

Albert Memmi: The Syndrome of Self-exile

ISAAC YETIV, *University of Hartford*

Among the native writers of the Maghreb, Albert Memmi seems to best represent the general trend in the evolution of North-African literature of French expression: from ethnocentrism to universalism. Born in 1920 in a poor family in the extremely poor Jewish ghetto of Tunis, he became one of the most eminent Maghrebian writers of the generation of 1950. Like his Moslem counterparts, he described with vivid realism his own social milieu. However, what distinguishes him from the other Maghrebian writers is that remarkable depth of self-analysis, sometimes so cruel that it has been compared to a surgical operation, to some kind of pathetic auto-dissection. Memmi constantly scrutinizes his own ego; his literary creation is a long and never-ending pursuit of truth, an introspective search in the darkest corners of his inner self, a desperate attempt to discover his fugitive identity, constantly changing, never fixed. Memmi seems to find some pleasure in cutting himself into pieces and vehemently criticizing his own ethnic group and the society at large. In his painful "know thyself" search, one might detect a touch of morose delectation. His sharp scalpel cuts deep into the wounds of his soul and his eagerness to understand who he is, where he comes from and what he is becoming, makes him forget and even enjoy his pains. Masochism? Certainly, to some extent, and Memmi himself candidly admitted the existence of "that strange devil of objectivity which is another aspect of my masochism."¹

It is very difficult to draw a line between egocentrism and universalism in a literary work of art. Is Balzac's *Le Père Goriot* the story of a poor man, well-defined in time and space, who is sick-of-love for his daughters and who is abandoned by them, or does it contain a universal teaching, valid for all times and places, namely that a father should not give everything he has to his children in his lifetime for fear of being rejected by them when he has nothing left to give? And is Hamlet an orphan who must avenge his father's murder, or a man who could not make up his mind? There is today a tendency among literary critics to find universalism in every literary or artistic creation; even a lyrical poem contains the universal themes of human love, hope, suffering or despair, and even an autobiography sheds light not only on the specific problems of an individual or a group, but also on the anxiety of man. In *La Force de l'Age*, Simone de Beauvoir expresses a similar view when she writes that "the study of a specific case is more informative than general and abstract answers."² Memmi himself goes even further in defending his own method of what he called "the specific story which is stylized,"³ or what we may call, in other words, the extrapolation of a personal experience. "It is probable," he writes, "that all the universal propositions owe their value only to that implicit contact with life, without which they would be nothing more than wind; this is what we find in . . . most of the great thoughts even if their authors don't say it, even if they don't notice it themselves."⁴ But even if we set aside these interpretations of universalism and stick to the traditional definitions, we still find in the works of Memmi a very clear evolution from the individual to the general, from the specific to the universal.

The world of Memmi, created and shaped under the impact of his own

alienation, is dominated by a pervasive anguish, not the metaphysical anxiety of the human condition, of the absurd in life as expressed for example in Camus' *Caligula* or Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, but a social-existential anxiety originating in his own split-individuality, in his marginality and ambivalence caused by his own situation, by his own personal equation, that of being a Jew, a Colonized, a Proletarian's son, exploited, rejected, and dominated on these three counts. To use Sartrean language, Memmi has always been "in situation," and the compulsive tension of his writings results from his continuous struggle to comprehend and fight his "situation" instead of "assuming" it and resigning himself to be what he really is. Many critics find in this reaction the cause of Memmi's pessimism and even of his deterministic attitude towards life and man. The evolution of his work followed a rigorous pattern which may be summarized as a progression from "I" to "the couple" to "the groups" to "mankind" in general. *La Statue de Sel* (1953)⁵ and *Agar* (1955)⁶ are two autobiographical novels; the first is egocentric and ethnocentric, the second is the story of a couple. For the study of the groups, Memmi published two "Portraits": *Portrait du Colonisé, précédé du Portrait du Colonisateur* (1957)⁷ and *Portrait d'Un Juif* (1963)⁸ followed by *La Libération du Juif* (1966).⁹ Later, he compiled a series of essays on what he called the conditions of oppression—the Black, the Colonized, the Jew, the Proletarian, the Woman and the Servant—which embraced almost all mankind, in a book, *L'Homme dominé* (1968).¹⁰

