. Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe since 1945* (London: Penguin, 2005). 804-808.

reflect the character of these nations, and generalized to ascertain a base line of universal human decency.⁶² However, the specific conditions of anti-Semitism cannot be ignored in such discourses nor the Holocaust placed under a broad umbrella of war crimes and horrors beyond the scope of “ordinary” racism. For Memmi, the Holocaust stemmed from the Nazis adaptation of racism from “a philosophy into a total conception of humanity” and this ultimate crystallization of racist ideology was abetted by the absence of a national entity to represent Jewish interests when their ideological allies and other nations refused to intervene.⁶³ Related to Memmi’s teleology of colonial revolt in *The Colonizer and Colonized*, the Holocaust resembles the other possibility: colonialism ending with the destruction of the colonized. The extremes of anti-Semitism coincide with the ultimate substitution of mythical portrait for the social identity of the oppressed.

Memmi also emphasized the pervasiveness of this Jewish portrait. Though he did recount the more infamous persecutions of Jews - the Holocaust, Russian pogroms, the Reconquista, and conflicts in the Islamic world – he evoked images beyond the more familiar geographical and social milieus of anti-Semitism. He considered the diffusion anti-Semitism throughout cultures, describing how Jews blend into society only by pretending they are someone else, using the example of a Peruvian relative whose family told locals they were Turks “ ‘We are respected here,’ my relative assured me and she added: ‘No one knows we are Jews.’”⁶⁴ Using the example of Ireland, he was also

⁶² Daniel Levy and Natan Sznajder, *The Holocaust and Memory in the Global Age* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2005)

⁶³ Memmi, *Racism*, 161.

⁶⁴ Memmi, *Portrait of a Jew*, 41. For an examination of Jews as scapegoats for national misfortune in Latin America, specifically through the example of media coverage of the 1994 bombing of the Israelite Argentinean Mutual Aid Association building in Buenos Aires see:

convinced that the only places that could honestly claim to lack anti-Semites had no Jewish population and that the prevalence of anti-Semitism is extant across boundaries of class, geography, and among other oppressed peoples.⁶⁵ Thus Memmi argued that, to the extent it existed, Jewish hyper-awareness was simply a recognition that anti-Semitism is exceptionally pervasive, while attempts by Jews and non-Jews to underplay rather than address anti-Semitism constitute the real offense. But historically the issue had been presented as a “Jewish question” in which the Jew was subject, other, and problem.

Biological Difference

Having accepted the basic premise that he was a Jew and aware of his condition, Memmi tested stereotypes associated with Jews against his own knowledge. He initiated his accounting with a self-portrait: “I study myself in the mirror, I touch myself: what does that studious inspection teach me? To be frank, I do not recognize my supposed portrait, not the protruding ears...the lips perhaps? No, not especially.”⁶⁶ Arguing that “the biological figure of the Jew, if there is a such a thing, is much a matter of geography,” he noted that despite the ethnic diversity of Jews they are nonetheless Jews in various countries “Chinese Jews and Negro Jews, Berber Jews and Hindu Jews and

Federico Pablo Feldstein and Carolina Acosta-Alzuru, "Argentinean Jews as scapegoat: A textual analysis of the bombing of AMIA" *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 27, no. 2 (2003): 152-170.

⁶⁵ Scholars have noted the existence of Anti-Semitism in countries without historical or contemporary Jewish populations due to religious and political factors, ex. Moshe Yegar “Malaysia: Anti-Semitism without Jews” in *Jewish Political Studies Review* 18:3-4 (Fall 2006). For a sociological study that considers several methods for measuring anti-Semitism including the size of Jewish communities and the prevalence of right/left political views see: Edward Dunbar and Lucie Simonova. “Individual difference and social status predictors of anti-Semitism and racism US and Czech findings with the Prejudice/Tolerance and Right-Wing Authoritarianism Scales.” *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* 27 no.5 (September 2003) 507–523

⁶⁶ Memmi, *Portrait of a Jew*, 95.

even Aztec Jews.”⁶⁷ To Memmi it appeared that Jews vary physically as much as non-Jews by region, however “like the skin of blacks” the physical characteristics of Jews are used to differentiate them and set them apart from others.

In his 1982 essay *Racism*, Memmi referenced numerous touchstones and key figures in the development of anti-Semitism and biological racism. In the case of the former he noted how as early as the first century C.E. Tacitus “stigmatized the people of Judea,” later followed by the anti-Jewish writings of John Chrysostom, the language of blood purity in the Spanish Inquisition, and finally Nazism with occasional reference to Barrès as a representative of the nationalists. In mentioning the pre-modern antecedents to anti-Semitism as well Montesquieu’s commentary on “the reasoning of the slave traders,” Memmi asserted that biological racism predates Gobineau’s 1854 *Essay on the Inequality of Human Races* or other points of distinction between meanings and constructions of race in the ancient, pre-modern, and modern periods.⁶⁸ In *Portrait of a Jew* he noted that “the biological concept of the Jew is purely relative and is rapidly disintegrating. That is indeed the unanimous conclusion of scientists when they are not engrossed in serving other gods than scientific objectivity.”⁶⁹ However he conceded the possibility that Jews were somehow recognizable, and rhetorically accepted a hypothetical “decisive test” that proved biological difference in order to question the

⁶⁷ Memmi, *Portrait of a Jew*, 99 and 97.

⁶⁸ Memmi, *Racism*, 70-2. For a thorough, albeit more recent, example of such distinctions see: Ivan Hannaford, *Race: The History of an Idea in the West* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996). Hannaford argues that race as an ethnic grouping became a common conception only in the period 1684-1815.

⁶⁹ Memmi, *Portrait of a Jew*, 97.

stability of recognition and the utility of biological distinctions between and among diverse groups of people.

Memmi was “inclined to believe that every group is recognizable in some way...but recognition is a more complex and general phenomenon of which biology is only one factor and not the most striking.”⁷⁰ Noting by way of example the similarities between Jewish and Muslim physical appearance in Tunis along with the variation in skin tone and facial characteristics between Jews in different regions of Tunisia, he concluded that the physical characteristics so prominent in constructions of racial difference were not generally applicable. Rather these malleable conceptions attained a false air of concreteness by their grounding in the physical. In the case of the multi-ethnic variety of Jews listed above, if there were identifiable physical differences, they were defined only after “Jew” was an established category of Other.

In a 1964 article for *La Nef*, Memmi defined racism as “the valuation, generalized and definitive, of biological differences, real or imaginary, to the advantage of the accuser and the disadvantage of his victim, in order to justify aggression.”⁷¹ In *Racism*, he repeated this definition but distinguished between racism in “broad sense” versus the “narrow sense,” that which is derived biological conceptions of race.⁷² In fact Memmi confessed an ability to recognize Jews through numerous characteristics related to their customs, socioeconomic status, employment and so forth, but even here he qualified that

On the contrary, in the accelerated evolution in which Tunisia has been living these past years, each trait may be deceptive. Dress was revealing, to be sure, but

⁷⁰ Memmi, *Portrait of a Jew*, 112.

⁷¹ Albert Memmi, “Essai de définition du racisme,” *La Nef* 19–20 (1964), 41–47.

⁷² Memmi, *Racism*, 101.

it was part of the social class, the age, the degree of culture, the progressive secularization and Europeanization, and all that was in full swing and constantly clouding the issue. I was amused to see that it became harder to differentiate as one approached the extremes: in the still traditional South and among Westernized intellectuals. A few blunders taught me at my expense that biology was no criterion.⁷³

Commenting along these lines in 2000, he observed that physical differences are an arbitrary means of emphasizing racial differences since “a gathering of Jews from the Maghreb, Corsica, and Russia all together in a hall in Paris would seem recognizable. But what is being recognized? If one takes a closer look at the Jewish gathering for example, one would discover all possible variations between those of Europe, North Africa, or the Middle East.” If there was some sort of biological tendency towards certain behaviors, Memmi believed this was the result of the condition imposed upon Jews over centuries.⁷⁴ From his earliest work, Memmi’s interests were drawn to social relations, as this treatment of biological racism emphasizes. And so, after a glance into the physical mirror, he turned to a powerful social construction of the Jew.

The Economic Figure

In a manner similar to the pattern of Jewish economic roles in European societies Jewish occupations in North Africa were often limited to high demand professional skills,

⁷³ Memmi, *Portrait of a Jew*, 101-02.

⁷⁴ Memmi, *Le Nomad Immobile*, 126-27. The cultural and ethnic diversity of Jews in Africa alone is extensive. For example, the expansion of Islam and the Ottoman Empire separated these communities from Ethiopia, site of the other significant Jewish population in Africa before 1500. Ethiopian Jews (i.e. Beta Israel) possess a unique history, see: Steven Kaplan, *The Beta Israel (Falasha) in Ethiopia: From Earliest Times to the Twentieth Century* (New York University Press, 1995). For a perspective on Ethiopian Jews relation to Zionism and questions of race see: Hagar Salamon, “In Search of Self and the Other: A Few Remarks on Ethnicity, Race, and Ethiopian Jews” in *Jewish Locations*, 75-89.

tasks associated with Jewish customs, or professions deemed suspect by Muslims.⁷⁵ However, again, Memmi primarily approached the historical European examples with little specific reference to the North African context. Again directing the accusation toward himself, Memmi asked “Am I an economic Figure?” in a transition from physical difference to the image of Jews as inherently greedy and materially inclined.⁷⁶ Memmi offered literary sources such medieval depictions of the Jew as “a usurer deserving only vengeance” as well as Shakespeare’s Shylock, and a comedic film entitled *Me and the Colonel* which featured a Polish Jew named Jacobowsky who “quite naturally” tries to borrow a car from the Rothschilds. And politically, “even on the Left there exists at least an economic doubt, extremely old and still enduring, which begins with the Socialist Toussanel and comes down to the Communist Khrushchev” with a particularly influential repetition of economic tropes in Marx’s *On the Jewish Question*.⁷⁷

Memmi believed the economic figure fostered a leftist tendency to depict Jews as disconnected from the “honorable trades of the masses” and associate them with capitalism. And even in political satire Memmi quoted a line from “*Le Canard Enchaîné* January 1th, 1959: “The First Lady of France...the Rothschild Bank”” believing that “it was only a joke, perhaps, but no joke is completely harmless.”⁷⁸ He conceded that a

⁷⁵ Michael Menachem Laskier and Reeva Spector Simon, “Economic Life” in *The Jews of the Middle East and North African in Modern Times*, 31.

⁷⁶ Memmi, *Portrait of a Jew*, 120, 132.

⁷⁷ Memmi, *Portrait of a Jew*, 122. For an analysis of Marx’s *On the Jewish Question* which also considers various interpretations of that text and addresses Marx’s “anti-Semitic slurs” directly, see: Dennis Fischman, “The Jewish Question about Marx.” *Polity* 21, No. 4 (Summer, 1989), 755-775.

⁷⁸ Memmi, *Portrait of a Jew*, 122-3.

certain economic character exists, but as an adaptation because while refused access to certain trades Jews are overrepresented in others, those that entail managing money or rather than owning property.

But while acknowledging the association of Jews with the banking and commercial sector created by the transition from medieval feudalism to mercantilism and modern capitalism, Memmi also believed it was impossible to reduce Jews to a class. Included in this assertion was a critique of attempts to catalogue anti-Semitism as a function of class warfare. Here Memmi made a direct comparison with a link *The Colonizer and the Colonized*,

I have described the similar persistence of the Communists in connecting colonial conflicts with class struggle...The revenge of the native is not limited to an economic revenge. Wherever native uprisings occur, they have all the earmarks of national struggles, headed by the bourgeoisie with extremely vague and often nonexistent social programs...Not that I would minimize the enormous importance of the Marxist discovery. I myself have shown that one of the fundamental mechanisms of the colonial situation was the mechanism of privilege. But I also discovered that colonial privilege was not confined to one *class*: all colonizers, of any class whatsoever, even if they were the most underprivileged in their home lands, benefited by it to some extent.⁷⁹

In this passage, Memmi linked the economic figure of the Jew with the oversimplifications of French leftists hesitant to accept the nationalism of the colonized – highlighting the limitations of the oppressed to construct their own portraits even in relations with potential allies. While he believed there is merit in identifying a “certain economic character,” he denied that Jews constitute an economic class or sub-spectrum

⁷⁹ Memmi, *Portrait of a Jew*, 141. More than perhaps any other example of Memmi’s writing employs language closely resembling discussions of “white privilege” in African-American historiography which included similar critiques of Marxism. For a foundational text concerning this subject see: W. E. B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860–1880* (1935). For a selection of readings within the historiography see: Paula S. Rothenburg ed. *White Privilege: Essential Readings on the Other Side of Racism* (New York: Worth Publishers, 2004)

between different classes. Rather, like the colonizer, the Jew is something altogether within himself that defies external characterizations or insistence that his interests coincide with some existing framework – here a Marxist one. Acknowledging that an exact evaluation of this phenomenon would require detailed sociological and historical study he argued that, regardless of the extent of its validity, the economic figure is not the origin of Jewish oppression. Rather “it is his whole position in the midst of non-Jews which results in his special form of economic penetration; as it also controls his political and cultural penetration.”⁸⁰ Instead, Memmi believed the economic character of Jews should be acknowledged as a result of oppression in order to more fully understand and respond to anti-Semitism, but acknowledged and dealt with honestly – neither denied nor fetishized - *by Jews*.

Memmi also explored how Jews have deployed aspects of the mythical portrait to assert claims within a given society, citing this as proof of both their capability to confront narratives and the limitations of coping with restricted agency. For example, the economic function of Jews may embody their role as productive citizens.⁸¹ As Derek Penslar notes in *Shylock's Children*, his book on the role of economics in shaping modern Jewish political and cultural identity, “Jews in the late 1800s such as American Reform Judaism leader Kaufmann Kohler could argue that Jewish commercial spirit and Jewish capital essentially built almost all the great commercial cities of Europe.” Penslar also cites several examples of early 20th century Jewish leaders and commentators intrigued

⁸⁰ Memmi, *Portrait of a Jew*, 142.

⁸¹ A notable attempt to compare another large cultural group’s experience to that of the Jews in Central Europe can be found in several articles on the Chinese in Southeast Asia in Daniel Chirot and Anthony Reid, eds., *Essential Outsiders* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997).

by the relationship of Jews to capitalism including Salo Baron and the German-Jewish economist Arthur Cohen.⁸² Cohen in particular was open to the idea that the Jewish association with capitalism presented the possibility of promoting Jewish achievements in a more sustainable manner than “great man” cultural narratives.⁸³

In Memmi’s analysis the tendency of Jews to “crowd into a certain liberal profession, medicine for instance” exemplified how defensive responses to anti-Semitism reinforced claims that Jews are insular, disloyal, or, inclined toward service jobs cast as non-productive.⁸⁴ The problem for Memmi was not these professions themselves, but that they are entered into out of necessity – paths of least resistance rather than reflection of particular skills or interests. Another example of his differentiation between passive and active cultural development, this reflects Memmi’s concern that a constant need to react has stunted the development of Jewish traditions. In addition to presenting false or contradictory images, the mythical portrait essentializes tactical decisions and denies active cultural creation.

Comparison to Other Conditions of Oppression

Memmi argued that the social characteristics ascribed to Jews are products of anti-Semitic distrust. Thus the Jewish condition and the situations of the colonized

⁸² Derek Penslar, *Shylock’s Children: Economics and Jewish Identity in Modern Europe* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001) 171. Salo Baron, *A Social and Religious History of the Jews* (New York, 1937) 176-7.

⁸³ Arthur Cohen. “Judenfrage und Statistik” in *Zeitschrift für die Demographie und Statistik der Juden* 10 (1914): 147 in Penslar, *Shylock’s Children*, 172-73.

⁸⁴ Memmi, *Portrait of a Jew*, 146. For a discussion of the relationship between Jews and the French state, see Pierre Birnbaum, *Jewish Destinies: Citizenship, State, and Community in Modern France*, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1995). Birnbaum’s depiction of the Jewish Consistory and its relationship to the French republic is reminiscent of many of the problems Memmi ascribed to “encystment.”

accomplish similar work – the anti-Semite juxtaposes himself with the Jew in order to enforce this difference, protect his position, and dispel insecurity regarding his own limits. The primary difference between Memmi’s depiction of the colonized and the Jewish condition is that while both exist beyond their situation, Jews can both be persecuted as Jews and assert that identity independently. This implies a dynamism which led Memmi to associate anti-Semitism with broad forms of discrimination based on race - that is for example black/white more than African-American - or gender.

In particular, Memmi suggested that the historical condition of women across Western cultures exemplified an especially similar contestation of identity. Remarking that “the history of nations is a purely masculine history” he pointedly invoked women’s absence from nationalist narratives, the imposition of characteristics and, and the casting of responses to oppression as essential traits all of which he also associated with the Jewish condition.⁸⁵ As he rarely approached the subject of women and gender, Memmi’s most significant subsequent reflection on this comparison was a brief commentary on women’s liberation via a response to Simon de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex*. In this case Memmi opened with an insistence on his lack of expertise “I hope that all I am about to say will be treated as highly suspect” and counted himself “as among the oppressors.” He accused de Beauvoir of “being content with a negative definition of [women’s] status vis-à-vis the male sex,” arguing against the revolutionary opposition he found inevitable and necessary for other oppressed groups, though in this case he was defending “the ideal of the couple,” an assimilation of sorts that Memmi explored on multiple occasions as a

⁸⁵ Memmi, *Portrait of a Jew*, 201. For an analysis of the relationship between female national symbols and the rights of women within a nation-state see: Beth Baron. *Egypt as a Woman: Nationalism, Gender, and Politics* (University of California Press, 2005).

conduit for rapprochement between groups.⁸⁶ Memmi considered “the couple” to be a fundamental social institution that might hold the greatest potential for cross-cultural understanding.⁸⁷ His generally cautious response to Beauvoir’s *A Second Sex* contains an energetic concern regarding the ability of “the couple to weather the storm” of Beauvoir’s seemingly platonic – in Memmi’s estimation – vision of women’s liberation.⁸⁸

More broadly linking gender and racism towards blacks with anti-Semitism in *Nomade Immobile*, Memmi asserted that it is not actually being a Jew or a woman or black that is “outrageous,” it is rather “the condition of women, the condition of blacks that is revolting” just as the Jew and the Jewish condition “are not at all the same.”⁸⁹ All of these forces combine in a cycle of exclusion and identity defined by persecution in which “history is made without us and we are used to it, as are the majority of oppressed persons.”⁹⁰ These comparisons imply that the Jewish condition is somehow broadly representative of the denial of self-definition at the heart of oppressive social relations.

The Jew as a Universal

Referencing the French philosopher Jean Wahl, Memmi asserted that “the Jewish fate, I insist, is only an abridged form, more condensed and gloomier, of the general fate of mankind.”⁹¹ Thus Memmi considered the Jewish condition reflective of not only the

⁸⁶ Albert Memmi, “A Tyrant’s Plea” 141, 151-60. See: “Mixed Marriage” in chapter 4.

⁸⁷ See for example, his brief and somewhat effervescent 1986 reflection “Le couple” in Memmi, *Ce Que je Crois*, 95-103.

⁸⁸ Memmi, “A Tyrant’s Plea” 154-55.

⁸⁹ Memmi, *La terre intérieure*, 181.

⁹⁰ Memmi, *Portrait of a Jew*, 208.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 236.

quests for autonomy and security by groups denied access to triumphalist narratives but the broader struggle of individuals to define themselves and overcome existential anxiety. Arguments for the Jew as a representation of the universal have come from several quarters. For example, during the *fin-de-siècle*, Maurice Barrès cast the rootless Jew as the ultimate foil for the coalescing French nation.⁹² In a 2004 essay Russian historian Yuri Slezkine considered the possibility of Jews as “quintessential moderns,” representing economic transitions and cosmopolitan social tendencies underpinning modernism while serving as a focus for anxiety and backlash from Barrès and other European nationalists such as Lueger in Austria-Hungary.⁹³ For these nationalists, the Jews nomadic character provided a self-fulfilling counterexample to the coalescing nation and a contrast to the structures nationalists sought to establish in the present upon the foundations of an idealized past. The refiguring of the Jew as a cosmopolitan threat was an extension of nationalist mythmaking, the treacherous half-sibling of Christianity refigured as the interstitial vagabond race.

From a radically different perspective Hammershlag contends that Sartre “valorizes Jewish rootlessness precisely because it calls into question the value of roots.”⁹⁴ In *Anti-Semite and Jew*, Sartre located the Jew between competing poles of nationalist particularism and humanist universalism.⁹⁵ Assessing Jewish culture as

⁹² Maurice Barrès, *Scenes and Doctrines of Nationalism*. (Paris: Emile-Paul, 1902). 56. See; Hammershlag, *The Figural Jew*, 28-9.

⁹³ Yuri Slezkine, *The Jewish Century* (Princeton University Press, 2004).

⁹⁴ Hammershlag, *The Figural Jew*, 67.

⁹⁵ Sartre, *Anti-Semite and Jew*, 69.

primarily a reaction to anti-Semitism, Sartre rebuked particularism as a stagnant road towards further isolation. He mentioned the economic figure as an example of a Jewish tendency toward the universal as it rises above the particular

Actually it is the power of purchase that appeals to him, and if he prefers this form of property to all others it is because it is universal. Appropriation by purchase does not depend on the race of the buyer; it does not vary with its idiosyncrasies....And when *that sum is paid*, the buyer is legally proprietor of the object.⁹⁶

In this respect Sartre's assessment of the Jewish condition resembles Memmi's comment that the Jewish fate may be a more pronounced expression of the human condition, the struggle to cope in a world where essence fails to provide meaning. Others have approached this possibility of the Jew as a representative figure not in their lack of essential claims but in the Jew as an object of persecution. Focused less upon rootlessness than on the related notion of victimhood, historian Esther Benbassa explores this perspective in her 2010 essay *Suffering as Identity*. Claiming that 19th century Jewish narratives of suffering and misfortune promoted the lachrymose tradition in a time when Jewish communities grew increasingly disconnected, Benbassa portrays the narrative of Jewish suffering and the admonition to remember as a paradigm of victimhood as identity.⁹⁷ While these are intriguing constructions, Memmi avoided any valorization of the Jewish condition - "I am not good solely because I am a Jew, just as

⁹⁶ Sartre, *Anti-Semite and Jew*, 126.

⁹⁷ Esther Benbassa, *Suffering as Identity: The Jewish Paradigm* (London: Verso, 2010). 175-77.

the proletarian is not virtuous and honest because he is a proletarian” - and remained focused on the meaning of the Jewish condition for Jews.⁹⁸

Memmi’s insistence that the Jew exists beyond the Jewish condition reflects his aforementioned disdain for abstraction and concern that during the postwar era French philosophy had become “a reflexive philosophy, not interested in the concrete man.”⁹⁹ Rather than explore the positive aspects of rootlessness – aside from supporting his own claim to interstitial perspective, Memmi associated rootedness with agency and lamented that Jewish attempts to represent themselves and assert agency were thwarted by the denial of their claims to group membership. Citizenship in existing nations was Memmi’s particular focus not only due to the nation’s contemporary preeminence but nationalists’ emphasis on place and a shared history. He did not portray the Jew as between universalism and particularism, but rather mired in the particular and barred from full entry into even the most liberal nations.

The Jew as “a Problem”

Arguing that Jews were an oppressed people in all societies, Memmi differentiated between degrees of anti-Semitism, declaring that the Jew is oppressed to varying degrees while “the anti-Semite is always the anti-Semite of a given society, part of a spectrum in the same way a good employer is like a bad employer.”¹⁰⁰ Linking this claim to frustrations regarding his own conflict identity, Memmi surmised that “I am a problem; that in our society the Jew is of necessity considered a problematical being; he

⁹⁸ Memmi, *Portrait of a Jew*, 263-64.

⁹⁹ Memmi, *Le Terre Intérieure*, 89.

¹⁰⁰ Memmi, *Portrait of a Jew*, 52.

is driven to become a problematical being. A problem to other men, why would I not be a problem to myself?”¹⁰¹ In this statement, Memmi recognized that his internal conflicts mirrored the Jew’s conflicted position in societies wherein he is Other.

Episodes in Memmi’s novels provide examples of the Jew as problem.¹⁰² These include Alexandre’s isolation within the French lycée in *The Pillar of Salt* and Marcel’s brother Emilio in *The Scorpion* who, being falsely accused of playing a trick on a one-armed student, discovered that even trusted French professors assumed he was devious or treacherous. Alexandre questioned Jewish culture and the extent of his own free will, while Emilio’s image of an egalitarian France – even amongst scholars – was shattered.¹⁰³ And Memmi later recalled that Jewish immigrants, including citizens from the colonies, faced extensive hardships most often alleviated by local Jewish organizations, raising the specter of supranational loyalty.¹⁰⁴

Memmi portrayed Jewish difference as an unceasing accusation: “To be a Jew is to first and foremost to find oneself called to account; to feel oneself continuously accused, implicitly or explicitly, clearly or obscurely.”¹⁰⁵ This is the heart of Memmi’s discovery that he is “a problem,” that Jewishness places him outside of Tunisian or French society in a way that other distinctions such as class or intellectualism did not. In

¹⁰¹ Memmi, *Portrait of a Jew*, 54. This statement resembles Du Bois’ introductory question in *The Souls of Black Folks*: “How does it feel to be a problem?” W.E.B. Du Bois. *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Bantam Books, 1989 [1903]), 1.

¹⁰² Memmi, *Colonizer and Colonized*, 127.

¹⁰³ Memmi, *Scorpion*, 68-9.

¹⁰⁴ Memmi, *La Terre Intérieure*. 193-95.

¹⁰⁵ Memmi, *Portrait of a Jew*, 54.

case this might appear to be a retrospective discovery of a middle-aged intellectual or an abstract conception requiring substantial thought, Memmi provided a moving example from a 1958 article by a Pole, Adolf Rudnicki who described the context of his eight year old son's own revelation:

“My friends know.”
“What?”
“That I am one.”
“That you are what?”
“That I'm a “Joos.””

His playmates had nicknamed him ‘Jew,’ he himself had mispronounced the word but he already knew. So for me, that problem was settled. But there are men who live in constant expectation, in the constant dread of the day when they will have to explain to their children.¹⁰⁶

The major functional difference between Jewish practice (*judaisme*) and the Jewish condition (*judéité*) is this issue of agency. *Judaisme* is inherited, articulated by Jews, and participatory to some degree, but *judéité* is imposed by non-Jews. And Memmi acknowledged that anti-Semitism powerfully impacts *judaisme*. While much of *Liberation of the Jew* explores the contours of these effects, in his 1976 interview with Victor Malka, he claimed that cultural tends to “be a reflection of a people's condition” and referred to Jewish culture as “a culture of exile” wherein the Jew's instinct is to react to being the unwelcome foreigner.¹⁰⁷ Memmi identified an active/passive dynamic within which anti-Semites held the initiative.

However at this point in his career Memmi also shared the burden of Adolf Rudnicki. Recalling a children's book, *Le Petit Trott* by André Lichtenberger, in which

¹⁰⁶ Memmi, *Portrait of a Jew*, 58. Adolf Rudnicki “Voyage en Occident” in *Les Temps Modernes*, (September-October 1958).

¹⁰⁷ Memmi, *La Terre Intérieure*. 185-86.

the young protagonist's mother is harassed by a Jew while his father is away in the army, Memmi bared his personal investment in not only self-examination, but the future of Jewish identity:

This is the image of himself as a Jew that my little eight year old boy is receiving from his first books. It will practically never be contradicted; on the contrary, it will be confirmed and constantly embellished...Do not tell me that they also show as many Christian cheats and cowards. They are cheats and cowards on the one hand and Christians on the other, like everyone else. There is no relation between their double-dealing and their faith. The Jewish character is money-grasping and cruel because he is a Jew.¹⁰⁸

Once the accusation is made, Jews are forced to react. The anti-Semite draws attention to or creates the sense of difference and the Jew cannot defend himself without further acknowledging there is something amiss -“one side attacks and the other retreats.”¹⁰⁹ Operating within the semiotic boundaries established by the very societies which insist upon their otherness, Jews “have practically accepted the problem as it is posed by the anti-Semite, they recognize his code and the sanctions it imposes.”¹¹⁰ This prevents Jews from asserting difference as a source of pride and denies the authenticity of Jewish claims to other forms of identity, i.e. full citizenship in European or postcolonial nation-states.

Searching for Agency – Asserting Jewishness

The religious state of nations being what it is, and nations being what they are, the Jew finds himself, in a certain measure, outside of the national community.”¹¹¹

¹⁰⁸ Memmi, *Portrait of a Jew*, 85.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 71.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 73.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 146.

Throughout *Portrait of a Jew*, Memmi explored barriers to Jewish political expression within the French context, to support his sense that “as a Jew I am deeply concerned with politics and, at the same time, politically paralyzed.”¹¹² The requirement for participation was not simply prioritizing national identity but effacing Jewishness. “He [the Jew] cannot be politically active except by putting aside his Jewishness, by forgetting himself and above all by making others forget it,” Memmi lamented, citing the frequency with which critics of Pierre Mendes-France referenced his Jewishness or, in the case of his “political friends,” counseled him to mask it.¹¹³ This mirrors the socialist presumptions of Jewish cultural sublimation Memmi decried – including the views of some assimilationist Jews such as the fin-de-siècle French journalist Bernard Lazare whose later assertion of the Jew as a distinct national or racial group was heavily influenced by the accusatory experience of the Dreyfus Affair.¹¹⁴

Memmi observed that attempts to prove national loyalty led politicians to avoid any charges of parochialism as “one scarcely ever sees a Jewish deputy introduce a bill on behalf of Jews, as non-Jews do normally and legitimately on behalf of their own people.” He cited the Crémieux decree as an exception that “shines like a solitary light in the political history of French Jews.”¹¹⁵ Rather, juxtaposing Trotsky and Stalin he observed that denying Jewishness and representing non-Jews appears to be the most

¹¹² Memmi, *Portrait of a Jew*, 222.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 225.

¹¹⁴ During which Lazare found himself in an ongoing public debate with Drumont which included an actual duel – in which neither writer was injured. Hammershlag, *The Figural Jew*, 45-8.

¹¹⁵ Memmi, *Portrait of a Jew*, 228.

feasible way to achieve a viable political career – and noted John F. Kennedy’s qualification of his Catholicism as a similar denial.¹¹⁶ Speaking directly of his own sense of isolation from political and social life Memmi remarked that

I belong to the nation and yet I do not quite belong to it, for it claims me unwillingly. I am of my own class and yet I am not, since it mistrusts me and I confess I avoid it in part. I mingle in the life of the city, and my activity always has the embarrassed look of an artificial addition.¹¹⁷

He identified a defensive tendency for Jews to carefully qualify public statements, for example, “a contemporary Parisian news story in which Weil-Curiel, a Paris city councilor noted a recently published dictionary containing offensive material and felt the need to attest “I have no complex about this question,” he said, “I am a Jew, but I do not come before you here as a Jew, but as a Frenchman through and through.””¹¹⁸ Given his previous references to Rudnicki’s story and *Le Petit Trott*, likely Memmi imagined his young son and other Jewish children encountering such material in the course of a school assignment. His sense of urgency regarding the current generation’s unique opportunity to decouple North African and European culture from the legacies of colonialism reflects a similar concern.¹¹⁹ But Memmi expressed frustration with a society that continued to treat Jews as foreign, undermining the credibility of Jewish politicians and prevented them from actually supporting Jewish rights and causes.

¹¹⁶ Memmi, *Portrait of a Jew*, 232.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 234.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 229.

¹¹⁹ Memmi, Interview with Salim Jay, 1990. And Memmi, *Decolonization*, 144.

Memmi accepted the nation as the modern device for crystalizing and promoting a people's identity, achievements, and interests and attributed two primary features to this construction.¹²⁰ First, the capacity of representative states to protect basic rights and freedom of expression within the context of the national whole. And second, a confidence born of this agency which supports flexibility wherein class interests can be expressed and religious difference mediated by a broader conception – for example, the very blending of French regional identities in the late 19th century which anti-Semitic nationalist like Barrès contrasted with Jewish rootlessness.¹²¹ Therein lies Memmi's hope that the assertion of a shared national identity could be a step towards a humanist universalism rather than an exclusionary division. Memmi identified oppressive situations as the limit points of national identities – i.e. the colonized could not be French, nor could the colonizer become a member of a colonized group. In this vein, he claimed that “while pride in the diversity of one's countrymen is acceptable for a nationalist or a socialist, emphasizing one's Jewishness is unseemly.”¹²² A state could espouse universalism but the Jew remained outside of it, the Other in all established societies.¹²³

¹²⁰ With “crystalizing” I employ Brubaker's term for the historical moment in which a group becomes aware of itself as such. Brubaker, “Ethnicity without Groups,” 12.

¹²¹ See: Eugen Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France, 1870-1914* (Stanford University Press, 1976). Weber's thorough examination of the French states attempt to create a homogenous national society through collective institutions and public education illustrates the oft-overlooked diversity of pre-20th century European states as well as state methods of promoting a broader conception of national identity.

¹²² Memmi, *Portrait of a Jew*, 146-7. Not coincidentally, nationalism and socialism were the two responses to anti-Semitism Memmi advocated.

¹²³ The United States may present a unique case wherein communitarianism and more homogenous visions of society have coexisted to some degree. See: Kenneth Marcus, *Jewish Identity and Civil Rights in America* (University of Cambridge Press, 2010).

In *Anti-Semite and Jew*, Sartre compared Jewish experiences in European states to the narrator's dilemma in Kafka's *The Trial*: "he does not know his judges, scarcely even his lawyers; he does not know what he is charged with, yet he knows that he is considered guilty."¹²⁴ Seen as foreigners or incomplete citizens they lack institutions to protect them or inspire something akin to the revolutionary action of the colonized Memmi advocated in *The Colonizer and the Colonized* - a situation Ivan Hannaford characterized in reference to Jews in the era of the Dreyfus affair as "anomic, experiencing for the first time Nietzsche's new civilization without the protection of antique notions of state, law, justice, reason and citizenship."¹²⁵ While in many ways religion and regional ethnicity appeared to decline, in reality European nation-states were legitimized through the mixing, welding, invention, and rediscovery of elements regarded as traditional.

Consequentially, while Breton socialists and Alsatian conservatives might find common ground in a French nation, Jews remained marginalized even as the nation accomplished a degree of unity beyond difference that Memmi found appealing. Memmi accentuated this – another impossible situation - poignantly with a quote from Nahum Goldman, founder of the World Jewish Congress "In the nineteenth century, we had to fight for the right to be equal; in the twentieth century we have to fight for the right to be different."¹²⁶ In broader terms, he considered the relationship between Jews and

¹²⁴ Sartre, *Anti-Semite and Jew*, 88.

¹²⁵ Hannaford, *Race*, 320.

¹²⁶ Memmi, *Portrait of a Jew*, 75. Memmi refers to this as a recent quote. Available sources indicate Goldman spoke the phrase at the plenary session of the World Jewish Congress in 1966

citizenship in the modern nation-state. He argued that Jews are never fully integrated into the nation and its history due to both anti-Semitism and the role of religion in nationalist conceptions, furthering claims of disloyalty and supranational allegiance. In a strongly punctuated rhetorical dialog Memmi displayed his frustration with an increasing sense that he had been blamed for choosing an identity others defined:

So then, is the accusation confirmed? As a Jew, you admit to being stateless and cosmopolitan. Of your own accord you reject the nation! I do not reject anything! What is confirmed? Do I really suffer from my own refusal or from what other men refuse me? As if, on this point, I had enough strength and pride, serenity and independence to refuse!¹²⁷

Memmi cited several examples of Jewish longing for a homeland in both the physical and social sense to emphasize this cosmopolitan exteriority. “Thus in Tunis, we sometimes used to boast of being authentic Berbers, or Phoenicians, settled there before anyone else, since the days of Queen Dido.”¹²⁸ He also observed that Jews have sought refuge in the European city as part of an attempt to assimilate reflecting “the persistence of my people in seeking to be admitted into the confraternity of our fellow countrymen” – a phenomenon that has since inspired scholarship on the relation between assimilationist urbanites and Hassidic Eastern European Jews as well.¹²⁹ While he would later explore the divisions between Jews in the Ashkenazi/Sephardim context, here Memmi expressed

¹²⁷ Memmi, *Portrait of a Jew*, 197.

¹²⁸ Memmi, *Portrait of a Jew*, 198. The history of North African Jewish communities dates back to at least 813 B.C.E according to scholars who accept references to Dido. Taïeb-Carlen suggests earlier settlements based on biblical references to King Solomon’s relations with the ruler of Tyre. Sarah Taïeb-Carlen, *The Jews of North Africa*, 1-2. The biblical reference is *The Bible*. Kings IX. Chouraqui states that “it is generally accepted that the first settlements date from about the time of the destruction on the Temple of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar in 586 B.C.E.” and alludes to the futility of making an accurate statement on the subject Chouraqui, 8.

¹²⁹ Memmi, *Portrait of a Jew*, 216. See: Jack Wertheimer, *Unwelcome Strangers: East European Jews in Imperial Germany* (Oxford University Press, 1991).

the result of this isolation within the modern nation-state poignantly: “I have never been able to say “We” in referring to those historical pedigrees on which my fellow-citizens pride themselves. I have never heard another Jew say “We” without wincing.”¹³⁰ This resembles Sartre’s comment that that “the Jew is to another Jew the only man he can say “we.”¹³¹ Identified more with accusations than assertions of pride, the collective noun evokes anxiety. This is another fundamental appeal of the nation, a claim to “we” without abrogation of *judaïsme*.

