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On the State of Being (Jewish) between “Orient” and “Occident”

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This chapter examines the kind of Jewish identity that has arisen out of the modern conditions of Tunisian Jewry as these are described and analyzed in Albert Memmi’s work. Memmi, who was born in Tunis, the Tunisian capital, on December 15, 1920, to a skilled and semischooled artisan father of Jewish Italian origins and an illiterate mother of Jewish Berber ones, studied philosophy at both the University of Algiers and the Sorbonne. He returned to Tunis in 1951 to teach and quickly joined the anticolonial struggles against France but, nonetheless, left Tunisia again in 1956, following Tunisian independence and the beginning of a process of ethnonational consolidation that “othered” Tunisian Jews in new ways. Postcolonial Tunisia proclaimed itself a Muslim Arab state and configured itself both in response to its recent colonial past and in affirmation of the culture of the majority, and now dominant, population.

To induce change, the Tunisian government introduced an extensive program that was intended to homogenize Tunisian society. As part of the process, it passed a series of decrees that adversely affected the Jews of Tunisia through the abolition of the Jewish Rabbinical Court in 1957, the dissolution of the Jewish Community Council, the destruction of the Jewish quarter of Tunis, the expropriation of the Jewish cemetery and its conversion into a public garden under the pretext of urban development, and the passage of school reforms that Arabized the curriculum, all in 1958. Tunisian Jews’ sense of difficult differences increased during the Bizerte crisis, which stirred up a blazing anti-semitism, and the arrest of some thirty Jewish merchants in 1962 on the charge of illicit trading in gold. Tensions culminated with anti-Jewish riots in 1967, following the outbreak of the Six Days’ War between Israel and the Arab countries surrounding it since Tunisia had allied itself with the Arab nations after

its independence. Many Jewish shops were plundered and destroyed, and the Great Synagogue of Tunis was burned. Other synagogues were destroyed later, one in Djebra in 1979, and the other in Zarzis in 1983. The Jews were also again subjected to obvious de facto discrimination, and it became clear that they could not envision their future on the terms of the larger Arabic Muslim population. They left by the thousands in a mass exodus, resulting in the self-liquidation of the Jewish communities of Tunisia.

Today, only about two thousand Jews still live in Tunisia. However, Jews seem to have settled there around the third century of the common era, while it was under Roman rule. They continued to come to it, with several large immigration waves taking place between the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries, when Jews were escaping the Spanish Inquisition and eventually forced by it to leave Spain, Portugal, as well as some Dutch and Italian cities in which they initially found a refuge. At its height, the Jewish population of Tunisia reached close to one hundred thousand; and though its fortunes fluctuated with the changes of the local regime, ever since the passage of the Justinian edicts in 533, Tunisian Jews occupied, in at least some respects, a "second-class" location in Tunisia. The Justinian edicts made them the "second-class" residents of a Christian Roman Empire. The seventh-century Arab conquest of Tunisia transformed them subsequently into the *dhimmi* "second-class" residents of an Arab Muslim empire, which they continued to be after the Ottomans extended their imperial reach and incorporated Tunisia in 1547.

Though Tunisia became a French protectorate in 1881, the legal status of Tunisia's Jews did not change much until after World War I when France began to grant French citizenship to some Tunisian Jews, mostly members of a small Jewish elite who were assimilating to French culture quite quickly. Nonetheless, the French, who had established a foothold in Tunisia already in the seventeenth century due to Ottoman capitulation agreements with France, did change the situation of Tunisian Jews who felt much safer under the French protectorate. But safety disappeared once France came under fascist and Nazi control and Tunisian Jews, similarly to other Jews in the French *Maghrib* (North Africa), were included in the "Final Solution" at the Wannsee Conference. When Nazi Germany occupied French Tunisia itself, between November 1942 and May 7, 1943, the Nazis established a *Judenrat*, took Jewish hostages, seized Jewish property, inflicted heavy fines on the Jewish community, sent some five thousand Jews to labor camps next to the front line, and deported some Jews to death camps.

After its liberation by the Allies in 1943, Tunisia abrogated all racial laws against the Jews, and the French increased the opportunities open to Tunisian Jews. Many Tunisian Jews, in turn, became more Francophile and Francophon than before. This is a change that has altered their identity significantly, since

prior to the entry of France into North Africa, Tunisian Jews, having a secular contact for generations with their Arab-Muslim environment, spoke and wrote in Judeo-Arabic, dressed quite similarly to their Arab neighbors, developed artistic forms that borrowed from and improvised on Arab ones, and adapted many of their customs to the Arab Muslim world in which they lived. It involved the formation of a Tunisian yet Occidental Jewish identity, hence an assimilation to French culture but of a kind that did not allow a return to what preceded it and, therefore, led to a Jewish migration out of Tunisia following decolonization and the nationalist transformation Tunisia underwent.¹ Memmi, while not necessarily the representative voice of Tunisian Jews, nevertheless contributes enormously to an understanding of the radicality of the change that the Jewish population of Tunisia underwent and its implications.