La Statue de Sel "is the story of a young man," wrote Memmi in *L'Homme dominé* (p. 100), "who looked very much like me, torn between two civilizations, who could not cut off the cord which tied him to the Orient, to the past, to his mother tongue, to his strange illiterate mother who still danced magic dances; but who also could not accept the Occident, its cruelty, its injustices, its false rationalizations and its fake morals; who finds himself very close to destruction when he decides to leave everything for an imaginary country and not to look back in order not to be transformed into a pillar of salt." This, indeed, is the main theme of the novel in which the author-narrator rigorously follows the chronological order of the events of his own life. The protagonist of the novel, Mordekhai Benillouche, tells about his childhood in the poor Jewish ghetto of Tunis, the serene and beautiful atmosphere of the Sabbath in his large family, the little saddler's shop of his father who must work long hours after sunset to make ends meet, and his superstitious mother of Berber origin, a dutiful housekeeper and strict educator of her children. The boy is full of admiration for his hard-working father who is his protector, the symbol of force and cleverness, and also, through his daily prayers, his intercessor before the Almighty God, the jealous and dreadful God of the Old Testament.

But this quiet and serenity do not last long. The young Mordekhai obtains a scholarship and is thrown "into the mouth of a wolf,"¹¹ in the French *Lycée* where he starts the adventure of knowledge. French culture and civilization fascinate him. He admires Racine for his wonderful tragedies, Rousseau for his humble origins, Vigny for his pride and his stoicism, Robespierre and Saint-Just for their struggle against social injustices. 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. He deliberately chooses the West and rejects

the East. He breaks with his father; he cannot endure any more the superstitious beliefs of his illiterate mother; he is disgusted with the religious and social customs of his uncles and aunts; he desecrates the social values of his ethnic group from which he severs himself. But to his painful disenchantment, he soon discovers that though he has heartily adopted Western culture and civilization, he is not welcome in his new spiritual homeland. In 1942, the Germans invade Tunisia and the so-much-desired Western civilization appears in the Nazi uniform of the Wehrmacht. Mordekhai knows the hardships and dangers of forced labor in German camps, and when, after the liberation, he decides to enlist in the FFL, the Free French Forces of General de Gaulle, he is refused because of his Jewish name. Mordekhai finds it impossible to return to his ethnic sources; he decides to leave for a far country in order to avoid madness or suicide.

Though essentially egocentric and ethnocentric, *La Statue de Sel* is nevertheless a document of universal scope about the marginal man, the cultural hybrid and his ambiguities. Memmi defines his work in general as "a thought that has been lived, then mastered and rethought"¹² and, as he says, "this is the best point of departure for the understanding of a condition."¹³

After many years of absence in that far country, the same Mordekhai returns to his native land. Though his name is not mentioned in *Agar*, this is the same narrator as in *La Statue de Sel*, with the same father and mother and social environment. In his second novel, new characters appear: Marie, French and Catholic, is the narrator's wife; and as a counterpart, the Jewish organized community with its rigid laws prohibiting mixed marriage and making life impossible for the young couple whose union eventually disintegrates.

In *Agar* we find the same theme of the clash between two cultures; but this time the two worlds evolve in the open, out of the inner self of the narrator. The masochism detected in *La Statue de Sel* is still present but an element of sadism is also apparent. The narrator, failing to reconcile the two parts of his schizophrenic individuality, throws them out of himself and, with a morbid pleasure, watches them fight each other on the arena. He himself is only a catalyst; without him, Marie's world would have never met his family's world and the community's. He has brought them face to face and the shock of their encounter seems to delight him and to provide him with a kind of revenge for his past sufferings when both worlds coexisted and fought inside his tormented being. However, the narrator gets more and more involved in his own game. Faced with impossible situations, he is the one who must make decisions and there is no easy way out. He is constantly pushed around by both parties and, despite his apparent efforts to satisfy both sides, he ends up at odds with everyone. The situation is aggravated by the birth of his son; for the tribe, this is an occasion of rejoicing in a festive mood, but for him, it is a source of trouble and anxiety. The crucial questions of the name of the newborn and the ritual of the circumcision must be answered, and without delay. He is caught between the hammer and the anvil, between the imperative command of his society and the intransigence of his alien wife angrily fighting against a conspicuous Hebrew name which will mark her child for life, and also against the barbaric rite of the circumcision. Irritated and exacerbated by the equally inhumane pressures exerted on his sick-and-tired ego, he violently resists, fights both his wife and his family, and becomes alienated from the two worlds. His marriage is broken

up and he quits the tribe. As in *La Statue de Sel*, the denouement of *Agar* is a failure, a separation, a departure.