However, in the present context Memmi felt himself a suspect in times of crisis when “I can never pursue, spontaneously, naturally, my civic and national interests. I am never permitted to be a patriot, a citizen, a rebel or a member of the Maquis without arousing suspicion.”¹³² Citing the perils of such disqualification at its furthest extent, he recalled Raymond Aron’s sense that he felt “paralyzed” to speak out against the rise of Hitler in the 1930s specifically due to Hitler’s anti-Semitism, since protest on his part would be viewed as self-serving.¹³³

Angered by political and intellectual pressures to abrogate Jewish identity, advocate for other constituent groups but not Jews, or cease emphasizing the negativity of the Jewish condition, Memmi exclaimed “why should I sometimes act as a Jew? Because

¹³⁰ Memmi, *Portrait of a Jew*, 199. For Memmi’s commentary on Ashkenazi vs. Sephardic perspectives see: chapter 5.

¹³¹ Sartre, *Anti-Semite and Jew*, 101.

¹³² Memmi, *Portrait of a Jew*, 235. No details exist regarding his actual treatment by the resistance following escape from the Vichy camp in 1943.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 230.

the Jew exists! Because the Jew exists as a Jew to himself and to others.”¹³⁴ This is the central statement of *Portrait of a Jew*, that the Jew exists as something beyond others perception. However this insistence does not devalue other forms of identity, in particular the nation. It is the Jew’s relationship to existing nations and the liberating potential of nationalism which underpins Memmi’s transition from a portrait of the Jewish condition to an answer in *Liberation*. Despite everything, Memmi called for both greater understanding and prompt action. Admitting the contradiction of his hopelessness in the face of anti-Semitic politics expressed simultaneously with an urgent need for participation, he declared “the game is fixed, my chances are ridiculous, the stake is greatly to my disadvantage and yet I am all the more eager to play.”¹³⁵ This is the ever-persistent Memmi, convinced that the necessary path is the difficult middle.

Conclusion: Liberation Revisited

This objective condition, one can claim or refuse, but neither deny nor avoid completely. Turning a blind eye does not impede the blow.”¹³⁶

Portrait of a Jew is a more explicitly personal explication of an interstitial perspective and the dangers of instability. Here Memmi delineated boundaries between the Jew and the Jewish condition while assessing psychosocial impact of such heavily restricted and erratic participation in the process of constructing social identity. These modalities resemble and enrich his frameworks in *The Colonizer and the Colonized* while illustrating the utility of Memmi’s approach to conditions of oppression. This includes

¹³⁴ Memmi, *Portrait of a Jew*, 227.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 240.

¹³⁶ Memmi, *Nomade Immobile*, 123.

the emphasis on social relations and degrees of agency in constructing cultural identity that his “portraits” illustrate. That Memmi responds to Sartre’s *Anti-Semite and Jew* by asserting the Jew’s existence is an observation clearly stated by Memmi and furthered by existing scholarship. My contribution here has been to explore and contextualize – within the broader scope of his work and that of others - Memmi’s assertions regarding *how* the Jew exists and show the continuity of Memmi’s approaches to studying oppressive conditions.

These assertions included an attempt to reassert his interstitial perspective. Memmi concluded *Portrait of the Jew* by emphasizing honesty - acknowledging that his appraisal of anti-Semitic constructs such as the “economic figure” risked lending additional weight to these forms. But Memmi insisted that “I am not siding with the anti-Semite; I explain him, I include him and I understand him. I believe, thus, that certain differences exist between Jews and non-Jews” along with the caveat that “I do not believe they are always the differences most frequently mentioned, nor do I believe they have the meaning attributed to them.”¹³⁷ According to Memmi, anti-Semitism reinforces the Jewish condition – in a manner similar to other forms of racism or colonial oppression – through the “mythical portrait.” The resulting image is both nebulous and fundamental – as with the colonized, even contradictory insults are attributed to Jewishness.

Another similarity is that Memmi’s depiction of anti-Semitism resembles a collage of situations and relationships through which Jews have managed to persist. Even while mentioning Nazism in *Racism*, he identified the Jews as the most numerous of a host of “undefended minorities” subject to the will of a regime under which the other

¹³⁷ Memmi, *Portrait of a Jew*, 81.

“merely becomes a utilitarian object.”¹³⁸ There is no system here that supersedes a particular historical situation, but episodes and locations in the history of a people. In this Memmi displays the opposite version of Sartre’s tendency to locate groups in a transcendent ontological narrative.¹³⁹ Rather, in these capacities and through various situations the Jewish people persist, but not unaffected. Memmi lamented a constant “calling to account,” manifested in high culture, political discourse, popular literature, and the mundane social interactions of children. Associating these with both his own childhood and that of his son, he insisted that not only does the Jewish condition exist but it is a condition Jews are aware of in all facets of their life. “It is an ensemble of relations with others and with oneself,” a moment of discovery that shapes emotional development by revealing the mechanics underpinning material and social conditions.¹⁴⁰

Memmi’s solution to the problem of difference in the long term was a universal humanism accompanying his observation of an increasingly interconnected world in which social hierarchies would persist beyond the removal of potential material security and prosperity “the truth is, universalism is a wish, not a fact; a value, not an incontestable reality. Human society is not unified, but it moves toward unification, to which universalism can contribute.”¹⁴¹ But Memmi’s universalism is not based on the elimination of difference, a homogenous utopia. Rather, he insisted that the problem of racism lay in the value judgment – differences do exist and real or imagined differences

¹³⁸ Memmi, *Racism*, 77.

¹³⁹ Judaken, *Sartre and the Jewish Question*, 127.

¹⁴⁰ Memmi, *Nomade Immobile*, 122.

¹⁴¹ Memmi, *Racism*, 158.

can be positive, connecting individuals to multiple larger communities - while “for those stigmatized, the process of devaluing differences can sometimes initiate an inverse process that reifies aspects of their own tradition that are suffocating or even onerous.” And Memmi argued that racism is simply a form of what he termed “heterophobia,” a broader fear of that which is different from oneself.¹⁴²

In this context *Portrait of a Jew* reveals the distance between the Jewish condition and that egalitarian future society. Memmi believed a progression of steps – the first of which, national liberation, Memmi believed he could identify – was necessary to achieve this goal. In this way – as with the colonized - the Jew could be assert himself and participate fully in the social construction of his identity. In his next essay, *The Liberation of the Jew*, Memmi articulated the failures of various attempts to escape or alleviate the Jewish condition and concluded with a Jewish vehicle for initial step, represented by the State of Israel.

¹⁴² Memmi, *Racism*, 158-59.

Chapter 4

The Liberation of the Jew

*What do you do if you are a Jew?
Is there a way out of the Jewish fate?*¹

Memmi claimed in *Liberation of the Jew* that *Portrait of a Jew* provoked criticism regarding his predominantly negative view of both Jewish history and capacity to participate as full citizens in the modern state. Arnold Mandel - friend of Sartre and Camus, novelist, and author of a number of texts on Hassidism – commented that he “did not recognize myself in this portrait” while Raymond Aron found the work to be characterized by the “almost excessive ambiguity” of Memmi’s existence.² On the one hand, the ruthlessness with which Memmi approaches the Jewish condition embodies what Yetiv called “a certain intellectual enjoyment in seeing oneself, armed with a sharp surgical lancet, slitting up the wounds of one’s own people”³ and even within the work Memmi acknowledged after two hundred fifty pages of accounts of Jewish oppression “I have no doubt that some of my readers are getting impatient.”⁴ However Memmi’s seemingly pessimistic construction built towards to the conclusion, similar to *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, that the Jewish condition required a revolutionary break.

In 1965, three years later, Memmi began *Liberation of the Jew* by warning readers that he would treat Jewish culture harshly but that “in one sense this is an optimistic book

¹ Memmi, *Liberation*, 1.

² Dugas, *Albert Memmi*, 49.

³ Isaac Yetiv. "Iconoclasts in Maghrebian Literature." 858-64.

⁴ Memmi, *Portrait of a Jew*, 259.

since it describes a liberation, while the preceding one, *Portrait of a Jew* describes a misfortune.” Alluding to concerns of friends and reviewers upon publication, Memmi did not address philosophical disagreements but rather criticism stemming from distaste for his harsh appraisal: “though the fact that those who profit from an oppression, willfully or not, do not like to hear about it easily understood, one is more surprised at the protestations of the victims themselves.”⁵ He attributed this reaction to a “double oppression, interior and exterior” consisting of anti-Semitism and internal anxiety, - the language of Frantz Fanon and W.E.B. Dubois as well as his own reference to “cultural bilingualism” in *The Colonizer and the Colonized*.⁶

Building upon his critique of passive or inward-focused responses to oppressive conditions in *The Colonizer and the Colonized* and *Portrait of a Jew*, Memmi termed this refusal to acknowledge one’s own suffering a “sanctuary value” intended to avoid the appearance of weakness.⁷ He scorned such defense mechanisms for reifying a disrupted condition – personal anxiety revealed through the stunted growth of the communal institutions, culture, and family life of the oppressed. In *Liberation of the Jew* Memmi identified these “sanctuary values,” ascribing various characteristics and limitations of Jewish culture to the impact of the Jewish condition and these defensive responses.

Memmi’s juxtaposition of parochial defensive attitudes with ultimately nationalist and universalist endeavors also expands Sartre’s argument that the Jew is defined by his

⁵ Memmi, *Liberation*, 13-4.

⁶ Memmi, *Colonizer and Colonized*, 107.

⁷ Memmi, *Liberation*, 15.

condition and “inauthenticity is to deny or attempt to escape from it.”⁸ As with the colonized whose “condition is absolute and requires an absolute solution: a break and not a compromise,” Memmi believed that accepting the Jewish condition and its perpetual uncertainty was tantamount to submission, a renunciation of the *right* to actively participate in the construction of social and cultural identity.⁹

Memmi’s depiction of Jewish responses to anti-Semitism and the corresponding impact upon Jewish culture are divided into attempts to escape the Jewish condition and coping mechanisms. Here I show how the “escape attempts” relate to other examples of Memmi’s commentary on these specific forms of assimilation. In a similar discussion, I have organized the responses Memmi labels “encystment” in a more cohesive manner than they appear in *Liberation*. Memmi’s approach to culture represents a bridge between Jewish nationalism and postcolonial thought, an observation I develop further in the following chapter on Memmi’s views toward the Israel and Arab states.

In this chapter I contend that Memmi’s critique of Jewish cultural forms as overly defensive both deepens his previous analysis and resembles his critique of oppressed cultures elsewhere. This reinforces a dynamic manifested throughout his body of work wherein he juxtaposes those phenomena he labels either active or passive responses to oppressive conditions. I conclude by contextualizing Memmi’s belief that the state of Israel represents the specific national liberation of the Jews in terms of his broader oeuvre and the work of other Zionist intellectuals, with attention throughout the chapter to

⁸ Sartre, *Anti-Semite and Jew*, 91.

⁹ Memmi, *Colonizer and Colonized*, 127.

continuity with Memmi's views regarding the nature of agency in the dynamics of social relations and material conditions.

Ways Out: Attempts to Escape Jewish Condition

“Towards the end of my adolescence, I had had enough of being a Jew”¹⁰

Memmi believed that “in at least one stage of his life, every oppressed person rejects himself.”¹¹ To explore this self-rejection he revisited the foundational question from *Portrait of a Jew* - “does the Jew exist?”¹² In *Liberation* the answer began with memories of his childhood, a general sense of growing frustration with the constraints placed upon him as a Jew in colonial Tunisian society. Sixteen years old in 1936, Memmi recalled his optimism as the Popular Front government in Paris - led by a Jew, Leon Blum – came to power as the Tunisian colonial administration promised reforms, and offered Zionist activists and appealed to Jewish youth.¹³ However anti-Semitic reaction to Blum and the young Memmi's pessimistic view of his future reinforced the conclusion that success meant escaping or concealing Jewishness “since the time of the French Revolution the most common reaction of Western middle-class Jews has always been to cover up, camouflage their Jewishness...I rejected myself as a Jew because I was rejecting a place assigned to me.”¹⁴ But this attempted rejection only confirmed the extent to which Jewishness defined and contextualized his experience.

¹⁰ Memmi, *Liberation*, 19.

¹¹ Memmi, *Portrait of a Jew*, 261.

¹² Memmi, *Liberation*, 21.

¹³ Dugas specifically mentions an affiliation with the socialist-Zionist youth movement Hashomer Hatzair, Dugas, *Albert Memmi*, 34-5.

¹⁴ Memmi, *Liberation*, 21-22.

Memmi's attempts to assert an identity that superseded his Jewishness ended in failure. Though sympathetic toward various attempts to escape the Jewish condition, his skepticism regarding their ultimate success best resembles an anecdote from the Jewish historian L.B. Namier regarding an assimilationist Jew:

He was one of those...Jews who would call themselves anything other than a Jew. "First and foremost," he declared in a pompous manner, "I am a human being." I replied, (and this was more than twenty years ago): "I too once thought so, but I have since discovered all are agreed I am a Jew, and not all that I am a human being. I have therefore come to consider myself first a Jew and only in the second place a human being."¹⁵

According to Memmi, by denying either their own identity or the existence of a specifically Jewish condition "whether he is a middle-class liberal, a youthful rebel or a systematic revolutionary, you always meet with the same love of abstraction... We proudly proclaimed that we did not exist."¹⁶ As a political extension of this protective negation "Jews of the Left" portrayed Jews as a non-national people – according to a definition of nationhood Memmi attributed to Stalin – lacking a common language and historical cultural knowledge.¹⁷ And here he included himself among the left

¹⁵ L.B. Namier, *Conflicts: Studies in Contemporary History* (London: MacMillan, 1942) 163, 144-5 cited in Joan Cocks, *Passion and Paradox: Intellectuals Confront the National Question*. (Princeton University Press, 2002) 91.

¹⁶ Memmi, *Liberation*, 28.

¹⁷ Stalin took particular interest not only in Soviet policy but demographic theory related to the question of nations and their treatment in the Soviet Union, stemming from a personal interest in the nationalities question and demographic analysis. Francine Hirsch, *Empire of nations: Ethnographic knowledge & the making of the Soviet Union*. Cornell University Press, 2005. For a history of the treatment of Jews in the Soviet Union see: Benjamin Pinkus, *The Jews of the Soviet Union: The History of a National Minority* (Cambridge University Press, 1990).

ideologically and through an instinctive reluctance to view Jews in national terms, recalling a hesitance to embrace Zionism after the enthusiasm of his youth cooled.¹⁸

Rather than consider arguments against the existence of a Jewish condition, Memmi concluded that the problem was the very ineffectiveness of negation “the only trouble was that when the peeling was finished, contrary to the artichoke, the Jew always found himself intact...Dare I stretch the paradox further? As a Jew I exist more than non-Jews!”¹⁹ Having realized that “I am a problem” in *Portrait of a Jew*, Memmi identified a fundamental solution: elimination of the characteristic which rendered him a problem by taking on the identity of those who are not, achieving agency through self-denial and acquisition of an alternative. This resembles a similar process described briefly and generally in *The Colonizer and the Colonized* as assimilation. In *Liberation* assimilation features as one of several potentialities – which could themselves be portrayed as part of an attempt to assimilate - Memmi dismissed as unreliable and fraught with additional dangers.

1. Name Changing

Memmi dedicated a brief chapter to name changing, feeling the need to address such a seemingly fundamental alteration, though he found it an especially ineffective recourse. This also provides a corollary to his emphasis on Alexandre’s name in *Pillar of Salt*, and there the reference to “Alexandre” as a perceived affectation belies superficiality.²⁰ In Memmi’s estimation name-changing seemed logical and yet “on closer

¹⁸ Memmi, *Liberation*, 28.

¹⁹ Ibid., 28-9.

²⁰ Memmi, *Pillar*, 94. See: Chapter 1.

inspection one is amazed to find it is never pushed to its conclusion.”²¹ This was certainly a generalization, part of Memmi’s insistence that Jewish identity could never be truly effaced. He believed that the inability to completely remove one’s Jewishness led to slips in the façade of an adopted name

One might object that I am drawing exaggerated conclusions from an ordinary procedure. I don’t think so. On the contrary, I am convinced that a whole psychology of name relationships might be evolved and that I but touch on it here. The name literally sticks to the person and most people suffer when they hear theirs mutilated.²²

Bearing out Memmi’s suspicions regarding the difficulty of this endeavor, historian Leo Spitzer has applied Memmi’s analysis of name changing as a basis for his discussion of African and Creole identity and Nazi social policies.²³ Both emphasize the practical difficulties of this ostensible choice. If successful, destroying an old identity – assuming social ties are severed as well - leaves a space that must be filled with a false history, nor does it automatically generate a new framework for understanding one’s relations within a new community. Name-changing is an act obscuring a more complex process, unsupported by relationships built through assimilation or marriage. Skeptical of cosmetic solutions, it is unsurprising that Memmi dismissed name-changing as a means of escape.

2. *Humor*

²¹ Memmi, *Liberation*, 33-4.

²² *Ibid.*, 40.

²³ Leo Spitzer, “A Name Given, a Name Taken: Camouflaging, Resistance, and Diasporic Social Identity” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 30. no.1 (2010) 21-31.

While Memmi tended to classify cultural expressions as either defensive “sanctuary values” or active assertions of Jewishness – i.e. national identity - he made an exception by including “the humor of the Jew” as an escape attempt, albeit a temporary one. He felt that Jewish humor was overly self-effacing, sharing “the same rejection and the same impossibility of self-rejection which characterize[s] most of these Jewish measure[s].” In his brief study of Jewish jokes and aphorisms he “was struck by an obvious fact: they are in no way to our advantage; the portrait of the Jew which emerges is not at all flattering.”²⁴ Memmi’s use of the word portrait here is especially appropriate as he believed humor reinforced the mythical portrait. He neither derided humor as masochistic - a common conclusion among social scientists in the 1960s and 70s - nor did he accept humor as a claim to agency and possession of the figurative.²⁵ Rather he classified humor as a temporary journey outside the self, a taste of the luxury of self-criticism productive for a liberated people but counterproductive for the oppressed.

Therefore, Memmi classified Jewish humor as part of the dual rejection reinforcing the Jewish condition - “the Jew’s self-rejection and his rejection by non-Jews are so intertwined that it is sometimes difficult to distinguish between them.”²⁶ Memmi did not ignore the basic role of humor as a coping mechanism, citing Nathan Ausbel’s *A Treasury of Jewish Humor* ““Why does the Jew laugh?” “He answers with the saying of

²⁴ Memmi, *Liberation*, 43.

²⁵ Christie Davies, “Exploring the thesis of the self-deprecating Jewish sense of humor” *International Journal of Humor Research* 4 no.2 (1991), 189-91. Davies supports the view that self-deprecating humor amongst marginalized groups is an assertion of agency and refiguring through possession, emphasis, and tone.

²⁶ Memmi, *Liberation*, 45.

the old sages of the synagogue: “when you’re hungry, sing; when you’re hurt, laugh.”²⁷

But, at the same time, Memmi was concerned that such humor reflected the tendency of oppressive conditions to encourage reproduction of the mythical portrait. For example the “economic figure” he considered in *Portrait of a Jew* appeared in a joke regarding the tablets of the law – God offers the tablets to various peoples who reject them since they prohibit stereotypical vices (adultery for the French, war for the Germans). Next,

“Nobody wanted his masterpiece, and God was very upset. It was then that he offered it to the Jews. The Jews immediately asked him:

“How much?”

“Nothing,” said God quickly. “Nothing, it’s free”

“Well then,” said the Jews, “in that case we’ll take two”

This amusing story is certainly not very malicious and its Jewish origin cannot be doubted. However it clearly reflects traits of the accusation: immediate concern with the economic aspect... The same story can be either anti-Semitic or self-justifying depending on the background which gives it its true meaning.²⁸

In this last sentence Memmi was specifically referring to the joke, but this could be a way of expressing his views on a number of subjects. The difference between the French, Germans, and Jews in this joke is that they are represented by institutions and the actions of governments *in addition to* myths and stereotypes. Their stereotyped faults are balanced by positive images their institutions promote – i.e. charisma and martial prowess. The failure of Memmi’s “escape attempts” is twofold; these efforts succeed

²⁷ Memmi, *Liberation*, 48. American professor of Hebrew language and literature Robert Alter explores the assumption that Jewish humor is a palliative attempt to remove the sting from anti-Semitic mythology. Alter’s analysis is included in an edited collection which includes a number of articles on Jewish humor in a broader sense and specific pieces on 20th century Jewish authors such as Phillip Roth and comedians such as Lenny Bruce. Robert Alter, “Jewish Humor and the Domestication of Myth.” in Sarah Cohen ed. *Jewish Wry: Essays on Jewish Humor*. (Detroit, Michigan: Wayne State University Press, 1990) 25-36.

²⁸ Memmi, *Liberation*, 49.

neither in effacing the old identity, nor gaining access to another. Here again is the interstitial quandary of Alexandre Benillouche and the colonized.

3. Assimilation

But how to acquire the requisite identity in order to make full use of such cultural tools? In rejecting alternative to his eventual conclusion that self-assertion is the only real solution, he approached assimilation more broadly. While ultimately not a solution, Memmi was also adamant that cultural exchanges were inevitable and that to an extent “assimilation is first of all a fact. Jewry has never been an absolute, an impenetrable block... What Jew, living among non-Jews, has not been assimilated to some extent?” And he particularly noted the tendency and ability of rich Jews to assimilate more effectively than poor Jews.²⁹ But, like name-changing, Memmi viewed assimilation as an unequal and hazardous exchange for aspects of an ephemeral identity as “the oppression has lasted too long to leave the Jew with many more sure landmarks; and he no longer knows what is his own and what he has copied from others.”³⁰ If Jewish anxiety is alleviated by this process, it is replaced with the anxiety of hybridity as the candidates for assimilation become a category themselves and at best a new other is created.³¹

Conversely, Memmi alluded to his rejection of sanctuary values attempting to preserve a stagnant identity and deny the very need for change. While questioning the

²⁹ Memmi, *Liberation*, 56-7.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 58.

³¹ This resembles a number of critiques of assimilation, particularly those directed at the idea of the American “melting pot” See: Nathan Glazer and Daniel Patrick Moynihan, *Beyond the Melting Pot, Second Edition: The Negroes, Puerto Ricans, Jews, Italians, and Irish of New York City* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1970). For a more specific analysis of Jewish identity in the United States see Berel Lang, “Hyphenated-Jews and the Anxiety of Identity” *Jewish Social Studies* 12.1 (2005) 1-15.

chances of assimilation for any given individual, Memmi also condemned the rigidity of Jews who might blindly reject cultural exchange, using food as an example, “The couscous was Arab; it became mine. The stuffed carp was Polish; it became Jewish.” Consequently, “to prohibit assimilation is to deny steak and French fried potatoes to Jewish immigrants in France. It is to prohibit a permanent, generalized, and inevitable aspect of the majority of Jewish communities...It was very silly to talk of taking the easy way out, treason, abandoning the ship, when history has regularly forced us to abandon our sanctuaries one after the other.”³² To Memmi such cultural protectionism resembled the insecurity of the Berlin Wall, a barrier that revealed the weaknesses of the world it protected rather than projecting strength. Therefore, while attempts to assimilate are placed among Memmi’s “escape attempts” prohibitions on assimilatory behavior would qualify as “sanctuary values.”

In his 1975 interview with Victor Malka he responded to a question regarding danger to “Jewish tradition and culture” by asserting that “I have a less fragile and at the end a less pessimistic view of culture.” Individuals respond to the “conditions of their existence” and thus aspects of culture are adapted in response to daily life and changing tastes.³³ More recently, in *Decolonization* he observed that fungible aspects of cultural identity could be chosen based on availability, popularity, and taste - “culture is a kind of

³² Memmi, *Liberation*, 58. This is another example of Memmi’s tendency to speak of food as possessing a certain level cultural and social, as in *Dependence* where he considered food in the same terms as other substances on which one might become dependent through need or taste. Several notes on possible projects related to dependence on food and luxuries also appear in his datebooks.

³³ Memmi, *La terre intérieure*, 185.

curio shop where each of us can pick and choose according to our desires and fears.”³⁴ As he believed in “more universalism,” Memmi has regularly asserted that some degree of assimilation can be innocuous, marginally significant to social relations, or part of a positive cross-cultural exchange. While there is an element of self-defense in this language given his relationship with French culture – and the reception of *Decolonization* - the claim that gradual acquisition of such cultural “curios” is the furthest extent to which most individuals assimilate in the short-term appears consistent over the course of Memmi’s career.

Paradoxically futile as long as it is desirable “assimilation was necessary and, as long as the oppression lasted, assimilation was doomed to fail.” Without addressing these groups in detail, or delving into the place of Jews *within* color based racial hierarchies and feminism, Memmi extended his dismissal to include assimilation attempts by women, the colonized and “The Negro.”³⁵ Assimilation appears – in the words of Robert Bernasconi who employs Memmi’s work to support this conclusion – a process framed by “impossible logic.”³⁶ However, for Memmi the compromises that advocates of assimilation espouse reflect a pursuit of universalism which ought not to be dismissed. Rather, he hoped assimilation could be refined into something more egalitarian, an active

³⁴ Memmi, *Decolonization*, 41.

³⁵ Memmi, *Liberation*, 59. For an examination of the Jews and their relation to “whiteness” see Melanie Kaye Kantrowitz, “Notes from the Shifting Middle: Some Ways of Looking at Jews” and Lisa Tessman, “Jewish Racializations: Revealing the Contingency of Whiteness” in Lisa Tessman, and Bat-Ami Bar eds. *Jewish locations: Traversing racialized landscapes* (Washington, D.C.: Rowman & Littlefield Pub Inc, 2001). 113-130. For a discussion of Jews in feminist discourse see: Marla Brettschneider, “To Race, to Class, to Queer: Jewish Contributions to Feminist Theory” in *Jewish Locations*, 213-38.

³⁶ Bernasconi, “The Impossible Logic of Assimilation,” 37-49.

pursuit of blending itself rather than “a false philosophy that has served to cover their [the dominated] oppression with a cloak of abstract virtue” while accepting only conformity to the values of a dominant group.³⁷ This comment evokes both the assimilation promoted by French colonial institutions and Alexandre Benillouche’s attempt to substitute French culture for the traditions of his family. Memmi’s more ideal assimilation implies a gradual reconstruction of identity through processes of exchange, criticism, and self-renewal.

Memmi implied that ideas and values could shift significantly without the loss of culture and a people’s sense of self in a liberated social situation. There is a precedent within Zionism for a Jewish acceptance of something resembling “Westernization” without assimilation – a conception Arthur Herzberg argues was put forth “with evident pain” by Leon Pinkser but “assumed beyond a doubt” by Theodore Herzl.³⁸ Inasmuch as Memmi supported liberal democracy, socialism, and ideals derived from the Enlightenment, he might follow in his spirit, albeit with a Sephardic skepticism towards Ashkenazi hegemony. However, Memmi rarely valorized “the West” but rather the ideas themselves, and these with qualification. He believed assimilation was worth pursuing in the long term because “what is needed is more universalism, that is, the passage from an abstract to a concrete universalism” in which culture is depoliticized and common values mutually constructed.³⁹ Memmi’s various discussions of assimilation can be difficult to

³⁷ Memmi, *Liberation*, 62.

³⁸ Arthur Hertzberg ed, *The Zionist Idea* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1997) 49.

³⁹ Memmi, *Liberation*, 64.

parse, Victor Malka told Memmi “in your analysis of the Jewish condition there is a small contradiction” regarding assimilation and Memmi responded equivocally that it was not his place to condemn the choices of individuals.⁴⁰ While Memmi avoided such judgments carefully throughout *Liberation*, he clearly attached especial gravity to religious some subject, particularly religious conversion.

4. Conversion

Memmi declared that “in Christian countries real assimilation is called conversion” and mentioned Catholic schools by way of example to again note the correlation between assimilation and class -“local snobbism dictated that middle-class families send their daughters to study with the Catholic Soeurs de Sion.”⁴¹ He also insisted that “conversion has never really tempted me. I have simply envisaged it as a logical, terminal stage of rejection.”⁴² However, in dismissing conversion as an escape from the Jewish condition he emphasized both the spiritual and cultural foundation religion provides, requiring the convert to replace his former religion with something able to serve those needs. He could not envision Christianity as a worthy substitute “on occasion I have been struck by the calm of a chapel, but I have never been moved,” a statement which tacitly acknowledges the power of Judaism to achieve that effect.⁴³

⁴⁰ Before Malka specified the nature of the contradiction Memmi interrupted “only one? You are very generous with me...” Memmi, *La terre intérieure*, 199.

⁴¹ Memmi, *Liberation*, 69-70.

⁴² Memmi, *Liberation*, 78.

⁴³ Memmi, *Liberation*, 78.

In a 2008 interview on Jewish-Arab relations Memmi commented that “I'm closer to thinkers like Montaigne or the philosophy of the Greeks than my religion.” Asked if secularism itself represented a growing fundamentalism, he responded that

Secularism for me is only a constitutional form, this is not necessarily a global totalitarian philosophy that encompasses all aspects of existence. It is only a form of contract between different groups that form a global society. All this with the aim of power coexist together in peace. For me it is the guarantee of freedom of thought and worship. The thing that fundamentalists do not give you!⁴⁴

Memmi believed religion does provide meaning and identity – remarking in 1985 that “if God is a fiction, religion is not” - but as with other questions of identity, his goal was a society that allowed freedom of practice.⁴⁵ And in response to the idea that the rejection of other Jews would be immaterial if conversion meant complete assimilation he scoffed “As if it were that simple! As if one could leave a group as one does a railway station!”⁴⁶ In *Liberation*, realizing “the reader may feel that I have exaggerated the significance of conversion; that it could be simply considered as a tactical measure,” Memmi argued that “if conversion is nothing but this empty act, a simple ruse, who cannot see the indignity increased by such a decision? For then one goes from degradation to deception, which for me is another form of degradation.”⁴⁷ He also believed converts tend to compensate through overzealousness – for example “the husband is often outdone by the wife who, not merely content with embracing her

⁴⁴ Dov Maimon, "Interview M Albert Memmi." *Covenant* 2, no. 1 (May 2008).

⁴⁵ Memmi, *Ce que je crois*, 178.

⁴⁶ Memmi, *Liberation*, 74. For an analysis that includes several Jewish social scientists from the early 20th century who believed this could be possible see: Mitchell B. Hart, "Racial Science, Social Science, and the Politics of Jewish Assimilation" *Isis* (1999): 268-297.

⁴⁷ Memmi, *Liberation*, 88.

husband's people, reproaches everyone for a lack of vigor and combative zeal."⁴⁸

Memmi's own wife converted to Judaism, though as Schehr notes "not insignificantly, not from anything, for she has already rebelled against her religious back-ground."⁴⁹ It is difficult to speculate about her conversion experience, though Schehr suggests this differs from the example in *Liberation* of marginalized believers adopting a normative faith.⁵⁰

Exploring his own conflicted relationship with the spiritual, Memmi evoked the specific relationship of Judaism to Christianity, contemplating the proposition that "The Jew is the Achilles heel of Christianity, as Manes Sperber so nicely expressed it."⁵¹ He considered the possibility that Christianity needs Judaism as a foil, but made a point to remind readers that anti-Semitism existed before Christianity and Christian anti-Semitism has not correlated with the influence of Christianity, but rather with Christian militancy (i.e. the Crusades and Reconquista Spain) or socioeconomic disruptions.⁵² This resembles

⁴⁸ Memmi, *Liberation*, 97. Of course Memmi's own initial embrace of French culture as an attempt to escape the colonized condition and Jewish parochialism. For studies in the relationship between colonial cultural dynamics and gender see: Anthonia C. Kalu, "Those left out in the rain: African literary theory and the re-invention of the African woman." *African studies review* 37, no. 2 (1994): 77-95 and Carol Devens, "Separate Confrontations: Gender as a Factor in Indian Adaptation to European Colonization in New France" *American Quarterly* 38, no. 3 (1986): 461-480.

⁴⁹ Schehr, "Albert Memmi's Tricultural Tikkun," 72; Memmi, *Nomade Immobile*, 92

⁵⁰ Memmi. *Liberation*, 97.

⁵¹ Ibid., 238, referencing Manès Sperber, *The Achilles Heel* (New York: Doubleday, 1960). For a somewhat journalistic but thoroughly sourced history of the relationship between Christianity and Judaism, particularly in the early centuries C.E and Western European since the era of Constantine see: James Carroll, *Constantine's Sword: The Church and the Jews* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2001).

⁵² Memmi, *Liberation*, 255. At the time Memmi also observed the Catholic Church retreating along with colonialism "at least momentarily there is no future for the Church in Africa or in Asia." For a critique of theories of inherent conflict between Judaism and Christianity see Miriam S. Taylor, *Anti-Judaism and Early Christian Identity: A Critique of the Scholarly Consensus* Vol. 46. (Brill, 1995). Taylor focuses in on the influence of Marcel Simon's classic work asserting the centrality of anti-Judaism in early Christianity, originally published in 1948 – Marcel Simon.

Memmi's subsequent argument in *Racism* that distinguishing between pre-1600 antecedents and modern race theory obscures a broader history of anti-Semitism.⁵³

In reference to the Catholic Church's response to Nazi Germany and the Holocaust Memmi asked - "But then, whether it was guilty, in agreement, or simply neutral before the awful death of so many of my people, how could I have dreamed of becoming part of it without shame, without dishonor?"⁵⁴ For an external example he quoted a passage from Isaac Bashevis Singer's *The Slave* which references pogroms during the series of 17th century invasions of Poland known as The Deluge, "But the moment the Jews caught their breath, they returned to Judaism. What else could they do? Accept the religion of the murderer?"⁵⁵ Memmi rejected conversion due to a combination of many of the same internal objections evoked by other forms of assimilation, "but it was also the ultimate gesture which I could have made in order to change the course of my destiny."⁵⁶ This rejection of conversion illustrates Memmi's complex relationship with religious practice. Here perhaps more than anywhere else in his work, Memmi's stark attitude towards conversion revealed his belief that the Jewish faith represents the cornerstone of *judaïsme*. Among others, historian Walter Lacquer refers to 19th century

Versus Israel: A Study of the relations between Christians and Jews in the Roman Empire (135-425). (Littman Library, 1986).

⁵³ Memmi, *Racism*, 70-2.

⁵⁴ For an assessment of both the Papacy as well as the diverse variety of Catholic clergy and lay Catholic responses to the Holocaust, and a history of the debate over the church's role in the Holocaust see: Michael Phayer, *The Catholic Church and the Holocaust 1930-1965* (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2000).

⁵⁵ Memmi, *Liberation*, 84.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 88.

German Jewish philosopher Moses Hess' view of conversion as one of the foundational ideas of modern Zionism.⁵⁷ Like Hess, Memmi believed conversion represented a futile attempt to escape persecution despite its totality as the converts risked becoming another interstitial other rather than exchanging the oppressed identity for the dominant.

5. *Mixed Marriage*

Marriage is another potentially transformative experience, and in *Liberation of the Jew* Memmi considered whether intermarriage between Jews and non-Jews provided a meaningful point of departure from the Jewish condition. His most notable depiction of a couple is the relationship between a Tunisian Jewish narrator and his Alsatian wife Marie in the 1955 novel *Strangers*, and at the time *Strangers* was first published he was planning to write his doctoral thesis on the sociological implications of mixed marriage.⁵⁸ Within the text of *Liberation* Memmi reflected that "I should have dealt with this after assimilation and before conversion; in the dynamics of rejection it occupies a place halfway between the two."⁵⁹ Though he did not explain the actual placement, it is notable that the previous elements may all occur in the context of such a relationship.

Memmi argued that the difficulties of mixed marriage render success all too uncommon and risk a greater isolation wherein, as stated by Kafka, "he feels more

⁵⁷ Lacquer, *A History of Zionism*, 49-53. Hess's most influential work which concerns both the inadequacies of assimilation and the potential for a Jewish nationalism is *Rome and Jerusalem* (1862).

⁵⁸ Though in *Strangers* he tended to concentrate on the difficulty of the relationship rather than its use a metamorphic escape from the Jewish condition. For a detailed examination of *Strangers*, see: chapter 9. Robequain, "Jalons biographie," 221.

⁵⁹ Memmi, *Liberation*, 90-1.

deserted with a second person than when alone.”⁶⁰ Reconciling this opinion with his own relationship in a 1976 interview, he compared his marriage to that of the main characters in *Strangers* in the sense that “The mixed marriage was a solution to my difficulties but, in one sense, it was their definitive perpetuation.”⁶¹ He believed that “it is a simple fact that a mixed marriage is more difficult than others” and “in short if we have, as I hope, been successful in this important venture of our life, our marriage, it is in *spite* of its mixture.”⁶² In *Liberation*, to a larger degree than his earlier work, Memmi acknowledged his pursuit of the very situations he deemed unlikely or impossible at one point or another in his life – claiming both identity and experience as sources of authority.

Though Memmi questioned mixed marriage as a means for escaping an oppressive condition, *Liberation* also includes strong statements in support of marriage as a culturally revitalizing institution: “I don’t want anyone to think that I take a pessimistic or defeatist view of marriage...the couple is probably man’s best chance; his second and last chance; which permits him to find a new, or best approach; his lost unity.”⁶³ Memmi evoked prohibitions on mixed marriage as examples of weakness, reflective of either the oppressor’s anxiety towards his own illegitimacy or his assertion that “as victims ourselves, we too often forget that as individuals we can hurt as well as be hurt.”⁶⁴ He contended that while insular religious fundamentalists rejected mixed marriage for fear

⁶⁰ Franz Kafka, *Diaries*, May 19, 1922 quoted in Memmi, *Liberation*, 96.