(UN)FREEZING THE SELF

Memmi describes and discusses many aspects of the change and its implications most vividly and strikingly in *The Pillar of Salt*,² his 1953 largely autobiographical novel, whose title alludes to the biblical story of Lot's wife. Disobeying God's command, she looked back at Sodom as it was being destroyed. She was punished by God and turned into a pillar of salt.³

Memmi depicts his own act of disobedience as one of killing a kind of self-reflection. "I am dying," he writes, "through having turned back to look at my own self . . . and I have reached the end of discovering myself."⁴ The dying that Memmi experiences is, according to him, also a function of a set of crises, each leading to a disintegration of some part of himself, leaving him with an unstable identity that is multiply rifted and that he describes in a summary manner saying,

I am ill at ease in my own land and I know of no other. My culture is borrowed and I speak my mother tongue haltingly. I have neither religious beliefs nor tradition, and am ashamed of whatever particle of them has survived deep within me. . . . I am a Tunisian but of French culture. . . . I am a Tunisian but Jewish, which means that I am politically and socially an outcast. I speak the language of the country with a particular accent and emotionally I have nothing in common with Moslems. I am a Jew who has broken with the Jewish religion and the ghetto, is ignorant of Jewish culture and detests the middle-class because it is phony. I am poor but desperately anxious not to be poor, and at the same time I refuse to take the necessary steps to avoid poverty.⁵

For Memmi, this is not a happy state. Rather it is an inevitable one that results from his specific circumstance as a Tunisian Jew of his time. Due to it he is exposed to a French-oriented education at the elementary, secondary,

and postsecondary levels, which is possible for him both due to Memmi's own talents and because of the established intricate Jewish educational network dedicated to the "advancement" of Tunisian Jews in French-controlled Tunisia.⁶ This exposure is at the same time to people of a different class than his own, especially beginning with the Lycée Carnot, which unlike the elementary Alliance Israélite Universelle (which was Jewish-administered and intended for the poorer of Tunis's Jews) was French-run and the training ground for the Tunisian political elite.

Memmi comments on this through a discussion of his language abilities. It is when beginning to attend the Alliance elementary school that he discovers that since at home he has been speaking Judeo-Arabic, so he actually does not speak the French that he will have to master to become educated. It is at the Lycée that he finds out that he still does not speak French well enough. His language abilities mark him as poor. What his classmates at the Lycée have in common is wealth, which seems to even out the ethnic and religious differences among them and in such a way that he is clearly the outsider and his classmates who—though "French, Tunisian, Italian, Russian, Maltese, even Jewish"⁷—" [t]hey all belonged to one and the same civilization."⁸ Memmi is reminded of his not belonging to the "civilization" of the rich not only at school, since at home he is expected to support himself and is aware that he is not bringing back what he "might have earned."⁹

Still, even if he is an alien, Memmi is being acculturated and actively acculturates himself to the Francophon "civilization" of the rich that is an enlightenment and secular "civilization." He consequently fights with his parents who are not changing with him and remain believing Jews tied to their neighborhood from which he distances himself thoroughly. His choice to study philosophy symbolizes this and he remarks as the protagonist (who is a combination of Memmi and his brother) of *The Pillar of Salt*,

Toward the end of my high-school years, I began to know what I did not want to become and, if only in a confused manner, what I wanted. . . . I wanted to escape from myself and go out toward others. I was not going to remain a Jew, an Oriental, a pauper; I belonged neither to my family nor to my neighborhood community; I was a new being, utterly transparent, ready to be completely remade into a philosophy instructor. It had to be done, and I would reconstruct the whole universe, with simple and clear elements, like all the philosophers who were my masters.¹⁰

Philosophy, however, fails Memmi. An antisemitic¹¹ riot, probably instigated by the government, since it is committed by Tunisian soldiers, and the engulfment of Tunisia by World War II, show how "vain and futile are . . . [the] constructions of the mind . . . when compared to the brutal realities of men."¹² After the pogrom (the Russian word for mob violence against Jews), which

complicates Memmi's attempts to work with a budding Tunisian national liberation group most of whose members are Arab Muslims, the "brutal realities" of Memmi's life include the Nazi imposition of an antisemitic racial order on Tunisia and a Jewish community whose middle class assumes community responsibilities in order "to save themselves and their children . . . and also decided that certain categories of men were to be spared, for instance, the intellectuals,"¹³ most of whom were of middle-class origins anyway.