With *Agar*, Memmi wanted to prove a thesis, that a mixed marriage cannot work. In *L'Homme dominé*, he wrote: ". . . there is a very common risk that the war between groups will break out inside the couples" (p. 101). To make his task easier, he hardened the character of Marie and weakened her husband's. If we accept these premises, we are bound to accept what seems to be the ineluctable conclusion. The plot evolves logically and, as in Racine's tragedies, the denouement seems written in advance in the characters of the protagonists and in their passions. But must we accept the premises? After all, most marriages suffer from a certain *mixité*, and not all mixed marriages end with a separation. In Mouloud Feraoun's novel, *La Terre et le Sang*,¹⁴ the author, a Kabyle from Algeria, tells the story of another Marie, also French and Christian, who is brought by her native husband to a Kabyle village and who, in spite of the first shock caused by the brutal change, gets along very well with her new social and cultural entourage and is happily married and *kabyalized*. True, her education, temperament, and character are different from her *Agar's* counterpart and perhaps the Kabyle religious laws are less rigid toward aliens than those of the Jewish community, but it is also true that Memmi, through his legitimate prerogative as writer and creator, deliberately exaggerated the intransigence of his Marie so that her confrontation with the archaic laws of the impregnable citadel of his own community could only lead to disaster. In *Agar*, Marie is depicted in Manichaean terms: "My folks were dirty and anachronistic! Like the Greeks and the Italians; she repeated that to me many times. [For her,] the world is divided in two: in the upper part of the globe, the Northerners, clean and orderly, civilized and masters of themselves, holders of political and technological power; in the lower part, the Southerners, noisy and vulgar, the Italian misery, the Spanish savagery, the African barbarity, the South-American mannerism . . . I was responsible for Jews and Arabs, for Negroes and Chinese . . . I convinced myself that she was the North and I was the South" (pp. 184-185).

Whatever our reservations to the somewhat pessimistic and deterministic attitude of Memmi concerning the inevitable failure of mixed marriages, the theme of *Agar*, though reflecting the socio-political realities of a specific place and a specific time, remains nevertheless universal. The author himself contracted a mixed marriage and he confessed that, in spite of its *mixité*, it was saved by the strong will and the intelligence of both partners. This clearly shows Memmi's belief that the individual is very often the victim of deeply-entrenched prejudices prevalent among different ethnic groups.

During the stage of acculturation, the colonized intellectual, the *évolué*, admired his master and eagerly desired to resemble him and to assimilate to the new culture. This was very often accompanied by contempt for his own society and even by a sentiment of self-hatred. Driss Chraïbi, a Moroccan Arab, and Mouloud Mammeri, an Algerian Kabyle, are two other Maghrebian writers who discovered with enthusiasm the French culture and who came to despise their milieu of origin and to desecrate all the cherished values of their society. Chraïbi's *Le Passé simple*¹⁵ and Mammeri's *Le Sommeil du Juste*¹⁶ deal with the same themes as *La Statue de Sel* in which Memmi wrote: "Sometimes, I think with fright of the darkness in which I might have lived, of the multitude of things in the universe that I might have ignored. And I wouldn't have even suspected their existence! Like certain fishes of the

depths which are not even aware of the existence of light" (p. 77). But the other side of the coin soon appears: "I discovered and detested the tribe . . . I learned to scorn Uncle Aroun . . . to mock at Uncle Filikche . . . to hate Aunt Foufa's husband" (p. 62). Even his mother is not spared: "She was a stranger to me, my mother, a strange part of myself, plunged in the heart of primitive continents. . . . What obscure ties chain me to this phantom!" (p. 142).

