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Albert Memmi, *Tunisie, An I. Journal tunisien 1955-1956 suivi de Tunisie, un pays d'opérette et Autres écrits des années tunisiennes*. Edited by Guy Dugas. Paris: CNRS Éditions, 2017. 226 pp. Preface, notes, index, and appendix. €10.00 (pb). ISBN 987-2-2710-9435-3.

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The new book by Albert Memmi is also, in many ways, his first and oldest. Two decades prior to *The Colonizer and the Colonized* (1957)—the landmark anti-colonial essay for which Memmi is best known, and well before the semi-autobiographical *Pillar of Salt* (1953)—Memmi's first novel and a foundational fiction of Maghrebi literature in French, the Judeo-Tunisian author had set himself the task of writing the book of his life, chronicling, day by day, his experiences as a poor but educated Jew coming of age in a Muslim land under the yoke of French colonialism. Memmi's journal, which he began in Tunis in 1937 at the age of 17 and continues to this day from his fabled *grenier* on the rue St. Merri in Paris's Marais district, is equal parts quotidian observation, personal inventory, political commentary, and literary reflection. The sum total is an exceptional document of nearly a century of personal experience inextricable from the vagaries of twentieth-century politics and history (colonization, World War II, the foundation of the state of Israel, decolonization).

Tunisie, An I represents an ostensibly unexpurgated section of this journal, a two-year period that witnesses the end of the French protectorate in Tunisia and the emergence of an independent nation-state helmed by Habib Bourguiba, who would preside over the country from 1956 to 1987. Established and published in close consultation with Guy Dugas (France's foremost Memmi scholar but also a longtime confidant, collaborator, and editor of the author's work), the diary entries are foregrounded by Dugas's cleverly titled preface "Journal d'un retour au pays natal"—a wink at Césaire's epic poem, of course, but also a reference to the fact that Memmi had returned to Tunisia in 1949, after having spent six years in France. The volume is rounded out by an appendix of short pieces published by Memmi during his "Tunisian years" (1949-1956). These include essays on the colonial situation (it was during this time that Memmi would finish the manuscript of *Portrait du colonisé précédé du Portrait du colonisateur*), but also an interview with François Mauriac and an essay titled "Portrait du juif colonisé," undoubtedly a precursor to the two-book study, *Portrait du juif* (1962) and *Libération du juif* (1966).

Under the direction of Dugas, the entirety of Memmi's journal is scheduled for publication in 2020 with the CNRS collection "Planète libre." The comprehensive volume is currently being established by Dugas under the auspices of l'ITEM (*l'Institut pour l'étude des textes et manuscrits*), a research unit devoted to *la critique génétique*. Dugas has described the final version of the journal as a "Pléiade-style" edition, rich in notes and information about the text's genesis, with a critical apparatus designed to highlight the role of versions; in other words, an imprint conceived for the specialist or scholar, rather than the public at large.

However, it was an awareness of the journal's potential interest to a broader constituency that prompted Memmi and Dugas to conceive of the current project with an eye to the general reader. *Tunisie, An I* opens with an entry written in Tunis on January 2, 1955, and ends with an entry from Strasbourg on September

16, 1956. (Memmi's wife hailed from Alsace, and upon leaving Tunis for France, the couple stayed with her family until they were able to find housing in Paris.) The focused selection is a highly readable chronicle unencumbered by the weighty critical apparatus promised for the complete journal; indeed, Dugas has by and large opted for a light touch with footnotes that provide historical context and help to anchor some of Memmi's passing references to political and literary personalities (Jean Daniel, Paul Sebag, Claude Roy, Bourguiba). Moreover, Dugas's interventions prove essential, at certain points, for decoding Memmi's shorthand in referring to certain close relatives and friends: one would have to be very familiar with the Memmi family tree to know that "Georges," whose commentary is often reported in the journal, is in fact the author's younger brother (and also a published writer). Even as Dugas's interventions elucidate certain elements of the text, it is worth noting that the editor—in spite of his profound knowledge of Memmi's life and oeuvre—does an admirable job of letting the journal entries speak for themselves, resisting the urge to make transparent aspects of the diary whose potential interest stems, precisely, from their ambiguity in both content and form. The nickname "Io" is a case in point: letting the reader know that this refers to Memmi's wife, Germaine, makes Dugas a responsible editor; not probing the question of *why* Memmi uses the Italian personal pronoun for "I" to refer to his spouse makes Dugas an ethical editor. (And of course, the seasoned Memmi reader will recognize in this choice yet another instance of the author's recuperation of his Italian heritage, evidenced in his frequent recall of his father's Livournese origins, or in the character Emile from *Le Scorpion*, who is just as often—and without explanation—referred to as Emilio or Imilio.)