Memmi writes about that situation through the protagonist of *The Pillar of Salt*. Alexandre Mordekhai Benillouche, Memmi's young hero and narrator, who is a university student at this point, voluntarily rejects the privilege handed to him by virtue of his position as an intellectual and joins the poorer Jews in a labor camp to which they are all sent. The camp experience, which Benillouche ends by escaping after realizing that what is planned is the death of its inhabitants, does not reconnect him with the Jewish community that he left but rather reinforces his understanding of himself as unlike others. However, Memmi is still a Jew, especially according to the people he comes in contact with, and even the Free French Forces prefer that he does not apply to serve under his own name because being rumored to already have many Jews "does [them] a great deal of harm."¹⁴

Memmi tries to leave his Jewishness behind, nonetheless, not yet impressed by the Jewish disaster brought about by the Nazis, and he adds physical distance from Tunisia to this attempt. He does so because he needs to resist his transformation into a "pillar of salt" and feels that he must free himself from the deadening effects of his situation. He describes this retrospectively in his 1966 *The Liberation of the Jew*,¹⁵ where he states,

During those days I wanted not to deny who I am but to conquer the world. I denied my Jewishness because I rejected the location assigned to me in the world, and which my people accepted. . . . When many of us decided, as we were finishing high school in Tunisia, to cut the bonds to the past, to the (Jewish) ghetto, and to (Tunisia) the motherland, they did so in order to go into an open space, in pursuit of the most beautiful of adventures. I did not want to be the cripple called Jew, primarily because I wanted to be a person; and also because I wanted to go toward other people, in order to conquer a humanity that was forbidden to me (as a Jew).¹⁶

Retrospectively, Memmi also becomes aware that his self-negation was in truth only half-hearted, as if he was afraid to "disappear totally under a new skin, in a new being."¹⁷ Moreover, his connections to his own Jewishness are too deep-seated and strong to be merely set aside and, as a result, Memmi is always cognizant of a nagging feeling that what he should do is embrace rather than reject who he is. But this move too is extremely costly since to be openly identified as a Jew he has to injure his "honor as a person."¹⁸

(BETWEEN) COLONIZER AND COLONIZED

When Memmi depicts as his own the movement between the poles of self-negation and self-acceptance, neither of which is liberating, he claims it to be one that as a Jew, due to the conditions of “Jewish existence” that is “delimited by others,”¹⁹ he shares with all oppressed people. As he points out in his 1965 preface to *The Colonizer and the Colonized*,²⁰ discovering that oppressed people have quite a lot in common, he has come to the conclusion that “all the oppressed are alike in some ways.”²¹ However, initially, when writing *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, which was first published in 1957, Memmi did not discuss the situation of the Jews as oppressed qua Jews. The oppressed Jew of *The Colonizer and the Colonized* is Tunisian and oppressed by virtue of being just like all the “natives.”

Memmi affirms that the majority of Tunisian Jews “were undeniably ‘natives,’ . . . as near as possible to the Muslims in poverty, language, sensibilities, customs, taste in music, odors and cooking.”²² And they were treated as “second-class citizens.”²³ But, because they were Jews and not Muslim Arabs, their situation was different from that of Tunisian Muslim Arabs and it let them more eagerly attempt to assimilate to French culture and move ardently toward the West. The Jews of Tunisia, “unlike the Muslims, . . . passionately endeavored to identify themselves with the French . . . turned [their] back happily on the East[,] . . . chose the French language, dressed in the Italian style, and joyfully adopted every idiosyncrasy of the Europeans.”²⁴

Quite many observers have noted that it is remarkable how quickly Tunisian Jews shifted their identification and leaped from a way of life quite similar to that of the Muslim Arab population into a new European cultural world, following the establishment of the French Protectorate in Tunisia in 1882. Under the French Protectorate, the Jews had a different position, “one small notch above the Muslims on the pyramid which is the basis of all colonial societies.”²⁵ Contact with the French colonizers of Tunisia and the official presence of the French facilitated the assimilation of Tunisian Jews to French culture and their emancipation. Relying on the French revolutionary promise of “*Liberté, Egalité, et Fraternité*,” the Jews hoped for a better life and were very receptive to the new French influences, though they had a Christian European source. For the generation born under the protectorate, the French language replaced Judeo-Arabic as the Tunisian Jews’ mother tongue. As a consequence, a confused Memmi’s daughter (born in France to a non-Jewish mother) pondered her own, and her father’s, identity when asking, “are you Arab, father? Your mother speaks Arabic. And I, am I Arab, or French, or Jewish/a Jew?”²⁶

Memmi’s daughter’s question is very important since it uses specific terms of social identity—“Arab,” “French,” “Jew.” The question does not involve

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the use of "Christian" or "Muslim" to modify either "French" or "Arab," clearly reflecting the Tunisian reality of three distinct social identity groups—*les Français, les Arabes, les Juifs*—which are, at the same time, national and religious. And the Jews of Tunisia, who were able to maintain and reproduce their autonomous administrative, cultural, and religious institutions, have always regarded themselves, and were regarded by both the Arabs and the French, as being a separate and distinct community. All the Jews of Tunisia—native "Twansa," Spanish, Grana/Italian, and other Jews—could be defined as a community bound together by their religion, their Jewish cultural traditions, history, and a sense of continuity with the Jewish Past.

