

Albert Memmi. *Decolonization and the Decolonized*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006. Translated by Robert Bononno. xiv + 148 pp. \$17.95. Paper.

Albert Memmi is principally known for his *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, originally published in 1957, a brilliant indictment of the colonial system and its social and political effects on those caught up in its oppressive embrace. He has followed up after fifty years with a look at the decolonized, an attempt to understand what has happened since colonialism. Yet whereas in the first work Memmi was writing from the point of view of one who had experienced the colonial situation from within, he now clearly writes from the perspective of a European commenting from afar. It is as if the diaspora experience has led to such a process of acculturation that the author has lost the capacity to think through the lenses that made his initial book such a success. "Why do they continuously beg for aid from the ex-colonizer?" (22) he bemoans; "the country of the decolonized is a country without law, where there is rampant institutional violence that can only be countered by greater violence" (61). The author's main concern is to discuss the Arabo-Islamic world of the Middle East and not so much Africa, although he maintains that his "portrait" can be generalized to the Third World as a whole.

The book consists of a series of general observations of a journalistic kind combined with a number of examples taken completely at random and bereft of historical context. For example, his list of contemporary Third World military leaders includes (16–17) Juan Peron, Hugo Chavez, Stalin, Tito, Idi Amin, Fidel Castro, and Mao Zedong, as if the mere fact of wearing a uniform were sufficient to situate all these individuals in the same category of despotic military dictator. Even by the liberal criteria to which the author adheres, it can easily be recalled that a number of these individuals were elected by universal suffrage, and moreover that the West has had its share of military men in power. It is these kinds of crude journalistic images of a Third World governed by corrupt tyrannical dictators beset by economic and political crises along with massive poverty and an apathetic population that form the core of Memmi's "portrait." In fact, the portrait has collapsed into a stereotype. He engages in very little critical thinking, especially with regard to the role of the West in ensuring the perpetuation of these features and their representations in the media. Memmi has no concept of neocolonialism, no idea that corruption is always a relationship that requires two sides in order to work, and little knowledge of the struggles of Third World people to ameliorate their conditions. The latter are simply seen as pathetic victims along the lines of Western media images: "The formerly colonized, socially leaderless, without unions or political leaders, do not have eyes to see or ears to hear" (19); their intellectuals kowtow spinelessly to nasty despots.

One would have expected more interesting remarks in Memmi's account of the lives of Maghrebi immigrants in France, yet here too we are

offered rather simplistic views. He adheres uncritically to the state's idea of "Frenchness," and he fails to contextualize the struggle over the registration of undocumented migrants within a discussion of what the access to rights means in a country like France, where people are expected to work without official documentation and thus without access to social services. To avoid any discussion of what it means to be French under these conditions is to fail to transcend a problematic republicanism which, according to the philosopher Alain Badiou, has made LePen possible.

The problem with portraits is that they search for an essence; once discovered, that "essence" is presumed to represent the whole of the phenomenon. But the "essence" can also collapse into a stereotype, providing simplistic answers, if not also vulgar prejudices. Unfortunately, it seems it is this pathway that Memmi's book has largely followed.

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