One might wonder what happened to these nice little children, obedient and respectful, of the Kabyle village, the Arab town and the Jewish ghetto. The only cause of their metamorphosis is that they had been thrown "into the mouth of the wolf" and that a new civilization which had on its side the prestige, glory, and power, was superimposed upon their own primitive, defeated, and obsolete culture. It took them many years to discover that what the French called their *mission civilisatrice* had in fact been to them a "cultural oppression."¹⁷ Disappointed by the treacherous attitude of the French colonizers who "frenchified" them but prevented their entrance to their long-coveted circles, they retreated to reality and recovered their lucidity with the calmness of the disillusioned.

In 1957, Memmi published his famous and now classic essay, *Portrait du Colonisé, précédé du Portrait du Colonisateur* which provided, at least in part, an answer to the enigma, and straightened out what was mistakenly considered by the *évolués* to be an incongruous situation. In this *Portrait*, Memmi stated that the colonial situation was to blame and that it could not have been otherwise. Again, this deterministic or even fatalistic attitude which we have already found in his novels is arguable. Jean Déjeux, a leading scholar in Maghrebian literature, finds these portraits "excessively rigorous, frozen, stereotyped . . . the work of a philosopher juggling with ideas rather than a man of action who would certainly have described them in a less rigid manner."¹⁸ This may be true; nevertheless, these portraits constitute a document of great value, historical, political, sociological, and even psychological. They contain a ruthless analysis which is comprehensive in its scope, and though extremely objective in its intention, it clearly reveals the author's partisanship, perhaps unconscious, and his own "situation" as an oppressed colonized. What remains certain is that Memmi's previsions have proven to be right; history vindicated him. His *Portrait du Colonisé* became a subject of discussion in a great number of universities in the world, especially in Black Africa. Leopold S. Senghor wrote about it: "Albert Memmi's book will constitute a document to which the historians of colonization will have to refer"¹⁹ and the President of the African Cultural Society, Alioune Diop, saw in it "the best known study of colonial psychology."²⁰

In his own preface to the book, Memmi wrote that he had "not invented or supposed anything, [that he had] not extrapolated, [but] had only analyzed his own experience as a colonized individual" (p. 20). However, other people, members of "oppressed" groups, recognized themselves in this essay. An American writer wrote to Memmi: "As a colored man who has lived the racial experience in the U.S., it is easy for me to identify with the colonized."²¹ The same reaction came from South-Americans, from French-Canadians and from other ethnic groups all over the world. Americans, from French-Canadians and from other ethnic groups all over the world.

In *Portrait du Colonisé*, Memmi asserts that the colonial situation is a

relationship between peoples and groups and not between individuals. For him, every "colonial" who chooses to live in the colony and enjoy the privileges of his "condition" becomes ipso facto a "colonizer." Memmi does not deny the existence of a "malaise" of the French leftist liberal such as Camus, for example, who lives in the colony but is opposed to the injustices of the colonial system. However, since the Liberal cannot relinquish his privileges and cross over to the other side, he remains a "colonizer." There is only one way out of his malaise: "If he cannot suffer in silence and make his life a perpetual compromise, if he is among the best, he may as well leave the colony and its privileges. . . . Ceasing to be a colonizer, he will put an end to his contradictions and to his malaise" (p. 81). As for the colonized man, he is dehumanized, mystified and deprived of his liberty by the colonizer. He is led to believe in his mythical portrait as drawn by the colonizer: he is lazy, weak, dirty, mentally retarded, undependable; he has no history, no culture, no memory, no language. This leads to the self-hatred of the colonized individual, his servile respect for his oppressor and his intense efforts to identify with him, efforts which prove to be in vain. For, says Memmi, "in order to assimilate, it is not enough to sever relations with his own ethnic group. [The colonized man] must penetrate another one and what he encounters is the refusal of the Colonizer" (p. 160). His way is blocked, his endeavor stifled. The closed circle of the Colonizer admits no intruders who might, by their numbers, jeopardize the vested interests of the privileged minority and endanger its "homogeneity."