In earlier years, Memmi had described his personal writing as "un soulagement morcelé," a self-consciously curative endeavor destined only for himself (p. 13). In an entry from 1949, he observed that writing was "un effort de volonté et de thérapeutique," and he never had "l'ambition ou la prétention de faire une œuvre littéraire" (pp. 8-9). And yet Dugas's work on the entirety of the journal suggests that Memmi had identified certain potentially stand-alone portions and separated them under new titles with a view to publication. This is the case for Memmi's chronicles of his experience in Nazi work camps in Tunisia during World War II, which were to be called either *Journal de la guerre* (1943), *Journal d'un travailleur*, or *Journal d'un travailleur forcé*. (This selection from the journal was never published on its own, but these entries provide some of the richness and texture for the episode of *Pillar of Salt* that recounts the Nazi occupation of Vichy-controlled Tunisia.) Similarly, a selection of entries from 1965 to 1968, set aside under the title *Journal du Scorpion*, would eventually be woven into Memmi's most experimental novel *Le Scorpion ou la confession imaginaire* (1969) as the fictitious journal of a character named Emile.[1]

The genesis and trajectory of *Tunisie An I* are, in certain ways, similar to that of the other episodes from the journal identified by Memmi for potential publication. In the "Avertissement de l'auteur"—which is included at the beginning of this volume but was penned, according to Dugas, in the second half of 1956 when the imminence of independence and all it entailed for the Jews of Tunisia made exile the only clear choice for Memmi[2]—the author explains that "ces feuillets n'étaient pas destinés à la publication; ils sont pris dans un 'garde-manger,' un réservoir où je puise régulièrement et que j'enrichis quotidiennement" (p. 15). Yet he goes on to imagine that the work might have value above and beyond his own therapeutic project: "Si je me suis décidé à les livrer tels quels, c'est pour une raison d'urgence, parce qu'il me semble qu'ils peuvent aider à la compréhension de problèmes que nous vivons tous les jours en A.F." (p. 15).[3] Notwithstanding a clear sense of urgency—and seemingly inspired by Sartre whom Memmi cites as describing the challenge of the contemporary writers as twofold: "donner assez vite pour aider à l'actualité, écrire assez bien pour donner œuvre d'écrivains" (p. 15)—*Tunisie, An I* would not see publication until 2017. And while it is, to date, the only portion of the journal to be published as a stand-alone volume, scenes from the waning days of French Tunisia, including questions of the country's minorities, the politics of founding a new nation-state, and the problem of the engaged Judeo-Tunisian intellectual, found purchase in Memmi's fifth novel, *Le Pharaon* (1988).

Some will see in the title *Tunisie, An I* a reference to Fanon's *L'An V de la révolution algérienne* (1959), a volume perhaps better known in English as *A Dying Colonialism*, a title whose poetry erases the original's intentional reference to the French revolutionary calendar. [4] Yet already in late 1956 when he identified this selection for "urgent" publication, Memmi had made a note of possible titles: *Tunisie, An I*; *Tunisie, année 0*; and *Journal d'une indépendance*. In his original ruminations, as well as in the ultimate title selected in consultation with Dugas, Memmi (before Fanon) reveals his awareness of, and belief in, the global and historical importance of third-world liberation struggles. Even his hesitation, in 1956, between "Year 1" and "Year 0" seems to replay some aspects of revolution-era polemics surrounding how to mark the new world order and when, precisely, to "re-start" the ordering of French history.

How one reads *Tunisie, An I* will inevitably be colored by one's knowledge of Memmi's work and by one's familiarity with the history of Tunisian decolonization. As a study in history, the journal probably does not stand alone: even with Dugas's addition of contextual footnotes, the explanations behind many of the circumstances described remain murky for a non-specialist reader. As a result, some of the significance of Memmi's references—to Bourguiba (perhaps particularly his disappointment that the first leader of a free Tunisia spoke French "avec un fort accent et cherch(ait) ses mots" [p. 47]); to the role of the Tunisian communist party; to the inevitable Arabization of Tunisia; and to the complexity of Judeo-Muslim cohabitation—will be lost. But of course, the journal does not purport to be a textbook, and the uninitiated reader will nonetheless be struck by the lucidity with which Memmi recounts this particular "dying colonialism" and the swan's song of Tunisian *judéité*.