⁶¹ Memmi, *Le Terre Intérieure*, 103.

⁶² Memmi, *Liberation*, 99.

⁶³ “lost unity” here is reminiscent of Martin Buber’s conception of Judaism as unifying project, given Memmi’s familiarity with Buber.

⁶⁴ Memmi, *Liberation*, 93-4."

that Jewish culture might be diminished - perhaps not an unreasonable point given restrictions upon European Jews social science research on mixed marriage and Jewish self-identification in the United States - these bonds promote a reflexively positive cross-cultural understanding.⁶⁵ Such unions threaten both the chauvinism of the dominant and the parochialism of the oppressed, though Memmi demurred that a degree of rapprochement must be established to provide fertile ground:

The day will perhaps come when mixed marriages will be one of the most helpful and beautiful contributions to the great communion of peoples of a single humanity. But first, or at least at the same time, these peoples must cease being hostile to one another.⁶⁶

Revisiting this point in a 1990 interview, Memmi discussed mixed marriage as a transgressive challenge to the debt owed by individuals to their cultural community, amplified by insularity.⁶⁷ Memmi believed such marriages represented the greatest vehicle for positive cross-cultural exchange. The interaction of Memmi's ideal couple – and the recasting of an individual's social portrait through such a relationship – might in fact be a microcosm of his universalist vision. However he also feared that, partially as a result of limits on the outlets available to the oppressed, energy required for liberation and cross-cultural development was too often turned to futile, sterile, or even self-destructive attempts to escape *judéité*.

6. Self-Mutilation

⁶⁵ See: Matthijs Kalmijn, "Intermarriage and homogamy: Causes, patterns, trends" *Annual review of sociology* (1998): 395-421 and Gary A. Tobin, Sylvia Barack Fishman, and Mordechai Rimor, "Jewish identity in conversionary and mixed marriages" *American Jewish Committee, Institute of Human Relations*, (1992).

⁶⁶ Memmi, *Liberation*, 105.

⁶⁷ Memmi, interview by Salim Jay, 1990.

Memmi declared acceptance of the Jewish condition to be “self-mutilation” and “self-hatred,” though he claimed that most Jews pass through a phase of such thinking and “luckily this state of mind is unlivable and one cannot remain in it for long.”⁶⁸ As in the *Colonizer and the Colonized*, Memmi delineated acceptance as a final negative response in *Liberation* comparable to the “impossible” choice of the colonized to accept the domination of the colonizer.⁶⁹ As a point of empathy he recalled how, while writing *Liberation of the Jew*, he uncovered a sheaf of papers entitled “anti-Jewish writings.” Derived from his realization of social constraints, these were a young Memmi’s proscriptions for Tunisian Jews to reform society and escape ancient tropes. Acknowledging the fleeting empowerment of self-rejection he rhetorically asked “Was there still in my attitude a sort of reverse pride?”⁷⁰ Rebellious and frustrated, the young Memmi’s conflicted reform arguments fall somewhere between Lazare’s social-climbing “Jewish parvenu” seeking to abandon Jewish identity and the “conscious pariah,” who translated awareness into revolutionary action.⁷¹

Drawing upon his own iconoclastic past, Memmi argued that self-hatred born of disillusionment led Jews to reproach others. He recounted an incident where, after Memmi’s return to Tunisia in 1949, a neighbor concluded a minor argument by shouting “You are nothing but a Jew like the rest of us! Don’t forget it!” Even when discussing

⁶⁸ Memmi, *Liberation*, 106.

⁶⁹ Memmi, *Colonizer and Colonized*, 127.

⁷⁰ Memmi, *Liberation*, 107-8.

⁷¹ A conception pursued further by Hannah Arendt Richard A. Bernstein, *Hannah Arendt and the Jewish Question* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996) 17-18.

Portrait of a Jew with friends “most of the non-Jews encouraged me to keep it, most of the Jews were against it.”⁷² Politically, Memmi believed self-hatred engendered passivity, discouraging Jews from protesting real injustice. He cited a conversation with the son of Emile Zola as an example.

Dr. Zola, son of the famous writer, told me that at the time of the Dreyfus Affair the Jewish bourgeoisie laughingly affirmed that the two Jews who had done them the greatest damage were Jesus and Dreyfus. It was a joke. But, added Dr. Zola, had it depended on them they would surely have hushed up the affair and left Dreyfus alone in his cell.⁷³

With some irony, Memmi also ascribed a certain fascination with anti-Semitism to Jewish self-hatred, exemplified by a conversation with a relative of “the racist writer” Gobineau who expressed surprised at the number of Jews “who came to glean souvenirs from his family. Moreover it is a Jew who first thought of publishing his complete works.”⁷⁴ Memmi argued that self-hatred substituted for the hatreds expressed by competing nationalists, quoting the Greek-French humorist Pierre Daninos “the Irish don’t like the English, the English don’t like the French, the French don’t like the Germans, but nobody likes the Jews, not even the Jews!”⁷⁵ This is a response to exclusion from the field of competition, though Memmi also spoke of self-mutilation in literal terms.

⁷² Memmi, *Liberation*, 112-13.

⁷³ Ibid., 117. For an analysis of the diversity of French Jewish responses to the Dreyfus affair, examining not only the growth of Zionism and Jewish affirmation but “a process of questioning and identity formation” see: Aron Rodrigue, “Reararticulations of French Jewish identities after the Dreyfus Affair” *Jewish social studies* 2, no. 3 (1996): 1-24.

⁷⁴ Memmi, *Liberation*, 117-18.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 110.

Memmi compared the damage caused by this assimilation through rejection to African-Americans' use of caustic hair and skin treatments, as depicted by Richard Wright in *Black Boy* "self-rejection has far reaching and corrosive effects on a human being; it attacks his body, language, traditions, religion, and culture."⁷⁶ The primary example of physical mutilation in Jewish context, circumcision, is a point of conflict in *The Pillar of Salt* as well as between the couple in *Strangers* following the birth of their child, and Lawrence Schehr argues that Memmi's stories of circumcision represented broader struggles with his Jewishness.⁷⁷ Memmi called circumcision itself a symbolic mutilation - "a substitute for the sacrifice of the child" that represents the futility of sacrifice as an escape from suffering.⁷⁸ Nor did he find the practice fundamental to Jewish identity, asserting "one does not need to be circumcised to be Jewish."⁷⁹ Again Memmi ascribed a broader representative character to the Jewish condition, contending that "like all the oppressed, the contemporary Jew finds his own culture progressively amputated."⁸⁰ This is the colonial subject's dilemma in detail: ill served by parochialism and stagnation, the oppressed risk further isolation or destruction.

⁷⁶ Memmi, *Liberation*, 112.

⁷⁷ Memmi, *Pillar*, 169. Schehr. "Albert Memmi's Tricultural Tikkun," 9-12.

⁷⁸ Memmi, *Nomade Immobile*, 30, 124.

⁷⁹ Memmi, *Portrait of a Jew*, 138-40.

⁸⁰ Memmi, *Liberation*, 115. And in the end these attempts are futile because they fail to address the fundamental aspects of the fractured relationship between groups, he observed in a 2007 interview that the shared "cultural characteristics" of religious and ethnic groups in Tunisia did little to ease Jewish fear of the Muslim majority. Albert Memmi "Growing up as a Minority Child" Trans. Ralph Terica in *Sephardic Horizons* 1 no.3 (Spring 2011).

Coping Mechanisms

“My daughter, ten years old, is still not sure of my exact identity, and therefore her own: “You are an Arab papa? Since your mother speaks Arabic...and, then, what am I, Arab, French, or Jewish?”⁸¹

I never wanted to become a Jewish writer, nor for that matter a North African novelist.”⁸²

Having cataloged various futile, or at best unreliable, methods of rejecting a repressed identity, Memmi surmised that “self-rejection can never be a real answer to an oppressive condition.”⁸³ Citing his own attempts, he concluded that “I did not find the solution to my problem as a Jew in an acquiescence to my fate.” Escape through denial of one’s Jewishness merely confirmed and consented to the mythical portrait.⁸⁴ However, he acknowledged that Jews had been coping with this “impossible situation” for centuries. Having considered means for discarding Jewish identity Memmi turned to mechanisms for managing the strain of an oppressive condition and the impact of the Jewish condition on culture, art, and religion. Memmi referred to these defensive manifestations as “sanctuary values” encouraging a process of “encystment” – a broader term for processes by which Jewish communities isolate themselves or are isolated by prevailing social conditions.

As in the example above regarding his daughter’s ambivalence and association of identity with language, Memmi believed such uncertainty would persist no matter how

⁸¹ Memmi, *Liberation*, 190.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 167.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 119.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 127.

insular Jewish culture became. However just as Memmi implied distinctions between escape attempts and freely entered cultural exchange, he concluded this account by reminding readers that being Jewish entails both a negative condition and a positive identity: “The Jewish people exist because they possess a religious and cultural tradition...but all these assets are heavily mortgaged by a terrible oppression.”⁸⁵ He framed this burden as a combination of anti-Semitic pressures and corresponding Jewish preoccupation with protecting rather than developing those assets.

1. *The Ghetto and Counter-myth*

Memmi derided the passivity of the ghetto as anti-thesis to a free state. Expanding upon previous references to his early criticism of Jewish culture, he recalled advocating the destruction of the ghetto as a student. The ensuing backlash from Jewish readers further convinced him that the ghetto was anti-revolutionary, with Jews reliant on the solidarity of the ghetto for stability – i.e. “how could I have failed to realize we felt more at ease within the ghetto than without.”⁸⁶ He recalled the insularity of Tunisian Jewish communities like his own - “each group lived to itself with a few guests of honor...The

⁸⁵ Memmi, *Liberation*, 296. This is not to say Memmi disassociated race from colonialism, while he viewed this as distinct in many ways he agreed that race and other forms of difference provide the justification for the establishment of colonial conditions. Memmi, *Portrait of a Jew*, 201 and *le Terre Intérieure*, 181.

⁸⁶ Memmi, *Liberation*, 191. Memmi, *Portrait*, 248-50. Nor is this a uniquely Jewish phenomenon, concern regarding the self-ghettoization of immigrants and minorities have been part of both minority concerns regarding their potential for achieving equality and an accusation leveled by nativists and racists. See: On the idea that Ronald Takaki, “Multiculturalism: Battleground or Meeting Ground?” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 530 (1993), 109-121. Scholarship exploring the balance between beneficial properties of Jewish communalism and the dangers of self-ghettoization include discussions of identity and memory as well as the physical communities such as the kibbutz See: Jonathan Boyarin, *Storms from Paradise: The Politics of Jewish Memory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992), Aryei Fishman, *Judaism and Modernization on the Religious Kibbutz*. (Cambridge University Press, 1992).

Communist milieu boasted of being the most open, which was true; but it was predominantly Jewish, and Jews could indeed feel at home there.”⁸⁷ And during his foreign travels Memmi was struck by the similarity of Jewish isolation among even relatively welcoming and affluent states to the ghettos of more oppressive countries - using the examples of New York’s Spring Valley Hassidic community and the Mea Shearim quarter of Jerusalem.

Feeling he understood the dual purpose of the physical ghetto, Memmi applied the idea of the ghetto metaphorically by comparing self-isolation to sleep-walking – “in the extreme, the Jew who accepts himself as a Jew tends to construct a small but complete world, mental as well as material, inside the world of others.”⁸⁸ This response to the anti-Semite’s “mythical portrait” glorifies Jewish suffering and martyrdom, prioritized the maintenance of tradition above the improvement of material conditions. As with assimilation however, Memmi refused to condemn “encystment” absolutely, since “I do not hold all myths in systematic contempt. As a writer why would I have a contempt for fiction?”⁸⁹ Memmi found the counter-myth a natural response “to this intolerable condition,” asserting that “to the obstinacy of a monstrous persecution, the Jew can but constantly oppose a glorious past and a triumphal future, which reassures him and intimidates his assailants.”⁹⁰ But again he maintained that such practices are counterproductive and that direct engagement with the non-Jewish world is essential to

⁸⁷ Memmi, *Portrait of a Jew*, 277.

⁸⁸ Memmi, *Liberation*, 134.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 155-56.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 157.

alleviating Jewish suffering – contributing to one’s own portrait requires agency and a ghetto is not agency.⁹¹ Realizing that the ghetto is a both a defense mechanism and a bulwark of tradition and culture “I came to discover at this time a fundamental truth, that the ghetto was also inside the Jew” - and not only within or around the Jew, but reproduced through his culture.⁹²

2. *The Culture*

Memmi’s critique of Jewish culture resembles Sartre’s response to the anti-Semitic trope that Jews are uncreative and possess a “destructive tendency.” Sartre rejected this stereotype - “Spinoza, Proust, Kafka, Darius Milhaud, Chagall, Einstein, Bergson – are they not Jews” - while qualifying that this “absurd accusation...has been given a semblance of truth” by a need to counter anti-Semitism by attacking the irrational and superstitious, the creations of “intuition.”⁹³ In Memmi’s judgment, the limiting effects of the Jewish condition permeated Jewish art and culture through extremes of parochialism and self-denial. This resembles a troublesome extension of Enlightenment race-making observed by Henry Louis Gates who argues that philosophers such as Descartes established the production of formal thought and literature as a litmus test which “used the absence and presence of reason to delimit and circumscribe the very

⁹¹ Memmi, *Liberation*, 134-5.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 129.

⁹³ Sartre, *Anti-Semite and Jew*, 113.

humanity of cultures and peoples of color.”⁹⁴ While Memmi and Sartre’s critiques concern the status of a substantial *existing* literature, this is a relevant concern.

Though skeptical toward the value of culture as unifying concept in the absence of strong historical and social bonds, Memmi was concerned about the limited number of Jewish writers to achieve worldwide distinction. He ascribed this dearth of strong literary representatives to stigmatization which bred an unfocused Jewish literature of writers who “happen to be Jews” rather than addressing the Jewish condition directly. On the other hand Memmi also referred to writers who did not address the conditions of Jews but simply defended tradition - “worst of all are the *professional Jews*, those who believe they must staunchly defend the institutions and values of the group; who live off it.”⁹⁵ This is the cultural manifestation of the “encystment” Memmi tended to attribute to religious and political figures.

While including the “plastic arts” in his assessment of Jewish culture Memmi was far less specific regarding how music, painting, sculpture, and theater illustrated the “sanctuary values” he associated with Jewish religion and literature.⁹⁶ He opined there was is no “specifically Jewish plastic art” – that is to say the literal creation of images

⁹⁴ Henry Louis Gates Jr., “Writing ‘Race’ and the Difference it Make,” in *“Race,” Writing, and Difference* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 8-9.

⁹⁵ Memmi, *Liberation*, 172. For an analysis of the relation between Jewish identity and Jewish literature see: Michael P. Kramer. "Race, Literary History, and the " Jewish" Question." *Prooftexts* 21, no. 3 (2001): 287-321. Kramer argues that all writing by Jews is “Jewish literature” and the racial or cultural implications of such as assertion are inescapable.

⁹⁶ Memmi, *Liberation*, 205.

and representations as well as the figurative constructions discussed here - or musical genre owing to the instability and diversity of Diaspora.⁹⁷

In a series of particularly reflective statements, Memmi discussed what characteristics he admired and sought to emulate in his own work “I have greater instinctive esteem for the writer who, without ceasing to be himself, wishes to address himself to the world at large.”⁹⁸ Memmi argued that the great Jewish writers tended to be analysts rather than literary figures because the most powerful creative endeavor seeks to provide solutions rather than escape “I do not believe in a great literature of avoided or accepted oppression... That is why Marx, Einstein, even Freud were Jewish, but there has never been a Jewish Dante or Shakespeare.”⁹⁹ As an example, Memmi identified Jewish holocaust literature as palliative rather than liberating, even welcomed by the West as fetishes of European guilt, claims resembling Said’s statement that “there can be no way of satisfactorily conducting a life whose main concern is to prevent the past from recurring.”¹⁰⁰ On the other hand, writing *Liberation of the Jew* he had begun to “hope

⁹⁷ As with similar cases in *The Colonizer and the Colonized* he admitted limited knowledge, however the editor of a 1999 collection of articles *Jewish Identity in Modern Art History* notes a similar tendency of Jewish art critics “to until very recently avoid the notion that their religion or ethnicity had anything to do with their art criticism.” Catherine M. Soussloff, “Introducing Jewish Identity to Art History” in Catherine M. Soussloff ed. *Jewish Identity in Modern Art History*. (University of California Press, 1999) 2-3. This is a compelling collection of work on the subject in relation to modern art, particularly German views of Jewish art and close studies of specific German and American Jewish artists.

⁹⁸ Memmi, *Liberation*, 175.

⁹⁹ Memmi, *Liberation*, 179. The author of a 1978 review essay on Memmi’s work on Jewish identity questioned the wisdom of judging a literary culture based on “the masterpieces it produced or did not produce.” A.B. Magil, “The Hairshirt of Albert Memmi,” 10-11.

¹⁰⁰ Edward W. Said and Jean-Claude Pons, *The Question of Palestine*. (New York: Vintage Books, 1980) 231.

that we have at last entered a Jewish Renaissance: the liberation of the contemporary Jew, and that of the colonized, has really begun. And perhaps it will grow to be one of the great marvels of our time.”¹⁰¹ However, his reason for hope was Israel, a representative national state able to empower cultural narratives.

Invoking a common element of nationalist constructions, Memmi also addressed the lack of a unifying language as a barrier to Jewish international solidarity “the absence of a unique and stable language is the absence of communication, with all the catastrophic consequences such a deficiency entails.”¹⁰² In a 1996 article for *Le Monde Diplomatique*, he addressed the difficulties of producing affirmative literature in cultures whose common language was imposed - “To write for whom and in what language? The authors of the third world, of oral tradition, are trying to respond, but often in torment, to this universal question.”¹⁰³ In *Liberation*, conscious of the economic disparity between the former colonies and European Jewish communities, Memmi had addressed this universal question, repeating his concerns regarding measuring one groups oppression against another but insisting that in this case “the difficulties of a bilingual Jew belong to

¹⁰¹ Memmi, *Liberation*, 179-81.

¹⁰² An example of Jewish public figures’ concerns regarding the tendency of holocaust memorializing to use “the Shoah as the model for Jewish destiny” include the Reform Rabbi Arnold Jacob Wolf and as well as the renowned Polish-born social activist and theologian Abraham Joshua Heschel. See: *Unfinished Rabbi: Selected Writings of Arnold Jacob Wolf* edited by Jonathan S. Wolf (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1998) and Morris M. Faierstein “Abraham Joshua Heschel and the Holocaust.” *Modern Judaism* 19, no.3 (Oct., 1999), 255-275

¹⁰³ Albert Memmi, “Dans quelle langue écrire? La patrie littéraire du colonisé” in *Le Monde Diplomatique*, (September 1996), 12.

a larger category, that of linguistic and cultural deficiencies in every oppressed person,” referencing a similar concern in *The Colonizer and the Colonized*.¹⁰⁴

Memmi believed the lack of a common language was both an ambiguity that impeded attempts to create a nation and an example of a common issue linking the Jewish condition to general categories of oppression - gender, race, and colonialism. He dismissed Hebrew as superficial and forced, a language he endeavored to learn but which “was further from me, stranger, infinitely less malleable than Italian or English which I heard in the street or at the movies, and which evoked familiar civilizations. Hebrew led nowhere.” What success Hebrew had attained, Memmi attributed to the state of Israel “In fact, *outside of a Jewish nation*, Hebrew was nothing but the mythical language of the Jew.”¹⁰⁵ In this instance, language provides a concrete example of the power Memmi attributed to the nation is fostering cultural development – he did not address Yiddish, which the 19th century Russian intellectual Haim Zhitlowski argued was a genuinely Jewish national artifact constructed through free association.¹⁰⁶

Provocatively, Memmi concluded this section with inflammatory musings on the very existence of a Jewish culture, suggesting that “Jewish philosophy has been nothing but one long rumination on the law” and broadly characterizing Jewish culture as a

¹⁰⁴ Memmi, *Liberation*, 187, 190.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 192-3. This is somewhat circular logic, based on current discourse on nationalism and the artificiality of created or “historical” language i.e. the standardization of French as national language in the late 19th century, see: Eugen Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France, 1870-1914* (Stanford University Press, 1976), the reinvention of Polish as a common tongue rather than a peasant dialect, or the invention of previously unwritten languages in Southeastern Europe, see: Eric Hobsbawm, *The Invention of Tradition*. (Cambridge University Press, 1983).

¹⁰⁶ Weinberg, *Between Tradition and Modernity*, 139.

response to the culture of others. Again, Memmi shunned defensive responses to anti-Semitism as passive and self-defeating. But he also attributed this passivity to a burden common amongst the oppressed, asking “does the Jew not share that resigned passivity, that timid behavior, with many of the weak throughout history?”¹⁰⁷ Here, accepting a Jewishness defined by anti-Semites is analogous to the passivity of the colonized and that “in an oppressive situation self-affirmation generally runs the risk of becoming a confirmation of that oppression”¹⁰⁸ This is a harsh critique of Jewish culture, but one in keeping with his belief in the necessity of an autonomous institutional structure as well as the social impact of the mythical portrait on the oppressed themselves.

3. Faith

Providing a powerful example of the “counter-myth” of noble suffering, Memmi related an argument between a professor of the University of Strasbourg and the President of the Paris Consistory at a 1960 conference in Paris.¹⁰⁹ Professor Neher of Strasbourg took up the argument that suicide was preferable to conversion, in reference to the Rabbi of York, a character in the novel *The Last of the Just* whose martyrdom was glorified.¹¹⁰ For Memmi, this was the essence of counter-myth, defensiveness at the cost of self-

¹⁰⁷ Memmi, *Portrait of a Jew*, 63.

¹⁰⁸ Memmi, *Liberation*, 223.

¹⁰⁹ The consistory is a representative institution intended to oversee Jewish congregations in France, initially instituted with the encouragement of Napoleon I. See: “The Consistories” in Esther Benbassa, *The Jews of France: A History from Antiquity to the Present* (Princeton University Press, 1999) 90-2.

¹¹⁰ Memmi quotes from the “Minutes of the Third Gathering of Jewish Intellectuals.” in *The Jewish Conscience*, Paris, 1960. Memmi, *Liberation* 162-64.

immolation.¹¹¹ In a preface for American psychologist David Bakan's *Freud and the Jewish Mystical Tradition*, Memmi identified Freud as an example of how members in a healthy culture must be able to question religion without threatening their fundamental identity – “the contestation of Judaism does not mean the rejection of Jews... This is why it is important to make a clear distinction between “Judaism” and “Jewry.”¹¹² While Memmi did not accept that conversion was a practical method for escaping the Jewish condition, his conception of “encystment” included religious conservatism, which he rebuked as constituting a divisive insistence on religious observation which not only threatened the potential contributions of lay Jews but counted as another failed attempt to achieve agency.

Memmi characterized the election of the Jews as a chosen people as the ultimate coping mechanism, a panacea for all the suffering of the world, and a narrative figuring Jews as the supreme representation of the *human* condition.¹¹³ He compared the foundational story of Moses leading the Hebrews out of slavery to the founding myths of other peoples, such as the Romans, concluding that, uniquely “the image Jews have forged of themselves is constructed or reconstructed in this perspective: oppression-liberation.”¹¹⁴ The promise of a final spiritual reward exalting the Jewish people above all

¹¹¹ The most comparable case of such self-destruction in Memmi's other work may actually be the “colonizer who accepts.” While the “colonized who accepts” acquiesces or succumbs to oppression, the “colonizer who accepts” destroys colonialism aggressively attempting to save it. Memmi, *Colonizer and the Colonized*, 51-60.

¹¹² Memmi, “The Double Lesson of Freud.” preface to David Bakan, *Freud and the Jewish Mystical Tradition* (Princeton, NJ: D. Van Nostrand, 1958) reprinted in *Dominated Man*, 107.

¹¹³ See: Chapter 3 “The Jew as Universal.”

¹¹⁴ Memmi, *Liberation*, 147.

others implies the Jewish people are persecuted above all others.¹¹⁵ This duality confirms a deep-seeded cultural understanding of the Jewish condition while “the Election explains it all, is consolation for everything.”¹¹⁶ It also provides a significant glimpse into Memmi’s universalism, he argued that Jews should *pursue* universalism rather than *represent* the universal.

Memmi identified the messiah as the embodiment of election translated into the material realm - a promise of liberation from the Jewish condition on earth rather than in an afterlife: “Only once, perhaps, has a Jewish Messiah succeeded: it was Christ. But he proposed an unacceptable solution: accept the human condition, which was recognized as a state of worldly defeat.”¹¹⁷ This is the dilemma that led Memmi to reject conversion as an escape from the Jewish condition. Christianity entailed denying the unique spiritual location of Jews in a world where religious tradition constituted a, or *the*, primary aspect of cultural identity. Memmi thought it possible to redefine the Jewish condition but this did not necessarily, or could not, entail the choice between religious superstition and political agency – a potential dilemma classically addressed by Spinoza.¹¹⁸ Memmi felt that “the fact that this people has stubbornly persisted in remaining alive throughout so

¹¹⁵ For perspectives on election and Christian anti-Semitism in the context of the Holocaust see: Georgeta Pana. "Christian Anti-Judaism and the Holocaust." *Studia Hebraica* 4 (2004): 69.

¹¹⁶ Memmi, *Liberation*, 150.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 154.

¹¹⁸ Baruch Spinoza. *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* (1670). A discussion of Spinoza on this subject as well as a broader examination of the relationship between Messianism and Zionism can be found in Aviezer Ravitzky, *Messianism, Zionism, and Jewish religious radicalism* (University of Chicago Press, 1996). Spinoza associated the Jewish status as a chosen people with their political vitality, Jay Geller, “Spinoza’s Election of the Jews: The Problem of Jewish Persistence” *Jewish Social Studies* 12 no. 1 (Autumn, 2005), 39-63

many centuries, with an astonishing continuity which makes other men recognize them and makes them recognize themselves.”¹¹⁹ He found Election a testament to both the scope of Jewish suffering and the enduring character of the very Jewish culture he critiqued.¹²⁰

Rather than claim that Judaism is inherently at odds with constructive attempts to alleviate the Jewish condition, Memmi believed Jewish religious practice need not be restricted to defensive measures. In the context of his youthful equation of religious tradition with Jewish suffering this observation resembles Bernard Lazare’s own transition. Lazare’s context was the Dreyfus Affair as opposed to decolonization and the continuing development of the Israel state, but both grounded their assertion of Jewishness through engagement in powerful theoretical discourses of their time.¹²¹

For Lazare these included the language of essential nationhood and race theory while Memmi invoked a critical approach to the culture, emphasizing the intersection between the cultural, social, and political without resorting to essentialism or an overly mechanistic interpretation. Expressing continuity between religious and secular Jewish activism, Memmi commented that one positive product of Judaism’s emphasis on the law was “divine justice was transformed into social justice” and declared that “Jewish myths have survived because they are still useable. Because, even today, the Jew still needs these same myths.”¹²² In a 1994 letter to the congress of the *Association Pour un*

¹¹⁹ Memmi, *Portrait*, 266.

¹²⁰ Memmi, *Liberation*, 147.

¹²¹ Hammershlag, *The Figural Jew*, 45-8.

¹²² Memmi, *Liberation*, 158.

Judaïsme Humaniste et Laïque, Memmi addressed Orthodox attempts to define Jewish identity - “here I need to denounce a very vicious circle: the Orthodox define the Jew in their way, abstract and terminal, and then measure this gauge against anyone who manifests their difference.” At issue was the implication that Orthodox Jews had the right or the ability to define who is or is not a Jew, employing Judaism to not only exclude outsiders, but create them.¹²³

Throughout Memmi’s work, for good or ill myths are useful, as adaptable and reflective of the human need for synthesis as his own portraits. Memmi desired a form of liberation that required neither abandoning *judaïsme* nor accepting an oppressive *judéité*. Rather, just as he believed in a future where the problem of difference could be solved by acceptance rather than elimination, he sought a solution by which the Jewish condition could be removed but the Jew retained “that is what the Jewish tradition suggested to me: if I accept myself as a Jew, it is only the beginning of a new conquest and the confirmation of the oppression. That is my true mission, and that is how I might one day obtain the equivalent of the coming of the Messiah on earth: freedom.”¹²⁴ The solution he reached was, as in *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, national liberation.

The Way Out

After initially making fun of their clothes, Memmi joined a scout troop in his youth - possibly the affiliation with Hashomer Hatzair Guy Dugas has alluded during

¹²³ Albert Memmi, “Communication au Congrès de l’A.J.H.L., Moscou, septembre 1994.” Reproduced as “Pour sortir du moyen âge: Judaïsme et Laïcité” in *Le Juif et le Autre*, 145

¹²⁴ Memmi, *Liberation*, 154.

Memmi's early teenage years at the Lycée Carnot.¹²⁵ In this troop he and other Jewish scouts played at being Israeli pioneers in Palestine, fighting other groups of boys and "we didn't even forget to imitate the internal bickering of the distant, young national movement. This is how I broke my first pair of glasses, in a fight with an opposing group, the Betarim, whom we pompously called our "Fascists.""¹²⁶ Aware of the dangers illustrated in this anecdote – infighting, intolerance, belligerence, and violence – Memmi claimed awareness of risks, alternatives, and objections to his conclusion that, like that of the colonized in his earlier essay, represented "The Way Out." If readers were, as Memmi worried, tiring of his tone and "litany of Jewish suffering," here he identified the state of Israel as the path toward a solution.¹²⁷

In his foundational work, *The Jewish State*, Herzl demurred that "I have discovered neither the historic condition of the Jews nor the means to improve it."¹²⁸ Though a great deal of Memmi's arguments resemble Herzl's discounting of assimilation and belief that the status quo reinforces anti-Semitism, Memmi declared that, having ascertained the historic condition of Jews, he found national liberation the most effective means for improvement. Memmi concluded that only such a liberation, embodied by the state of Israel, could decouple Jewish culture from the Jewish condition.

Socialist Alternatives

¹²⁵ Dugas, *Albert Memmi*, 34-5.

¹²⁶ Memmi, *Liberation*, 125-6.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 239.

¹²⁸ Theodor Herzl, *The Jewish State*. (New York: Dover Publications, 1989 [1896]), 69.

Certainly, Memmi had considered other approaches to liberation stemming from his socialist universalism but “What could we expect from the forces of the Left? I will say it loud and clear: not much.”¹²⁹ Using Sartre as an example of an intellectual who argued the Left should support Jews based on the idea that their interests coincided with those of French workers and colonized Algerians, Memmi attacked this linkage directly - “the objective conditions are not the same.”¹³⁰ He cited the history of Europeans failure to show common cause with Jews in times of division by observing “all are willing to acknowledge that [during the Second World War] the Jew had been abandoned by almost everyone, and that he paid an infinitely higher price than all the rest.” Memmi felt the Left attached Jews to other groups that only partially represented them “because the stakes were not the same...At best he fights for the Jew because he fights for all oppressed.”¹³¹ The result of Memmi’s logic is disheartening - everything is indirect and the Jew must rely upon the success of a Left that perceives Jewishness as a malleable cultural identity rather than an objective social condition.¹³²

He traced the anti-Semitism of the Marxist Left to Marx’s portrayal of the Jew as the prototypical bourgeois who “is still a bone in the throat of the revolution.”¹³³ Memmi contended that “the social revolution was in fact a specific solution to a particular oppression: that of the workers...the European Left has already made a serious mistake in

¹²⁹ Memmi, *Liberation*, 237.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 237.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 238.

¹³² For a succinct explanation of the threat posed by assertions of cultural identity to leftist universalism see: Eric Hobsbawm, "Identity politics and the left" *New Left Review* (1996), 38-47.

¹³³ Memmi, *Liberation*, 240-2.

applying it to the oppression of the colonized which first called for a *national* revolution.”¹³⁴ He accepted the egalitarian principles of socialism but believed the left ignored the necessity and validity of cultural identity. Addressing other frameworks for collective liberation and their relationship to the Jewish condition, he contended that “the social revolution was in fact a specific solution to a particular oppression: that of the workers...the European Left has already made a serious mistake in applying it to the oppression of the colonized which first called for a *national* revolution.”¹³⁵ Revisiting a critique of assimilation contained in *Portrait of a Jew* and *Liberation* and “The Colonial Problem and the Left,” Memmi rejected attempts to subsume Jewish interests within broad collectivities.

As these conceptions either included only some Jews, like European nations, failed to accept them, “the oppression of the Jew being a particular oppression, I had to discover a specific solution.”¹³⁶ According to Memmi, Israel represented not simply a solution to material problems but, “a tentative collective response of the Jews to bitter historical solitude,” a statement from his 1976 interview with Malka closely resembling his conclusion in *Liberation* that “oppressed as a people, and living as such, the Jew must

¹³⁴ Memmi, *Liberation*, 245. The idea occurs that perhaps, by Memmi’s logic at least, the Soviet state, while unable to further a unified socialist internationalism outside of what passed for it in the Eastern Bloc, crafted a sort of proletarian nationalism within the Soviet Union. However I certainly do not mean proletarian nation by Mussolini’s definition which derided nations that were part of the “proletariat” among other nations.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 245. The idea occurs that perhaps, by Memmi’s logic at least, the Soviet state, while unable to further a unified socialist internationalism outside of what passed for it in the Eastern Bloc, crafted a sort of proletarian nationalism within the Soviet Union.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 237.

be liberated as a people”¹³⁷ and by implication, one that appears throughout Memmi’s work on oppressive conditions, through their own action.

Memmi spoke of concerted action, “collective autonomy,” and the Jew finding “the freedom to express his originality as a people.” He dismissed pacifism as an oppressed dignity “the rejection of drawn blood is also the fear of blood: sanctuary value” and advocated “humanism yes but humanism after the liberation and not this fake humanism, a one-way street where I must consider all men as saints in a humanity in which I still have no place.”¹³⁸ Memmi’s humanism did not preclude judgment and conflict. By the publication of *Liberation* in 1966, the reference to a necessary violence post-dated the creation and early conflicts on the state of Israel. However the willingness to accept a liberation that might turn violent is consistent with his analysis in *The Colonizer and the Colonized*.

Violent, but especially collective. Memmi foresaw no individual solution to the Jewish condition as a consistently viable option for escaping Jewish suffering. This was by no means a new conclusion in either anti-colonial or Jewish thought. Fanon contended that violence reinforced the collective by tying revolutionaries to the cause they fought for via irrevocable action.¹³⁹ This claim to an identity, marking oneself as revolutionary, is an active response which contrasts with “encystment” but as Memmi

¹³⁷ Memmi, *La Terre Intérieure*, 189. Memmi, *Liberation*, 154.

¹³⁸ Memmi, *Liberation*, 279.

¹³⁹ Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, 40. In the words of one scholar of Fanon, according to Fanon, violence “forges among the oppressed the consciousness of a shared condition and the habit of solidarity. Ato Sekyi-Otu, *Fanon’s Dialectic of Experience*. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1996). 98.

feared, there is risk in maintaining a revolutionary identity. While his later critique of a stagnant revolutionary mentality featured postcolonial African states, similar claims have been leveled at Israel.¹⁴⁰

Israel

The state of Israel had survived multiple wars by the time *Liberation of a Jew* was published. While Herzl's assertion that Zionism must succeed because assimilation had failed scandalized some in 1896, Memmi's own arguments regarding assimilation were far from earth-shattering - albeit broadened by his comparisons to colonial liberation.¹⁴¹ However his assertion of Jewish nationalism in his own well-developed language of anti-colonial nationalism was striking. In *Le Nomade Immobile* he reflected that "I have defended Jewish nationalism the same way I have defended the nationalisms of other oppressed people."¹⁴² However in many ways Memmi claimed to delve deeper than Herzl or conflicting Zionist political leaders concerned over how to build a Jewish state and closely evaluate the material and cultural basis for Jewish nationalism. In this manner Memmi's conception of Jewish nationalism resembles that of Martin Buber's skepticism that Jewish political and cultural developments could be separated, and in fact Buber was

¹⁴⁰ Recently, for example, by journalist and political scientist Peter Beinart in his 2012 volume *The Crisis of Zionism*, which addresses Israeli state policy and the state's relationship with American politics as well as the diaspora, has garnered praise from the Israeli and the American left, most notably former President Bill Clinton as well as Naomi Chazan, former Israeli Knesset Deputy speaker of the social democratic Meretz party and President of the New Israel Fund. Peter Beinart, *The Crisis of Zionism* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 2012).

¹⁴¹ Theodor Herzl, *The Jewish State*, (Toronto: Dover, 1988). This republication is based on a 1946 translation by the American Zionist Emergency Council. *The Jewish State* was originally published as *Der Judenstaat* in 1896.

¹⁴² Memmi, *Nomade Immobile*, 129.

a notable early influence on Memmi's thought.¹⁴³ Though, unlike Buber, Memmi believed Jewish identity could flourish within a secular Jewish state.