What is then the solution to that intolerable situation? Memmi sees only the revolt against the colonial power which ultimately leads to political independence: "The political situation, by virtue of its internal fatality, calls for revolt. For the colonial condition cannot be adjusted; as a pillory, it can only be smashed" (p. 164).

After World War II, Memmi left Tunisia for France to pursue his education which had been interrupted by the Vichy laws against the Jews. A few years later, he returned to his native country as a philosophy professor, and took an active part in the nationalistic movement for independence. For a while, he was the editor of the literary page of *L'Action*, the first Tunisian weekly newspaper. But when Tunisia became independent (1956), Memmi painfully realized that there was no place for him, as a Jew, as a leftist liberal, in a country whose newly-drafted constitution clearly declared Islam as the religion of the State. In the preface to *Portrait du Colonisé*, he candidly wrote: "I said that I was of Tunisian nationality; like all the other Tunisians, I was treated as a second-class citizen, deprived of political rights, with no access to most of the administrative posts. . . . But I was not a Moslem. And this had a tremendous meaning in a country where so many human groups coexisted but where each one of them was strictly jealous of its own physiognomy" (p. 22). Against all hopes and expectations, it became evident to him that "his Jewish dimension had not been resolved in his new quality of citizen."²²

This new failure and its inevitable results, disappointment and disillusionment, prompted Memmi to pursue his never-ending search on the *via dolorosa* of the quest for identity. His insatiable thirst for the Truth and his never-satisfied curiosity to explore and understand his own personality led him to a new investigation, in an attempt to penetrate a new part of himself: his Jewish condition. Five years after *Portrait du Colonisé*, Memmi published *Portrait d'Un Juif*,²³ another condition of oppression, another lived experience,

systematized and generalized. He was not the first to write about the Jewish condition but his study is unique for two reasons which he clearly stated in his preface. First, "the enterprise must be conducted by a Jew, from the inside" (p. 16), and though he admitted that Sartre's essay, *Réflexions sur la Question Juive*,²⁴ "contains more intuition and truth than one may find in tons of publications" (p. 16), he nevertheless found it lacking in the necessary coincidence with the condition. No White can fully understand the Black condition; no Man can fully understand the Woman condition. Simone de Beauvoir who may be considered as the precursor of the Women's Liberation movement, put it very simply in terms which can easily apply to any condition of oppression: "To elucidate the situation of the Woman, certain women are in the best position. . . . We know the feminine world more intimately than the men do because our roots are there, we understand the meaning of being a female more immediately and we care much more to know about it."²⁵ The second reason is that no Jew before him has had the courage to tell it like it is, and to tell everything, for fear it might serve the enemy and do harm to the already extremely vulnerable Jewish community. At the risk of vehement protests and accusations from the beleaguered Jewish establishment, Memmi courageously speaks his mind. Nothing is considered taboo; nothing is left aside or embellished. He does not intend to "master history or geography" (p. 19); nor does he want to defend a thesis, religious or metaphysical. His sole purpose is to comprehend the mechanics of his own condition and that of his contemporary coreligionists. In the same process, he analyzes the attitude of the others for, "even if I prefer to forget myself . . . the Others will not forget and will do their best to remind me" (p. 15). He thus espouses the Sartrean point of view that antisemitism is the disease of the Others. The task is not easy, he admits. This is "a fight against myself; I will have to mistreat myself in order to reach the most profound truth" (p. 18).

Memmi analyzes all the facets of the Jewish condition: the "curse" of being a Jew, hated and persecuted through the centuries, ostracized and banished; its counterpart, the immense heritage of Judaism, cultural and spiritual, and its great contribution to mankind and to modern civilization. He refutes all the myths, developed and nurtured for centuries against the Jewish people: the Jew is not a biological figure, nor is he an economical one; these myths are the creation of the antisemite who needs a scapegoat for his misfortunes. Memmi's *Portrait of a Jew*, exclaimed an American rabbi, "is what would have been Rousseau's *Confessions* had he lived after Sartre and Joyce and had he been Jewish."²⁶ Indeed, it is a confession, a painful and somewhat desperate confession, an ambitious enterprise conducted with patience and lucidity, a mixture of pseudo-scientific self-analysis and raging emotions and, to put it in Sartre's words, "a passionate geometry."²⁷

In a subsequent volume, *La Libération du Juif*,²⁸ Memmi attempts to provide a solution to the Jewish problem. For the colonized peoples, he saw nothing else but revolt and political independence; for the Jew, the way out is very similar. Memmi first shows the impossibility of assimilation and the inefficacy of conversion, and then concludes with the necessity of a national liberation: "Since a people could . . . live and achieve self-determination only as a nation, Jews must be made into a nation. Shortly, the particular liberation of the Jews is a national liberation and this has been called, for ten years, the State of Israel" (p. 243).