Therefore, in the modernizing French-controlled Tunisia, even when Jewish parents started to give their children French first names after centuries of using Hebrew and Arabic names, they went on assigning them Hebrew middle names, and they stopped giving Arabic names. For example, a girl might have been named Marie (French) and Miriam (Hebrew), instead of Miriam and Massouda (Arabic). The children also were dressed in new styles of clothing and with their parents wore European-style pants, dresses, shoes, and head covers rather than the Arab-style ones. Dress code changes are the external signs that had marked the affiliation of the Jews as belonging to a specific religious ethnic minority and their exclusion from the Muslim Arabs. As married women stopped concealing their hair under a *taqrta* (head covering), an identity based on Jewish religious law and the values of the Judeo-Islamic cultures began to be transformed. As men replaced the traditional indigenous attire—the *sarawal* (the billowing oriental trousers), the *burnous/jubba*, the red *chechia* (a type of round hat), and the *belgha* (a type of slipper) with the Western *complet-veston* (suit), the *casquette*, or the French *beret*—the indices of Jewish identity now Westernized, ceased to mark the Jews as different, blurring the boundaries between them and the French.

Not only clothes, but also table manners were modified and people had fewer shared dishes into which everyone dips for food and used plates and silverware. In addition, of course, Jews altered their folkways, removing protective devices against the evil eye, or as more often happened translated ritual phrases into French. Westernization spread in the domain of culture and leisure. The Tunisian Jews were reading a variety of French novels and writing their own. They could read many Jewish newspapers in French, such as *La Justice, L'Egalité, La Voix Juive*, and *Le Petit Matin*. They listened to Western music and singers such as Dalida, Paul Anka, Sarita Montiel, and Les Compagnons de la Chanson. They saw French movies with Brigitte Bardot, Jean Gabin, Catherine Deneuve, and Jeanne Moreau and American movies with Burt Lancaster, Doris Day, Esther Williams, James Dean, and Charlton Heston. They attended concerts, operas, and theaters together with the colonizers. They danced the fox trot and the cha-cha-cha.

Many of the changes that Tunisian Jews undertook may seem superficial since they establish rather small variations of appearance and some such variations were introduced by Tunisian Muslims as well, since as Memmi notes, “the first attempt of the colonized is to change his condition by changing his skin.”²⁷ But when the colonial power started to hire Jews in their administration, these minor differences mattered greatly over time because they blurred some of the boundaries between the Tunisian Jews and the French colonizers, while distancing the Jews a bit from the Tunisian Muslims. Undertaking cultural and socio-economic changes made it possible for the Jewish minority of Tunisia to eventually occupy a “middle” kind of position between the French colonizers and the colonized Tunisian Muslim Arabs.²⁸ However, this was not a simple position since it actually brought with it a division of the Tunisian Jewish community along new lines of nationality with one-third of Tunisia’s Jews holding French passports by 1956. The other two-thirds were legally Tunisian (some were Italian).

Even Memmi, who aligns himself with the colonized Tunisians, was not about to reject “Europe in its entirety.”²⁹ Indeed, the people with whom he was “most at ease” were the French philosophy professors working at the University of Tunis, the living examples that he generalizes into the model of the “colonizers of good will.”³⁰ While different from the “colonialists” who take on the role of colonizers and are usually people “of small stature beyond the pomp or simple pride of the petty colonizer,”³¹ “resolutely conservative,”³² and thoroughly racist due to a “mixture of behaviors and reflexes acquired and practiced since very early childhood,”³³ the “colonizers of good will” are still colonizers, though tormented ones. What torments them is their sense that the colonized are suffering grave injustices under colonialism. At the same time, the “colonizers of good will” neither give up their economic privileges nor their sense of superior difference from the colonized, whose culture they find “shocking” or just “irritating.”³⁴

It is probably not an accident that Memmi was most at ease with “colonizers of good will.” Their attitudes resembled those of the Tunisian Jewish population following a Westernization that did not fully elevate the Jews to the ranks of the French colonizers. Nonetheless, they thought of it as emancipatory and tended to view themselves as different from the colonized. Thus, Memmi maintains:

[The Tunisian Jews’] constant and very justifiable ambition is to escape from their colonized condition, an additional burden in an already oppressive status. To that end, they endeavor to resemble the colonizer in the frank hope that he may cease to consider them different from him. Hence their efforts to forget the past. . . . But if the colonizer does not always openly discourage these candidates to develop that resemblance, he never permits them to attain it either. Thus they live in painful and constant ambiguity. Re-

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jected by the colonizer, they share in part the physical conditions of the colonized and have a communion of interests with him; on the other hand, they reject the values of the colonized as belonging to a decayed world from which they eventually hope to escape.³⁵

That Tunisian Jews hoped to escape "the values of the colonized" is at least in part a function of their colonization by the Arabs. As Memmi suggests in his 1975 collection of essays significantly titled *Jews and Arabs*,³⁶ though Tunisian Jews lived in Tunisia prior to its colonization by the French, they were a "dominated, humiliated, threatened, and periodically massacred" minority, living among a Muslim Arab majority that persecuted it, as a result of which European colonization, "which the majority of Jewish intellectuals condemned for the sake of political ethics, was received by our own masses as a guarantee of survival."³⁷ All the Jews of Tunisia, feeling more secure under the European Protectorate, ardently tried to identify themselves with the French; they were willing to assimilate to the French culture that translated into socio-economic emancipation, because, though "Jews have been living in these so-called Arab countries before the arrival of the Arabs . . . [the] fact is that for centuries the Muslim Arabs have scornfully, cruelly, and systematically prevented [them] from carrying it out . . . [and] cohabitation with the Arabs was . . . filled with threats."³⁸

The systematic prevention of Jews living in Arab countries from being equal to the Muslim Arabs was renewed in Tunisia's case when Tunisia became independent and declared itself a Muslim country and a member of the Arab nation. The Jews were once again cast as "outsiders," this time because they were Jewish and because they had assimilated to French culture under the French Protectorate. Tunisian officials implemented processes of Arabization, as well as anti-Jewish economic measures. The Tunisian Jews, consequently, became apprehensive about the revolutionary changes taking place in Tunisia, and felt quite vulnerable. Coexistence seemed hard and complicated, and the Jewish population could not really envision its future in Tunisia in the decolonizing Tunisian terms that segregated as well as discriminated against them. "Under the circumstances," asks Memmi, "what is surprising about the . . . exodus toward France and Israel [which] even speeded up?"³⁹

No large exodus was possible before French colonization and the foundation of the state of Israel. So, the longevity of the large Jewish community in Tunisia cannot be taken as proof of a better state of affairs. To make sure that this is understood, Memmi declares:

Except during two or three periods, . . . the Jews never had an idyllic life [in Arab countries]. . . . [T]he Jews were not only at the mercy of the rabble but in fact had a statute that legitimized, as it were, their servitude. We are familiar with that statute: since the Abbasside dynasty, it has been in the Charter of Omar. Roughly speaking,

and in the best of cases, the Jew is protected like a dog which is part of a man's property, but if he raises his head or acts like a man, then he must be beaten so that he will always remember his status.⁴⁰

Memmi is very concerned that the gravity of the Jewish situation in Tunisia and other Arab countries be comprehended. He gives both historical examples of the Jewish experience and personal ones pointing out that his own "grandfather and father still lived in terror of the blows on the head which any Arab passerby could give them at any time."⁴¹ In addition, he calls attention to several factors that hinder seeing the situation clearly. These include the centering of European Jewish history, the politically motivated wish of Muslim Arabs to place responsibility for Jewish-Arab conflicts—especially since the rise and successes of political Zionism—on Europe's Jews, the European left's excusing sympathy toward the oppressed Muslim Arabs, the Jewish Israeli left's political wish to belong in the Middle East, and the nostalgia of the Jews from Arab countries who like any uprooted people "embellish the past" and "minimize and even completely erase the memory of persecution."⁴²

THE (RACIALIZED) JEWISH PREDICAMENT

Memmi knows that by saying that the Tunisian Jews were colonized by the Tunisian Muslim Arabs he implicates the Tunisian Muslim Arabs with racism. After all, he was among the first to identify the role of racism in colonization. Unlike some liberals and left radicals, he believes that victims of racism, like the Tunisian Muslim Arabs, can be racist themselves and that, in the case of Tunisia, the racism has not been imported from Europe. While the French did develop a brand of modern, read racist, antisemitism in the nineteenth century⁴³ and brought it with them to Tunisia, the Tunisian Muslim Arabs already had their own brand of antisemitism.⁴⁴ Tunisian antisemitism did not, prior to colonization, have biological foundations. However, according to Memmi, it was racist nonetheless.