According to Memmi, a national state was the logical conclusion since it thus followed that "we must now go one step further toward what appears to me equally obvious and equally obligatory: since a people cannot, even today, live and determine its destiny freely except as a nation, the Jews must be made into a nation. In short *the specific liberation of Jews is a national liberation* and for the last years *this national liberation of the Jews has been the state of Israel.*"¹⁴⁴ This resembles a line of argument by the Zionist scholar Jacob Klatzkin that "Judaism is Nationalism," originally published in an essay with that title in his 1914 collection *Boundaries*. While Klatzkin's title suggests a more essential formation, he actually claimed Judaism lacked two essential ingredients to national practice: land and language.¹⁴⁵ Memmi's focus is less mechanistic in this case, returning consistently to the Jew's relationship to self and others.

As with decolonization political independence was not enough, rather "the relationship between the state of Israel and the Diaspora must be reversed" and Israel must transition from the independent outpost of the Jewish people to a true home nation. He insisted that Jews must accept a dual loyalty "in short, we will be responsible for a double involvement."¹⁴⁶ While the state of Israel as a representation of Jewish liberation

¹⁴³ He translated several of Buber's writings during his studies at the Sorbonne. Guy Dugas, *Albert Memmi*, 12.

¹⁴⁴ Memmi's emphasis. Memmi, *Liberation*, 283.

¹⁴⁵ Jacob Klatzkin, "Judaism is Nationalism" in *Boundaries* (1914) in Hertzberg, *The Zionist Idea*, 316-18.

¹⁴⁶ Memmi, *Liberation*, 284-5.

reflected Memmi's views of colonial liberation, this view of Jews living abroad is more problematic. Hess, a major influence on Labor Zionism, foresaw the exclusion of Jews from the national identities established by German and Italian leaders during the mid-1800s and his consideration of a Jewish national stemmed from the challenges and opportunities presented by burgeoning conceptions of national identity.¹⁴⁷ The "double involvement" Memmi described resembles a common trope of anti-Semites brought to fruition, a liberated form of the double-consciousness of the oppressed. In this conception does the state of Israel not confirm or reify accusations of split loyalty?¹⁴⁸

However Memmi also reproached the Israeli state, claiming "its actions have often shocked me. I have never denied myself the right to question them or denounce them, regarding the status of local Arabs, for instance, or the North African immigrants, or their excessive clerical indulgence." He also remained wary "that nationalism is far too frequently an alibi for hatred and domination."¹⁴⁹ There is a pattern of such statements throughout his work on the colonial and postcolonial world which characterize full membership in a group as implying the freedom and responsibility to self-criticize. Memmi believed the nation-state can allow oppressed peoples to act as full members of

¹⁴⁷ Laqueur, *A History of Zionism*, 49-5.

¹⁴⁸ Memmi did not address this, and defended the state of Israel from accusations of colonialism by both Arab leaders and the European Left – who he accused, as recently as 2008, of remaining "imbued with Stalinist and Soviet Manichaeism." Dov Maimon, "Interview M Albert Memmi" (2008).

¹⁴⁹ Memmi, *Liberation*, 286-7.

the world community, serving protective functions similar to the “sanctuary values” Memmi disdained, but by affirming culture rather than shielding it.¹⁵⁰

In *Portrait of a Jew* Memmi asserted that the Jewish condition simultaneously encouraged the denial of Jewish identity while discouraging creativity and reform Jewish institutions. As Memmi’s “way out” in the concluding chapters of *Liberation of the Jew*, the state of Israel could facilitate both affirmation and self-criticism. In a 2002 essay, Memmi defined his philosophy as broadly humanist “let us say that it is overall a matter of showing that humankind takes precedence over myths and even over ideas and groups.”¹⁵¹ But throughout his career he asserted that affirmation and self-criticism must come first in order that mankind can choose humanism rather than “encystment, the retreat to a strictly defined front, the rejection of all experimentation, the condemnation of all innovation and research. In short the very negation of a living and lively culture.”¹⁵² For Memmi, no source of collective identity other than nationalism could separate Jewish culture from the Jewish condition, a separation necessary for the liberation of the Jew and the pursuit of a broader humanist universalism.

Only a national solution can exorcize our shadowy figure. Only Israel can infuse us with life and restore full dimensions. Only the liberation of a people can provide a real opportunity to their culture.¹⁵³

¹⁵⁰ For a discussion of the fear of oblivion as a component of nationalism, see Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 1991), 36 and Anthony D. Smith, *National Identity* (Penguin, 1991) 160-161.

¹⁵¹ Albert Memmi, *Dictionnaire Critique à l'usage des incrédules* (Paris: Le Félin, 2002), 11.

¹⁵² Memmi, *Liberation*, 297.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 296.

It is this advocacy of self-affirmation as a step toward universalism that unites his work on oppressive conditions and provides a compelling background for his views on Palestine and immigration which I consider in the remaining chapters. This also separates him from advocates who viewed self-assertion as a means to develop a unique and separate culture – for example Senghor and even Buber in the above context. Perhaps once again Memmi’s position most resembles that of Lazere who concluded an 1899 lecture titled “Jewish Nationalism and Emancipation” by stating his belief “that for internationalism to take root, it is necessary that human groups should previously have won their autonomy; it is necessary for them to be aware of what they are.”¹⁵⁴

¹⁵⁴ Bernard Lazere. “Jewish Nationalism and Emancipation” in Hertzberg, *The Zionist Idea*, 476.

Chapter 5

Jews and Arabs

*“To my Jewish brothers
To my Arab Brothers
so that we can all
be free men at last”¹*

In *Liberation of the Jew*, Memmi concluded that “the specific liberation of Jews is a national liberation and for the last years [sic] this national liberation of the Jews has been the state of Israel.”² In his analytical manuscripts, Memmi primarily addresses relations between Jews and non-Jews in the context of broader questions such as colonialism and the nature of Jewish identity, and in the latter case Memmi primarily employed European examples with occasional references to Tunisian history and his own life. He has produced no book-length work on Israel or Jews in Arab societies except for a collection of articles published in 1975 as *Jews and Arabs*.

Here, Memmi addressed relations between these two groups, the question of Palestine, and the conflict between Arab states and the state of Israel.³ These selections present Memmi’s views on a range of subjects related to Jews in the postcolonial world and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Published together, this collection also represents an intentionally crafted synthesis of Memmi’s direct commentary on relations between

¹ Albert Memmi, *Jews and Arabs* (Chicago: J. Phillip O’Hara Inc. 1975), vi.

² Memmi, *Liberation*, 283.

³ This is a collection of thirteen articles divided into two parts, consisting of pieces published in French magazines as well as previously unpublished works from the 1960s. Listed as twelve chapters, the final three were consolidated into two parts, possibly for symmetry between the two main sections of the book.

Arabs and Jews intended for a broad audience, and more direct than later commentary in *Le Nomade Immobile* or *Decolonization*.⁴ Nowhere in this collection does Memmi claim to construct a portrait, though there is a sense of cohesion that readers may find more focused than the “notes towards a portrait” in *Dominated Man*. Furthermore, what *Jews and Arabs* does include is a series of suggestions for the settling of the Palestinian question, in this case a “socialist solution.”

Memmi’s caustic and seemingly Eurocentric treatment in *Decolonization* as well as numerous articles for French periodicals such as *Le Monde Diplomatique*, *La Figaro*, and *L’Express* have shaped perceptions of Memmi’s views on the Middle East.⁵ I am hesitant to consider Memmi’s statements in *Decolonization* the conclusion of his journey of self-discovery, particularly given his insistence elsewhere on universal principles.⁶ Many of the same criticisms Memmi leveled against the Arab world in the post-9/11 era are present in his earlier works, however so is a genuine concern for, in particular, the Palestinian people.

In this chapter I consider Memmi’s commentary on the State of Israel and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, locating him as a Sephardic voice critical of the means by which Jewishness has been constructed within Israel and amongst Western diaspora communities. I argue that Memmi represented an early voice in an increasingly

⁴ In *Portrait of a Jew* and *Liberation of a Jew* Memmi refers far more often to European situations. Like his novels, much of Memmi’s commentary on Jewish life is focused inward with French, or more generally Western, culture as the normative exterior society. Here it is worth remembering that while Memmi grew up in closer proximity to Muslim Arabs and Berbers than Europeans, the dominant institutions during his time in North Africa were French.

⁵ Neocosmos, "Review: Albert Memmi's *Decolonization and the Decolonized*," 190.

⁶ Memmi has referred to his career as such a journey, a conception recently examined by Kelly “One Question and Six or Seven Life Lessons with Albert Memmi,” 67-8.

prominent critique of Israeli history from Jews of non-European origin. This also reflects his concerns regarding the risks and intermediate nature of nationalism as a step towards ultimate liberation from oppression, brought home in *Jews and Arabs* via a “socialist solution” to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Memmi identified himself as a “Zionist of the Left,” at odds of Conservative Zionism, arguments against the legitimacy of Israel’s establishment, and what viewed as a Eurocentric image of Israel in public discourse.

He questioned what he claimed to be a dominant Zionist narrative that downplayed not only the experiences of Sephardic and Mizrahi Jews, but also the similarities between Jewish and Palestinian experience. In response, Memmi claimed to present a self-critical view of all parties which, as with colonialism and Jewish identity, he believed was sorely lacking in contemporary public discourse – the portraits of the involved parties constructed by external forces or internal sub-groups who dominate these narratives. I conclude by both establishing the consistency of this project with Memmi’s previous work and questioning the limitations of Memmi’s frameworks as applied to the Israeli-Palestinian situation.

Zionist of the Left

“Israel represents the still precarious result of the liberation of the Jew as decolonization represents this for the colonized of Africa and Asia”⁷

Memmi’s closing image in *The Liberation of the Jew* was the establishment of Israel as mechanism of national liberation capable of alleviating the Jewish condition through which Jews could become agents in the social construction of Jewish portraits. However, he felt that his Zionist credentials were assailed from two directions.

⁷ Memmi, “What is a Zionist,” 97.

Questioned by Zionists who found his sympathy for Palestinians and depiction of Zionism as a national liberation movement disconcerting, he also faced criticism from fellow socialists and anti-colonialists who believed Zionism was a misguided project at best and a new colonial project at worst.

In a 1972 piece for the literary magazine *Unity and Dispersion*, Memmi mentioned these accusations and defended Zionism as a national liberation movement, arguing that critics of Zionism refuse to admit this legitimacy - “by stigmatizing Zionism, on the contrary as a colonial or imperialist phenomenon, they single it out for universal blame and calumny and prepare the world for it seeing it receive proper punishment. *By denaturing Zionism, by destroying it symbolically, they pave the way for its real destruction.*”⁸ Supportive of a rapprochement between Israelis and Palestinians on the basis of mutual rights of residence and citizenship, Memmi declared that “I am a left wing Zionist: I want justice for my people without injustice for others.”⁹ However, while Memmi found the settlement of Palestine a question of immense difficulty for leftist Jews, he also resented the idea that Jews were foreign to Palestine.

As suggested by previous examples, Memmi’s relationship with the Left was that of a contrarian member. Exploring his political affiliation in *Liberation* he determined that though “I have never been a card carrying Communist or Socialist,” he remained “of

⁸ Memmi, “Israel, the Arabs, and the Third World,” 161. Nigel Harris, author of a 1990 study of national liberation movements presents an analytical framework for such a partial recognition of Zionism, characterizing the establishment of the state of Israel as a form of national liberation that suppresses the self-determination of a native group. Nigel Harris, *National Liberation*, (New York: IB Tauris & Company Limited, 1990) 225-28. Harris also defines Jews as a religious group able to assimilate readily through conversion, a claim Memmi thoroughly dismissed in *Liberation of the Jew*.

⁹ Memmi, *Jews and Arabs*, 13 and *Nomade Immobile*, 129.

the Left” and “a determined partisan of a new society,” linking this political position with the interests of Jews more broadly since they do not benefit as a people from the status quo.¹⁰ He identified with denunciations of Western racism from socialist/communist societies such as the Soviet Union. However, he also attacked the paradoxes and unfulfilled goals of the Soviets as he had the contradictions of French imperialism even though “I continued, I continue, to think that socialism is the only honorable, probably the only effective, road open to humanity...we [Jews] were, in a way, condemned to the Left,” and dismissed Jewish conservatives as embracing economic motivations and thus aforementioned “sanctuary values.”¹¹

While identifying as a “Jew of the Left,” Memmi complained that Jewish leftists during the colonial period had been too insular, “they read only the Communist newspapers, books by “comrades,” maybe those of fellow travelers.” Jews were thus indirect participants in a struggle that may or may not benefit them “The Jew-of-the-Left, if he recognizes himself as such, is under the impression that he is playing a game of billiards: he hits one ball in the hope of its hitting another.”¹² But if he found his fellow Jewish leftists parochial, this was balanced by a suspicion that the European left was unreliable.¹³

¹⁰ Memmi, *Liberation*, 235.

¹¹ Memmi, *Liberation*, 240, 228. This characterization greatly resembles Memmi’s disdain for the “bourgeois ideals” represented by his father as well as more financially secure figures such as Monsieur Bismuth in *The Pillar of Salt*, see: chapter 1.

¹² Memmi, *Liberation*, 236.

¹³ See: Chapter 4, “Socialist Alternatives.”

Memmi believed that the end of Jewish suffering required a fundamental change in what it meant to be Jew. In response to a hypothetical argument that a rejection of a Jewish historical character negates Jewish pride he countered “Let me explain myself. You may choose, in spite of everything, to remain on the side of the oppressed, whatever the risks; *but you cannot prefer to remain oppressed*. In any case I fail to see the glory in it.” Memmi believed the dignity of the oppressed arose from self-awareness and action - “the first condition of a specific liberation seems to me self-evident: The oppressed person must take his destiny into his own hands.”¹⁴ This movement from a passive to an active position remains in line with his arguments for a Zionist liberation from the Jewish condition.

Memmi thus placed himself in a conflicted position within a polarized debate – sympathetic to the security and material condition of both Israelis and Palestinians, but their nationalism as well. Here being “in between” served as a useful perspective from which Memmi could claim to act as an arbiter. As Terry Eagleton, an otherwise harsh critic of a postmodernist tendency to glorify marginality, notes - “to be inside and outside a position at the same time is often where the most intensely creative ideas come from. It is a resourceful place to be, if not always a painless one.”¹⁵ However this particular position appears voluntary compared to Memmi’s claims of interstitial cultural identity elsewhere. It seems, for example, more reasonable that Memmi could have been a conservative Zionist than a fully assimilated Frenchman. However this move towards something resembling a center between Israeli, Arab, and a French left universalist view

¹⁴ Memmi, *Liberation*, 272, 74.

¹⁵ Terry Eagleton, *After Theory* (London: Penguin, 2004) 34.

of the conflict reflects his roots in these cultures as well as his belief that a liberated people must be both assertive and self-critical – i.e. “questioning the actions of the state of Israel is not the same as questioning Zionism.”¹⁶

In a piece initially written for a 1966 lectures series in the United States, published as a complete article in *Jews and Arabs*, Memmi asked “What is a Zionist?” and answered by reexamining his work to that point, using his own attempts to understand his condition as a means for exploring not only the definition of a Zionist but the questions Zionism answered for himself. He began by reviewing Alexandre’s conflicts with his family and relationship to Tunisian society in *The Pillar of Salt*, declaring “in a sense, all of my later work has been a multiple effort to answer from several angles the various problems that were more or less consciously raised in this book.”¹⁷ In *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, *Portrait of a Jew*, and *Liberation of the Jew*, Memmi detailed these problems – the Colonial condition, the Jewish condition, and his own relationship to both as well the French culture he embraced as a young scholar. In the case of Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Memmi did not experience the daily reality of the material disputes he addressed. However, in the concluding articles of *Jews and Arabs* and elsewhere, he offered opinions on the relationship between Jewish nationalism and Palestinian claims, invoking his past interventions and interstitial perspective.

¹⁶ Memmi, “Israel, the Arabs, and the Third World,” 174-5. See “Israel” in my conclusion to Chapter 4.

¹⁷ Memmi, “What is a Zionist?” in *Jews and Arabs*, 71.

Israel and Palestine:

“There is no such thing as a historical problem that cannot be solved if one is willing to sit down and pay the price for it”¹⁸

In October 1969, Memmi visited Jerusalem while reporting for Radio Luxembourg. During his stay, the weekly magazine *Match* requested an article on the developing story of a fire that burned part of the Al-Aqsa mosque.¹⁹ While Memmi’s response, titled “Grotesque Farce or Ritual Murder?” arrived too late for publication, he included it in *Jews and Arabs*. The story features the trial of the arsonist Denis Michael Rohan, an Australian Christian member of The Worldwide Church of God, who believed that by burning down the mosque he would hasten the Second Coming of Christ and become God’s messenger for the reconstruction of the Temple. While the initial investigation was short, the trial and response to the incident spawned numerous accusations of Jewish or Christian conspiracy. Memmi mentioned some details of the trial at hand, however he was more concerned about Arab responses to the incident, which he felt reflected a persistent and instinctive anti-Semitism among Muslim communities in the Arab world. Arguing that Muslim reactions were uniquely vicious he asked:

Why speak of holy war and of destroying the man’s entire nation? Suppose a North African worker in Paris was suddenly gripped by some fleeting mystic folly and tried to set fire to a pulpit inside Notre Dame. Would France begin talking about a crusade? Would it propose a summit conference in order to draw all the European, and Christian, nations into a holy war against Algiers or Rabat?²⁰ Some time ago,

¹⁸ Memmi, “The Arab Nation and the Israeli Thorn,” 111.

¹⁹ Later the site of Ariel Sharon’s 2000 visit that sparked the five-year uprising known as the Second Intifada, which also referred to as the Al-Aqsa Intifada. For an article focused on the symbolism of Al-Aqsa in this situation see: Craig Larkin and Michael Dumper, “In Defense of Al-Aqsa: The Islamic Movement inside Israel and the Battle for Jerusalem” *The Middle East Journal* 66, no. 1 (2012): 31-52.

²⁰ Though it is unclear what precisely Memmi was referring to, a conference was held by Faisal I of Saudi Arabia in response to the incident and John Esposito, professor of Islamic

the synagogue in Tunis was burned down by rioters. Did anyone talk about casting doubt on whether Tunisia should *exist* as a state and a nation?²¹

Memmi decried claims of a Jewish conspiracy following the burning of the mosque as “the typical example of those imaginary, monstrous crimes still called, in the Prague of Kafka’s day, the ritual crime.” Specifically “in my opinion the accusation that followed upon the arson at El Aqsa [sic] sprang from the same motives: *it was an accusation of ritual murder.*”²² He asked how long it will take before Muslims cease an obsession with Israel in which they call for the destruction of a city in response to such an event, again noting recent attacks on synagogues in Europe as well as the desecration of Israeli graves and holy places during the Jordanian invasion in the 1967 war. While Memmi’s contemporary remarks following the burning of Al-Aqsa may appear less controversial in the context of a heightened conflict and Memmi’s proximity in time and space, this language strongly resembles the sections of *Decolonization* which led reviewers and established scholars to accuse Memmi of a Eurocentric turn. In 1969, whether or not Memmi’s perspective is “French”, it certainly appears Jewish. Incidents such as this ran counter to Memmi’s hopes that the establishment of Israel could reorient Arab-Jewish conflicts by establishing Jewish legitimacy on the world stage through a national state.

Studies at Georgetown University cites the Al-Aqsa mosque fire as a catalyst for the founding of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation in 1969. John L. Esposito, *Islam and Politics: Contemporary Issues in the Middle East* (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 1998). 164 as does Adnan Al-Sayyid Hussein, "Jerusalem in Arab-Israeli Negotiations" *Islamic studies* 40, no. 3/4 (2001): 543-547.

²¹ Albert Memmi, “Grotesque Farce or Ritual Murder?” in *Dominated Man*, 123.

²² *Ibid.*, 126.

As in the case of anti-colonial revolutions, Memmi acknowledged the dangers of nationalism as a tool of liberation but appeared similarly frustrated by the persistence of colonial and pre-colonial attitudes among Arabs. While Memmi consistently warned against attempts to compare the severity of oppressive conditions his dedication to a mechanical approach lends itself to comparison of form that are similar problematic: “It has taken centuries for Christianity to be – almost – purged of its obsessions about Jews and their undesirable presence in its midst. Will we have to wait as long for Islam in turn to be cured of the illness?” However, as opposed to the era of persecution sponsored by the Christian church, at this time “the Israelis form a nation that defends itself, sets up its own court to refute the charges. Besides, history is created more quickly nowadays.”²³ Though the recognition of common bonds is fundamental to the resolution of conflict in Memmi’s universalist teleology, he remained critical of the Islamic Arab world - though notably more sympathetic toward Palestinians themselves.

Memmi argued that the Israelis and Palestinians possessed not only a shared humanity but similar struggles. In his article for *Unity and Dispersion*, Memmi responded to the question “How can one support Israel, The Arabs, and the Third World, all at once?”²⁴ In the Israeli-Palestinian case his answer lay in both groups’ interstitial position: their mutually inconvenient narratives and external manipulation of their conflict in the service of others’ national interests and Cold War prerogatives. In the Palestinian situation, Memmi believed that even if the socialism of Arab states proved real, peace

²³ Memmi, “Grotesque Farce or Ritual Murder?” 126.

²⁴ Albert Memmi, “Israel, the Arabs, and the Third World” in *Unity and Dispersion* 12-1972. Reprinted in *Jews and Arabs* 142-96.

would not have been significantly more reachable “nor would socialists in Israel be any more inclined to make peace.”²⁵ Here Memmi’s position resembles the counter-establishment scholarship of Israeli scholars such as Ella Shohat and Yehuda Shenhav, including their relative unpopularity amongst the broader population of Sephardic Jews.

However, Memmi also couched his support of the Palestinian cause in his own language of national liberation. As a conflict between developing nation states, Memmi believed that “some good, however, will have come of this considerable difficulty: it will have had the advantage of revealing that the struggle between Jews and Arabs is not a matter of contradiction but of conflict.”²⁶ Therefore, the relationship between Jews and Arabs could be seen not as an implacable opposing duo, but as a situational confrontation with the potential for diplomatic resolution.

Though ever hesitant to acknowledge claims of “neo-imperialism,” Memmi did believe that external forces play a major role in exacerbating the Israeli-Palestinian problem, arguing that “there are no more material conflicts between Israel and Arab states than between any two Arab or Muslim states.”²⁷ While criticism of Israel as resembling an imperial state became significantly more pronounced following the Six-Day War and the 1973 Yom Kippur War – Said’s *The Question of Palestine* was published in 1979 - Memmi claimed not to “find any of the features of colonialism in the Israeli

²⁵ Memmi, “Israel, the Arabs, and the Third World,” 159.

²⁶ Ibid., 159.

²⁷ Memmi, “The Arab Nation and the Israeli Thorn,” 109.

undertaking.”²⁸ One instance where Memmi did perceive a colonial equivalent was in a comparison between Cold War politics and colonial conflicts wherein Western imperial authorities treated Arabs and Jews as pawns.

Both “the Americans and the Russians benefit from our misfortunes, picking up where the English and the French left off. As a socialist I find the Russian behavior even more shabby [sic].”²⁹ This may appear contradictory given his later disdain for claims of neo-colonialism by post-independence governments.³⁰ However, here Memmi accused the superpowers of exacerbating an existing conflict within the context of the Cold War struggle rather than indirectly promoting undemocratic governance and mass poverty. While the global political climate and local conditions threatened the material and cultural condition of the Jewish state, Memmi’s solution to both internal and external dangers was democratic unity.

While critical of self-interested Arab states giving lip service to pan-Arabism, he also acknowledged divisions within Israel and amongst the Jewish diaspora, not only over ideological differences but between European and non-Ashkenazi Jews. Here Memmi articulated a familiar framework of one comparatively well-represented group dominating a broader narrative. In this case it was the Ashkenazi, represented by the more prosperous and secure Jewish communities of the United States, Britain, and France while occupying most positions of leadership within Israel, whose image Memmi feared

²⁸ Memmi, “Israel, the Arabs, and the Third World,” 155. For an oft-cited example in American political science focusing upon the results of the Six-Day War see: Sheila Ryan, “Constructing a new imperialism: Israel and the West Bank” *MERIP Reports* 9 (1972): 3-17.

²⁹ Memmi, “After the Yom Kippur War,” 15.

³⁰ Memmi, *Decolonization*, 19.

had come to stand for all Jews in discourse regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. He worried this Ashkenazi portrait of Israel not only marginalized Sephardic voices within that state but reinforced perceptions of that state as a foreign entity supported by the West as compensation for the Holocaust. And again Memmi, as a French Tunisian Jew, offered his interstitial position as a fruitful critical vantage point.

Memmi the Sephardim – on Ashkenazi vs. Sephardic Perspective

“Today, just as yesterday, it is our life that is at stake.”³¹

Reflecting upon the experiences of Sephardic Jews in Israel since its founding, and particularly since the large-scale immigration by Sephardic Jews following the Six Day War in 1967, postcolonial scholar Ella Shohat published an essay in 1988 titled “Sephardim in Israel: Zionism from the standpoint of its Jewish Victims” invoking Said’s “Zionism from the standpoint of its Victims.” Referring to herself, like Memmi, as an Arab Jew, Shohat denounced the extent to which the history of Zionism had become synonymous with Jewish history and dominated by histories of European Judaism.³² During the early 1960s, while writing *Portrait of a Jew* and *Liberation*, Memmi was already expressing his own concern that Sephardic narratives were suppressed or overshadowed by a predominant Ashkenazi face of Judaism and attributed this lack of representation to a Western tendency to treat North Africans as marginal cousins of European Jews.

³¹ Memmi, “What is an Arab Jew. 29.

³² Ella Shohat, “Sephardim in Israel: Zionism from the Standpoint of Its Jewish Victims” *Social Text* no.19/20 (Autumn 1988), 1-3. Said’s essay is from *The Question of Palestine* (1979), 56-114.

In a 1962 article in the Francophone Jewish magazine *L'Arche*, Memmi recounted several occasions when he discussed the conditions of North African Jews in public settings or Western publications – each incident illustrating the disconnect between European and Arab Jews. These included an evening dinner with “the ladies of a well-known Jewish organization” where he was asked to make an impromptu speech on North African Judaism. When he appealed to the audience’s help in assisting immigrants, “my listeners’ faces were set and stony” and the host quickly concluded the meeting by noting that “their organization was not the least bit concerned with the Diaspora. All of their efforts should be focused on the magnificent country of Israel.”³³ To Memmi, for whom that “magnificent country” provided a foundation upon which the Diaspora could finally stand, this reflected a particularly frustrating disconnect.

Western Public Discourse

During a visit to a Parisian aid station for North African Jewish immigrants in the early 1960s, Memmi had implored French Jews not to reject Arab Jews “even if you think there are good reasons.”³⁴ The basic material needs of these immigrants and the cultural divide separating them from the European Jews they relied upon for assistance was a living and immediate embodiment of the disconnect Memmi identified. He believed the attention of Jews must be directed not only towards national liberation in the form of the state of Israel, but to the service of all that nations’ members in the broader sense of the Jewish people as a whole.

³³ Memmi “Such an Everyday Tragedy,” 59.

³⁴ Ibid., 67. This situation resembles the conflict between Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe and more affluent Jews in the urban centers of Central and Western Europe during the late 19th century.

In the Middle Eastern context, Memmi distinguished between Sephardic and Ashkenazi Jews both in terms of the Sephardic relationships with Arabs and the hegemony of Ashkenazi narratives in public discourse. In doing so he examined the privileging of Ashkenazi views within Israeli politics as well as in the framing of the Palestinian conflict. Despite the concurrence of these events and publications, this is not a distinction Memmi had explored to any significant degree in *Portrait of a Jew* or *Liberation of the Jew*. Unsurprisingly, Memmi was perturbed by a tendency for Western observers of the Arab-Israeli conflict and Arab leaders such as Gaddafi to avoid discussing the treatment of Jews in the Arab world both historically and in the present-day.

Memmi articulated his concerns in a series of statements and questions written for a forum with Gaddafi organized by European newspapers, including *Le Monde* and *The Times of London*, and held on November 24, 1973. The statements were converted into an article for the January 1974 edition of *L'Arche* "What is an Arab Jew?" while the, mostly unasked, questions were subsequently published with commentary in European newspapers and in *Jews and Arabs* as "Questions for Colonel Kadhafi."³⁵ At several points Memmi quoted from Gaddafi's own speeches as the basis for his questions.

Using this framework, Memmi delivered a series of observations on specific topics such as the relationship between Palestine and the Arab states, the lives of Jews in Arab countries, and the effects of colonization on all groups. He asked Qaddafi why the Palestinian question is so much more unfortunate than fate of Jews in his own country. In

³⁵ Memmi, "What is an Arab Jew," 26. Albert Memmi, "Questions for Colonel Kadhafi" in *Jews and Arabs*, 30-7.

this case, Memmi offered the exodus of Jews from Arab states following decolonization - “No more Jewish communities are to be found in a single Arab country, nor can you find a single Arab Jew who is willing to return to his native country” - as evidence of Jewish attitudes towards Arab regimes.³⁶ And Memmi offered his own family as evidence that Jews remained a marked other through experience and recent memory - “my grandfather still wore the distinguishing marks on his clothes.”³⁷ But he felt that Gaddafi’s ability to promote a false narrative of Arab-Jewish harmony was abetted by an existing myth of Jewish suffering as a primarily European phenomenon.

In Paris Memmi “came face to face with the fable that was very popular among left-wingers in Paris, namely, that the Jews had always lived in perfect harmony with the Arabs.”³⁸ He believed the reality of Jewish-Arab relations had been obscured by a European narrative that positioned Jews as a Semitic race caught adrift, persecuted in Europe because they were away from more accepting homelands and proposed five reasons underlying the myth of a peaceful coexistence in North African countries between Jews and Arabs:

First, the idea that European Jews caused a rift by imposing the state of Israel on the Arab world, ignoring Sephardic participation in and subsequent embrace of the Israeli state. This was particularly concerning since the Sephardic experience is Memmi’s

³⁶ Memmi, “Questions for Colonel Kadhafi,” 37. This is an overstatement. However it is true that by the time this article was written the migrations of Jews from the Arab states to Europe and Israel had occurred. However, conditions varied greatly from state to state and several historians have argued that Zionist activism played a major role in exacerbating tensions between Jews and Arab states with a history of more peaceful relations such as Morocco and Tunisia. Laqueur, *History of Zionism*, xv.

³⁷ Memmi, “What is an Arab Jew,” 21.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 26.

primary objection to claims that Israel is a colonial state.³⁹ Second, a tendency to assume that a group is either oppressor or oppressed -“the Arabs were an oppressed people, therefore they could not be anti-Semitic,” a trope he attributed to many he otherwise agreed with among the anti-colonial Left.⁴⁰ Third, the inability of “contemporary historians including, oddly enough, Western Jewish historians, to conceive of anything resembling the Holocaust elsewhere.”⁴¹ Fourth, “many Israelis, extremely worried at the idea of their coexistence with their Arab neighbors, want to believe that there was already such coexistence in the past; otherwise the whole undertaking would seem hopeless!” And fifth, a more general nostalgia of an uprooted people to romanticize condition prior to the Diaspora.⁴² Absent in each case are Sephardic contributions to this portrait of Jewish experience.

More recently, Memmi expressed concern that relations with Israel remained colored by the paradoxical mythical portraits derived from European anti-Semitism. In his preface for a 1986 volume on relations between Jews and Muslims, he opined:

Is Israel a more moral nation than others? This ambition, often proclaimed, is much applied and curiously presented. It [Israel] will always be severely condemned for breaches absently tolerated in all others, and among his opponents.⁴³

³⁹ Participation emphasized in particular by activists and scholars calling attention to Ashkenazi biases towards Arab Jews, Joseph Massad, "Zionism's internal others: Israel and the Oriental Jews" *Journal of Palestine Studies* 25, no. 4 (1996): 53-68.

⁴⁰ Memmi, “What is an Arab Jew,” 26.

⁴¹ This is example of the dominance of the Ashkenazi narrative along with the implication that the Holocaust narrative belongs only to European Jews.

⁴² Memmi, “What is an Arab Jew,” 27.

⁴³ Albert Memmi, preface to David K. Shipler, *The Star and Crescent* (Paris: Presses de la Cité, 1988), III.

Here Memmi echoed the sense of consistently being called to account that he related in *Liberation*, declaring that “as a Jew I exist more than non-Jews!”⁴⁴ However he also observed a similar reification of the history and anxieties associated with the Ashkenazi narrative in the Israeli state itself.

Within Israel

In 1972, Memmi delivered a paper entitled “Justice and Nation” to “Unity and Difference,” at a Zionist conference in Jerusalem, in which he identified points of conflict between Ashkenazi and Sephardic Jews in terms of economic disparities, discriminatory political discourse, and social stratification.⁴⁵ In an example evoking these fractures, he cited a comment by Golda Meir on Middle Eastern Jewish immigrants: “irritated I suppose, by the demands made by ethnic groups, she spoke of people who had lived in caves before arriving in Israel, who used bathtubs as places in which to score vegetables...speaking of a very specific part of the population, certain Middle Eastern Jews, she even accused them of congenital laziness!” This “racist language” reminded Memmi of the colonizer’s language, that “of people in a dominating position talking to dominated people.”⁴⁶ This was also an affront to Memmi’s belief that “if Zionism is not socialist, then it loses some of its meaning.”⁴⁷ Socialism appeared to him the best and

⁴⁴ Memmi, *Liberation*, 28-9.

⁴⁵ Later published in *Cahiers Bernard Lazare* no. 36 July-August 1972. Reprinted as in *Jew and Arabs* 127-41.

⁴⁶ Memmi, “Justice and Nation,” 131.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 130.

perhaps only way to prevent ethnic division within Israel from defining political distinctions and cultural development.

Such concerns over ethnic divisions have been borne out to some degree by studies of Israeli policy towards Arab Jews during the 1950s and 60s as well as more recent events. Israeli responses to the economic and cultural pressures resulting from large waves of immigration, the resulting stigmatization of Arab Jews, and the presentation of Jewish migration from Arab states as a counter-narrative to the Palestinian refugee question have been addressed by several scholars – particularly in the case Iraq, where strong anti-Jewish measures were enacted in 1948 followed by a window of opportunity for immigration at the cost of Iraqi citizenship in 1951.⁴⁸ Israeli sociologist Yehouda Shenhav has argued that, in the Iraqi case, the “right of return” was interpreted selectively with an intentional, if vaguely expressed, policy of countering Palestinian claims through emphasis on Arab-Jew refugee issues.⁴⁹

Highlighting internal debates regarding the role of Sephardic Jews in the creation of Israel, James Gelvin notes that a wave of curriculum reform in Israel during the 1980s centered on the shift from a history derived from the primordial national espoused by “Jerusalem school” of historians - including Benzion Dinur, primary designer of the first Israeli state education curriculum – to the views of the New Historians who emphasize

⁴⁸ Including the perception that Arab Jews were impure due to the cultural characteristics shared with the Arab enemy, Ella Shohat, "Rupture and return: Zionist discourse and the study of Arab Jews." *Social text* 21, no. 2 (2003): 49-74. For a detailed history of the Iraqi Jews during this period see: Abbas Shiblak and Peter Sluglett, *Iraqi Jews: a history of mass exodus* (London: Saqi, 2005).

⁴⁹ “As with its nuclear policy, it [the Israeli government] remained vague about its position on the population exchange question.” Yehouda Shenhav, *The Arab Jews: A postcolonial reading of nationalism, religion, and ethnicity* (Stanford University Press, 2006.) 110-35.

the fluidity of culture and the artificiality of national histories. Another bi-product Gelvin associates with these national histories is a tendency to champion a dominant sub-group's narrative, i.e. Ashkenazi Zionism, and historians' reconceptualization of nationalism in the 1980s occurred parallel to the increasing volume of Mizrahi and Sephardic voices in Israeli public discourse.⁵⁰

The editors of a recent primary source collection entitled *Modern Middle Eastern Jewish Thought* identify Memmi as "the best articulation" of "some recent Mizrahi ideas about Israel's own cultural orientation."⁵¹ Memmi consciously asserted that Sephardic perspectives were obscured even when their claims might bolster those of Ashkenazi settlers. Believing that Arab Jews provided the best argument that Israel was not a foreign entity in the region, or a European colony, Memmi wryly remarked that

I even used to say to myself, jokingly: 'Another trick played by the Europeans! Even when it comes to Jewish misfortune, there's just enough for them: they've confiscated it for their Ashkenazim.' As if there were only a Moslem East, and only a Western Diaspora! As if there were only an Arab-Moslem set of claims, by contrast with a West represented by the Jews!⁵²

In defining "Arab Jew," Memmi noted that Arab is an over generalization, but retained the term in order to remind readers that Sephardic and Mizrahi Jews share a

⁵⁰ Gelvin, *The Palestinian Conflict*, 159. For a discussion of these debates between advocates of primordial and modernist conceptions of national see: Anthony Smith, *The Nation in History*. The standardization of the French language is a particularly strong example of homogenization from a dominant center with through the power of state education, Eugen Weber. *Peasants into Frenchmen*.

⁵¹ Moshe Behar and Zvi Ben-Dor Benite eds. *Modern Middle Eastern Jewish Thought: Writings on Identity, Politics, and Culture 1893-1958* (Waltham, Massachusetts: Brandeis University Press, 2013), xxx.