In closely following the man and his works, one cannot help discovering

in Memmi's personality two distinct figures, very often at odds with each other. This may be the sequel of the early duality caused by his French acculturation, or perhaps the inevitable corollary of his situation, of his personal equation. The first trend of his social and political outlook is to find a clear-cut solution, nationalistic or ethnocentric, to the oppressed conditions: revolt and independence for the Colonized and national statehood for the Jew. However, after second thoughts, a more humanistic and universalistic philosophy seems to overcome his narrow ethnocentric considerations. The Tunisian independence results in his exodus from his native country, and the establishment of the State of Israel does not resolve the Jewish problem. Memmi will have to think again, to reflect after this stage of investigation as he did after the others. In his introspective long itinerary to comprehend his "condition," he systematically exhausted all possibilities: his ego, his tribe, the Others; his being a colonized man, his being a Jew. But despite his efforts, the malaise is still there. Something else must be penetrated, that transcends all egoistic and ethnic distinctions: the nature of Man. In our stratified and segregated society, every human being is a tyrant of sorts and needs someone else to oppress: the Antisemite needs the Jew; the Colonizer needs the Colonized; the White needs the Black; the Capitalist needs the Proletarian; the Male needs the Female; the Master needs the Servant. In *L'Homme dominé*, Memmi analyzes all these conditions of oppression and finds that "racism is the symbol and the summary of every oppression, which is an unbearable aspect of human reality" (p. 9). Thus, Memmi's inquiry achieves universal proportions. The malaise is general and it becomes the task of world statesmen and nations to tackle the problem. In this last book of what seems to be the first cycle of his literary career, Memmi concludes his long journey in Hell, his arduous and painstaking search that led him from egocentrism to universalism. "It is by starting from my condition as Colonized and Jew," he wrote in the preface to *Portrait d'Un Juif*, "that I found the meaning of other conditions of oppression, of this general relationship of oppression which is unfortunately the most certain aspect of the human condition" (p. 21).

From the blind alley of his childhood to the noisy and anonymous life of the French capital, Albert Memmi has been in a permanent state of conflict with himself, trying in vain to sign an "armistice" with himself, certain that a real peace was not possible. This eternal struggle can provide an answer, however limited, to his inner contradictions and inconsistencies, his "impossibilities" as he liked to call them. After his *agrégation* in philosophy at the Sorbonne, he returned to his home country only to discover, after independence, that he could not stay there. His critics find the same ambiguity in his relationship with Israel: while suggesting a national solution to the Jewish problem, he himself did not settle in Israel. But even in France, today, where he seems to enjoy a solid reputation as a thinker and a writer, Memmi is far from having achieved that "armistice" he so craved for. In an interview, he once answered: "I am a French university graduate, I have French diplomas, yet I can't pretend to be completely integrated in France because I am not and I will never be."²⁹

With *Le Scorpion*,³⁰ Memmi seems to recapitulate all his previous works and ideas which were a faithful reflection of the different aspects of his life and personality. The structure of this novel is very different from those of *La Statue de Sel* and *Agar*. In fact, it can hardly be called a novel; it is an eclectic literary work of art that combines the humor and irony of the fable with the rigor and depth of the philosophical essay and with the lyric accents of a confession—the subtitle of this work is *The Imaginary Confession*. In this

novel, the inner contradictions of the author are incarnated in four different characters, each of them representing one facet of his restless personality: Imilio is the writer who thinks he can understand life by fictionalizing his own through an effort of his imagination; Marcel, his brother, is an ophtalmologist, well entrenched behind the fortress of science and facts, who believes in action; the uncle, a wise old man, a devout patriarch, relies on experience, patience and faith; and J.H., a former student, contests everything and shows the impatience of the revolutionary, which eventually leads him to commit suicide.