In his 1982 *Racism*,⁴⁵ Memmi distinguishes between a narrow and wide sense of racism. Racism in its narrow sense appeals to biological differences. Racism more generally, which Memmi later refers to as "heterophobia,"⁴⁶ "values any factual or imagined group differences in a manner that favors a discriminator and harms their victims, and the valuation is intended to justify aggression or privilege."⁴⁷ Memmi's distinction between biologically based racism and racism in general resembles the distinction that Anthony Appiah draws between extrinsic racism and intrinsic racism.⁴⁸ Though any form of racism, according to Appiah, provides the racist with a basis for treating members of her/his own race differently from others, extrinsic racists tend to be racialists and assume a biological base for race that they then use to ground

beliefs about the moral value of the races. Intrinsic racists can be but are not necessarily racialists since they assign different values on the basis of group membership independently of racial essence.

Memmi's move to a more general definition of racism is motivated by his sense that racism expresses a suspicion and fear of the difference of strangers, hence is fundamentally a form of xenophobia. While racism may be presented propositionally, it is its continued existence despite the obvious wrongness of the propositional account that leads Memmi to probe into the psychoexperiential aspects of racism. Memmi states at the end of his own careful analysis and critique of racist discourse, "Racism does not belong wholly to the logical order. Its true meaning is not rationally given. It is at the same time a utilitarian and naive thesis that is based on something other than itself which rules its origins and purpose. To understand racism we have to ask ourselves what is its end and where was it born? And the answer is that racism is not a theory but a pseudo-theory. . . . [I]t is a mythologizing and rationalizing projection of existential feelings."⁴⁹

Methodologically, Memmi's turn to the psychological dimensions of racism is in line with Jean-Paul Sartre's existentialist analysis in *Anti-Semite and Jew*.⁵⁰ What Sartre emphasizes even more than Memmi is the racist choice of racism that is fundamentally a choice of a passion that resists reason and is supported by the racist belonging to a group. For Memmi too, racism experientially connects, but not only the members of the group to which the racist belongs. Rather, it also connects racists and their victims since, even though racism attempts to nullify the other, "it is nonetheless a rich and distressing experience of the different other."⁵¹

Memmi claims that both Christians and Muslim Arabs have been distressed by Jewish difference. At its early beginnings, this difference threatened Christianity since it competed with Judaism from which, in addition, it needed to differentiate itself. Christian antisemitism responds to the threat posed by Jewish existence. For Islam, antisemitism plays a different role. Here, what is at issue is the need for an oppression that always reminds both sides that Islam won its wars and the Jews lost theirs: "The Jews deserve scorn because they are weak."⁵² Tunisian Jews have been the subject of Muslim Arab scorn for a long time.

French colonialism, as well as immigration to France, brought Tunisian Jews in contact with European antisemites. Immigration to Israel, the country that Memmi wants to support because he sees it as promising a liberation for Jews of the kind that national liberation brings colonized people, subjected them to intra-Jewish discrimination. And, while Memmi notes that this is not surprising, he also notes in his preface to *Racism* that it has taken until 1998 for his work on racism to be translated to and published in Hebrew and that his *The Colonizer and the Colonized* has yet to be picked up for publication by a Jewish Israeli press.⁵³

CONCLUSION

As Memmi's work suggests, modern Tunisian Jewish identity has been forged under a complex set of circumstances. Tunisian Jews were not just members of a religious minority community. Deeply embedded in Tunisia, they had to deal first with a Tunisian Muslim Arab kind of antisemitism or anti-Jewish racism even as they culturally became quite like Tunisian Muslim Arabs. Under French colonial rule, the Jews of Tunisia deconstructed many aspects of their "Oriental" selves, and experienced an image shift, from resembling the "Oriental" colonized Arabs to resembling the "Occidental" French colonizers, through their rapid adaptation to the French language, customs, and culture. Since the French administrators strongly encouraged the French acculturation of Tunisian Jews through many educational and economic opportunities, their "Oriental" past started just to fade away. As a result, a new society of French-assimilated Jews emerged. When Tunisia gained its independence from France and emerged as a Muslim Arab country, Tunisian Jews were not let to forget that after all they were French-accultured Jews.