⁵² Memmi, *Jews and Arabs*, 11.

history of physical proximity to the peoples now commonly referred to as Arab.⁵³ The most notable large-scale expression of discontent by Sephardic and Mizrahi Jews in Israel was the 1971 protest by the Israeli Black Panther Party in which between five and seven thousand members protested in Jerusalem's Zion Square in the months following a meeting of party leaders with Golda Meir. The party would go on to claim 13,332 votes, slightly under 1%, in the 1973 Knesset elections.⁵⁴

In her work on Arab Jews in Israel, journalist Rachel Shabi examines this politicization, depicting Arab Jews as a semi-foreign minority voting bloc in the eyes of political parties. She accuses Likud especially of gaining Arab Jewish support during the 1970s and 80s through conservative demagoguery and fear tactics.⁵⁵ However, Mizrahi activist Sami Chetrit, a former Black Panther living in the United States, argues that the nature of Israeli parliamentary politics allows ethnic voting blocs to construct “alternatives to Ashkenazi Zionism in all aspects – religious, social economic, and cultural” through the development of organizations such as the ultra-Orthodox Mizrahi and Sephardic political party Shas, to represent liberal and ultra-Orthodox constituents.

⁵³ Memmi, “What is an Arab Jew,” 29.

⁵⁴ Shalom Cohen and Kokhavi Shemesh, “The Origin and Development of the Israeli Black Panther Movement” *Middle East Research and Information Project Reports* no. 49 (Jul., 1976), pp. 19-22. The Israeli government has made 1971 state documents covering the meeting and the protest available through the archives website with summaries in English and full text in Hebrew, see: “40 Years Since the Establishment of the Israeli “Black Panther” Movement: New Documents on the Response of Government Institutions” at <http://www.archives.gov.il/>. Documents featured are archived under subsets within Israel State Archives RG 60/K191, 77/A56, 79.3/IP412, and 119/A4479.

⁵⁵ Rachel Shabi, *Not the enemy: Israel's Jews from Arab lands* (Yale University Press, 2009).

While he acknowledged that Likud attracts a broad swathe of secular conservatives which includes a majority of Mizrahi Jews, Chetrit remained a left critic of this trend.⁵⁶

Though challenges to Zionism within Israel have a long, albeit marginal, history, a sophisticated internal critique of Zionism has emerged from Sephardic and Mizrahi quarters within such parties as well as the Israeli academy.⁵⁷ This includes an historical assertion, expressed most directly in Shenhav's 2006 *The Arab-Jews: A Postcolonial Reading of Nationalism, Religion, and Ethnicity*, that the Mizrahi were never Zionists nor accepted as fellow Zionists but immigrated due to economic reasons and familiarity on the one hand and the religious settlers needed for cheap labor on the other. Shenhav also claims that the Ashkenazi view of the Mizrahi derives from a Eurocentric colonial perspective.⁵⁸

To the extent that postcolonial turn is occurring in Jewish studies, Shenhav and Shohat's work appears at the forefront, though it is worth noting that the original edition of *The Arab Jews*, published in Tel Aviv in 2003 lacks "A Postcolonial Reading" in the subtitle.⁵⁹ And, in a 2005 article for *Mideast Quarterly* Meyrav Wurmser, director of Middle East Policy for the Hudson Institute, drew heavily on their work to support an

⁵⁶ Shas is an acronym for "Shomrei Sfarad" trans: "Sfarad's guards," Sami Shalom Chetrit, "Mizrahi politics in Israel: Between integration and alternative" *Journal of Palestine Studies* (2000): 51-65. Scholarship on the Israeli Black Panthers is limited and primarily derives from sources closely connected with the party with Chetrit being the most prominent in English translation, see: See: Sami Chetrit, *Intra-Jewish Conflict in Israel, White Jews, Black Jews* (London: Routledge, 2010).

⁵⁷ For a survey contemporary with the publication of *Jews and Arabs*, see: Charles Glass, "Jews against Zion: Israeli Jewish Anti-Zionism" *Journal of Palestine Studies* 5, n 1/2 (Autumn, 1975 - Winter, 1976), 56-81.

⁵⁸ Yehouda Shenhav, *The Arab-Jews*, 11-12 and 49-74.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 77-85.

assertion the Mizrahi voices in the Israeli academy led a push to reassess the foundations of Zionism, toward a position of Israeli “post-Zionism.”⁶⁰ However, Wurmser also qualified that “this new school of intellectual radicalism remains so far contained within the halls of academia and without broad support among the broader Mizrahi population.”⁶¹ In his work during the 1960s and 70s, Memmi identified as a Zionist, but understood the challenges presented by Jewish diversity. In turn Memmi’s Zionism reflects his determination to promote both national liberation and deemphasize ethnic distinctions.

There is a tension between Memmi’s disdain for qualitative comparisons of oppressive conditions and his emphasis on Jewish situations. While I have addressed this concern in previous chapters it is particularly worth noting in this context, approaching his discussions of the Israeli state. A French “student of Arabic” once confronted Memmi during a meeting, arguing that Jews in Arab countries were not treated any better than Europeans. His response was another example of his oft repeated insistence that a hierarchy of sufferings is counterproductive “That is true but what of it? That is an argument that cuts both ways, for what it is really saying is that no member of any minority lived in peace and dignity in a predominantly Arab country!”⁶² In his reply to the French student, Memmi also referenced the support offered to minorities by

⁶⁰ Meyrav Wurmser, “Post-Zionism and the Sephardi Question” *Middle East Quarterly* (Spring 2005) 21-30. Perhaps a more appropriate term than anti-Zionism, in any case the above cited article by Charles Glass refers to a journal editor who espoused “a very popular view among the non-Zionist left in Israel: namely that Zionism is dead.” Glass, “Jews Against Zion,” 68.

⁶¹ Wurmser, “Post-Zionism and the Sephardi Question,” 21.

⁶² Memmi, “What is an Arab Jew” 21.

representative states “there was, however, one considerable difference: the Christians were generally foreigners and thus they were protected by their prospective countries.”⁶³ This is somewhat contradictory, Memmi, after arguing that one group’s suffering does not negate another’s, felt the need to point out the difference in Christian and Jewish experiences.

Similarly, in a footnote in *Jews and Arabs* he observed “Everyone knows about the dramatic situation of the North African or Portuguese workers in Europe...And yet the North African Moslem can, luckily, go back to his native country: the Jew cannot.”⁶⁴ This was an oversimplification, and doubly problematic given the role Memmi ascribed to the state of Israel, but the common issue in the above comparisons is the presence of strong representative institutions juxtaposed with Sephardi Jewish rootlessness. In these essays Memmi continued to apply the analytical style of his “portraits,” again associating liberation with agency in constructing political, social, or cultural institutions and identity.

Memmi’s Socialist Solution

Though he often projected a pessimistic or, at best, cautiously optimistic view of the future, Memmi also spoke of Arab-Jewish relations with a sense that “peace will certainly be achieved someday.”⁶⁵ This assertion reflects the tone of his conclusion of *The Colonizer and the Colonized* and *Liberation of the Jew*. As with decolonization and the Jewish condition, Memmi held no illusions that he could anticipate the entire process by

⁶³ Memmi, “What is an Arab Jew. 20-21.

⁶⁴ Memmi, *Jews and Arabs*, 68.

⁶⁵ Memmi, “After the Yom Kippur War,” 15.

which this future peace might be achieved, only that he believed he had identified a key step. For the colonized and Jews, this was national liberation with an eye towards cultural renewal – the decoupling of a culture from a condition of oppression.⁶⁶

In the case of the Palestinian conflict Memmi believed the next step towards liberation was a “socialist solution” - the mutual recognition by Israelis and Palestinians of the validity of both people’s national liberations. While Memmi’s position resembled that of contemporary Zionists and statesman such as Nahum Goldmann in calling for a rapprochement and something resembling what is now termed a “one-state solution” Memmi emphasized a differentiations between Palestinians and the Arab states.⁶⁷ This answer to the Israeli-Palestinian question requires, in Memmi’s assessment, not only rapprochement between Israelis and Palestinians, but an evolution of postcolonial Arab states’ attitudes towards the conflict.

One article included in *Jews and Arabs* is “The Arab Nation and the Israeli Thorn,” originally published a September 1969 edition of *La Figaro Littéraire* as “Israel is not the Arab Nations’ Real Problem,” – the title changed by the publication’s editor. Beginning with a conversation with an Egyptian diplomat who pessimistically declared “you do not throw yourself in front of an oncoming locomotive,” Memmi protested what felt to be a common and cynical conception of the Arab-Israeli conflict as a series of

⁶⁶ On the Jewish condition - “Only a national solution can exorcize our shadowy figure. Only Israel can infuse us with life and restore full dimensions. Only the liberation of a people can provide a real opportunity to their culture.” Memmi, *Liberation*, 296.

⁶⁷ For a summation of Goldmann’s position in the Six-Day War and the occupations he opposed see: Nahum Goldmann, “The future of Israel,” *Foreign Affairs* 48, no. 3 (1970): 443-459.

incomprehensible or unsolvable political and religious tensions.⁶⁸ As with colonialism and the Jewish condition, Memmi referenced the creation of myths, their utility, and the need to move past the divisions such myths reinforce.

First, comparing Arab and Israeli positions, he observed that the nationalist goals of both groups conflicted due to the significance of Palestine in both religious and strategic terms, as well as the instability of new states in the region. Acknowledging the political and cultural reality of these concerns, Memmi insisted that he was not an opportunistic “friend of the Arabs” in the manner of Europeans and Americans seeking to promote Cold War interests by suddenly embracing Arab independence movements. Furthermore, he offered his anti-colonial activism as proof that he supported independence from an early point in his career “where that conduct is concerned, my readers will forgive me for recalling that I described it and approved of it long before those brand new friends did.”⁶⁹ Memmi considered the goals of Jews and Arabs, as well as Israelis and Palestinians, to be fundamentally similar since “Israel’s intention is also a national one; it was born of misery and oppression, it is comparable to that of the Arab peoples, and it is no less honorable than theirs.”⁷⁰ However, Memmi also questioned the sincerity of Arab leaders who argued Jews could exist freely in an Arab majority state.

Quoting an early manifesto by the Palestinian political party Fatah as well as a September 9, 1969 statement by then new Libyan leader Qaddafi emphasizing “Arab unity,” Memmi contended that Arab and Palestinian leaders envisioned a future for

⁶⁸ Memmi, “The Arab Nation and the Israeli Thorn,” 102.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 102.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 103.

Palestine as part of a homogenous Arab Muslim community.⁷¹ In a tone reminiscent of his offer of mediation to Muammar Gaddafi in a dialog between the two groups - “I, a Jew born among Arabs, am at your disposition” - Memmi insisted that, in reference to *Portrait of a Jew* and *Liberation of the Jew*, “I am taking the liberty here of denouncing this Arab myth, or alibi, because, first of all, I did not hesitate to examine at length, and to denounce, a certain number of still-flourishing Jewish myths.” Memmi sought to place himself in the role of arbitrator, exploring what he identified as the myth of an unsolvable conflict.⁷²

Mythical portrait of the Israeli-Arab conflict

Memmi observed that “One of the Characteristics of a Myth is its convenience.”⁷³ The mythical portraits of colonized and Jews were not only created with limited agency on the behalf of the oppressed but affirmed the interests which constructed those images. This utilitarian aspect of myth was prominent in Memmi’s assessment of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The “convenient myth” Memmi denounced was the narrative that Israel must be eliminated in order for Palestinians to become part of a truly unified Arab world. Convenient because proponents of this position insist Israel is a finite barrier to an era of Arab unity which will solve economic and political problems.

⁷¹ Memmi, “The Arab Nation and the Israeli Thorn” in *Jews and Arabs*, 104. Article 7 of Fatah’s 1964 constitution more directly states “The Zionist Movement is racial, colonial and aggressive in ideology, goals, organization and method.” While in Article 12, Fatah’s first goal is “Complete liberation of Palestine, and eradication of Zionist economic, political, military and cultural existence.” While it is possible to argue that “Zionist” is not synonymous with “Jew” this distinction would not be satisfying to Memmi and the word “cultural” makes this statement especially problematic.

⁷² Memmi, “Questions for Colonel Gaddafi” in *Jews and Arabs*, 37. Memmi, “The Arab Nation and the Israeli Thorn” in *Jews and Arabs*, 104.

⁷³ Memmi, “The Arab Nation and the Israeli Thorn” in *Jews and Arabs*, 105.

Though Memmi did not employ the term here, this assumption that realizing the Arab idea requires the destruction of the Israeli one creates a mythical portrait of the state of Israeli analogous to the mythical portraits Memmi associated with the colonial and Jewish conditions through which “Israel becomes the Jew of the Arab countries”⁷⁴ He also believed the remaining Israeli obstacle allowed Arab leaders to pause and consider “whether that unification would be beneficial to all, or would favor only one nation.”⁷⁵ This reflected Memmi’s suspicion that Arab states claimed to embrace the Palestinian cause but were hesitant to find a solution - revealing their personal or national ambitions rather than an actual commitment in a unified Arab sphere and concern for the material conditions of Palestinians.⁷⁶

In his 2004 history of Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Gelvin asserts a related claim that the condition of Palestinian refugees in Arab states is one of the reasons for the persistence of Palestinian nationalism and so “no wonder many of the Palestinians still hold on to the keys to their former homes in what is now Israel.” Gelvin also identified the effects of fluctuating labor demand in surrounding states as a variable in refugee policy.⁷⁷ This perpetuating myth, to which Memmi referred to as recently as interviews

⁷⁴ Memmi, “The Arab Nation and the Israeli Thorn,” 107.

⁷⁵ He believed that “to date, Egypt has been the most likely candidate.” Memmi, “The Arab Nation and the Israeli Thorn” in *Jews and Arabs*, 106.

⁷⁶ For example Memmi believed Arab manipulation of Palestinian question was a method for both preserving regimes and exploiting the international oil market. Memmi, “The Arab Nation and the Israeli Thorn” 104-8.

⁷⁷ This also resembles European policies regarding post-colonial immigration I consider in subsequent chapters. James Gelvin, *The Israel-Palestine Conflict: One Hundred Years of War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004). Neither Memmi nor Gelvin go so far as to suggest, as conservative revisionists such as Efraim Karsh argue, that the initial refugee crisis was

in 2008 and 2012, identified the Palestinians as a distinct people but cast aspersions upon the motives of Arab states.⁷⁸ And perhaps the utility of the “convenient myth” extended to a growing unwillingness to take risks or unify in order to destroy Israel.⁷⁹

Despite this critique of Arab states, Memmi insisted upon a fundamental similarity between Arab nationalism and Zionism: “I have often pointed out that in order to have a clear understanding of what was in happening in those countries not only their social difficulties but their claims to nationhood had to be taken into consideration.”⁸⁰ In addition, he argued that Israel must honestly address the national aspect of the Palestinian group, part of a broader principle that Israel must be unified but not at the expense of the right to bring forth grievances. Furthermore, Memmi explicitly argued that freedom of speech and freedom to criticize must not be limited to Jews, that all manner of open dialog is beneficial to Israel since “only through comparison with other young nations, including the Arabs, will Israel fully understand itself or will Jewry, in its present state of fermentation, become fully conscious of itself.”⁸¹ Thus while Memmi advocated a one-

the product of an intentional Arab strategy. However both observe that various Arab states have manipulated the crisis for political and economic purposes.

⁷⁸ Albert Memmi, “interview with Feriel Berraies Guigny,” in *L’Expression Tunisie*, January 2008. htm and Levy, “Une entrevue exclusive avec Albert Memmi” (May 13th, 2012).

⁷⁹ For an argument that failure to destroy Israel militarily was followed by a corresponding increase in “radical pan-Arabism” see Michael Hudson, “Public Opinion, Foreign Policy, and the Crisis of Legitimacy in Arab Politics,” *Journal of Arab Affairs* 5 (1986), 155-56. For an analysis of how the growing *stability* of political boundaries and the Arab state system influenced Egyptian, Jordanian, and Syrian responses to the Palestinian question in the context of responses to the first intifada see: Rex Brynan, “Palestine and the Arab State System: Permeability, State Consolidation and the Intifada” *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 24, no. 3 (Sep., 1991), 595-62.

⁸⁰ Memmi, “Justice and Nation,” 128.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 129-30.

state solution, he viewed treatment of Palestinian claims within that state as a measure of Israeli progress towards liberation from the anxiety of oppression.

Yet this is both an acknowledgment and denial of Palestinian national claims.

Strikingly, Memmi's arguments resemble those of one French deputy in the National Assembly during the Revolutionary period who declared that

The Jews should be denied everything as a nation, but granted everything as individuals. They must be citizens. It is claimed that they do not want to be citizens, [but] there cannot be one nation within another nation. It is intolerable that the Jews should become a separate political formation or class in the country. Every one of them must individually become a citizen.⁸²

Of course Memmi's view differs from the above distinctly, in that he recognized Palestinian nationhood as a fact, evidenced by his statement that "concerning the people living in the camps: naturally we should fight for the recognition of their rights to nationhood," though he remained at an impasse due to "the fact that it is difficult to fight for the national rights of people who deny your own such rights."⁸³ Consequently, while Memmi advocated a "socialist solution" he was unable to articulate a means by which Palestinians might recognize their nationhood within the Israeli state without a direct shift unrealized national aspirations to equality in a diverse socialist state.

Conclusions:

"Like virtually all other events of our century, the solution of the Jewish question merely produced a new category of refugees, the Arabs, thereby increasing the number of stateless by another 700,000 to 800,000 people. - Hannah Arendt⁸⁴

⁸² Paul Mendes-Flohr and Jehuda Reinharz, *The Jew in the Modern World: A Documentary History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 115.

⁸³ Memmi, "In Favor of a Socialist Solution," 215.

⁸⁴ Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 290.

Memmi's commentary on Israel and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict follows upon previous work on Jewish identity and colonialism in multiple respects. He again characterized national liberation as a step toward the assertion or reacquisition of cultural agency and democratic universalism while again presenting himself as an interstitial mediator by way of his Sephardic "Arab Jew" background. In questioning prevailing Western views of Israel and the hegemony of Ashkenazi narratives, Memmi's work resembles a rare, and early, postcolonial critique of Israel from a pro-Zionist perspective. This view of Israel is also consistent his characterization of nationalism as an intermediate step towards full liberation and the de-emphasis of difference in a democratic society. In addition, perspective on the international politics of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict exemplifies the utility of his analytical constructions, in this case that of a "mythical portrait."

Regarding Memmi's frameworks, Ilan Peleg has observed that there is something in Memmi's portrayal of how colonizer and colonized perceive each as Other which transcends the colonial milieu

Although the structure of the Arab-Israeli conflict, and certainly the Arab-Jewish dilemma within Israel, is very different from the colonial situation described by Albert Memmi, his analysis of otherness applies rather well to the long-standing Middle Eastern dispute. [Conditions therein] facilitate the reification of the Other and the resistance to any change in the depiction of the Other including the negation of the other side's very existence. Thus the Arabs have traditionally insisted on the distinctions between "Jews" and "Zionists," claiming that while they accept the legitimacy of Judaism, they reject the legitimacy of Zionism and, consequently the State of Israel.⁸⁵

⁸⁵ Ilan Peleg, "Otherness and Israel's Arab Dilemma" in Lawrence J. Silbersetin and Robert L. Cohn eds. *The Other in Jewish Thought and History* (New York: New York University Press, 1994) 267.

Peleg also contended that “To some Israelis, particularly those whom [Ehud] Sprinzak refers to as the “Radical Right,” the Holocaust emerged as a metahistoric event symbolizing the otherness of all adversaries.”⁸⁶ The relationship between the holocaust and the existence of the state of Israel is a living issue, as evidenced by the employment of the holocaust as a justification for the state’s founding, the repetition of Said’s accusation that “the Palestinians have now become the equivalent of a past experience reincarnated,” and the persistence of holocaust denial.⁸⁷ In *Liberation*, Memmi cautioned that Holocaust literature tended towards palliative rather than creative purposes – concern echoed by intellectuals such as historian Robert Wistrich who believed the Holocaust became part of a secular “civic religion” in Israel, re-creating a defensive narrative that both defines Jewishness as victimhood and labels Holocaust survivors and their descendants as particularly authentic Jews.⁸⁸ Wistrich’s critique of such a civic religion resembles not only Memmi’s characterization of Ashkenazi narratives but his definition of “encystment” in *Liberation*.

However, perhaps the utility of Memmi’s language in *Liberation*, and as articulated by Peleg, extends farther into the postcolonial world than Memmi would like.

⁸⁶ Peleg, “Otherness and Israel’s Arab Dilemma,” 271.

⁸⁷ Said, *The Question of Palestine*, 231. See: Joseph Massad, “Palestinians and Jewish History: Recognition or Submission?” *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. 30, No. 1 (Autumn, 2000), 52-67.

⁸⁸ Memmi, *Liberation*, 168. Robert S. Wistrich, “Israel and the Holocaust Trauma” *Jewish History* 11, no. 2 (Fall 1997), pp. 13-20. For a stronger denunciation of the Holocaust as a justification for the Jewish state, particularly as a vehicle for explaining Israel’s actions to American audiences see: Norman Finkelstein, *The Holocaust Industry: Reflections on the Exploitation of Jewish Suffering* (London: Verso, 2000). For a response to Finkelstein arguing that he and others overemphasize the intentionality and utilitarian function of memory see: Alvin H. Rosenfeld. “The Assault on Holocaust Memory.” *KulturPoetik* Bd. 2, H. 1 (2002), 82-101.

If - as Memmi believed - nationalism represented the necessary means for defeating imperialism, it was also the basis for postcolonial state formation, providing a real or imagined history which may draw on culturally significant justifications for concentrations of power. And if something does replace nationalism as a unifying force in postcolonial societies, there is no guarantee that even the most benign liberal democracy – or a 21st century socialist Israel - will abandon national myths in the name of universal humanism. Memmi predicted that tensions created by hegemonic systems within a state, imperial or otherwise, would end destructively - the starkest example being his expectation, stated in 1965, that America was moving toward mass racial violence and civil unrest.⁸⁹ However, his hope for the future lay in the intercultural exchange he believed would follow once the oppressed firmly established their freedom of self-assertion.⁹⁰

In his work on Zionism and Israel we see Memmi add detail to this version of liberation in which an oppressed people would be free not only of external hegemony but the legacies of oppression – those “mythical portraits” as well as the violence of revolutionary necessity. A common theme in anti-colonial and postcolonial writing strongly shared by Memmi, Amilcar Cabral, and Said is that of an oppressed group’s absence from and inability to effect dominant historical narratives.⁹¹ Memmi believed that “the most serious blow suffered by the colonized is being removed from history and

⁸⁹ Memmi, “The Paths of Revolt” 25-6.

⁹⁰ Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, 153.

⁹¹ See: Amilcar Cabral, *Unity and Struggle* trans. M. Wolfers, (New York, Monthly Review Press, 1979) especially “The Weapon of Theory: Address delivered to the first Tricontinental Conference of the Peoples of Asia, Africa and Latin America held in Havana in January, 1966.”

from the community” and while “the Tunisian experience was not directed against the Jews, neither was it made with the Jews, it was made without them.”⁹² In a similar vein, Said, in his introduction to *The Question of Palestine*, asserted that “what I have tried to do is to show that the Palestinian experience is an important concrete part of history, a part that has largely been ignored by both the Zionists who wished it had never been there, and by the Europeans and Americans who have not really known what to do with it.”⁹³ Memmi has continued to argue – in interviews and shorter pieces as well as *Decolonization* - that the Palestinian conflict is an excuse for Arab leaders to ignore local problems and justify their own hold on power.

His scathing commentary in *Decolonization* has prompted strong critical response, justifiably so given his language therein referring to an ambiguous “sickness” in the Arab world:

If one can employ here the language of medicine, one could say that Arabo-Muslim society suffers from a grave depressive syndrome that prevents it from perceiving an escape from its current state. The Arab world still has not discovered, or wanted to consider, the transformations that would finally adapt it to the modern world that is coming at it from all directions. Instead of examining itself, and in function of this diagnostic, of taking the remedies required, it searches in others the causes of its dysfunctions. It is the fault of the Americans, or the Jews, the miscreants, the infidels, the multinationals... Through a classic phenomenon of projection, the Arab world also blames others for all sins, depravations, loss of values, materialism, atheism, etc.⁹⁴

⁹² Memmi, *Portrait of a Jew*, 245-8.

⁹³ Edward Said, *The Question of Palestine*, xxxix.

⁹⁴ Memmi, *Decolonization*, 33-6. Unlike his early work, *Decolonization* has been subject to widely accessible academic criticism from contemporary scholars in the Arab world, rendering his more abrasive and vague critiques therein all the more glaring. See: Dina Jadallah, “The Shibboleths within Albert Memmi’s Universalism.” *Jadaliyya* (October 2011). Jadallah accuses Memmi of being unwilling to confront racism directly; a strange claim in the context of Memmi’s career as a whole but painfully difficult to dispute regarding *Decolonization*.

However, Memmi's opinions are more complex than this, he has accused not only Arabs but Jews of turning the Israeli-Palestinian conflict into the sole referendum on the future – “for Israel it is time to abandon the idea of a greater Israel demographically and territorially and it is necessary to stop believing that it is the unique solution for the Jewish world.”⁹⁵ And, regarding the future of the former North African colonies, Memmi echoed his basic argument regarding difference by asserting that “the Maghreb and the West must make their differences cease causing problems and conflict.”⁹⁶

As of a May 2012 interview for *The Canadian Jewish News*, Memmi remained skeptical that either Zionists, Palestinian leaders, or Arabs were willing to recognize their similarities and rights

I am afraid that, today, no one really wants peace... Of course, revolts that shook and still shake the Arab-Muslim world are very important because for the Arab peoples it is a reconquest of their freedom of expression. However, so far, the victories of the fundamentalists in the Arab and Muslim countries where populations have revolted do not bode well.⁹⁷

Nor, addressing Tunisian events in a 2011 response to the journal *Sephardic Horizons*, did he find the Jasmine Revolution likely to overturn autocracy and fundamentalist politics.⁹⁸ Yet despite this pessimism and despair at the lack of will to solve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Memmi included a reminder that “this does not

⁹⁵ Albert Memmi, interview by Ferial Berraies Guigny. “Aujourd'hui, l'hétérophobie devient une extension du rejet biologique, à l'ensemble des traits culturels de chacun!”

⁹⁶ Memmi, Albert, “interview by Dany Toubiana” (2002).

⁹⁷ Elias Levy, “Une entrevue exclusive avec Albert Memmi.” In *The Canadian Jewish News* (May 13th, 2012).

⁹⁸ “As for the Jasmine Revolution, there is a lot of delirium in it. What is very positive is that the Muslim Arab intellectuals can now express themselves, but the basic problem remains intact: corruption, tyranny, and above all the impossibility up to now of separating religion from politics.” Memmi, “Postscript February 2011,” *Sephardic Horizons* 1 n. 3 (Spring 2011).

prevent us from continuing to search for that peace.”⁹⁹ This mirrors Memmi’s conclusions regarding postcolonial states: progress has stalled, the way forward is difficult, but the leaders of today must persevere toward a better future. Memmi believed the answers lie in a move toward universalism and democracy in which all voices are heard and ideas are evaluated based on humanistic principles rather than the identity of their exponents.

⁹⁹ Levy, “Une entrevue exclusive avec Albert Memmi” (May 13th, 2012).

Part Three: The Postcolonial World

Chapter 6

The Postcolonial Immigrant

Contemporary relations between Europeans and the former colonized are often framed by interactions between postcolonial states and Western entities – be they states or corporations – and via discourses on immigration. While transnational approaches to these subjects emphasize the fluidity of physical and discursive borders, I employ the distinction between immigration and postcolonial relations not only to reflect Memmi’s own treatment and maintain continuity but also to highlight relationships between Memmi’s commentary and contemporary perspectives. In this chapter I approach immigration and immigrants in Memmi’s work.

Memmi stated directly in a 1996 interview with anthropologist Gary Wilder that “immigration to France is a colonial legacy.”¹ While he produced no central text on immigration, his work often addressed the experiences of immigrants and his own movement between the Tunisia and France – for example *Strangers* and, to a lesser degree, *The Scorpion* feature North Africans who spend part of their lives in France - during his early career while a section of *Decolonization* is dedicated to the subject of immigration and integration in Europe. Furthermore Memmi himself immigrated, though as usual he is a hybrid whose relationships to France and Tunisia defy convenient terminology.

¹ Gary Wilder, “Irreconcilable Differences: a Conversation with Albert Memmi” *Transition*, no. 71 (1996), 172.

While there is no “portrait of the immigrant” in Memmi’s work, immigrants and immigration play a sizable and discernible role, adding further nuance to an author whose universalist interrogation of particularism coexists somewhat uneasily with a skepticism towards integration and attitudes towards nationalism. Understanding the impact of immigration upon cultural identity as well as relationships between postcolonial immigrants and the former colonizers is as essential to studies of the postcolonial world as analysis of Islamic fundamentalism, European integration, or American foreign policy. Memmi’s work, so valuable in assessing colonial power relationships, can enrich these conversations as well through his depiction of immigrants whose identity remains uncertain and host countries where local conceptions of identity are challenged.

Here I contend that Memmi’s treatment of immigration reveals a skepticism towards multiculturalism derived from his insistence that integration requires parties acting from positions of unity and security as well as a linking of cultural assertion to place which appears most prominently in this commentary. In his work on immigrants and immigration, be it his early fiction, personal reflections, analytical essays or political commentary, Memmi again approaches these situations in his familiar language of oppression/liberation and social agency. The difficulties in establishing social and cultural identity, along with limitations upon the subject’s agency in the process of constructing identity, are once again the factors that draw Memmi’s attention. And, his treatment of immigration and hybrid identity a tension is revealed between Memmi’s interstitial position and transnational perspectives.

Memmi the Immigrant:

“My first stay in France was disastrous.”²

Memmi’s own experience as a student in France proved fortuitous and thus his success obscures the uncertainty that accompanied these initial ventures. Following the war Memmi spent two years of study in Paris “living 200 meters from the Sorbonne, at the Hotel Moliere.”³ Having resumed his academic pursuits in 1944 at the University of Algiers and then traveled to Paris for the first time in 1945 to study at the Sorbonne. It was there his focus shifted from philosophy to sociology under Georges Gurvitch and the psychoanalyst Daniel Lagache.⁴ He addressed this period in the opening pages of a chapter in *Le Nomade Immobile* titled “The apprenticeship of solitude.” Here, Memmi remarked on a sense of isolation and the underwhelming realization that the difficulties he encountered in French universities in Tunis and Algiers remained in Paris – colonial laws and the disruption of his studies during the wars require him to seek special dispensations at the Sorbonne, to the irritation of his professors “these grand republican professors were, despite all, honest men.”⁵ He pursued further opportunities as a researcher with the *Ecole Nationale d’Administration* and through the support of his former mentors Amrouche and Patri.

² Memmi, *Nomade Immobile*, 67.

³ The hotel currently bearing that name is located on the Rue Moliere, slightly north of the Louvre.

Albert Memmi, “Émergence d’une littérature maghrébine d’expression française : La génération de 1954” interview with Mireille Calle-Gruber in *Études Littéraires* 33 no.3 (2001)17.

⁴ Dugas, *Albert Memmi*, 36-7. See reference to Gurvitch in introduction to Chapter 2.

⁵ Memmi, *Nomade Immobile*, 68.

After a series of projects, including an attempt to acquire the rights to unpublished works of Martin Buber on behalf of a short-lived publishing house, Memmi returned to Tunis to pursue an academic position. Memmi's challenges during this period in Paris differed from his struggles in Tunis: "In Tunis I was fighting, and the resistance I met nourished me; in Paris it was empty, and I felt myself dissolving."⁶ In both cases, Memmi described a lonely struggle to pursue his academic career burdened by combination of cultural otherness and intellectual isolation. However his first experience in France was daunting in a way Tunis was not. In addition to the disappointing realization that French colonial attitudes remained prevalent in the metropole, the sheer sense of foreignness – from the climate to his interactions with Parisian university officials – left Memmi discouraged and doubting the validity of a pursuit that had shaped his life and relationship to his family.

Tunisian independence followed three years of negotiations between the French government and leaders of future President Habib Bourguiba's Neo Destour (New Constitutional Liberal) party, as the French consolidated forces following the Battle of Algiers.⁷ Bourguiba, who favored a negotiated independence while France was occupied and in turn offered mixed support for the Algerian FLN, would go on to rule from 1957-87 after winning an internal dispute with Salah Ben Yusuf over Bourguiba's gradualist policies. After fifty years of activism beginning with the founding of the original Destour part in 1907, Tunisia avoided revolutionary conflict on the Algerian scale.

⁶ Memmi, *Nomade Immobile*, 70.

⁷ On the one hand Bourguiba managed to moderate nationalist tactics, but on the other hand France made a calculated decision to focus on Algeria due to its economic significance and more unique position as a French department. Perkins, *A History of Modern Tunisia* 68-74.

Memmi's eventual decision to leave Tunisia following independence in the context of growing tension between Muslims and Jews in the Arab world over Palestine well as historic conflicts between Jews and Muslims in North Africa.⁸ Decolonization presented Memmi with an unfortunate paradox: he supported the independence struggle but felt unwelcome in the new nation due to his Jewishness. Concerned regarding his family's future and his ability to speak freely in the new society, Memmi immigrated to France permanently in 1957 and would subsequently support his parents and other extended family members in their own departure.

A significant theme in *The Pillar of Salt* as well as Memmi's second novel *Strangers* is the generational tension stemming from a family's investment in the education of a child whose intellectual pursuits prove alienating and denude the family of labor. A focus of substantial sociological research regarding both transnational and domestic familial relations as well as literary perspectives and memoirs of the immigrant experience, this dynamic also features in Memmi's personal reflections.⁹ In 1989 he indicated that he was more aware of his family's financial commitment than classmates from similar backgrounds – though only later did he realize the additional hardship posed by his absence from the family business along as well as the potential risks associated with intellectual and political engagement under colonialism.¹⁰

⁸ On Memmi's treatment of Arab states in relation to the Israeli/Palestinian conflict and the immigration of Maghrebi Jews to Israel see: Chapter 5.

⁹ There is substantial sociological research on the relationship between immigrants and their children or parents. For a more general analysis of family expectations and educational investment among immigrants see: Cynthia Feliciano and Rubén G. Rumbaut, "Gendered paths: Educational and occupational expectations and outcomes among adult children of immigrants" *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 28, no. 6 (2005): 1087-1110.

¹⁰ Salim Jay, "Entretien avec Albert Memmi," 1990.

The limitations imposed by colonialism extend beyond the colony, and immigrants retained a connection to the colony in most cases. But it also represented a way out – links to an economically prosperous metropole combined with the hope that the French would live up to their egalitarian ideals in their homeland. Educational accomplishment represented one the primary avenues for immigration to France from the colonies and Memmi was in this case representative of colonial and postcolonial elites seeking such opportunities.¹¹ Thus it is unsurprising that the French educated intellectual idealized the metropole to some extent. For Memmi, the France of his imagination which he left Tunisia to find was “the France of Montaigne, of Voltaire and Rousseau, and of the rights of man.”¹² The Tunisian Jewish traditions of his family appeared weak because they did not present a solution to the problem of oppression.

While Memmi pursued education for personal and scholarly achievement, his distrust of tradition and conflicted feelings towards his own Jewishness did not cause him to shun collective endeavors, as evidenced by his participation in scouts and the boisterous Zionism of his youth.¹³ And he was certainly aware of the economic limitations of the hara, “*La Royaume des Pauvres*.”¹⁴ His reasons for immigration were not those of semi-skilled workers who compose the vast majority of the France’s immigrants from both the former colonies who encounter, to a much greater extent, the

¹¹ As opposed to post-independence when the former colonized were encouraged to immigrate to provide cheap labor, demand for which has ebbed and flowed along with government restrictions on immigration

¹² Memmi, *Le Nomade Immobile*, 67.

¹³ Memmi, *Liberation*, 125-6.

¹⁴ Memmi, *La Terre Intérieure*, 16.

legal and material realities of most immigrants from postcolonial states.¹⁵ However the concerns of an immigrant intellectual are critical to the broader issues of access to the institutions that allow immigrants to develop political and intellectual leaders as well as highly skilled workers and Memmi's life and work have appealed to a broad spectrum of readers. Memmi may be a unique immigrant, but his is still an immigrant story and a sense of foreignness accompanies Memmi's commentary on his own life in France while this iteration of otherness features in his work alongside previously considered interstitial forms.

In the course of his permanent move to France, During the 60s, Memmi served as Professor of Cultural Studies at the Paris Haute Étude Commercial. After an often frustrating process that spanned several years, he obtained French citizenship in 1967, around the time he published *Liberation of the Jew*.¹⁶ He accepted a position at the University of Paris as Maître de Conference in 1970 where he served as professor and professor emeritus for the remainder of his career. In addition to his academic work at the University of Paris - Nanterre, continued literary production, and tours abroad to discuss his work, Memmi became an occasional commentator in French newspapers and academic publications on issues related to the former colonies in general and the Maghreb in particular.

¹⁵ For a discussion of how nationalist attitudes inflame postcolonial immigration issues by encouraging migration in times of labor shortages while discourages assimilation through both nativism and the promotion of self-determination see: Chaim Gans, "Nationalism and Immigration." In *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice*. Vol. 1, No. 2, *Nationalism, Multiculturalism and Liberal Democracy* (June 1998),159-180.

¹⁶ Robequain, "Jalons Bio-Biographiques," 223.