This system of mirrors, facing one another and reflecting ad infinitum the evanescent pictures very often deformed by the different angles of vision of the protagonists, enables the author to indulge in his cherished game of contradicting, even antagonizing himself at will, thus leaving open and unresolved the great problems of human existence, of love and hate, of right and wrong, of good and evil. Among the numerous symbols in *Le Scorpion*, the "cave" is the most significant for the understanding of the meaning of this literary creation; it symbolizes light and shadow, riches and poverty, fear and hope.

Emulating Rousseau whom he admires, Memmi writes in *Le Scorpion* that education begins with the individual, alone and naked, cut off from society. J.H. commits suicide because he expected too much from society and could not wait to find an answer to his questions, but Imilio who seems to be the real Memmi opts for his usual solution, a departure. By doing so, he precisely avoids the fate of those who, like J.H., push to extreme limits their own contradictions. He himself will live with his "impossibilities" for the rest of his life, in the perpetual self-exile of the alienated man of our modern society.

NOTES

¹Albert Memmi, *Portrait d'Un Juif* (Paris: Gallimard, 1962), p. 70. The translation of this quotation, as well as all translations in this article, is done by me.

²Quoted by Memmi in *L'Homme dominé* (Paris: Gallimard, 1968), p. 172.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Albert Memmi, *La Statue de Sel* (Paris: Buchet-Chastel, 1953) and (Paris: Gallimard, 1966). All the notes in this article refer to the last edition.

⁶Albert Memmi, *Agar* (Paris: Buchet-Chastel, 1955).

⁷Albert Memmi, *Portrait du Colonisé, précédé du Portrait du Colonisateur* (Paris: Buchet-Chastel, 1957) and (Paris: Pauvert, 1966). All the notes in this article refer to the Pauvert edition.

⁸Albert Memmi, *Portrait d'Un Juif*, (Paris: Gallimard, 1963).

⁹Albert Memmi, *La Libération du Juif* (Paris: Gallimard, 1966).

¹⁰Albert Memmi, *L'Homme dominé* (Paris: Gallimard, 1968).

¹¹This phrase was first pronounced by Kateb Yacine, another Maghrebien writer of the same generation, referring to his father's decision to enroll him in the French school.

¹²In *La Libération du Juif*, p. 77.

¹³Ibid.

- ¹⁴Mouloud Feraoun, *La Terre et le Sang* (Paris: Seuil, 1953).
- ¹⁵Driss Chraïbi, *Le Passé simple* (Paris: Denoël, 1954).
- ¹⁶Mouloud Mammeri, *Le Sommeil du Juste* (Paris: Plon, 1956).
- ¹⁷Paul Sebag, *La Tunisie* (Paris: Editions sociales, 1951), p. 183.
- ¹⁸Jean Déjeux, "Au-delà des conflits de civilisations," ESNA, *Cahiers nord-africains*, No. 72, April-May 1959, pp. 20-21.
- ¹⁹*Portrait du Colonisé*, Note of the Editor, p. 10.
- ²⁰Ibid.
- ²¹Ibid., p. 11.
- ²²*Portrait d'Un Juif*, p. 14.
- ²³The stress, says Memmi, is on the word "Un," meaning "a Jew" and not "the Jew," his self-portrait and not that of every Jew.
- ²⁴Jean-Paul Sartre, *Réflexions sur la Question Juive* (Paris: Gallimard, 1954).
- ²⁵Quoted by Memmi, *Portrait d'Un Juif*, p. 17.
- ²⁶Source unidentified; I found it among other opinions sent to me directly from Memmi.
- ²⁷In his preface to *Portrait du Colonisé*, p. 32.
- ²⁸Before the publication of *La Libération du Juif*, Memmi announced it as *L'Issue* (The Way Out) following *L'Impasse* (The Impasse) which he described in *Portrait d'Un Juif*.
- ²⁹*L'Afrique littéraire et artistique*, No. 11, June 1970, p. 56.
- ³⁰Albert Memmi, *Le Scorpion* (Paris: Gallimard, 1969).