Experiences of this sort do not yield a unitary sense of identity but rather a sense of an identity that is crisscrossed by Jewishness, the Arab (and Muslim) "Orient," and the French (and Christian) "Occident." At least for Memmi, this is not an identity without internal conflicts, some of which are particularly acute due to the relation of all three not only to each other, but also to class. However, as Memmi's work, which probes relentlessly into the conditions of his own life, demonstrates, this rifted crisscrossed identity is also very rich. His work also illustrates that assimilation, just like the affirmation of authenticity, can be strategic for the survival of any community, let alone a minority community like that of Tunisian Jews. Survival cannot be accomplished through assimilation but rather demands an exit and migration at an individual and a communal level. In the case of the Jews of Tunisia, all members of the Jewish communities fled because of discrimination and persecution, and the dramatic circumstances of their flight from Tunisia, a member of the Arab League, have been used to simply identify them as Jewish refugees from Arab countries.

NOTES

1. In addition to a few Web sources such as the one by the Institute for Jewish Policy Research, Tunisia, <www.jpr.org.uk/antisem/countries/tunisia/tunisia.html> (last accessed: July 1999), one can find historical information about Tunisian Jews in Andre N. Chouraqui, *Between East and West: A History of the Jews of North Africa* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1968); H. Z. (J. W.) Hirschberg, *A History of the Jews of North Africa*, vol. 1, *From Antiquity to the Sixteenth Century* (Leiden: Brill, 1974);

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H. Z. (J. W.) Hirschberg, *A History of the Jews of North Africa*, vol. 2, *From the Ottoman Conquests to the Present Time* (Leiden: Brill, 1981); Robert Attal and Claude Sitbon, *From Carthage to Jerusalem: The Jewish Community in Tunis* (Tel Aviv: Beit Hatfutzot, 1986); and Paul Sebag, *Histoire des Juifs de Tunisie Des Origines a nos Jours* (Paris: Editions L'Harmattan, 1991). For historical information regarding the experience of Tunisian Jews under Vichy and the Nazi occupation, see, in addition, Michel Abitbol, *The Jews of North Africa during the Second World War* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1989) [French edition: *Les Juifs d'Afrique du Nord sous vichy* (Paris: Maisonneuve and Larose, 1983)]; and Jacques Sabille, *Les Juifs de Tunisie sous Vichy et l'Occupation* (Paris: Editions du Centre, 1954). For historical documents, see Robert Attal and Claude Sitbon, eds., *Regards sur les Juifs de Tunisie* (Paris: Editions Albin Michel, 1979). For Arab antisemitism in Arab countries, see Ychoshafat Harkabi, "Antisemitism in Arab Countries," *Encyclopedia Judaica*.

2. Albert Memmi, *The Pillar of Salt* (Boston: Beacon, 1992) [French edition: *La Statue de sel* (Paris: Gallimard, 1953)].

3. Memmi cites the story in an epigraph. The story appears in *Genesis* 19:26.

4. Memmi, *Pillar of Salt*, 335.

5. Memmi, *Pillar of Salt*, 331.

6. Memmi received a scholarship from the Jewish Community Council of Tunis that made it possible for him to attend the Lycée Carnot. While the scholarship was local, the elementary school that he attended was one of many established by the Alliance Israélite Universelle, an international Jewish organization based in France that in 1860 was constituted with the "aim of defending Jewish honor, encouraging physical labor, opposing ignorance and prejudice, striving towards Jewish emancipation and its consolidation through the moral and spiritual improvement of the Jews." See Shmuel Ettinger, "The Modern Period," in *A History of the Jewish People*, ed. Haim H. Ben Sason (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1976 [Hebrew edition: *Toldot Am Israel* (Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1969)]), 850. There is plenty of critical commentary on the subject, but mostly it focuses on the imposition of acculturation from the outside. For a discussion of internal moves, see Naomi Zack's discussion of E. Franklin Frazier's work and the Harlem Renaissance and the expectations for a "redemptive acculturation" in Naomi Zack, *Race and Mixed Race* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993), 86–111.

7. Memmi, *Pillar of Salt*, 104.

8. Memmi, *Pillar of Salt*, 105.

9. Memmi, *Pillar of Salt*, 119.

10. Memmi, *Pillar of Salt*, 230.

11. Antisemitism means systematic prejudice against the Jews and is used for all types of Jew-hatred; one talks about Arab antisemitism and Islamic antisemitism; see "Muslim Antisemitism: A Clear and Present Danger" by Robert A. Wistrich, *The American Jewish Committee* (April 2002), and "Arab Antisemitism and the Arab-Israeli Conflict" by Abraham H. Foxman, *Jerusalem Post*, 30 July 2001. Notice the absence of a hyphen; there has never been any such thing as "Semitism." The terms Semitic and Aryan refer not to racial categories of people but to groups of languages, Hebrew and Arabic being Semitic tongues. For more explanation, see Samuel Almog, "What's in a Hyphen?" *SIOUX Report: Newsletter of the Vital Bassoon International Center for the Study of Antisemitism* (Summer 1989) and the following Web sources: <http://sicsa.huji.ac.il/hyphen.htm> and <http://wow.mtsu.Ed/~Austin/glossary.html>. There is no such thing as "anti-Jewish antisemitism" and "anti-Arab antisemitism."