To some extent his post-1967 life as a French citizen and public intellectual concluded Memmi's search for cultural identity, with Memmi resolving his problematic identity through an embrace of France - Schehr referred to the French language as the final stage of Memmi's *tikkun* in which "writing in French moves him away from all those oppositions, gaps, and alienations."¹⁷ However Memmi never acknowledged a complete break from his homeland or found himself entirely at ease in France. Rather, in a previously unpublished essay he contributed to an electronic publication shortly after the release of *Decolonization*, Memmi portrayed himself as still in between worlds:

I have never left this childhood sensation of being caught in between two cultures, both of them dominant, each in its own way. My native land and my impressions of childhood can be found in half my books, even today, and I remain deeply attached to the fate of formerly colonized peoples. Many of my friendships and affections lie there. And moreover, the battle to master the French language and European culture requires a constant effort on my part.¹⁸

There are reasons to question the validity of Memmi's assertion that his perspective remains fruitful, beyond disagreements with tone and argument. The ways in which he is "in between," are further complicated by decolonization as well as his success and relocation. Though Memmi has not asserted a relationship to North African migrants or postcolonial citizens comparable that presented in and regarding *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, his interstitial position was the currency he offered as support for the efficacy of his portraits. In this case Sartre's defense in his introduction to *The Colonizer and the Colonized* that Memmi "represents no one but *is* everyone" would

¹⁷ Schehr, "Albert Memmi's Tri-cultural Tikkun," 77.

¹⁸ Memmi, "Growing up as a Minority Child"

be difficult to reapply, though his claim here is one of rootlessness between a homeland he felt compelled to leave and a residence that can never truly be his own.¹⁹

To a degree Memmi followed in the tradition of expatriate writers and artists from Chopin to Hemmingway who found a home in Paris. However his establishment in the French academy and conflicting views regarding the larger population of postcolonial immigrants more closely resembles an intellectual version of historians of migration such as Nancy Green have applied to explore class distinctions within immigration communities and problematize globalization narratives.²⁰ Critics of *Decolonization* argue that Memmi's has come to represent a Eurocentric old left, while the idea that Memmi has spoken to the experience and concerns of the decolonized with anything resembling the veracity of *The Colonizer and the Colonized* is tenuous at best. However *Decolonization* is far from the first site where Memmi's explored immigration and the unstable conditions of migrants.

Immigrants in Memmi's Work:

Where do the immigrants appear in Memmi's work? Prior to his analysis in *Decolonization*, with the exception of occasional references to African migrant workers, they are primarily characters from Memmi's early fiction. These characters are all Maghrebi Jews from similar backgrounds, their fathers shopkeepers like Memmi's own. Their relationships to their families contain a generational conflict complicated by the strain of colonialism and they become isolated interstitial figures.

¹⁹ Sartre, *Colonizer and the Colonized*, Introduction to the 1965 edition.

²⁰ See in particular Nancy L. Green, "La migration des élites: Nouveau concept, anciennes pratiques?" in *Cahiers du Centre de Recherches Historiques*, no. 41 (April 2008), 107-116.

In *Strangers*, the main character is a dentist whose family supported his studies in France, with the anticipation that he return to begin a promising career. The narrator in *Strangers* discusses France fairly briefly in the early pages, with other allusions set within the story as it follows his and Marie's life in Tunis. And in *The Scorpion* the immigrant is Emilio, a writer who studied in France and traveled abroad while his brother Marcel – the narrator reading through Emilio's papers - remained in Algeria. *The Scorpion* includes accounts of Emilio's time in Paris, emphasizing a sense of disillusionment with latent discrimination within and beyond the university. However, while examples of immigration and return are common in Memmi's work, there is no comprehensive narrative of a fictional character's daily life in France in the manner of Alexandre's Tunisian youth in *Pillar of Salt*.

Pillar of Salt

For Memmi, exile was the result of decolonization, the realization that the removal of the colonizer led to a society where Jews, and especially Jewish intellectuals, were distrusted due to historical conflicts, the international political situation vis-à-vis the state of Israel, and the association of middle class Jews with the French.²¹ His fiction provides additional examples of migration and exile from a similar socioeconomic perspective. *The Pillar of Salt* concludes as Alexandre Mordechai Benillouche, chooses to immigrate – albeit to Argentina rather than France – after rejecting the tradition of his family and the false hope of his academic career.²² Under varying degrees of duress, exile

²¹ Memmi also argued more recently that intellectuals in general found more difficulty in postcolonial North Africa due to the insecurity of autocratic governments. *Decolonization*, 28.

²² Memmi, *Pillar*, 335.

from the colony or from a society was the fate of Memmi and the principal characters in the novels *Pillar of Salt*, *Strangers*, and *The Scorpion*. For Memmi and Alexandre, the colony was the initial site of rebellion against one identity and the failed assumption of another. The result of subsequent alienation was exile.

In *The Pillar of Salt*, Alexandre's self-exile resulted from self-exploration "I am dying through having turned back to look at my own self.. God turned Lot's wife into a pillar of salt – is it possible for me to survive my contemplation of myself?"²³ He retained a desperate faith in the redeeming value of French culture as long as possible, an exercise in effort-justification accompanied by fear that attempting to become French prevented him from returning to his life in *hara* "if I rejected what I was becoming would I be able to return to what I had been?"²⁴ In the end, he answered in the negative, exile serving as an alternative to impossible metamorphosis or the acceptance of an oppressed condition.

Alexandre's exile was the culmination of his search for identity with the conclusion that, whatever the answer, he could not be himself in Tunis. Memmi and Alexandre share characteristics of both groups as depicted in *The Colonizer and the Colonized* without fully becoming either. Colonized, he could not become French despite his strongest attempts to do so. Modified by Mordekhai and Benillouche, even the name Alexandre was derided as a presumptuous affectation rather than a representation of his Frenchness.²⁵ An interstitial figure able to leave the colony, Alexander and Memmi

²³ Memmi, *Pillar*, 335.

²⁴ Ibid., 315.

²⁵ Ibid., 94.

himself resemble the “colonizer who refuses” following, in the words of one literary scholar “the incapacity of the protagonist to achieve his integration into the pluralistic society of Tunisia”²⁶ Memmi’s own academic connections allowed him to immigrate with relative ease considering the fate of migrant workers and the harkis.

Strangers

Memmi’s second novel *Strangers*, originally published in France as *Agar*, was released in 1955, one year before Tunisian independence. It is an exploration of several themes related to his analysis of colonialism as well as the divisive mechanisms of “encystment” he identified in *Liberation of the Jew* – the false hope offered by colonial institutions, the defensive parochialism of both Jewish communities and the colonized more generally, and the perils facing couples from contrasting backgrounds. *Strangers* features an unnamed narrator, a Tunisian ophthalmologist from an urban Jewish family. His time studying in France is covered briefly in the early pages of the novel, characterized by a sense of loneliness and difficulties acclimating to the weather and social climate. France as depicted as a fundamentally hostile environment.

However, the narrator develops a relationship with Marie Mueller, an Alsatian woman who cared while a wet and cold French winter left him ill and his fellow students avoided him.²⁷ At the completion of his studies they marry and she returns with him to Tunis. Marie is a Frenchwoman from Alsace, with some linguistic and cultural ties to

²⁶ Edris Makward, “The Multicultural Environment in Albert Memmi’s Autobiographical Novels” in *Pan-Africanism Updated*, 109-17.

²⁷ Memmi, *Strangers*, 11.

Germany.²⁸ What develops is the story of a couple's inability to reconcile cultural differences in a colonial society. Marie's seeming incompatibility with her husband's family and culture is exacerbated by limited career prospects, despite the French educations in which the narrator's family had heavily invested. The narrator's professional degree failed to result in a successful practice while his family made large sacrifices and demanded high returns.

Initially Marie sought acceptance from her husband's family but was faced with customs entirely foreign to her, a more communal family, strange rituals, and the commotion of paraffin sellers in the alley. Marie insisted upon moving to a country home away from the narrator's family and the bustle of the city. However while the narrator showed some interest in moving to a new home he genuinely preferred "towns and men to nature and trees."²⁹ The narrator remained cognizant that his family supported his journey to France, experiencing guilt from both his limited professional success and rejection of Jewish religious traditions. By the end of the novel, their marriage proved unable to withstand the strain.

Many of these differences - urban and rural life, rich and poor families, religious and political disagreements - can be challenging even without the gulf created by language, ethnicity, and hierarchies of colonial oppression. Memmi later acknowledged that most of couple's experiences in *Strangers* were not exceptional taken each on their

²⁸ She was made to work for the Germans during the war but treated as an ethnic German by the government which sought to separate Alsatians from the France. In fact, the narrator finds himself wishing she had been treated poorly by the Germans as to be more like the Jews in Tunisia "they (Alsations) could not reasonably pose as victims, though indeed I would have preferred that she had been one." Memmi, *Strangers*, 14-5.

²⁹ Ibid., 56.

own. In truth, Memmi held out hope that mixed marriages will someday “be one of the most helpful and beautiful contributions to the great communion of peoples of a single humanity. But first, or at least at the same time, these peoples must cease being hostile to one another.”³⁰ Memmi considered cross-cultural relationships essential to the overcoming religious and cultural parochialism, however, in *Strangers* the couple’s struggles unique in how numerous they were - “every marriage is difficult, and it is a simple fact that a mixed marriage is more difficult than others.”³¹ This presaged Memmi’s later consideration of mixed marriage in *Liberation of the Jew* and later reflections.

The similarities between Memmi’s marriage and the mixed marriage in *Strangers* are apparent – like the narrator, while studying in France Memmi “met a young woman who would become my wife.” And Marie-Germaine Dubach, like Marie, was from Lorraine. Marie’s relationship with her own family receives sparse attention in *Strangers*, however Memmi remarked on “a certain apprehension” regarding his wife’s family as they were “very Catholic, Catholics of the East, rigorous and austere.”³² Literary scholar Jeannine Hayat depicts Marie as a representation of Memmi’s longed for and partially-acquired France.³³ Hayat and others familiar with his work have commented on the links

³⁰ Memmi, *Liberation*, 105.

³¹ Memmi, interview by Salim Jay (1990). Memmi, *Liberation*, 93-4.

³² Memmi, *Juif et l’Autre*, 80.

³³ Jeannine Hayat. "Les romans autobiographiques d'Albert Memmi: Le réel et son double." *Revue des études juives* 157, no.1-2 (1998): 213-223.

between *The Pillar of Salt*, Memmi's time at the Sorbonne, and the marriage in *Strangers*.

In 1976 Memmi compared his marriage to that of the main characters in *Strangers* in the sense that "the mixed marriage was a solution to my difficulties but, in one sense, it was their definitive perpetuation."³⁴ He later acknowledged that in "Agar, the story is of a mixed marriage because I have a mixed marriage, certainly, because the mixed marriage is a sort of tentative solution, for me, to the problems posed in *The Pillar of Salt*."³⁵

While Memmi believed mixed marriages may constitute transgressive challenges to the demands of tradition, replacing the social context tradition provides is extraordinarily difficult, thus his claim in *Liberation* and subsequent commentary that the immense cultural benefits mixed marriage require a baseline of mutual acknowledgement if not amity between groups.³⁶

Insisting the couple move to a home outside the city, Marie seeks to isolate herself from a world where her differences are publicized. Her insistence on French names for their child or European style decorations for the home assertion of foreignness were treated as threats while attempts to operate within Tunisian Jewish culture were received as poor imitations³⁷ - reminiscent of how Alexandre was derided by French students for

³⁴ Memmi, *Le Terre Intérieure*, 103.

³⁵ Memmi, "Émergence d'une littérature maghrébine d'expression française," 14. Commenting along these lines in a letter to Memmi composed for a conference publication, Claude Roy simply referred to the narrator in *Strangers* as Alexandre. Claude Roy. Untitled letter, "études and texts" in *Albert Memmi: Prophète de la Décolonisation*, 162-70.

³⁶ Memmi, interview by Salim Jay (1990)

³⁷ Memmi, *Strangers*, 80-81.

his parents' audacity in naming him.³⁸ She could not escape her differences in Tunisia, as he could not in France. For Memmi this is the crippling problem – such mixed marriages, even in the most accepting of circumstances, require one member of the couple must be a stranger or the couple exists as strangers together. This evidences Memmi's broader view that assimilation and cross-cultural interaction are not without sacrifice and risk, requiring a degree of security and assurance unavailable to oppressed peoples either attempting to assimilate or as incorporate outsiders.

The Scorpion

Early sections of Memmi's 1969 novel *The Scorpion* feature a narrator, Marcel, reading the journals and assorted personal writings of his brother Emilio, a prodigal writer whose travels and study in France contrast with Marcel's life as a dentist in Tunisia. In one of these journals, Emilio portrayed himself a perpetual outsider in a French University that viewed him with suspicion and failed to satisfy the lack of belonging that drove him to leave home – though, reading this account, Marcel sardonically dismissed his brother's travels as another example of his irresponsibility and wayward personality.³⁹ Emilio claims he was disappointed by how unspectacular the monuments of Paris appeared in person when he first arrived, even before his experience at the Sorbonne and bemoans his isolation amongst other students.⁴⁰ This culminated when a trusted professor accused Emilio of a cruel trick played on a one-armed student and Emilio saw no other reason for this

³⁸ Memmi, *Pillar*, 94.

³⁹ Memmi, *Scorpion*, 73.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 68.

assumption besides his race.⁴¹ Everyday incidents erode the immigrant's faith in what he termed, in reference to his own hopes, "The France of the Rights of Man."⁴²

Having lost its initial sheen, France leaves its mark on Memmi's immigrants. Often this was through personal relationships, and here Marie is the best but not the only example. Emilio and Alexandre experienced love in France. Emilio, Alexandre, and the narrator in *Strangers* also received degrees in France, another way in which they were marked. Their treatment by the former colony and by their families reminded them of their connection to the metropole and the colonizer, "one day, you take a slightly more cordial tone, you find yourself guilty of bad taste, you've made the error of forgetting that you're not "one of them."⁴³ France failed to provide material opportunity and disrupted their relationships with family and community.

Emilio could not shed his former identity or return home, though again Marcel provides a counterpoint by insisting that Emilio's stories of their family are dramatized at best and fiction at worst. In many ways Emilio's life appears to be a continuation of Alexandre's following the conclusion of *The Pillar of Salt* – with similar academic interests and period spent in South America. The contrast between Emilio's dramatic stories of his youth and his brother's determination to remain home and develop a responsible professional career provides another example of how immigration can be viewed within a given family. In each case immigration is the result of uncertainty and an uprooted condition. While this is the basis of Memmi's claim to authority via his

⁴¹ Memmi, *Scorpion*, 68-9.

⁴² Memmi, *Le Nomade Immobile*, 67.

⁴³ Memmi, *Scorpion*, 68.

interstitial position, this uncertainty appears almost exclusively as negative, a barrier to the desire for participation in a society or cultural groups.

Memmi and Discourses on French Immigration

The demographic and political questions posed by immigration have long been a topic of interest to historians in France and in West generally, however a renewed emphasis on postcolonial legacies accompanies contemporary debates regarding relations between European societies, postcolonial states, and postcolonial immigrants.⁴⁴

Contemporary concern over Islamic fundamentalism further complicates matters. Muslim immigrants have been characterized as threats to various “French values” from Catholicism, to secularism, to women’s rights. Many of these concerns appeared vividly in the controversy surrounding 2004 French legislation restricting the wearing of religious symbols in public. One of the most significant texts of these debates, Joan Scott’s *The Politics of the Veil*, considers how Muslim schoolgirl’s choice to wear the veil represents a complex combination of race, gender, class and nationalist factors at work in French society.⁴⁵ Controversy centered upon the Muslim hijab served as a flash point for debates regarding the compatibility of Islam with French society and the tensions between French secularism – *laïcité* - and calls for a multiculturalist acceptance of diversity.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ For comparative studies between France and immigration in other Western countries see: Adrian Favell, *Philosophies of Integration, Second Edition: Immigration and the Idea of Citizenship in France and Britain* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2001); Jeffery Togman, *The Ramparts of Nations: Institutions and Immigration Policies in France and the United States* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 2002); Martin Schain, *The Politics of Immigration in France, Britain, and the United States: A Comparative Study* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008)

⁴⁵ Joan Wallach Scott, *The Politics of the Veil*. (Princeton University Press, 2007).

⁴⁶ See: John Bowen, *Why the French don’t like Headscarves* (Princeton University Press, 2010).

Memmi was very aware of the larger context of the French immigration. In a preface for *Un noir a quitté le fleuve*, Annie Lauren's 1968 novel depicting the life of a Senegalese worker living in Paris, Memmi referred to the "35,000 black salaried workers in Paris," as "the new slaves."⁴⁷ Memmi's characterization of black immigrants, who live alongside of Maghrebi immigrants in the housing projects of the Paris suburbs, acknowledged the living conditions and labor relationship of immigrants from the former colonies.⁴⁸

In his more recent material Memmi concentrated primarily on the postcolonial immigrants residing in France – Muslims from North Africa or West Asia and black West Africans – where cultural and structural institutions of the metropole are familiar even if not truly their own.⁴⁹ These immigrants represent a diverse collection of peoples, culturally divided but sharing similar grievances based on their living conditions, labor, and lack of access to the state. Their potential to respond collectively to these conditions is nebulous. Can suburban riots and ethnic solidarity on the behalf of *beurs* and *sans-papiers* act as a pressure valve while the definition of "French" or "European" adapts to embrace growing numbers of immigrants and their descendants?

Memmi's interventions on the subject of immigration and debates regarding the relationship between Muslim immigrants and French society have accompanied conflicts

⁴⁷ Albert Memmi, preface to Annie Lauren, *Un noir a quitté le fleuve* (Paris: Editours Français Réunis, 1986) 19.

⁴⁸ In a footnote to the same preface, he admitted that, while revising the essay, he happened to watch the film *El Salto* which drew his attention to 350,000 Portuguese workers living in similar conditions. Even Memmi, trying to speak out on the condition of immigrants living in France, was initially unaware of the scope and diversity of immigrant communities. Memmi, preface to Annie Lauren, *Le noir a quitté le fleuve*, 17-18.

⁴⁹ Memmi, *Decolonization*, 41.

over the nature and conditions of multiculturalism as well as a shifting regulatory framework. The legal status of immigrants from the former colonies has shifted over time. Numerous shifts since 1960 - initial immigration by *pied noir*, the encouragement of labor immigration during the economic boom of the 1970s, the Mitterrand government's abortive attempt to promote a multi-cultural society during the 1980s, the restrictive Pasqua laws of 1993, and the subsequent humanitarian backlash in support of women and children of migrant workers rendered the status of immigrants tenuous.⁵⁰

As the story of postcolonial immigration extended to include second-generation *beurs* and the prospect of longer-term relationships between European states and flows of migrant workers, the political discourse increasingly featured the question of more permanent residency and the status of families rather than individual workers.⁵¹ A dramatic increase in *beur* activism – including riots, strikes, and a cross-country March for Equality and Against Racism by immigrant youth - during the early 1980s

⁵⁰ Named for Interior Minister Charles Pasqua, the Pasqua laws required additional verification for the issuing of work permits, and placed restrictions upon the immigration of spouses and children. An especially controversial provision, enacted in 1993 and reversed in 1998, required children born to foreign parents to make a formal request for citizenship, altering a longstanding policy of *jus soli* - the right to citizenship for all those born on French soil. For a study on the role of the family in French immigration policy focusing on Maghrebi immigrants see: Miriam I. Ticktin, *Casualties of Care: Immigration and the Politics of Humanitarianism in France*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011) and Raissiguier, *Reinventing the Republic..*

⁵¹ For a brief history of the issues of public benefits for the children of French immigrants as well as an analysis of public attitudes toward the issue in France and Israel see: Leslie King, "From Pronatalism to Social Welfare? Extending Family Allowances to Minority Populations in France and Israel" *European Journal of Population / Revue Européenne de Démographie* 17, no. 4 (2001), 305-32.

accompanied the election of Francois Mitterrand's socialist coalition and an increasingly charged discourse regarding the nature and desirability of cultural pluralism in France.⁵²

In addition to raising questions regarding the place of ethnic distinctions in French society, postcolonial immigration and postcolonial immigrants also press discussions about the role of government in legislating cultural questions. The conception of a humanistic melting pot that privileges ideas over religious and ethnic distinctions influences French policy on religious expression and public acknowledgments of ethnic differences – begetting, for instance, a dearth of information regarding immigrant backgrounds due to restrictions on census data. This renewed emphasis upon ethnicity and cultural distinction accompanied the assertions of both conservative nationalists and immigrant advocates who questioned assimilationist pluralism.⁵³ Both multiculturalists and assimilationists on the right and left have since challenged longstanding practices such as the limited collection of census data based on ethnic categories for a wide array of ideological and practical purposes as the meaning of Frenchness and the responsibilities of the French government towards immigrants and cultural minorities. These impulses resulted in actions such as the Sarkozy government's championing

⁵² For a detailed study of the evolution of the relationship between French immigration policy and conceptions of citizenship since 1980s see Miriam Feldblum, *Reconstructing Citizenship: the Politics of Nationality Reform and Immigration in Contemporary France* (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1999) especially 33-55.

⁵³ Salvador Cardús, "New Ways of thinking about Identity in Europe" in Roland Hsu ed. *Ethnic Europe: Mobility, Identity, and Conflict in a Globalized World*. (Stanford University Press, 2010) 73.

expanded data collection in the ostensible cause of more effective services and “positive discrimination” in 2008-09.⁵⁴

Within the French party political spectrum, issues related to the fairness of shifting policies, the exploitation of immigrant labor, and the political agency of a growing population with postcolonial roots has led the French left to tentatively express support for immigrant rights. In her article “Decolonizing the Past,” Francophone literary scholar Dayne Oscherwitz presents contrasts between the “multicultural model” and “nationalist model” for defining Frenchness based upon not only conflicting ideologies but related differences regarding historical memory of the colonial era.⁵⁵ The right has generally downplayed French historical responsibility issues while exploiting worries of a foreign threat to French culture – heightened by incidents such as waves of riots in the Paris suburbs in the past decades and the 1995 bomb attacks in Paris and Lyon by a second generation Algerian raised in the slums of Lyon.⁵⁶ However, the French left possesses its own history of suspicion regarding foreign – for example, American – cultural influence.

⁵⁴ Alec Hargreaves, “Veiled Truths: Discourses of Ethnicity in Contemporary France” in Roland Hsu ed. *Ethnic Europe: Mobility, Identity, and Conflict in a Globalized World* (Stanford University Press, 2010) 100-01. Hargreaves explores this discussion in order to question the utility of “ethnicity” as a category, ultimately concluding that expanded data collection will ultimately promote this discourse.

⁵⁵ Dayne Oscherwitz, “Decolonizing the Past: Re-visions of History and Memory and the Evolution of a (Post) Colonial Heritage” in *Memory, Empire, and Postcolonialism*, 189-202, 189-90.

⁵⁶ Withol de Wenden, “From Migrants to Citizens: Muslims in France” in Alec Hargreaves ed. *Politics and Religion in the United States and France* (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2007) 148-52.

In power during the 1980s, the left coalition led by Francois Mitterrand struggled to balance populism, anti-racism, and belief in a republican universalist French identity, leading to splits between the Socialist Party, immigrant groups, and left parties like the PCF who more openly support immigrant activists – albeit with less to lose.⁵⁷ With personal and cultural connections to their countries of origin, immigrants also represent a concrete challenge to the legitimacy of state boundaries, acting not only as subjects but as political actors within their countries of origin, in their states of residence, and across borders – like Memmi, in between by virtue of being both inside and outside of two societies.⁵⁸

Memmi’s views on cultural assimilation are somewhat mixed. In the long term, he believed the blending of cultures would promote the acceptance of difference. However, he also expressed skepticism towards assimilation as a policy of the colonizer and a method of alleviating the Jewish condition.⁵⁹ Sympathetic to assimilation as an organic process derived from interpersonal relationships and a free exchange of ideas, he believed even well-intentioned attempts to promote integration could backfire. Specifically referencing immigrant communities, Memmi observed that “integration is a

⁵⁷ Feldblum, *Reconstructing Citizenship*, 42-6 and 126.

⁵⁸ See: Rabah Aissaoui who considers the connection between North African and French political circles in *Immigration and national identity: North African political movements in colonial and postcolonial France*. In particular, Aissaoui confronted the idea that Maghreb immigrants are somehow more difficult or less inclined to formal political participation than other groups, using the connection between supporters of Messali Hadj in France and Algeria to show the interplay between immigrant and North African politics. He presents the opportunities for political action on the part of North African immigrants dating back to the colonial era, but also the potential conflict between political movements in Europe and their North African counterparts. Rabah Aissaoui, 2009. *Immigration and national identity: North African political movements in colonial and postcolonial France* (London: Tauris Academic Studies, 2009), 3, 13

⁵⁹ Memmi, *Colonizer and Colonized*, 126. *Liberation*, 56-8

solution to many things but also creates anxiety. It is sought and rejected by both parties.”⁶⁰ Like previous European minorities such as Roma and Jews, immigrants from the former colonies threaten conceptions of European identity derived from Christianity, Caucasian racial types, and the boundaries of nation-states which crystalized during the 19th and 20th centuries.⁶¹ And like minorities at the time such conceptions were initially developed – historical processes key to Memmi’s analysis in *Portrait of a Jew* – this Europe’s others are isolated and demonized as dark threats and the term *banlieues* becomes as racially charged as the word “ghetto” and in the case of European or North African Jewry as well as the United States.⁶²

In *Decolonization* Memmi reiterated his belief that ultimately “The Maghreb and West must choose a universal society to stop their differences from causing problems and conflict” and work toward a mutually constructed society. Therein, all could lay claim to their own cultural identity while established shared social values, both stripped of essentialist chauvinism.⁶³ His skepticism toward the potential assimilation of Muslim

⁶⁰ Memmi, *Decolonization*, 93.

⁶¹ Emily Apter, *Continental Drift: From National Characters to Virtual Subjects* (Chicago: Univ. Chicago Press, 1999) 25-38 and George Hage, *White Nation: Fantasies of White Supremacy in a Multicultural Society* New York: Routledge, 2000) 69-77. See also: B. Ceuppens and P. Geschiere. “Autochthony: local or global? New modes in the struggle over citizenship and belonging in Africa and Europe.” in *Annual Review of Anthropology*. 34 (2005):385-407

⁶² A his 1994 dissertation, sociologist Loic Wacquant of the University of Chicago, compared the relationship between Paris and its suburbs to that between communities in Chicago arguing, among other things, that cultural identity in ethnic communities of both cities is reinforced by the lack of effective city services. Loic Wacquant, *Urban Outcasts: Color Class and Place in Two Advanced Societies* Phd. Dissertation (University of Chicago, 1994). Two studies on the ethnic composition, development, culture of and political issues related to the suburbs of French cities make this connection as well, David Lepoutre, *Coeur de Banlieu: Codes Rights and Languages*. (Paris: O. Jacob, 1997) and Collette Petonette, *Ethnologie des Banlieues* (Paris: Galilee, 1982).

⁶³ Toubiana. *Entretien radiophonique. Albert Memmi*. 2002.

immigrants was reflected both his suspicion of assimilation as a viable possibility and the short-term and his belief that democratic and culturally affirming states in the postcolonial world required the former colonized to embrace their own cultural identity. Despite his critical but understanding view toward the assertion of repressed cultural practices, as well as a sympathetic comment in *Decolonization* that “one never asserts one’s identity so much as when it is threatened,” skepticism toward the potential for Muslim integration colors Memmi’s observations which, while echoing his previous suspicion of assimilation preceding cultural assertion and self-criticism, are largely superficial.⁶⁴

Concerning the headscarf affair itself, Memmi rebuked those who claimed the veil as a source of cultural pride by referring to the hijab as “a portable ghetto.”⁶⁵ Memmi was unsympathetic to wearers of the veil, arguing that the appropriation of the veil as a freely chosen expression of religion or rejection of Western objectification merely obscures the predominant function of veil as a symbol of male dominance. In particular he disparaged the idea that Muslim women could claim cultural agency by appropriating a religious symbol that simultaneously represented agency denied through extreme patriarchy, noting that “God gets blamed for a lot, it seems.”⁶⁶ In a 2008 interview wherein Memmi questioned the extent Muslim immigrants were willing to reject fundamentalist doctrines and the extent to which European states should renegotiate commitments to a secular society, he further explained his utilitarian universalist attitude towards secularism:

⁶⁴ See: Albert Memmi, “Intégrismes et laïcité” in *Le Monde Diplomatique*, March 1989.

⁶⁵ Memmi, *Decolonization*, 85, 87.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 86-7.

Laïcité for me is only a constitutional form, not necessarily a total global philosophy that encompasses all aspects of existence. It is only a form of contract between different groups that form a global *society*. All this with the aim of power coexist together in peace. For me it is the guarantee of freedom of thought and worship. A thing that fundamentalists do not give you! Currently, there is a secular tradition that is crushed by the fundamentalists of all stripes!⁶⁷

This raises a question as to Memmi's delineation between healthy expressions of difference and examples of what he referred to in *Liberation of the Jew* as "encystment."

In a 2002 study produced for the journal *Race and Ethnic Studies*, based on thirty interviews with North African immigrants, the authors observe that while official French anti-racism draws upon Enlightenment conceptions of universalism and French Republican ideals "North African immigrants rebut racism by drawing instead on their daily experience and on a 'particular universalism', i.e. a moral universalism informed by Islam."⁶⁸ In both cases French universalism is exclusionary - as Seth Wolitz indicates in an analysis of Jewish identity in France, French universalism "expected a rapid abandonment of "particularistic" Jewish peoplehood and culture."⁶⁹ Memmi's ambivalence towards a multiculturalist view of French society, wherein ethnic and cultural differences are recognized rather than subsumed, reflects longstanding debates and pressing questions.

Both in his earlier work - such as in *Liberation* where he observed that "it is clear that a group, inasmuch as it is a *group*, cannot assimilate," and in *Decolonization*,

⁶⁷ Albert Memmi, "interview with Feriel Berraies Guigny."

⁶⁸ Michèle Lamont, Ann Morning, and Margarita Mooney. "Particular Universalisms: North African immigrants respond to French racism." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 25, no. 3 (2002): 390-414

⁶⁹ Seth L. Wolitz, "Imagining the Jew in France: from 1945 to the present." *Yale French Studies* 85 (1994): 119-134.

Memmi noted the elusive balance between acknowledging personally meaningful conceptions of group identity and realizing the fruits of cross-cultural engagement.⁷⁰ However, the sense of urgency that led him to plead for a move beyond the legacies of colonialism is present in these concerns that cultural exchange and the promotion of egalitarian values has reached a dangerous stalemate highlighted by the incompatibility of Islamic revivalism with his cherished universalist ideals.

By depicting the immigrant's challenges in his novels as well as discussing immigration directly, Memmi lends cohesiveness to a construction of postcolonial immigrants as a distinct community with certain common shared experiences – though he disparages the long-term viability of that identity. Of course this does not mean immigrants themselves form a cohesive unit. The perception that immigrants are an amorphous grouping of peoples whose identity as immigrants supersedes other characteristics is a common trope of anti-immigrant groups and governments seeking to deal with problems rather than people – the sort of false construction that raised Memmi’s concern regarding hybrid identities. On the other hand, as Paul Silverstein argues, though this label is often imposed through the prejudiced eyes of “natives” or clumsy state approaches to legal issues, addressing immigrants as a distinct group within various states does help reveal the artificiality of state boundaries.⁷¹ These lines are constantly blurring, problematizing the politics and sociology of integration and assimilation.

⁷⁰ Memmi, *Liberation*, 51-2. Memmi, *Decolonization*, 86.

⁷¹ Paul Silverstein, *Algeria in France: Transpolitics, Race, and Nation* (Indiana University Press, 2004, 10-18.

In a recent article for the *Journal of French and Francophone Philosophy* Robert Bernasconi argues that “Memmi’s analysis in *The Colonizer and the Colonized* transcends the colonial situation of the 1950s.”⁷² Like Memmi, Bernasconi characterized assimilation as an impossible ideal, at least in a single generation, quoting *Liberation of the Jew*:

To propose assimilation globally to a group is, in the final analysis, absurd. As the philosophers would say, it contradicts its own essence. In order to assimilate, a group must consent, if only confusedly. Now it is clear that a group, inasmuch as it is a group, cannot assimilate. It cannot want to go against its own existence, for then it would be rejecting itself.⁷³

In France, restrictions on foreign workers and postcolonial immigrants have been altered numerous times since decolonization, reflecting the French government’s uncertainty as to its relationship with the former colonies as well as the influence of economic interests comparable to Arab states reasons for controlling Palestinian immigration. Shifting conditions as well as generational conflicts between first and second generation immigrants divide families and communities. And there is no simple formula to understand this process, the assumption of a more secular tendency among youth is challenged by second generation *beurs* in France who embrace Islamic doctrine and practice as an assertion of the cultural identity their parents often suppressed.

Rather than reject tradition, these children of immigrants embrace traditional religious and cultural practices in opposition to cautious elders seeking acceptance and security. In the 1980s, organizers of the *beur* movement emphasized their youth and the difference between their collective action and their parents cautious self-preservation of

⁷² Robert Bernasconi, “The Impossible Logic of Assimilation,” 40.

⁷³ Memmi, *Liberation*, 51-2.

their through activist organizations such as the Berber Cultural Association and Association of the New Immigrant Generation.⁷⁴ And these immigrants increasingly reject binary conceptions of identity. As Alex Hargreaves notes in respect to Maghrebi writers such the Algerian rock singer and novelist Mounsi, postcolonial immigrants and their children are taking the initiative to define themselves beyond the constructions Memmi believed were possible for long-term security and cultural stability. Quoting Mounsi

I refuse to accept it when people try to label me as either purely French or purely Algerian. I was brought up in a hybrid world, impregnated with Kabyle influences and French culture. I stand for a cosmopolitan way of thinking, which is that of immigrants the world over.⁷⁵

Memmi's claim to interstitial perspective is based upon the idea that this position is occasionally useful but largely undesirable. His work illustrates a consistent skepticism towards conceptions of identity that lack concrete institutional supports and clear definition. As with defensive parochialism, Memmi dismissed such forms of identity as provocative but vague counterproductive, provoking instability without constructing a basis for future rapprochement.

Conclusions

That a hybridity resembling Memmi's own interstitial identity appears elusive and fragile to Memmi is consistent with his depictions of failed assimilation and emphasis on the perils of rootlessness throughout his work. But, if immigrant identity is not a way forward, where does that leave immigrants in Memmi's analysis? Throughout his work

⁷⁴ Silverstein, *Algeria in France*, 164.

⁷⁵ Alec Hargreaves, "Writers of Maghrebi Immigrant Origin" in *Post-Colonial Cultures in France* (New York, Routledge, 1997) 229.

on colonialism and the Jewish condition Memmi's teleology of nationalist self-assertion as a stage between oppression and integration included manifestations of revolutionary violence. In Memmi's view revolutionary change was the inevitable final option for the colonized, and Memmi observed in 2002 that "the poor revolt instinctively."⁷⁶ However the narrative of failed assimilation and the disillusionment which Memmi depicted in *Pillar of Salt* and described in *The Colonizer and the Colonized* left revolt as a final resort. Memmi feared the potential for a break to occur in Europe, an increasingly hostile confrontation between unaccepted but emboldened immigrants and increasingly insecure European authorities.

In *Decolonization* and other recent commentary, Memmi was somewhat kinder to immigrants than to post-independence African leaders, whom he accused of using the former colonized as scapegoats to prop up their regimes "there is little certainty that the capitalist West has an interest in impoverishing the Third World."⁷⁷ He has rarely been optimistic regarding the future of oppressed peoples, even when hopeful. But there appeared to be a new layer of despair in evidence, frustration with immigrants' inability to overcome their situation as well as with the West's ability to cope and willingness to do so: "This is something new in the history of Europe, it is not the first time it has played host to foreigners, but to assimilate them it must not only welcome them but have the capacity to absorb them. This time it is doubtful that it can, or even wants to." If Memmi is correct regarding European intransigence, he suggests a future in which the

⁷⁶ Memmi, "Interview with Salim Jay,"

⁷⁷ Memmi, *Decolonization*, 22-3. Memmi is generally unsympathetic to the idea that the West has an interest in the impoverishment of former colonies, see chapter 7.

immigrants are more likely to become the “colonized who revolts.” This is not a simple proposition. The more resolutely antagonistic the colonized become the more likely their methods will alienate allies among the colonizer and abroad.⁷⁸ And Memmi dismissed the potential for a viable immigrant identity, believing that ethnic or cultural differences limit the potential for collective action because “although they share a number of frustrations and demands, they reject the image of themselves they see in one another” i.e. a common situation is insufficient.⁷⁹

In the colony, violence or economic protest provided further opportunities for the colonial administration to divide the colonized and find sympathy for a message of order. If immigration is a “colonial legacy” as Memmi stated, anti-Western terrorism associated with Islamic fundamentalism is an antecedent to colonial violence. While Memmi has not addressed terrorism directly in his novels, in *Dependence* he spoke of fanaticism. After acknowledging the religious connotation that is typically associated with the term, Memmi explored fanaticism in a general sense, seeking to understand what fanatics defend and why. While two of his examples were religious, Saints Felicia and Perpetua and the story of Thomas More, Memmi used these figures as examples of especially unusual sacrifice and *cultural* fanaticism. He argued that each is willing to risk or accept death due to their belief in truth, their loyalty to a conception of the world that provides them meaning. For More, this was an expression of his humanism as much as his Catholicism, the insistence that the king is bound to the laws and customs of the kingdom rather than able to change them at a whim. In each case Memmi argued that their

⁷⁸ Memmi, “The Colonial Problem and the Left,” 52-71.

