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Memmi@100: A Centenary Celebration

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Albert Memmi would have turned 100 on December 15, 2020. The legacy he leaves behind bears the mark of his multiple engagements: he was one of the great Tunisian-Jewish-French writers; one of the most significant voices of Mizrahi/Sephardi Jewry; one of the titans of the anti-colonial pantheon—best known for his essay *Portrait du colonisé précédé du Portrait du colonisateur* (*The Colonizer and the Colonized*, 1957); one of the first, major cross-over Francophone novelists—beginning with his breakthrough work, *La Statue de sel* (*Pillar of Salt*, 1953); one of the most insightful interrogators of the modern Jewish condition in *Portrait d'un Juif* (*Portrait of a Jew*, 1962); one of those who understood Zionism as a national liberation project but who was nonetheless critical of the treatment of Mizrahi Jews and other Arabs in Israel in *La Libération du Juif* (*The Liberation of the Jew*, 1966), and in *Juifs et Arabes* (*Jews and Arabs*, 1974); one of the progenitors of intersectional analyses of oppression in works like *L'Homme dominé* (*Dominated Man*, 1968); one of the most insightful sociologists and theorists of racism in treatises like *Le Racisme: description, définition, traitement* (*Racism*, 1982); one of the critical voices of the postcolonial situation in *Portrait du décolonisé arabo-musulman et de quelques autres* (*Decolonization and the Decolonized*, 2005); and, finally, one of the prophets of diaspora and exile across his corpus.

While one or another of the books in his oeuvre may well be known, many scholars and readers do not have a sense of the vastness and depth of his interventions, nor of their ongoing relevance today. Bringing together an interdisciplinary group of scholars of Memmi, this issue seeks to highlight the breadth of Memmi's writing and to stoke a conversation about what it means to read Memmi 100 years after his birth, but more importantly in the wake of his death on May 22, 2020. This set of essays offers a glimpse of what a new moment in Memmi studies might yet look like. To do so, we respond to a set of questions raised by Memmi's work: how do the multiple affiliations of his identity trouble the categories of identification (Arab, African, Jewish, French, European, Eastern, and Western)? How did Memmi's role as canonizer and theorist comport with his own catalogue of literary works? What insights did Memmi bring to contemporary discussions of post-Holocaust Judeophobia and racism, Zionism and anti-Zionism, religion and secularism, diaspora and homelands? How does Memmi's critique of colonialism align with his criticisms of the postcolonial regimes and immigrants to France that emerged after independence in North Africa and the Middle East?

Lia Brozgal's "Memmi's Novels, in Practice and in Theory" explores Memmi's experimental fiction, highlighting the author's penchant for playing with conventions of genre and style--gestures that render his literary work more formally and theoretically complex than many readers

have appreciated. Whereas Brozgal focuses on *Le Scorpion* (*The Scorpion*, 1969) and *Le Désert* (*The Desert*, 1977), two of his mid-career novels, Margaux Fitoussi highlights the complex negotiations of place, origin, and belonging staged in *Agar* (*Strangers*, 1955), a lesser-known early novel. *Agar* serves as a touchstone for considering Memmi's broader exploration of a diasporic sense of self, haunted by an evanescent sense of authenticity. Susie Linfield's "Memmi, Zionism, and the Left," highlights Memmi's self-reflexive critique of Leftist anti-colonialism, showing how the romanticization of the struggles of the wretched of the earth blinded many to the revolutionary violence and terrorism whose dangers were apparent to Memmi. She then considers Memmi's Zionism and support for the State of Israel as it became an overdetermined symbolic site where the Left condemned nationalism and its discontents. Daniel Gordon's "Radical Candor: On Albert Memmi (1920-2020)" contemplates how Memmi's fulsome commitment to truth-telling, especially in his last controversial work, *Decolonization and the Decolonized*, anticipated our era of cancel-culture. Gordon plumbs a tension between Memmi's support for liberation struggles and his understanding that true freedom could only be realized through the transgenerational transmission of values and culture, and through a commitment to facing hard truths. Finally, Jonathan Judaken's "Memmi on Racism and (Post-Holocaust) Judeophobia" explores the development of Memmi's reflections on what he ultimately termed "heterophobia," highlighting his understanding of privilege, racial entanglements, and his conceptual acuity, making him a vital anti-racist voice with a fulsome toolkit of resources. These short essays show not only that the moment is ripe for a resurgence in Memmi scholarship, but also why we need Memmi now more than ever.

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