12. Memmi, *Pillar of Salt*, 269.
13. Memmi, *Pillar of Salt*, 281.
14. Memmi, *Pillar of Salt*, 319.
15. Albert Memmi, *The Liberation of the Jew* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1976 [French edition: *La liberation du juifs* (Paris: Gallimand, 1966)]). Translations from Hebrew by Bat-Ami Bar On.
16. Memmi, *Liberation of the Jew*, 21.
17. Memmi, *Liberation of the Jew*, 33.
18. Memmi, *Liberation of the Jew*, 100.
19. Memmi, *Liberation of the Jew*, 173.
20. Albert Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized* (Boston: Beacon, 1991 [French edition: *Portrait du Colonisé précédé du Portrait du Clonisateur* (Corréa: Buchet/Chartel, 1957)]).
21. Memmi, *Colonizer and the Colonized*, ix.
22. Memmi, *Colonizer and the Colonized*, xiv.
23. Memmi, *Colonizer and the Colonized*, xiii.
24. Memmi, *Colonizer and the Colonized*, xiv.
25. Memmi, *Liberation of the Jew*, 147.
26. Memmi, *Colonizer and the Colonized*, 120. The French words “Arabe, Française, Juive” are both adjectives and nouns.
27. Memmi, *Colonizer and Colonized*, 145.
28. For comparative discussions and explanations of the phenomenon of an identified group, like the Tunisian Jews, coming to occupy the “middle” social position in a society, see Daniel Chirot and Anthony Reid, eds., *Essential Outsiders* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997).
29. Memmi, *Colonizer and the Colonized*, 145.
30. Memmi, *Colonizer and the Colonized*, xv.
31. Memmi, *Colonizer and the Colonized*, 49.
32. Memmi, *Colonizer and the Colonized*, 61.
33. Memmi, *Colonizer and the Colonized*, 70.
34. Memmi, *Colonizer and the Colonized*, 25.
35. Memmi, *Colonizer and the Colonized*, 15–16.
36. Albert Memmi, *Jews and Arabs* (Chicago: O’Hara, 1975). The book contains essays originally written in French between 1953 and 1975.
37. Memmi, *Jews and Arabs*, 12.
38. Memmi, *Jews and Arabs*, 20.
39. Memmi, *Jews and Arabs*, 24.
40. Memmi, *Jews and Arabs*, 33.
41. Memmi, *Jews and Arabs*, 33.
42. Memmi, *Jews and Arabs*, 28. Memmi’s position is very different from the position that Ella Shohat has been developing in her work. In Memmi’s terms, she appears to commit most of the fallacies he enumerates. See Ella Shohat, “Sepharadim in Israel: Zionism from the Standpoint of Its Other Victims,” *Social Text* 19/20 (Fall, 1988): 1–35; and Ella Shohat, “The Invention of the Mizrahim,” *Journal of Palestinian Studies* 29, no. 1 (Autumn, 1999): 5–20.
43. See Ivan Hanford, *Race: The History of an Idea in the West* (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center, 1996), especially his discussion of Jules Michelet (253–255) and

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Edouard Drumont (319–321). See also Dominique Schnapper, "Perceptions of Anti-Semitism in France," in *Antisemitism in the Contemporary World*, ed. Michael Curtis (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1986), 261–272.

44. See Bernard Lewis, *The Jews of Islam* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1986); and Norman Stillman, "Antisemitism in the Contemporary Arab World," in *Antisemitism in the Contemporary World*, ed. Michael Curtis (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1986), 70–85.

45. Albert Memmi, *Racism* (Jerusalem: Carmel, 1996 [French edition: *Le racisme* (Paris: Gallimand, 1982)]). Translations from Hebrew by Bat-Ami Bar On.

46. Memmi, *Racism*, 121.

47. Memmi, *Racism*, 106.

48. K. Anthony Appiah, "Racisms," in *Anatomy of Racism*, ed. David Theo Goldberg (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990), 3–17. See also David Theo Goldberg, *Racist Culture* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1993). Goldberg too has a definition of racism that is quite open and in which a biologically based racism is only a variant.

49. Memmi, *Racism*, 39.

50. Jean Paul Sartre, *Anti-Semite and Jew* (New York: Schocken, 1948 [French edition: *Reflecons sur la question juive* (Paris: P. Morihien, 1946)]). See Zack's use of the Sartrean analysis in Zack, *Race and Mixed Race*, 155–164.

51. Memmi, *Racism*, 48.

52. Memmi, *Racism*, 86.

53. Memmi, *Racism*, 12.