Satisfying for veteran Memmi readers and scholars will be the various ways in which *Tunisie, An I* produces a kind of inverted detective story: we already know "whodunit" and why, but in tracing back through the journal, we now find clues we didn't know existed. Indeed, for Dugas, Memmi's journal constitutes "la matrice de l'œuvre," an index to which all other work can be referenced. [5] This may be true; after all, any frisson of recognition is a product of having encountered certain episodes, details, and characters in Memmi's essays and novels. But there is also a certain pleasure in the encounter with details heretofore unexplored, or only hinted at elsewhere in Memmi's corpus. For example, Memmi's siblings (he was one of eight or nine children) make an appearance in the journal but are hardly referred to in his essays; in *Tunisie, An I*, not only is Georges a regular interlocutor, but we are treated to Memmi's mother recounting the story of how she met his father (pp. 77-78), and to a comic interlude in which Memmi's sister Ginette regales the family with the tale of her (failed) contraception techniques (pp. 79-80). We learn that Memmi tried to learn Arabic but abandoned the study after a short time, that he struggled to explain racism to his wife, that he worried that his "portraits" of the colonizer and the colonized would only ever be "inexacts" (p. 121). We learn that, in many ways, Memmi assumed the incoherence of his fractured identity: "Qu'est-ce que je souhaite? Avoir la possibilité d'un *Français de gauche*: condamner le colonialisme mais ne pas rompre avec les valeurs françaises" (p. 120). And yet, in the final entry of the book, written from France in September 1956, Memmi circles back to *la gauche* with a more ambiguous view: "En fait les hommes de gauche croient, à tort ou à raison, que les intérêts de la gauche en France coïncident avec ceux de l'universalité. Au point de vue commercial, c'est utopique. Cela me rappelle les ambitions euphoriques de l'impérialisme anglais" (p. 188). *Tunisie, An I* ends on this note of disillusionment.

Perhaps more than any other genre, the journal in all its potential documentary glory seems to prompt its reader to look for omissions, minimizations, and other forms of subterfuge. In *Tunisie, An I*, there are certainly any number of details and episodes that were either not recorded by Memmi or not included in the final publication. One omission in particular struck me as both flagrant and deeply meaningful: none of the entries from August 1956 mention Memmi's departure for France. In the final entries of the book, the time and place indications jump from "Tunis-août 1956" to "Strasbourg, 19 août" with no mention of the author's physical displacement, no mention of what would be not a trip, but an exile. Although mentions of an impending move to France can be found, touched upon only glancingly, throughout the 1955-1956 journal, it would seem that as Memmi's situation advanced, inexorably, toward expatriation,

France itself ceased to be a textual presence. Indeed, a final intervention by Dugas is required to clarify the timeframe and the physical displacements contained these last entries.

Absent any narration of the actual rupture with his motherland, Memmi might have considered ending *Tunisie, An I* on a different note. Rather than conclude in Strasbourg with a condemnation of the left, he might have allowed the first year of a free Tunisia to end in Tunisia, with an undated entry from sometime in August 1956 that seems to contain the mission statement of the journal, along with all of its ambiguities and contradictions: “Coquets, beaucoup d’écrivains livrent leur journal à l’éditeur en précisant qu’ils l’avaient écrit pour eux-mêmes. Dois-je préciser que ce journal fut écrit pour les autres? Si j’arrive à trouver un éditeur courageux et si j’arrivais à faire passer ces textes, je serai si heureux qu’ils paraissent. Si j’ai quelque pudeur de reste, je serais seulement honteux de ne pas avoir écrit plus tôt là-dessus: il est incroyable que ‘la situation coloniale,’ ces bizarres relations d’homme à homme n’avaient pas inspiré davantage les gens. Il y a peut-être une explication. Les privilégiés, pourquoi écriraient-ils? Et les opprimés? Trop compliqué: trop opprimés, ils n’ont plus de langue, ne croient plus en eux-mêmes. Il est temps, vraiment” (pp. 185-86).

It was time, then. But more than fifty years on, maybe it still is?

NOTES

[1] Correspondence with Guy Dugas, January 19, 2018. I would like to thank Guy Dugas for his generosity in sharing details regarding the genesis of this volume, as well as of the larger Memmi journal project. Elements from our email conversations have enriched this review.

[2] Correspondence with Guy Dugas, January 19, 2018.

[3] “AF” is shorthand for *Afrique française*.

[4] David Macey, *Frantz Fanon. A Biography*. (London: Verso, 2000), p. 394.

[5] Correspondence with Guy Dugas, January 19, 2018.

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