⁷⁹ Memmi, *Decolonization*, 116.

sacrifice was rooted in fear, that a relentless pursuit of truth reflects fear that the principles which give them meaning will be destroyed.

In *Decolonization*, Memmi was sharp and direct, if hyperbolic, regarding religious extremism. He referred to terrorism as a reaction to conditions, the 21st century iteration of internecine violence people have inflicted on one another throughout history. Spoiled by “its’ very progress, the West has become a fat glutton” and, neglectful of its responsibility to the larger world “it resembles a giant Club Med that discards excess food while surrounding villages go hungry.”⁸⁰ His metaphor may not be particularly constructive but the point is clear: with immigration as with colonialism politicians and frustrated citizens are quick to find external sources for problems that may then be placed comfortably outside our scope of responsibility, or attacked. Immigration and colonialism resemble each other in that that in an insistence on differences obscures the needs, and the fears, both partners in the relationship have in common. Connections between the French state and the larger community of relatively wealthy nations within the European Union, versus poorer countries undergoing financial hardship, show that it is not only the former colonized whose identity is expanding but also definitions of Europe and the West.⁸¹

Memmi’s association of Islamic fundamentalism and immigrant assertions of Muslim tradition with the failings of Jewish “sanctuary values” emphasizes a discontinuity between a liberating nationalism and defensive parochialism. Hence Memmi envisioned a rapprochement between postcolonial and French nationalism based

⁸⁰ Memmi, *Decolonization*, 129.

⁸¹ Silverstein, *Algeria in France*, 16.

on mutual respect, exchange, and competition. It is a perspective that insists upon a problematic distinction between “positive” nationalism and “negative” traditionalism. However, applied back to the French, Memmi’s distinction also implies that a positive nationalism for the French requires a utilitarian compromise between multiculturalism and a French version of “encystment.” Toward both the French and postcolonial immigrants, Memmi’s reiterated his concern that unstable or insecure self-perceptions impede cultural development and fruitful comingling, placing him at odds with those who claim that hybridity provides a meaningful and fruitful basis for cultural identity.

Chapter 7

Portraits of the Decolonized?

While issues related to immigration and integration have featured in Memmi's more recent work, he also explored the results of decolonization with a critical eye towards the accomplishments of postcolonial states. The majority of Memmi's literary career followed the establishment of independent states in the Maghreb, the realization of the national movements Memmi advocated as an initial step in the more expansive work of liberation. In *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, Memmi concluded that revolt was inevitable since colonialism is self-destructive, the revolt of the colonized and the response of the colonizer would tend towards extremism and violence, and independence was only the first step in decolonization.

Throughout his career, Memmi has been pessimistic regarding the peaceful resolution of situations that might be deemed colonial, for example predicting the American Civil Rights movement would turn towards large scale violence in the face of greater white intransigence.¹ Praise for *The Colonizer and the Colonized* has focused on Memmi's dissection of the colonial situation, but also his concerns regarding legacies of revolutionary violence and the, albeit necessary according to Memmi, risks of nationalism.²

¹ "The Paths of Revolt" introduction to the French edition of James Baldwin's *The Negro Protest* (Paris: Editions Maespero, 1965).

² For example the title of a 1993 edited volume Edmond Jouve, ed. *Albert Memmi: Prophète de la Décolonisation* Papers presented at a conference organized by Académie diplomatique internationale, held in Paris. Paris: SEPEG International, 1993.

Since moving to France, Memmi addressed decolonization and the postcolonial in the context of his publications on Jewish identity, the sociology of dependence, and racism. However his most comprehensive intervention appeared in *Decolonization and the Decolonized*, an evaluation of the postcolonial world including postcolonial states, their relationship with the West, the responsibility of intellectuals and postcolonial immigrants in Europe. Perceived by many as a fateful departure from his previous work, *Decolonization* is highly critical, particularly toward Arab states.³

One French reviewer, arguing that the 2006 English translation distorts and obscures Memmi's terminology, referred to this as "deeply a Memmi book."⁴ However, while Memmi claimed to present portraits of "the ex-colonized, who has remained in his country and become a new citizen of an independent state" as well as immigrants and their children, *Decolonization* contains no assessment of choices and nor attempts to construct a broader systematic framework in the vein of *The Colonizer and the Colonized*.⁵

Here I evaluate Memmi's critiques of the postcolonial state and the "ex-colonized" as relates to questions of continuity and change in Memmi's analysis of colonialism and colonial legacies. I also consider other situations where Memmi identified or entertained the possibility of a colonial situation such as commentary on the African-American context, including his relationship with James Baldwin.

³ Lisa Lieberman, "Albert Memmi's About Face," 160.

⁴ Françoise Vergès, "Decolonization and the Decolonized (review)" *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History* 8, no. 3 (2008).

⁵ Memmi, *Decolonization*, xii.

Decolonization elicited accusations that Memmi had abandoned his interstitial position and accepted the colonizer's perspective. However, I contend that Memmi's views are grounded in the logic and concerns of *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, *Liberation of the Jew* and other cases where Memmi emphasized the cultural assertion of the oppressed as a path to constructive agency, self-criticism, democracy, and ultimate rapprochement between liberated peoples. In short: what has Memmi said about colonialism and decolonization since 1957 and how does *Decolonization* relate to his body of work? In answering this question I assess the extent to which Memmi's later career represented an "about face," or realization of a "French" identity, arguing that there is greater continuity across his work than these characterizations indicate.

Beyond the Colonizer and the Colonized

As noted previously, Memmi approached nationalism with hesitation. *The Colonizer and the Colonized* featured a colonial milieu in which a European national state was idealized but political actions were discouraged and the colonized defined as opponents of the state. Retrospectively, Memmi observed that "as a result of colonization, the colonized almost never experiences nationality and citizenship, except privately."⁶ Studies of constructed nationalism have been a compelling way for historians to trace to roots of 21st century conflicts and theorize less polarizing conceptions of difference without dismissing cultural identity – i.e. Rogers Brubaker's "ethnicity without groups" – there is something in this scholarship reminiscent of Memmi's critique of the French leftist objections to colonial nationalism. Both accept that nationalism can be

⁶Albert Memmi, *Colonizer and Colonized*, 96.

simultaneously liberating and polarizing.⁷ As such, broader conceptions of national identity such as Pan-Africanism, Negritude, and Pan-Arabism played a role in independence struggles and postcolonial attempts to define supranational identities independent from Western narratives. Over the course of his career Memmi occasionally engaged these conceptions, though in *Decolonization* he scarcely mentioned developing theoretical interpretations of transnational identity.

As a cultural and intellectual movement, Negritude's origins lie in the Francophone world and it is one of several 20th century attempts – distinct from but not wholly unlike Black Power or Édouard Glissant's *antillanité* - to conceptualize black identity. Founded by Léopold Senghor, Aimé Césaire, Léon Damas, with antecedents in early 20th century literary circles such as the journal *La revue du Monde Noir*, these intellectuals and those who pursued comparable frameworks proposed broader conceptions of identity which engaged and encountered political and cultural barriers to reimagining identity.⁸ In his essay, "Negritude: A Humanism of the Twentieth Century," Senghor referred to Negritude as "the sum of the cultural values of the black world; that is, a certain active presence in the world, or better, in the universe."⁹ He spoke to a broad universalism: a black conceptual lens through which to contextualize Eurocentric

⁷ Rogers Brubaker, *Ethnicity without Groups* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004) Brubaker sought to reconcile the advantageous aspects of nationalism with its chauvinistic and dehumanizing tendencies.

⁸ Memmi's critique of Muammar Gaddafi illustrates these limitations via the accusation that Gaddafi employed unifying rhetoric to further his personal ambitions. For Memmi's commentary on the politics of Pan-Arabism. See: Chapter 5.

⁹ Léopold Sédar Senghor, "Negritude: a humanism of the 20th century" *Optima* 16 no.1 (1966),1-8.

narratives, as opposed to a humanism - derived from and grounded in Europe - which can include but never empower the non-European.

Though Memmi presented something similar regarding Jewish identity, he ventured no broader frameworks for a transition toward the universal humanist future he advocated. Rather than theorize an alternative universalism, he contended that more specific terms were necessary to articulate aspects of group identity and experience, in order to discourage the application of self-serving tropes – as in the mythical portrait of the colonized. For example, Memmi addressed *négritude* directly in a piece titled “*Négritude and Judéité*,” originally published in the journal *African Arts*, in which he expressed concerns that Senghor and other’s assertions of black commonality at the Dakar conference represented illusory false hope.¹⁰ He believed a sophisticated yet succinct and concrete approach to terminology could be useful for promoting understanding of *négritude* and thus broader identification with its aims.

Memmi found the term *négritude* to be problematic, like “Islam” and “Judaism,” nebulous and thus risking appropriation by racists who generalize a negative “mythical portrait.” Without more refined terms, he believed these groups would have great difficulty positing counter-narratives. Memmi argued for the division of “*négritude*” into three terms representing these concepts along the lines of his “*judaïsme*” “*judéité*,” and “*judaïcité*,” which he restated in this analysis.¹¹ He identified, and attempted to separate through his own terminology, three concepts contained within blackness or Jewishness: a sense of personal identity, a collection of shared cultural practices, and a collection of

¹⁰Albert Memmi, “The Negro and the Jew,” *African Arts* 1, No. 4 (Summer 1968), 26-29.

¹¹ For a full exploration of these terms see chapters 3 and 4.

people identified by these characteristics. He suggested “Negritude,” “Negricite,” “Negrisme,” but did not claim to be “imposing anything.”¹² To a degree, Memmi and Senghor’s comments work at cross-purposes. Rather than try to create an alternative discourse, Memmi’s conception is somewhat defensive in its specificity. Memmi did not engage Édouard Glissant or *antillanité* directly, however his conceptions of universalism differs, in theory, from the hegemonic universalism disdained by Glissant in his 1981 essay *Le discours antillais*.¹³

Memmi initially hesitated to apply the language of colonialism to other groups. His willingness to do so grew over the course of his career as he received responses from other Tunisians and as *The Colonizer and The Colonized* became more widely read and translated.¹⁴ His attempts elicited two distinct concerns. First, could Memmi’s colonial framework effectively express the condition of groups outside the European overseas colonial setting? Second, can Memmi’s work transcend the time period when it was written, the 1950s and 60s, and prove useful in more recent contexts? Both questions concern the differences between Memmi’s colonial origins and a postcolonial world with greater ability to communicate globally, a post-Cold War geopolitical situation, and new arguments for assimilation rooted in the language of globalism.

¹² Memmi, “The Negro and the Jew,” 27-8.

¹³ Édouard Glissant, *Le discours antillais* (Paris: Editions de Seuil, 1981)

¹⁴ Memmi, preface to 1965 edition of *colonizer and colonized*, in *Dominated Man*, 45 After hearing that the book had been translated into Farsi “Je veux parler au monde entier, pas hors de la « mégalomanie » mais est ce que les auteurs veulent faire, pas pour la célébrité mais connaître juste un est lecture” Salim Jay, “Entretiens avec Albert Memmi,” audio-recording, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, 1989.

Recent discussions of Memmi's work often concern this issue of adaptability. In her introduction to the 2004 English language edition of *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, Nobel Prize winning South African novelist and activist Nadine Gordimer questioned Memmi's claim that successful collaboration between the colonized and sympathetic settlers was virtually impossible and argued that Memmi undervalued the role of racism as a motivation for colonialism.¹⁵ Responding to Gordimer, Patrick Chabal countered that "regarding the colonizer who refuses, she is too quick to dismiss a significant aspect of Memmi's work in an attempt to apply the book in detail to the South Africa of the 1980s." Interestingly, Chabal believed that today's readers will see numerous applications to present day situations but that "unlike Fanon, Memmi never sought to either generalize or proselytize."¹⁶ This is in keeping with Memmi's self-characterization as an interstitial witness, but that such witnessing is not in some way evangelical is specific at best and disingenuous at worst.

While I concur that Memmi's stated goals have been to reveal and display conditions rather than argue a course of action, except to urge that people accept rather than attempt to eliminate difference, Memmi's willingness to work beyond 1950s Tunisia is evidenced by his reflections on his early work and his analysis of other oppressed peoples.¹⁷ On several occasions, Memmi did attempt to apply the language of *Colonizer*

¹⁵ Nadine Gordimer, introduction to Albert Memmi *The Colonizer and the Colonized* (London: Earthscan, 2003).

¹⁶ Patrick Chabal, "Review of Albert Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, (2003)" *Development in Practice* 14, no. 5 (August 2004), 716-717.

¹⁷ See: The conclusions of *Dependence, Liberation*, and (albeit much less optimistically at this point) *Decolonization*.

and Colonized to situations and milieus beyond colonial Africa, most significantly in regards to Jewish identity but also the state of African-American civil rights.

Towards an African-American Revolution

Memmi addressed American race relations in several articles as well as a number of introductions to French editions of books, particularly those of James Baldwin after the two became friends following Memmi's travels in the United States during the 1960s, and in these pieces Memmi suggested a few significant comparisons between the choices faced by African-American activists and those of the colonized.¹⁸ In an essay titled "Un révolté totale" – an introduction to the 1963 French edition of James Baldwin's *The Fire Next Time* – Memmi considered whether African-Americans were colonized and countered some real concerns of contemporary postcolonial authors. First was the impression that American complaints have a bourgeois tone generally.¹⁹ At a time when Europe was still slowly recovering from the devastation of the Second World War, comparing condition in the United States to those of the European, much less the African, poor appeared difficult at best. Evaluating Baldwin's work, as well as the story of Richard Wright's *Black Boy*,²⁰ Memmi anticipated this disbelief "it will be said that Baldwin is overstating things. Seriously, how can the Black American, citizen of a rich and free country, have so much to complain about?"²¹

¹⁸ See: Guy Dugas, *Albert Memmi*, 27 and a mention of their friendship and Baldwin's popularity abroad in "James Baldwin," *Contemporary Black Biography*, Volume 37, Gale, 2003.

¹⁹ Albert Memmi, "Un Révolte Totale," Introduction to James Baldwin *Le Feu Prochain* (Paris: Gallimard, 1963) in *Dominated Man* (Boston: Beacon Press: 1968), 7.

²⁰ Wright's story illustrates the reality of Northern racism, dispelling the myth that the key to avoiding racism in American is escaping the South

²¹ Memmi, "Un Révolte Totale," 19.

Having presented these challenges to the narrative of African-American oppression, Memmi countered both. First, he briefly dismissed Garibaldi's concern that a state of legal bondage did not exist, noting the extent of legal and de facto restrictions on African-Americans at the local level as well as the history of social restrictions placed upon women. Memmi responded in greater detail to the notion that African-American oppression is significantly less than that of Africans due to American affluence. This was exactly the sort of complaint Memmi warily anticipated when contemplating the application his colonial frameworks beyond their original context. He feared that his attempt to understand oppression globally would be perceived as a comparison between degrees of oppression.²² However in the case of African-Americans he was far more direct, quoting Baldwin, "the black American is oppressed by the whole of American society."²³ Addressing the issue of American affluence, Memmi saw a valid issue but one that could be overemphasized, playing into the hands of oppression,

Black Americans are, paradoxically, down-trodden rich Americans; many African blacks who have now achieved independence would be glad to have their standard of living, but the fact remains that the black American takes a dramatic view of his situation. At all events we must beware of making the mistake so common to the bourgeois and Marxists alike of laying too much stress on the material aspect. Oppression is like an octopus: it is hard to tell which of its arms has the tightest stranglehold²⁴

²² With a French-Canadian audience, Memmi hesitated but expounded on the notion of relative affluence, relating the Canadian divide to attempts to force the assimilation of large groups into a culture with opposing religious and linguistic traditions (along the lines of Jews in European countries) Albert Memmi, "Are the French Canadian Colonized?" 74-83.

²³ James Baldwin, *The Negro Protest* (Paris: editions Maspero, 1965).

²⁴ Memmi, "un Révolte Totale," 21 this is also a specific example of Memmi critiquing Marxist materialism not only for ignoring non-material motivations but for underestimating the extent of oppression due to an overemphasis on material conditions.

Memmi elaborated by combining Baldwin's assertion with his own understanding of American society and the language of *Colonizer and Colonized*. In his most effective rebuke to those who would downplay the condition of African-Americans, Memmi refused to make excuses for American material conditions: "You need a lot of imagination to put yourself in someone's place; and it is astonishing how much we can find bearable for others." He contended that American society not only inhibits African-Americans legally and socially but teaches that discarding African-American identity in favor of white culture is the only escape. Memmi claimed that African-Americans, like the colonized, were encouraged to pursue impossible goals.²⁵

In another assessment of the African-American condition, his introduction to the French edition of *The Negro Protest*, Memmi considered the different paths represented by three African-American leaders, Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X, and James Baldwin, based on speeches each gave for a May, 1963 television special aired in Boston. In these three men, Memmi saw the embodiment of the options available to African-Americans. For Memmi, King represented an older generation of reformers who sought gradual gains rather than revolutionary change, represented by Malcolm. Malcolm X was revolutionary - "the embodiment of this institution, on the verge of despair." - accepting the necessity of violence. Finally Baldwin represented the intellectual position of compromise and mutual engagement.²⁶

²⁵ Memmi, "un Révolte Totale," 21.

²⁶ Memmi, "The Paths of Revolt" introduction to the French edition of *The Negro Protest*, 1965, reprinted in *Dominated Man*.

Memmi believed the direction of Civil Rights would turn towards Malcolm X and a militant approach. He suggested that Black Power resembled an anti-colonial identity, concluding with the prediction that recent developments portended a violent revolutionary struggle within the United States.²⁷ While he admired Baldwin, he suspected the violence Malcolm represented would be embraced by a younger generation that would prove more energetic and unable to compromise. In Memmi's estimation the United States was moving towards greater racial tension despite the legal attainments of Civil Rights.

In fact, the movement did turn in the direction of Malcolm X, using the language of Black Power. Groups arose, such as the Black Panthers and the US Organization led by Maulana Karenga, which espoused cultural independence, active self-defense, and revolutionary social/political change and these activists were familiar with the literature and intellectual language of the anti-colonial struggle. And both American and African groups were in dialog with their counterparts as evidenced by the travel not only of key figures such as Marcus Garvey, Malcolm X and Kwame Nkrumah but also organizational leaders of the Black Panther Party and other Black Power groups to nations in post-independence Africa.²⁸ Memmi's prediction of violent revolutionary activity was partially

²⁷ Memmi, "Paths of Revolt," 13-15.

²⁸ Malcolm X himself was certainly familiar with and sympathetic to Fanon's views on the necessity of violence which he referenced on several occasions in Ali A. Mazrui, *By Any Means Necessary: Cultural Forces in World Politics* (London: James Currey, 1990) 242, 270 and Garvey, who proclaimed himself "the first President of Africa," and the UNIA were well known to nationalist leaders in African colonies CLR James noted a particular influence in Kenya where Garvey's newspaper was copied by hand or memorized and passed by word of mouth. Ayodele J. Langley, *Pan-Africanism and Nationalism in West Africa 1900-1945: A Study in Ideology and Social Classes* (Oxford: Clarendon Press: 1973), 307.

realized in the riots in the late 1960s, 1970s, and early 1990s, but over the longer term racial violence has ebbed and flowed since the publication of Memmi's essay rather than gradually escalating. Memmi's assessment of the African-American condition in the United States provides a strong example of his willingness to apply the language and concerns of *Colonizer and the Colonized*, including an eventual rupture over issues of social equality and cultural agency.

Critique of the Postcolonial State

*"Rarely have I had so little desire to write a book...in writing Decolonization and the Decolonized I fear I have managed to annoy just about everyone"*²⁹

The first half of *Decolonization* is a report upon the state of the former colonies framed in Memmi's language. The concerns in *The Colonizer and the Colonized* reappear alongside criticisms resembling those he had previously associated with Israel – in particular the marginalization of internal minorities. However Memmi's judgment here is entirely negative. He believed the disconcerting nationalist bunker mentality so necessary to the revolutionary struggle had in fact become a mechanism for legitimizing autocracy through internal suppression and foreign policies built on chimeric threats.

Memmi published *Portrait du décolonisé: arabo-musulman et de quelques autres* in 2004 with the English translation, *Decolonization and the Decolonized* in 2006. French political and intellectual discourse gravitated towards various questions raised and reinvigorated by the September 11th attacks and the American invasion of Iraq in 2003, ranging far beyond the highly publicized relationship between France and the United States. Subsequent American actions and perceptions of European complicity provoked

²⁹ Memmi, *Decolonization*, ix-x.

immediate public criticism from a wide-range of intellectuals such as Derrida, the post-structuralist philosopher Jean Baudrillard, historian Tzvetan Todorov, and Jean-François Kahn - the veteran journalist later disgraced by a provocative dismissal of the sexual assault allegations against Dominique Strauss-Kahn. For these opponents the war and the War on Terror embodied such developments as American imperialism, Western acceptance of the “clash of civilizations,” or the superficiality of cultural arguments overlying economic conflicts and globalization.³⁰

This flurry of activity included a renewed international interest in French debates over Muslim immigration and religious expression, but extended to the international role of former colonial powers and the application of Western democratic ideals. The New Philosophers – identified by their leftist rejections of Marxism as totalitarian - and fellow critics of multiculturalism within France whose views on the Israel-Palestinian conflict and *laïcité* closely resemble Memmi’s were more divided over Western interventionism. Bernard-Henri Lévy opposed the Iraq war as a misdirected extension of the War on Terror which he did support and Pascal Bruckner wrote in favor of the invasion until shaken by the Abu Ghraib scandal, a “recourse to barbaric methods” by “the defenders of

³⁰ Kemp, Matthew A., "French intellectuals and the Iraq War" *Modern & Contemporary France* 17, no. 2 (2009), 199-210. See for example: Jacques Derrida and Lieven De Caeter, "For a justice to come: an interview with Jacques Derrida" trans. Maiwenn Furic, *The Brussels Tribunal* (2004) and the concern regarding American military interventionism in Jürgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida, "February 15, or what binds Europeans together: a plea for a common foreign policy, beginning in the core of Europe" *Constellations* 10, no. 3 (2003): 291-297. Tsvetan Todorov, "Le nouveau désordre mondial." *Divinatio* 15 (2002): 151-156, a critique of American imperialism and the title of Todorov’s 2003 book of the same name.

civilization” which also solidified Lévy’s position, while Andre Glucksmann was the most full-throated supporter of the war.³¹

Among these he included the Israeli-Palestinian struggle, which Memmi characterized as a “convenient conflict,” citing Algerian President Ben Bella’s declaration that “if he had the atomic bomb he would have launched it against Israel, which had become a kind of absolute evil.” He sympathized with the Palestinians themselves who “are dominated by the Israelis and the conflict will not go away as long as this situation prevails” - though Israel’s embrace of democracy differentiates that state from the postcolonial governments he condemns.³² More sympathetically, Memmi observed that the postcolonial “nation has come into existence at a time when the Western national ideal that served as a model has begun to weaken throughout the rest of the world.”³³

Memmi’s view of progress entailed an acceptance of difference with an emphasis on common humanity, the pursuit of an ideal wherein “the truth is, universalism is a wish, not a fact; a value, not an incontestable reality. Human society is not unified, but it moves

³¹ Kemp, “French intellectuals and the Iraq War,” 206. Pascal Bruckner, “Irak, l’effroyable gâchis: Après le scandale d’Abu Ghraib, la Maison-Blanche dans la tourmente” *La Figaro*, (11 May, 2004) and Pascal Bruckner, and Richard J. Golsan, “Interview with Pascal Bruckner.” *South Central Review* 22, no. 2 (2005): 11-19.

³² Memmi, *Decolonization*, 24, 28. For more on this subject, see Chapter 5.

³³ Memmi, *Decolonization*, 55. Several key texts articulated the constructed nature of nationalism were written between Algerian independence and the end of the Cold War. Ex. Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities*, Eric Hobsbawm’s, *The Invention of Tradition* and Earnest Gellner’s *Nations and Nationalism* were published in the early 1980s, while a treatment which included Africa in more detail was released two years before the publication of *Decolonization*., Robert Wiebe, *Who Are We? A History of Popular Nationalism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002)

toward unification, to which universalism can contribute.”³⁴ However, he placed responsibility for both the current situation at the start of the 21st century primarily upon the former colonized.

Regarding the war itself, Memmi was equally critical of the Hussain regime, Arab states for supposedly ignoring the regime’s excesses, and the ineffectiveness of international law, but also the Bush administration’s clumsy aggression in the wake of 9/11 and America’s history of cynical support for Hussain and the Afghani Taliban. However, regarding international relations, Memmi engaged broader questions of this period primarily in the context of postcolonial states and the Arab world.³⁵ Do Western states have the right to judge postcolonial regimes or the obligation to promote a universalist ideal grounded in individual rights and a secular democratic state? Memmi has consistently answered these questions in the affirmative, with a critical suspicion of cultural forms within which he identified parochial or anti-democratic ideas.

In *Decolonization*, Memmi reflected upon the history of the former colonies since independence. Feeling that sufficient time had passed, “it is finally possible to evaluate what has been lost and gained, and possibly draw certain conclusions about the future.”³⁶ Memmi’s general impressions, part of his motivation for the book, were that “fifty years later, nothing really seems to have changed, except for the worse” as the former colonies

³⁴ Memmi, *Racism*, 158. This also resembles the conclusion of Michael Omi and Howard Winant’s highly influential *Racial Formation in the United States*: “Despite exhortations both sincere and hypocritical, it is not possible to be “color-blind.” So today more than ever, opposing racism requires that we notice race, not ignore it, that we afford it the recognition it deserves and the subtlety it embodies.” Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States* 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 1994).

³⁵ Memmi, *Decolonization*, 46, 95.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, xi.

failed to coalesce into democratic states.³⁷ Linking this evaluation to his goals in *The Colonizer and the Colonized* and *Portrait of a Jew* he remained “convinced that the best way of correcting such failures is to make an accurate assessment of them.”³⁸ As such *Decolonization* was intended as another example of the harsh but ultimately revealing and innovative criticism which drove his early work.

The first half of *Decolonization* - and much of the concluding material - concerns the governments of former colonies and the legacies of colonialism. Memmi spoke with an understandable emphasis upon Francophone Africa as well as a specific animosity towards Muammar Gaddafi and framed the central question post-independence as a translation of immediate success into long term stability.³⁹ However, while society realigned as new leaders consolidated power, “the slogans of national unity have been extinguished, and the faces we see are the pale faces of egotism.”⁴⁰ Alliteration aside, Memmi’s concern derived from the continuities he observed between the mechanisms of colonialism and postcolonial autocracies.

Noting disparities between the material resources of many former colonies – i.e. as Nigerian oil - and the inability or refusal for new governments to distribute wealth fairly, Memmi blamed paranoid and exploitative leaders indirectly abetted by peoples

³⁷ Ibid., x.

³⁸ Memmi, *Decolonization*, xiv.

³⁹ Who he had previously addressed via a series questions written for a 1973 forum with Gaddafi, initially published in European newspapers with the conclusion that “For purposes of such a dialog [a hypothetical conference between Arab and Jewish leaders] I, a Jew born among Arabs, am at your disposition.” This was republished as a chapter of Memmi’s 1975 edited volume *Jews and Arabs*. Albert Memmi, *Jews and Arabs*, 37. See: Chapter 5

⁴⁰ Memmi, *Decolonization*, 3.

pacified under colonialism: “the sheep are piteously fleeced and it’s amazing how much can be obtained from sheep who have already been shorn.”⁴¹ With the withdrawal of the colonial power, a strict dividing line used to identify “disloyal” Muslims disappeared – characterized by actions such as the FLN’s ban on alcohol consumption, enforce through individualized violence or attacks on French cafés and bars – ceased to exist.⁴² Memmi claimed that such divisions were replaced by nebulous definitions of loyalty manipulated to preserve state power, rather than a relaxation of revolutionary paranoia.

Charismatic autocrats like the “big men” of Sub-Saharan Africa personified this postcolonial dysfunction. Political Scientist Crawford Young recalled

attending political rallies by the Neo-Destour Party in Tunisia at the time of independence in 1956, at which President Habib Bourguiba spoke. The air was electric, the crowd’s adulation overpowering. Equally memorable was the universal esteem of the university student population...in an atmosphere free of the fear and intimidation that years later might influence public debate.⁴³

The exuberance of independence era activists eagerly anticipating the collapse of barriers to political expression gave way to material concerns and the fears of a fragile leadership unwilling to countenance reform movements if they might crystallize into political opposition.

According to Memmi, autocratic postcolonial regimes derived power not from the people but from elite institutions representing either conservative traditionalism - i.e.

⁴¹ Memmi, *Decolonization*, 10.

⁴² Including the bombing of a milk bar bustling with families, portrayed in a notable scene of Gillo Pontecorvo’s film *The Battle of Algiers*. The O.A.S. in Algeria employed similar repression to enforce the loyalty of the *pieds noir* such as fining families who took vacations abroad. Horne, *A Savage War of Peace*, 263.

⁴³ Young, *The African Colonial State in Comparative Perspective*, 239.

religious extremists - or the revolution itself via the military.⁴⁴ In each case Memmi characterized relationships between these institutions and the state as “a game of liars’ poker, a zero-sum game” in which the religious groups will always question the zeal of politicians and businessmen. And the military, forged in revolutionary opposition to state power, does not truly need the politicians and will depose them in various circumstances.⁴⁵ Thus Memmi, his evaluation based upon a narrative of progressive modernity, feared the postcolonial state had inherited the traditional cultural institutions of the colonized and the force of a successful armed rebellion, but not the political or intellectual leadership necessary to maintain unity and promote human rights.

In place of effective leadership and rule of law, Memmi observed the methods of colonialism reconstituted. To preserve inequality, colonial institutions had enforced subdivisions between groups of the colonized – for example the Crémieux Decree of 1870 extending French citizenship to Algerian Jews which Alistair Horne termed “a constantly open wound” for Muslims.⁴⁶ While he asserted that “the solidarity of the colonized is still alive among the decolonized,” Memmi believed unstable or corrupt regimes directed this energy – and suspicion – towards potential real or imagined internal and external threats via similar mechanisms.⁴⁷ Given control over, or at least responsibility for, the entire country, leaders were able and inclined to associate the

⁴⁴ In 1987, Adu Boahen, a historian and UNESCO official, referred to the armies inherited by postcolonial states as “the greatest millstones around the necks of African leaders.” Adu Boahen, *African Perspectives on Colonialism* (John Hopkins Press. 1987) 99.

⁴⁵ Memmi, *Decolonization*, 100.

⁴⁶ Horne, *Savage War of Peace*, 36.

⁴⁷ Memmi, *Decolonization*, 100-01. For specific examples in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict see: Chapter 5.

nation's problems with opposition to the regime, crippling the potential for democratic political develop and a culture enriched by the free exchange of ideas.

This is an especially apparent colonial legacy, the late 20th century contains numerous examples of retroactive violence and populations displaced due to their association with the former colonizer – a poignant Maghrebi example is the fate of the *harkis* who served in the French Army, as many as 150,000 of whom were killed following independence, while those who managed to immigrate occupy an uncertain position in France.⁴⁸ Referring to a continued pursuit of foreign enemies and domestic traitors, Memmi found a common thread between colonial and postcolonial manipulation of interstitial groups: “the presidents of the new republics generally mimic what is most arbitrary about the colonial power.”⁴⁹ Arbitrary, but either brutally effective in a similar preservation of power or equally suicidal, precipitating revolution upon revolution. However, Memmi was content to locate these divisions within the former colony – ancient disputes merged with revolutionary excess - rather than address the persistence or continued role of European narratives.

⁴⁸ In addition to scholarship on the *harkis* by historians of the Algerian War such as Alistair Horn, postcolonial scholars as Todd Shepard “Excluding the *Harkis* from Repatriate Status, Excluding Muslim Algerians from French Identity” in ed. Hafid Gafaïti, Patricia M.E. Lorcin, and David G. Troyansky, *Transnational Spaces and Identities in the Francophone World* (Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 2009), and numerous publications in French, a recently released book by a professor of comparative literature at SUNY addresses the Harki experience in France through personal observations and interviews with *harkis* and their children framed by a history of *harki* immigration, legal claims and public perception in France: Vincent Crapanzano, *The Harkis: The Wound that Never Heals* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2011). Featuring the Hmong minority of Vietnam Anne Fadman, *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down: A Hmong Child, Her American Doctors, and the Collision of Two Cultures* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1998) provides a compelling American example of a similarly marginalized group.

⁴⁹ Memmi, *Decolonization*, 60.

Legacies of Violence

Memmi's commentary on the revolutions concerned both the naiveté or self-serving biases of the French left and the impact of revolutionary violence on the shape of postcolonial societies.⁵⁰ Believing such violence was the culmination of an inherently destructive colonialism, Memmi, like Fanon, understood the utility and foresaw the corrosive effects of revolutionary strife.⁵¹ James Munro Bertram, activist and a pioneering scholar of Asian studies, remarked in the context of Maori anti-colonialism, that "the power to shock is surely one of the marks of an adult and living literature."⁵² In terms of both literature and armed struggle, the power to shock provides a certain agency and may redress an imbalance in resources or draw attention to conditions long ignored. Bertram's comment also resembles Isaac Yetiv's observation regarding Memmi's work that there is "a certain intellectual enjoyment in seeing oneself, armed with a sharp surgical lancet, slitting up the wounds of one's own people and of "others."⁵³ Violence can provide agency and a sense of brutal honesty which, in Yetiv's view, Memmi appreciated well enough to understand its allure both in terms of the physical manifestation of power or resistance and the efficacy of a critical assault upon parochial ideals.

⁵⁰ For my discussion of the former, see: chapter 2.

⁵¹ Memmi, *Colonizer and Colonized*, 133-36. The question of violence in Fanon's thought inspired the title of Marie Perinbam's intellectual biography *Holy Violence: The Revolutionary Thought of Frantz Fanon* (Washington, D.C.: Three Continents Press, 1982).

⁵² James Bertram, "On Violence in New Zealand Literature" (1971), quoted by Otto Heim in *Writing along Broken Lines: Violence and Ethnicity in Contemporary Maori Fiction* (Auckland, Australia: Auckland University Press, 1988), 11.

⁵³ Yetiv, *Le Thème de l'aliénation dans le roman maghrébin*. 154.

However, as he had feared, post-revolutionary violence stalled transitions to constructive development. The residue of colonialism and violent struggle – a repressed, militarized, and paranoid society - contrasted dramatically with the revolutionary dreams and so “one of the greatest disappointments of the decolonized individual was his belief in an end to violence.” Identifying this as a failure of the revolutionary generation to effect a transition and implement the ideals they had used to justify revolutionary violence, Memmi noted that “the faces were just about the same, the executioners the same.”⁵⁴ Torture and summary violence, justified during the revolutions by the fragility of nascent movements and powerful counterinsurgencies, became tools of new regimes in whom the fears of insurrectionists merged with the concerns of paranoid autocrats waging perpetual wars against newly conceived, or reconceived, enemies.⁵⁵

Memmi judged the actions of these postcolonial regimes, but presented no clear explanation for this continued violence other than pursuit of power, nor did he articulate that impulse with particular nuance. His critique assumes a teleology of modernity in which traditional forms ought to be replaced with a move towards universalism and representative government – be it a clearly Western capitalistic form or some species of socialism. His references to mass rape and the use of child soldiers Sub-Saharan Africa and the abduction of Algerian children born to mixed couples are presented as postcolonial failures with the implication that these reflect a return to traditional local

⁵⁴ Memmi, *Decolonization*, 49.

⁵⁵ During the Algerian War when French intelligence succeeded in using a large number of informants to infiltrate FLN cells leading to the capture of numerous rebel leaders including those killed or captured during the Battle of Algiers. Horne, *A Savage War of Peace*, 183-207.

conflicts.⁵⁶ In addition to internal repression, he noted the frequency of warfare between postcolonial states, particularly the settling of revolutionary quarrels writ large – for example between the North African states that showed varying degrees of solidarity with the Algerian revolutionaries over power struggles such as the real or perceived ambition of Nasser in Egypt or Gaddafi in Libya.⁵⁷

In keeping with his claim to be a contrary member of the left, Memmi questioned the accuracy and efficacy of those he deemed apologists for repressive postcolonial states. He alleged that “embarrassed historians among the formerly colonized” and “certain sympathetic outsiders have not failed to look for explanations. They claim this is simply a bad habit inherited from the colonial period, an additional wound.”⁵⁸ There is no direct reference in *Decolonization* to either the New Philosophers he resembles nor to the Marxists and postcolonial scholars who would seem to fit his definition of “embarrassed historians” and “sympathetic outsiders.” What frustrated Memmi in *Decolonization* was a perceived inability or lack of will to challenge this institutionalization in the *absence* of the colonizer and lamented that too often left intellectuals attempt “to relieve our sense of guilt any way we can” and excuse violence which has “not only endured but gotten

⁵⁶ Memmi, *Decolonization*, 52.

⁵⁷As the Algerian war dragged on disunity in the North African world became very apparent, most notably the ambition of Nasser in Egypt to be or at least be seen as the representative of Pan-Arabism. Among other things Nasser’s interests often conflicted with those of the FLN and the provisional government which choose Tunis rather than Cairo for its headquarters. Horne, *A Savage War of Peace*, 316.

⁵⁸ Memmi, *Decolonization*, 52-3.

worse.”⁵⁹ Again, this narrative of the postcolonial appears to dismiss pre-revolutionary and postcolonial European influence.

At issue for Memmi was the new order and the legacy of the colonizer’s *withdrawal*. Colonial institutions included an established legal system, economic regulations and so forth, along with varying numbers – depending upon the proportion and location of settlers – of local officials.⁶⁰ Memmi argued that colonial legal structures were replaced primarily by the interests of dictators whose attempts to preserve their own power discouraged the establishment of any institutions that might threaten it, such as a free press or an independent judiciary, “that could serve as buffers between himself and the decolonized, who, in the event of litigation, are forced to turn directly to him, the only effective judge.”⁶¹ He then linked this accusation to the growth and influence of religious violence.

Memmi classified the terrorism practiced by Al-Qaeda and other Islamic fundamentalist groups as part of this revolutionary legacy – poorly checked by civil society or political leadership. In *Dependence*, Memmi remarked that martyrs are rare, their choices lionized for good reason: “they accomplish something most people would not do even if they believe that they should.”⁶² Despite a general lack of sympathy for Islamic fundamentalists and the tactics of terrorism in the postcolonial context, he soberly

⁵⁹ Memmi, *Decolonization*, 52-3.

⁶⁰ The primary French example being the *évolués*, favored products of colonial education. Not coincidentally more subjects reached this stage of “progress” towards assimilation in colonies more reliant on local intermediaries. Conklin discusses the role of *évolués* in French West Africa throughout *A Mission to Civilize*.

⁶¹ Memmi, *Decolonization*, 59.

⁶² Memmi, *Dependence*, 203.

noted that most martyrs are heroes in some quarters. However, compared to the revolutionary violence of decolonization, Memmi found terrorism unsympathetic and finally ineffective due to an absence of concrete goals, lamenting that “all of this would be exacerbated if the terrorist actions of the Arab world were effective. But through its attacks, including in recalcitrant or hesitant Arab countries, terrorism has triggered total war without possessing the means to win it.”⁶³ As such, he broadly construed “fundamentalist terrorism” as directionless violence creating a cycle of hostility towards the Islamic world which perpetuates its sufferings.

Not only within *Decolonization* but in several articles and interviews during the years preceded and following its publication, Memmi characterized the Arab or Islamic world as either in a state of crippling anti-modernism or essentially incompatible with “Western values.”⁶⁴ In a 2008 interview, Memmi alluded to an article in *Dominated Man* entitled “return of the pendulum” in which he presented the vengeance of liberated domestic servants – referencing Harold Pinter and Joseph Losey’s film *The Servant* – as a metaphor for the violence of oppression mirrored in post-revolutionary reaction.⁶⁵ His use of the phrase in this interview was more direct:

As long as the memory of colonization and its after-effects, and the socio-historical decline of the Arab/Muslim world, have not faded, the pendulum risks swinging as far as possible to one side; hence the attractions of past glories, of nationalism, the efforts to recover power in the process of which violence and terrorism appear as the most efficacious tools – instead of latching on bravely to

⁶³ Memmi, *Decolonization*, 66.

⁶⁴ See: Christian Makarian, “Les Arabes ne peuvent qu'accepter les valeurs de l'Occident: Entretien avec Albert Memmi” *L'Express* (14 June 2004); Albert Memmi, “Intégrismes et laïcité” in *Le Monde Diplomatique* (March 1989).

⁶⁵ Memmi, “The Return of the Pendulum.” In *Dominated Man*, 165-81.

democratization and the adoption of contemporary knowledge.⁶⁶

Such statements exemplify the polemics and oversimplifications endemic in *Decolonization*. These arguments appear to recreate in regards to Arabs and Islam some of the same issues Memmi confronted when proposing the terms Judaïté, Judaïsme, Judéité and, as a Canadian reviewer notes, presents an essential view of The West that privileges democratic universalist tradition while largely ignoring capitalism.⁶⁷ In this frame, terrorism appears as a vestigial legacy of decolonization, the wrong weapon for the present struggle – the ultimate recourse of fundamentalist “encystment” – withdrawn from rather than part of highly interwoven political, cultural, and economic relations.

The Responsibility of Postcolonial Intellectuals

Insisting that French intellectuals possessed a responsibility to the public discharged by voicing their principles regardless of who violated them, Memmi admonished that “the left must reassert its universalism in word and deed.”⁶⁸ Memmi’s warning against the dangers of “unconditional solidarity” among the former colonized echoes a similar concern – albeit with the benefit of considerably longer hindsight. The inability of the French to understand or take a balanced view of violence and extremism was, in his estimation, tragically mirrored in the colonized intellectual’s failure speak out against the perpetuation of revolutionary zeal in the service of paranoid autocrats.

⁶⁶ Dov Maimon, "Interview M Albert Memmi," (May 2008).

⁶⁷ See: Joseph Galbo, “Review Essay: Albert Memmi. Decolonization and the Decolonized.” *Canadian Journal of Sociology Online*, (March-April 2007).

⁶⁸ Memmi, “The Colonial Problem and the Left,” in *Dominated Man*, 69.

Of course, Memmi himself immigrated following independence, moving to the Parisian apartment which has since been his only permanent residence. This renders his commentary on postcolonial intellectuals – particularly the insistence that they could have done more – awkward in the absence of strong evidence and greater specificity. But Memmi’s departure marked an early realization of his concerns regarding postcolonial states. Rather than free the voices of intellectuals as Memmi had hoped, he recalled that postcolonial leaders possessed the incentive and the power to curtail public discourse. He claimed that it was “harder to be a writer in the post-colonial period than during colonization, straying from the party line is seen as a betrayal, examination of the society is regarded with suspicion.”⁶⁹ In a subplot within Memmi’s 1969 novel *The Scorpion*, a quandary faced by Marcel, the primary narrator, exemplifies the collateral damage inflicted by societal transition.⁷⁰

Marcel, an optometrist, chose between accepting the removal of Niel, a highly skilled French colleague, from a hospital administrative position or protesting and risking the ire of the new government.⁷¹ While the initial impression was that Niel had been fired due to the general removal of French professionals from significant positions following independence, Marcel began to see a deeper issue, “a particular sort of effectiveness that

⁶⁹ Memmi, *Decolonization*, 36. Memmi provides no specific examples speaking only of postcolonial governments in general terms.

⁷⁰ Marcel’s decision to become an optometrist was inspired by his father’s eye condition, his criticism of his prodigal brother is tinged with envy. Memmi himself underwent cataract surgery in 1997 Robequain, “Jalons Bio-Biographiques,” 231. For more on theme’s in Memmi’s work regarding the theme of blindness, vision, as well as his interest in using color and non-standard text to convey perspective see: Lia Brozgal, “Blindness, the Visual, and Ekphrastic Impulses: Albert Memmi Colours in the Lines” in *French Studies* (2010) 64 (3): 317-328.

⁷¹ Memmi, *Scorpion*, 65.

got in too many people's way. He took care of every kind of family in every class of society and every community in the country. He knows too many secrets and he knows about too many tragic situations, too much poverty."⁷² His knowledge of the problems which the new regime cannot fix, combined with his French origins, causes Neil to lose his job. While Memmi's claims in *Decolonization* that postcolonial regimes "promote distractions" and possesses "a natural tendency to exaggerate one's pains and attribute them to another" are polemical and lack depth, Marcel's quandary represents a vivid and more complex depiction of such issues.⁷³

Memmi condemned African autocrats for self-serving or schizophrenic policies, but with a qualified insistence that the former colonized must at some point take matters into their own hands. Though acknowledging the difficult realities of postcolonial public life, he considered intellectual leadership a necessary component to progress. In *A Dying Colonialism*, Fanon counseled that intellectuals would be essential to the creation of a national culture in order to facilitate the new states' progress beyond revolutionary imperatives. Memmi's retrospective evaluation of the result was stark: "Third-World intellectuals have also failed their societies." In *Decolonization*, Memmi accused intellectuals in the former colonies of failing to speak as urgently as in their own country as they had, in spite of equal or greater risk, against the colonizer and thus abandoning "their specific function, which is to fairly evaluate society's needs, the necessary first step to positive change."⁷⁴ He evoked more specific incidents as anecdotal evidence

⁷² Memmi, *Scorpion*, 88.

⁷³ Memmi, *Decolonization*, 19.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 30.

There was not much to be heard of from black writers, or intellectuals for that matter, during the genocides in Biafra, Uganda, and the Sudan. Nor did we hear much from Maghrebi intellectuals during the absurd, bloody conflicts between neighboring countries or during the liquidation of minorities. The massacres of the Kurds by the Iraqis also failed to impress Iraqi writers and intellectuals, even those in exile.⁷⁵

As at least one reviewer has noted, Memmi selectively ignored a host of intellectuals and politicians – such as Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana and Salvador Allende of Chile – who publically addressed conditions in their countries as well as Western influence, but were also swept up in political violence.⁷⁶ Nor did he acknowledge the very intellectuals – such as Senghor - whose work he engaged over the course of his career. In Memmi’s *Decolonization*, such contributions are overshadowed by the failure of these intellectuals – both in the former colony and abroad – to hold new governments accountable, and “the most common excuse was that of solidarity.”⁷⁷ Though this judgment warrants much of the criticism *Decolonization* has received, it is also in keeping with Memmi’s initial concerns regarding anti-colonial nationalism, his belief in the significance of intellectuals, and a pessimism that appears as often as his belief in the pursuit of universalism.

Asked to comment on the Arab Spring revolutions in a 2011 questionnaire from the online journal *Sephardic Horizons*, Memmi replied that

As for the Jasmine Revolution, there is a lot of delirium in it. What is very positive is that the Muslim Arab intellectuals can now express themselves, but the basic problem remains intact: corruption, tyranny, and above all the impossibility

⁷⁵ Memmi, *Decolonization*, 38.

⁷⁶ Salessi. “The Postcolonial World and the Recourse to Myth,” 930.

⁷⁷ Memmi, *Decolonization*, 30.

up to now of separating religion from politics. As long as the Muslim Arab world has not made this separation, I am afraid that things will not change very deeply.⁷⁸ He was silent regarding the role of the West – or non-Western powers for that matter. This raises the question of how Memmi *did* characterize the relationship between former colonizers and colonized. And therein lie further examples of how Memmi's universalism may contain either a limited appreciation of transnational interactions or, as harsher critics have suggested, a postcolonial recasting of the colonizer's perspective.

Conclusions – Questioning Neo-Colonialism and Hybridity

Decolonization, along with Memmi's other discussions of immigrations and contemporary issues related to the postcolonial world included here, illustrate Memmi's insistence that liberation requires the establishment or reestablishment of representative cultural and political institutions. Dismissing the validity of immigrant identity as a viable substitute for a more conventional nationalistic form of self-assertion, Memmi rejected such conceptions as ephemeral, a poor basis from which to confront heterophobia and establish democratic institutions. He also characterized attempts to renegotiate French identity as futile attempts to revive assimilationist hopes at best and efforts to impose the parochial dictates of defensive traditionalism at worst. While this leads Memmi to resemble an integrationist who despairs on integration, his predictions regarding the future of societies attempting to reconcile a previously dominant culture with an assertive minority seeking agency have been consistently pessimistic. In turn, Memmi also questioned claims of neo-colonialism as disingenuous characterizations of common interactions between states and cultures employed by postcolonial autocrats, fundamentalist demagogues, and their apologists.

⁷⁸ Albert Memmi, "Responses to 2011 Questionnaire" *Sephardic Horizons* v.1 (3) Spring 2011.

The desirable relationship between postcolonial states and the West has been a matter of great political and intellectual contention. For example, Senghor supported the former colonies' development within the context of an international Francophone community while Fanon argued for a more complete separation. Senghor understood that breaking institutional and cultural connections to France destabilize the former colonies and risk losing significant economic support.⁷⁹ Fanon did not deny this, but believed that colonialism exists beyond the political construction of the colony, and that any connection to the former colonizer provided opportunities for exploitation by business interests and the French government.⁸⁰

Memmi's own views resemble a combination of these positions. In *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, Memmi rejected any future for the colonies within a reformed France. At the same time, the colonial experience was far too recent to be ignored economically and especially culturally. Memmi believed postcolonial states must achieve stability and egalitarian democracy through their own efforts in order that oppressed peoples might fully reenter history and "become a man like any other" despite "the ups and downs of all men" as he stated in the concluding sentence of *The Colonizer and the Colonized*.⁸¹

Memmi's characterization of the colonial relationship as mutually transformative implied his acknowledgment that colonialism would persist through institutional and

⁷⁹ Claude Roynette, "À propos de négritude: Senghor et Fanon" in *Vie sociale et traitements* 87, (2005), 70-72

⁸⁰ See: Fanon, *Towards an African Revolution*, especially 120-26.

⁸¹ Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, 153. Later, Memmi's concluded in *Liberation of the Jew* that the state of Israel, whatever its faults, was the necessary condition for the independent development of Jewish culture and the alleviation of the Jew condition beyond its borders. See: Chapter 4

historical memory. But in Memmi's estimation these are residues of colonialism as opposed to its continuation or refashioning. Rather than examine a continuing conflict between these interconnected worlds, he characterized postcolonial European influence as an inheritance. For example, in much of Memmi's work educational institutions play a key role, and the influence of French *colonial* perspectives on citizenship and civilization linger, but Memmi is primarily concerned with direct administrative and pedagogical decisions.⁸²

Another example is the language question for Maghrebi authors, a subject Memmi addressed directly in a 1996 article for *Le Monde Diplomatique* - in which he referenced the French linguist Claude Truchot who elsewhere associated Memmi's fiction with that of Ben Jelloun and Assia Dejebar. And Memmi himself contributed to a broader appreciation of Francophone literature, editing and prefacing three edited volumes of Maghrebi literature in French during the 1960s and in 1985.⁸³ However, looking back in this piece, Memmi attributed the linguistic uncertainty of the postcolonial author to the inability of postcolonial states to resolve language questions internally and the absence of an independent literary that the "artist and citizen" must endeavor to construct. He

⁸² This emphasis is also a feature of postcolonial literature featuring immigrant experiences – for example See: Catherine Raissiguier, *Reinventing the Republic: Gender, Race, and Citizenship in France* (Stanford University Press, 2010) and Alice Conklin, *A Mission to Civilize*, respectively. Azouz Begag's autobiographical novel *Shantytown Kid* and the wide-range of anecdotes regarding institutional racism in Europe and the United States in Tahar Ben-Jelloun's *Racism Explained to my Daughter*. Azouz Begag, *Shantytown Kid* (Paris: Editions de Seuil, 1986). Tahar Ben Jelloun, *Racism Explained to My Daughter* (New York: The New Press, 1999).

⁸³ These are *Anthologie des écrivains, maghrébins d'expression française* (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1964), *Anthologie des écrivains française du Maghreb* (Présence Africaine, 1969) and *Ecrivains francophones du Maghreb: une anthologie*. (Paris: Seghers, Coll, 1985).

challenged postcolonial writers to contribute to “the collective affirmation of nation building” and themselves work to resolve these issues.⁸⁴

Postcolonial scholars tend to characterize these legacies not as vestigial inheritances but as perpetuated or reproduced forms imposed upon the former colonized and continually evolving along with the relationship. But neither in *Decolonization* nor elsewhere did Memmi address any particular theorist or aspect of postcolonial scholarship produced in recent decades. Work by Spivak, Bhabha, Chakrabarty, Robert Young, and others who have explored the role of hegemonic discourses and intellectual legacies of colonialism does not appear incongruous with Memmi’s warning that decolonization required a thorough decoupling from the broader legacies of colonialism.⁸⁵ Indeed, consideration of a concept like Spivak’s use of “strategic essentialism” to describe how marginalized groups set aside differences to forge collective identity within political movements seems ripe for consideration regardless of Memmi’s stance.⁸⁶

However, rather than addressing anything like Spivak’s concern regarding the eurocentrism of social science, Memmi’s engagement with neo-colonialism has primarily concerned economic and social questions more representative of contemporary political and popular discourse. He acknowledged the material and organizational hardships

⁸⁴ Albert Memmi, “Dans quelle langue écrire? La patrie littéraire du colonisé” in *Le Monde Diplomatique*, (September 1996), 12. 12. Claude Truchot, “La langue, c’est aussi de la politique” in *Le Monde Diplomatique*, (February 2008), 2.

⁸⁵ See: Young’s *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction*, Chakrabarty’s *Provincializing Europe*, Spivak’s *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, and Bhabha’s *The Location of Culture*.

⁸⁶ Spivak in “Feminism and Critical Theory” in *The Spivak Reader* (New York: Routledge, 1996 [1985]), 214.

resulting from colonial rule but proved quick to dismiss insistence on the effects of “neo-colonialism” as an overstated trope of the dictatorships to excuse their own plundering. Instead Memmi argued that “it is hard to assert the West has a vested interest in continually impoverishing the Third World as opposed to competing economically in general. This is not to excuse them and one might especially question their military spending and complicity with corrupt regimes.”⁸⁷ Even here, Memmi failed to consider anything like Kwame Nkrumah’s expression that “the principles which inform capitalism are in conflict with the socialist egalitarianism of the traditional African society” – though Nkrumah’s assertion is highly compatible with Memmi’s own language.⁸⁸

Memmi further contended that Western governments or corporations have as interest in promoting rather than discouraging the expansion of political rights and the development of postcolonial economies. And he claimed postcolonial governments act inconsistently in order to manipulate their populace while lacking the balancing influence of a functional civil society.⁸⁹ Arguing that autocrats hypocritically employed the former colonizer as a bogeyman, Memmi accused these leaders of encouraging the same policies they condemn as neo-imperialism, for example “the French soldiers who operate in the Ivory Coast did not invade the country,[sic] they were called in by the local government. Why didn’t they request assistance from another African country?”⁹⁰ He remarked that such autocrats readily choose “neo-imperialism” over reform.

⁸⁷ Memmi, *Decolonization*, 98-99.

⁸⁸ Kwame Nkrumah. *Consciencism*. (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1970 [1964]) 78-9.

⁸⁹ Memmi, *Decolonization*, 22-3.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 22.

His question: “Why do they continuously beg for aid from the former colonizer?” is relevant – if inflammatory. However he follows it with an equally terse statement – “Black Africa continues to solicit the intervention of foreign troops to control internal dissent” – lacking any subsequent evaluation.⁹¹ This is a broad accusation placing the guilt on either leaders, whom he already called opportunistic, or the intellectuals, the professional classes and even the people more generally. Rather than explore reasons beyond finding fault, or interrogating the former colonizer, Memmi placed open-ended blame upon the “ex-colonized.”

His concerns extended to the motivations behind Pan-Africanism and Pan-Arabism. In his questions for Muammar Qaddafi he implied that Gaddafi represented himself as the face of Pan-Africanism in order to bolster his own status.⁹² And in several essays collected in the volume *Jews and Arabs* - especially “The Arab Nation and the Israeli Thorn” - he argued that the primary catalyst for Arab unity was either the eventual destruction of Israel or the perpetuation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.⁹³ Memmi tenuously juggled universalism with a skeptical eye towards these post-nationalist structures. However, both views are also grounded in a distrust of illegitimate leadership and imposed forms of identity. But, as previously noted, he failed to acknowledge the contributions of numerous intellectuals and political leaders who did speak and were overthrown as well as those whose concerns included the continued pressures of capitalism or neo-colonial politics.

⁹¹ Memmi, *Decolonization*, 22.

⁹² Memmi, “Questions for Colonel Kadhafi.” in *Jews and Arabs*, 37.

⁹³ See: Chapter 5 on Memmi’s opinions regarding the Palestinian question in the Arab world

Though quick to mock “observers” for failing to anticipate that the former colonized would be as self-interested as citizens of other countries, Memmi’s frustrations sometimes reflect this very perspective. Rather than eschew the colonizer’s culture Memmi observed that “paradoxically, the ex-colonizer’s culture has never been so great” within the former colonies.⁹⁴ However Memmi neglected the struggles leading to such adaptations. For example in post-independence Algeria attempts to replace French with Arabic, in addition to disadvantaging generations learning and working in French, alienated Berber groups who did not write in Arabic and opposed the narrative of Algeria as an Arab country.⁹⁵

This inheritance may have deeper consequences or legacies as well. In *Conscripts of Modernity: The Tragedy of Colonial Enlightenment* – a work which bridges the postcolonial conceptions Memmi failed to address and the political issues he did confront - David Scott argues that postcolonial intellectuals have embraced a European narrative of modernity in which industrialization and economic prosperity foster liberal democracy. This theory of development is then contrasted with postcolonial struggles at the continued expense of the former colonies. Scott contends that this juxtaposition promotes unrealistic or counterproductive modeling as postcolonial states are measured against the industrializing 19th century West rather than each other or states emerging from

⁹⁴ Memmi, *Decolonization*, 41.

⁹⁵ See: Mohamad Benrabah, “Language and Politics in Algeria” in *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics* 10:1, (2004) 59-78 and André Nouschi. “The FLN, Islam, and Arab Identity.” in Alec Hargreaves and Michael Heffernan eds. *French and Algerian Identities from Colonial Times to the Present* (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1993) 111-28.

historically comparable situations.⁹⁶ Memmi's engagement of Western cultural or discursive hegemony in *Decolonized* is limited to such observations as "culture is a kind of curio shop where each of us can pick and choose according to our desires and fears."⁹⁷ Such a metaphor reconciles the persistence of European forms while implying that the former colonized possess the capacity to make informed decisions.

However, Memmi's clever remark also trivializes culture to a degree incongruous with the role it plays in the reconstructed postcolonial identity to which he attached so much importance. One reason elements such as the language of the colonizer persist is the diversity of the former colonized themselves.⁹⁸ In *Decolonization*, and throughout his work, Memmi understated the potential for new divisions within postcolonial states following independence. Rather than address this complexity, he attributed internal strife to a lingering revolutionary mentality, "hence the attractions of past glories, of nationalism, the efforts to recover power in the process of which violence and terrorism appear as the most efficacious tools – instead of latching on bravely to democratization and the adoption of contemporary knowledge."⁹⁹ While he had criticized leftists for assuming a teleological progression from colonized to universal citizen, he appeared

⁹⁶ David Scott, *Conscripts of Modernity: The Tragedy of Colonial Enlightenment* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004).

⁹⁷ Memmi, *Decolonization*, 41.

⁹⁸ The largest example being India where English was the only language with any hope of being a lingua franca out of sheer practicality as well as allowing the state to avoid favoring or offending cultural or religious groups numbering in the tens or hundreds of millions as noted by Bernard Porter in *The Lion's Share: A Short History of British Imperialism, 1850-2004*, 4thed., Harlow, U.K.: Pearson, 2004. And with more of an emphasis on supposed positive aspects of imperialism by Niall Ferguson, *Empire: The Rise and Demise of the British World Order and the Lessons for Global Power*, (New York: Basic Books, 2004).

⁹⁹ Dov Maimon, "Interview M Albert Memmi," (May 2008).

frustrated by the reality that national identity was not simply an intervening step, but the catalyst for a fuller contestation of identity. The colonizer represented a common foe, obscuring the heterogeneity of the colonized, and defining the nation in the absence of the colonial Other has proved difficult.¹⁰⁰ This ought to have been especially apparent to Memmi given the position of Maghrebi Jews.

One critic, sociologist Michael Neocosmos, noted that the “the problem with portraits is that they reach for an essence” which “can collapse into stereotype, providing simplistic answers, if not also vulgar prejudices.”¹⁰¹ Such essentialism is often the currency via which we exchange ideas about the categories of identity which shape our political, social, and cultural position. In much of Memmi’s work, his portraits combined this utility with his creative talent and erudition to create psychosocial archetypes based upon self-perception and experience informed but not overpowered by material concerns. In *Decolonization*, the difference is an absence of critical thinking and the engagement with the decisions of individual actors that rendered his “portraits” or useful and appealing.

¹⁰⁰ One need look no further than Algeria for numerous examples of the weaknesses of alliances between not only former colonies – i.e. the relationship between the FLN, Tunisia, and Egypt - but factions within the revolution such as the FLN versus supporters of Messali Hadj.

¹⁰¹ Neocosmos, “Review: Albert Memmi’s *Decolonization*” 189-190

Conclusion

In an inflammatory 2004 interview for *L'Express*, Memmi referred to decolonization as “a massive failure,” and questioned the capacity for critical thinking in the Islamic world.¹ While he also identified himself as a Francophone writer – as opposed to a French one – statements such as this support the argument that Memmi fully embraced France, and in doing so abandoned his support for the former colonized. However Memmi constantly argued that the oppressed must become full partners in the construction of their social identity and establish institutions capable of securely representing their culture in order to achieve liberation from the legacy of oppression. Liberation and the decline of antagonism inherent in constructions of difference remained Memmi’s ultimate hope, and his pleas became more urgent as the revolutionary generation began to fade from public life.

Throughout his later career, suspicious of lingering parochialism, the manipulation of the Palestinian question and accusations of neo-colonialism, Memmi has referred to an incomplete liberation. *Decolonization* concludes with a final plea: “but if we can act toward fulfilling our shared destiny, even a little, if we can play some role in it, no matter how small, it would be unforgivable for us not to have tried.”² This is a far cry from his assertion in the *The Colonizer and the Colonized* that “having reconquered

¹ Makarian, “Les Arabes ne peuvent qu'accepter les valeurs de l'Occident: Entretien avec Albert Memmi,” 14 June 2004.

² Memmi, *Decolonization*, 144.

all his dimensions, the former colonized will have become a man like any other.”³

Memmi’s perspective is difficult to judge, his arguments less so.

Reviewing *Decolonization*, Lieberman claims that Memmi “has found a home at last in the France of his youthful imaginings, the liberal and secular republic that promised so much to oppressed peoples and delivered so little.”⁴ Memmi’s comments are not simply acerbic and unpopular, but lack the sophistication of his previous “portraits.” Quick treatments of complex issues - such as his blanket dismissal of both neo-imperialism and arguments against the banning of hijab - fail to achieve the depth, originality, and context which accompanied similar harsh statements in *The Colonizer and the Colonized* and *Liberation of the Jew*. But was it Memmi who changed? In *The Invention of Decolonization*, historian Todd Sheppard argued that the French political actors have reframed the narrative of decolonization. He observed that the revolutions which once came as a shock to the French state are now cast as the inevitable conclusion to a civilizing mission – either noble or pretentious depending on ones’ politics – that was doomed to fail.⁵ Perhaps the issue is that Memmi’s views remained static while others have adapted.

The title of a 1993 French academic conference in Paris organized by the Académie Diplomatique International referred to Albert Memmi as the *Prophète de la*

³ Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, 153.

⁴ Lisa Lieberman. “Albert Memmi’s About Face.” 160.

⁵ Shepard, *Invention of Decolonization*, 15. Alice Conklin. *A Mission to Civilize*, 254-6. On the politics of claiming a colony could be both French and colonial see Jonathan Gosnell, *The Politics of Frenchness in Algeria, 1930-54* (Rochester, NY: The University of Rochester Press, 2002).

Décolonisation, based on his ultimate conclusion in *The Colonizer and the Colonized*. However this prophecy had three components: the expectation of inevitable revolt, a warning of challenges following independence, and the expectation that the colonized would eventually reenter history. By the end of the Cold War his rhetoric grew increasingly insistent. In a 1990 radio interview Memmi called for immediate democratic compromise so the next generation could avoid the colonial legacies of autocracy and dysfunction, a sentiment he echoed again in 2002, insisting that “the Maghreb *and the West* must choose a universal society in order that their differences may cease to pose problems and be in conflict.”⁶ The debate between a republican enforcement of *laïcité*, more conservative conceptions of French identity defined as incompatible with Islam, and a broad based tolerance of public religious practice continues and Memmi’s comments do resemble those of a revolutionary generation which espoused the universalist potential of French identity. But the arguments to this effect in *Decolonization* are consistent with, if much less nuanced than, concerns expressed in his early work. And he voices a powerful sense of increasing frustration that while those who experienced the anti-colonial revolutions are passing away, new generations are born into a forbidding landscape of incomplete liberation.

However, whether or not he wished to acknowledge it, his opinions are increasingly associated with a conservative anti-Muslim nativism as much as leftist egalitarian suspicions of multiculturalism. This is evident not only in scholarly critiques of *Decolonization* but praise from French Conservatives such as historian, Alain-Gérard

⁶ Albert Memmi, “Interview by Salim Jay.” 1990. Memmi, Albert, interview by Dany Toubiana. *Entretien radiophonique. Memmi, Albert. 2002 Paris: Radio France internationale magazines*, (2002).

Slama as well as European and American academics.⁷ In a comparison between Memmi and Finkielkraut, American historian and RAND Corporation analyst Michael Shurkin points to Memmi's "place alongside the colonized, who's cause he never doubted" as evidence that *Decolonization* is an honest critique. But Shurkin, a Conservative Zionist, supports Memmi's claim to authority without asking whether the essay is as well constructed, all the while comparing it without qualification to the *Colonizer and the Colonized*.⁸ For those deeply familiar with Memmi's work, it is possible to equate the ideas in his later commentary with the work of a younger Memmi whose criticism of the colonized and Jewish culture was clearly tempered by sympathy and his own internal conflict. In *Decolonization* Memmi paid brief tribute to such even-handedness but failed to substantiate his claim.

In a critique of *Decolonization* in the 2011 issue of the *Journal of French and Francophone Philosophy* dedicated to Memmi, political theorist Keally McBride observed that "whether Memmi has become "French" is irrelevant; what matters is that he is speaking the same truth as those in power."⁹ To support this statement she included part of a 2007 speech Nicholas Sarkozy gave at the University of Dakar regarding the need to look forward rather than search for an idealized past. "The tragedy of Africa is

⁷ Alain-Gérard Slama, 'Le colonisé imaginaire', *Le Figaro Magazine*. 20 July 2004.49. Slama was born in Tunisia and is a former cultural studies director of Sciences Po. See also: Sheila Walsh, "A Prophetic Voice?: Albert Memmi's Portrait du Décolonisé Arabo-Musulman et de quelques Autres." *Journal of Franco-Irish Studies* 3, no. 1 (2013): 6.

⁸ Michael Shurkin. "France's Jewish Prophets: Alain Finkielkraut, Albert Memmi, and the Looming Crisis of Liberalism." *Zeek: A Jewish Journal of Thought and Culture* (May, 2006).

⁹ Keally McBride, "Albert Memmi in the Era of Decolonization" *Journal of French and Francophone Philosophy - Revue de la philosophie française et de langue française*, Vol XIX, No 2 (2011) 67-8.

that the African has not fully entered into history... the golden age that Africa is forever recalling will not return, because it has never existed.”¹⁰ But it is Memmi’s statement in *The Colonizer and the Colonized* that “the most serious blow suffered by the colonized is being removed from history” and his concerns regarding the conservative application of tradition in that text and *Liberation of the Jew* resonates more closely here than his claims in *Decolonization* regarding the “sickness” of the Muslim world or the specific failures of postcolonial societies.¹¹

McBride argues that both Memmi and Sarkozy claim to be outsiders evaluating the failures of postcolonial states while wedded to “ideologies of progress” that leave them unable to “exhibit a clear understanding that the world they currently live in has been impacted by colonialism; in short, they are not-- nor could they ever be— outsiders.”¹² But, Memmi’s claim to be both inside and outside different facets of the colonial system once resonated. His progressive universalism was always tempered with skepticism and a refusal to valorize action contrary to his universalist and democratic belief. Memmi’s place in the 21st century political landscape reveals the extent to which anti-colonial narratives have, as Shepard contends, been incorporated into French discourse. However, the arguments in *Decolonization* are neither even-handed nor part of a broader appeal toward future progress and, perhaps most importantly, they are not new.

Over fifty years have passed since the publication of *The Pillar of Salt* in 1953. Albert Memmi’s life and career have followed similar paths. The distance between start

¹⁰ Keally McBride, “Albert Memmi in the Era of Decolonization,” 50-66.

¹¹ Memmi, *Colonizer and Colonized*, 91.

¹² Keally McBride, “Albert Memmi in the Era of Decolonization,” 63.

and finish is deceptively short. Beginning in Tunis with a story of a young man discovering differences and the workings of power, he has concluded in Paris with commentary on a new generation struggling with cultural identity and their relationship to both communal and state authority. However Memmi covered vast ground in the course of this journey.

The colonial landscape he examined with a compelling blend of erudition and humanity in *The Colonizer and the Colonized* gave way to a postcolonial world which, the title *Decolonization and the Decolonized* notwithstanding, Memmi could not call fully liberated. Culture is where Memmi locates identity. Thus his assertion that oppressive conditions do not entirely define oppressed groups – the colonized discover or rediscover their culture in the process of liberation, and the Jew is more than the anti-Semitic mythical portrait. This refusal to separate the everyday from the abstract - childhood meals from adult aspirations for a representative nation state - is part of Memmi's appeal. His torrid relationship with his homeland, dramatized by Alexandre Bennilouche's struggle between Jewish family traditions and embrace of the French intellectual tradition, led Memmi to appreciate both the transcendent ideals he found in French republicanism and the strength of his family's Judaism.

Memmi reached nationalist conclusions in the case of both colonial liberation and the Jewish condition. When examining situations beyond colonizer and colonizer such as immigrant communities and the condition African-Americans he indicated a similar trajectory. His teleology equated liberation with the ability to securely assert one's culture and play a role in the social construction of identity, of the portrait constructed through and viewed within the context of relations with others. In each case Memmi was

skeptical of peaceful or negotiated solutions. Concerned that traditional authorities lacked the will to pursue real change and skeptical of immigrants or colonized people's ability to unify based simply on their oppression he identified nationalism as a force capable of seizing the power of culture to promote active rebellion against dominant authority. Likewise with Jews, Memmi's argument that the Jew is more than a figure created by anti-Semitism draws upon a cultural tradition that can support a national project.

Where Memmi found himself at odds with the culture of the oppressed was in cases when that culture promoted a passive defense of institutions rather than the real improvement of conditions or liberation. In *Liberation of the Jew* he called this defensive stance "encystment" and explored numerous examples in detail. However, his first use of this term appeared in *The Colonizer and the Colonized*

Formalism, of which religious formality is only one aspect, is the cyst into which the colonial society shuts itself and hardens, degrading its own life in order to save it. It is a spontaneous action of self-defense, a means of safe-guarding the collective consciousness without which a people quickly cease to exist... The calcified colonized society is therefore the consequence of two processes having opposite symptoms: encystment originating internally and a corset imposed from the outside.¹³

While this term does not reappear in *Decolonization* the sentiment is there in Memmi's critique of immigrant's assertion of Islamic traditions – the most poignant being his assertion that "the headscarf is a portable ghetto, revealing a sense of discomfort about one's identity that affects Muslim immigrants."¹⁴ Instead Memmi advocated an honest assessment of oppression, including the extent to which colonialism, anti-Semitism and European fears of immigrants promoted unhealthy responses within

¹³ Memmi, *Colonizer and Colonized*, 101-2.

¹⁴ Memmi, *Decolonization*, 88.

the culture of the oppressed. For the colonized and Jews, a nationalist solution offered a creative and assertive alternative. And for immigrants – as well as African-Americans - he foresaw no potential for a peaceful solution, though the manner by which these groups might achieve liberation was unclear.¹⁵

Of course, by the time of *Decolonization* he also spoke with some disenchantment regarding the limits of decolonization and the continuing Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Yet a sense of optimism persists at the end of each of Memmi's analytical works. *The Colonizer and the Colonized* concludes with a light at the end of the tunnel, the idea of the colonized becoming completely himself. *Portrait of a Jew* and *Liberation of the Jew* characterize the state of Israel as a foothold by which Jews claim an independent space on the world stage where culture may grow free of external domination. Even *Decolonization* ends with the plea that leaders and intellectuals of the present era make the most of their time, so as to avoid passing the colonial legacy to new generations.¹⁶ And *Racism* includes an invective to continue a long and difficult struggle

“Recall,” says the Bible, “that you were once a stranger in Egypt,” which means both that you ought to respect the stranger because you were a stranger yourself and you risk becoming one again someday. It is an ethical and practical appeal – indeed, it is a contract, however implicit it might be. In short, *the refusal of racism is the condition for all theoretical and practical morality*. Because, in the end, the ethnical choice commands the political choice, a just society must be a society accepted by all. If this contractual principle is not accepted, then only conflict, violence, and destruction will be our lot. If it is accepted, we can hope someday to live in peace. True, it is a wager, but the stakes are irresistible.¹⁷

¹⁵ For Memmi's discussion see: Memmi's account of a debate between James Baldwin, Martin Luther King, and Malcolm X in Memmi, “The Paths of Revolt” and my analysis of this piece in Chapter 8.

¹⁶ Memmi, *Decolonization*, 144.

¹⁷ Memmi, *Racism*, 165.

This is quintessential Memmi: incisive in defining problems, insistent upon specific solutions, and skeptical of frameworks that create speculative categories or lose sight of the lived experience. His concerns reflect those of an anti-colonial writer both dismissive of overly reductive or disingenuous Marxist materialism and suspicious of narratives removed from their physical or cultural sites of origin. His suspicions regarding the viability of hybrid identities in the postcolonial world and neo-colonialism derive from an insistence on concrete objectives, social relations, and the primacy of local conditions in framing broader conceptions. All the while, Memmi maintained his insistence that liberation entails participation in the social construction of the self, the security provided by representative institutions, and a democratic society promoting the acceptance of common values along with the rejection of parochialism. These ideas may appear old-fashioned or lacking in nuance given the present state of 21st century society and postcolonial scholarship. However, given the instability of identity, knowledge, and truth in an increasingly interconnected society – or alternatively a highly fractured one – Memmi’s ideas, even in their more recent form, represent a challenge from an era during which long-simmering discontinuities begat dramatic and revolutionary action.

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