

# TANGIER DIARY: A POST-COLONIAL INTERLUDE

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THE CITY is still here, spread out along the hill-tops and overlooking the circular harbour, the strait and the mountains of Andalucía. In the late afternoon people sit along the low wall bordering a vast empty lot on the Boulevard Pasteur in the very heart of Tangier, watching the gyrating clouds of swallows in the air far above, like locusts swarming. The British still have their big villas on the Mountain, but it is harder to get workmen to keep the gardens in trim. The Americans, having given up their extra-territorial rights if not their Cadillacs, can no longer make faces at the policeman who tries to stop them from going in the wrong direction down a one-way street, or snarl "Screw you, Buster," at him as he tells them it is forbidden to park in a particular spot. To give the streets a more "European" aspect, girls are encouraged to go about "naked"—that is, without their veils. At the same time, all signs and advertisements must now be printed in Arabic as well as in Roman characters, with the result that the place looks considerably *less* European than it has in years.

If you see a new face, the chances are it belongs to a policeman; the city is overrun with police, most of them not in uniform. These are what in colonial days would have been called *chkama*, informers. They are also skilled *agents-provocateurs*, used among other things for trapping girls not averse to being followed by a young man who is making flattering remarks out of the side of his mouth as he walks along. When the right moment has come, the amorous pursuer turns back his jacket-lapel and discloses his badge, a tactic which the people of Tangier are still old-fashioned enough to find wholly offensive.

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This is the second anniversary of the winning of Moroccan independence. The trees along the main thoroughfares are ablaze with coloured electric bulbs, and the enormous baroque kiosk in the centre of the Place de France, built earlier in the year in celebration of the first visit of the Sultan to Tangier

since 1947, has been cleaned up and rewired, so that its mottoes in Arabic script (as well as the four large numerals indicating the year—1377) flash again. One waits for dusk impatiently, to walk beneath the canopies of lights strung from building to building; Tangier is such a small town in feeling, that a surfeit of light makes it seem much larger.

A segment of the Moroccan population is regretful that the celebration should come at this time, so that it could mistakenly be construed by the 50,000 or so Spanish residents as having been arranged in honour of the birthday of *Jesucristo*. Christmas has always been the great general holiday of the year in Tangier, and it was the Spanish who animated it for a fortnight beforehand, donning masks, dressing as shepherds and marching in mock-military groups through the streets playing their *zambombas* (which made a noise like a lion grunting rhythmically), clapping their hands, clicking their castanets and occasionally singing between swigs of *vino tinto* from the flasks hanging over their shoulders. Such unbridled festivities are not at all in keeping with the surge of puritanism being propagated by the younger generation of Moroccan patriots, and the fact that it was exclusively the Spanish who indulged in them, (even if to the delight of the entire population of Moslems, Jews and Christians) makes their observance that much less acceptable this year. It is only two days to Christmas, and so far I've seen no sign of *zambombas*, merrymaking shepherds, or anything else indicating the advent of the December holidays. The discretion of the Spanish civilians is understandable when one considers that at the moment their armed forces are busy shooting Moroccans, their warships are bombarding the Moroccan coast south of Agadir, and that just behind Djebel Musa (Mount Moses) which I can see from my window, at the entrance to the town of Ceuta, barricades of barbed wire have been thrown up by Spanish troops to prevent possible violence between Spanish and Moroccans.

The twin cities of Ceuta and Melilla, at opposite ends of the Rif, are considered by the government in Madrid (and with the same variety of logic as that used by the French in defining the status of Algeria) to form an integral part of metropolitan Spain. One assumes that at some point in history they became detached from the mother country and floated across to Africa. Uppermost in the minds of Moroccans since Independence has been the question of liberating these two key cities, which also happen to

be Morocco's only Mediterranean ports. On paper, of course, there has never been any question of a change of sovereignty; officially it is understood that Melilla (Spanish since 1506) and Ceuta (since 1580) would continue to be regarded as *presidios* inseparable from the rest of Spain.

There is little doubt that the guerrilla warfare in progress at present in the south of Morocco over the relatively unimportant question of control of the Ifni enclave is merely the opening salvo in an extensive long-term military operation—a campaign led by the FLN of Algeria and the Moroccan Army of Liberation with the aim of ousting both France and Spain from all Saharan territories. For the past eighteen months the Moroccans have been pointing out that there is every reason why their country should extend its hegemony southward through Rio de Oro, the Spanish Sahara and French Mauretania, to the northern borders of Senegal. The Algerians are equally determined that the area lying roughly between 20° and 30° N.L. and 0° and 10° E.L. shall not remain in French hands, regardless of what happens in Algeria proper. During a recent conversation about the “Greater Morocco” project with an official of the Moroccan government, I was interested to note that he used as justification of the policy the argument that at the time of the Saadi Dynasty, in the Sixteenth Century, Moroccan control extended to the Sudan, and I remarked lightly that in that case Andalucía and Castilla as well would have to be annexed. He smiled. “First things first”, he said. “That will come later.”

So far the Moroccans show surprisingly little resentment toward the Spanish when one considers that the two nations are in a sense unofficially at war with one another. A possible reason for this complacency is that in recent times anti-colonial hatred has been directed almost exclusively against the French. Generalissimo Franco made political capital out of this tradition at the time of the French-Moroccan War, between 1953 and 1955, when, in spite of French pleas, he refused to outlaw the nationalist movement in his part of the Protectorate. Then too, *relative* justice in the ex-Spanish Zone was far greater than in the ex-French; that is, the Spanish government's treatment of its colonial subjects and its treatment of Spanish subjects differed only in degree—it was all rough and authoritarian—while there was a terrifying disparity between the favouritism France showed her own nationals in Morocco and the cynical contempt with which she governed the native Moroccans. It is also true

that many of the Spanish, being only slightly removed racially and culturally from the Moroccans, tended to think of the latter as human beings, whereas the French colonist's classical epithet for them was "animals". (A small illustration of the difference in attitudes: if a Moslem funeral passed through the streets of Tetuan or Larache or another of the Spanish Moroccan cities, some of the Spanish passers-by always stopped for a moment and crossed themselves respectfully; I never once saw this happen in the ex-French Zone.)

Allal el Fassi, the dynamic founder-leader of the all-powerful Istiqlal party, is at the moment making a comprehensive tour of the Moroccan hinterlands, using his legendary oratorical gifts to persuade the tribesmen and peasants to defend their country by joining the ranks of the Djij Tsahrir, the army of Liberation; recruiting of volunteers is going on all over Morocco. The general belief of the Europeans living here is that the Sultan is powerless to impede the activities of the Army of Liberation, and it is probably true that on occasion they have caused him embarrassment; yet there is no doubt in the mind of any Moroccan that the tactic of having an official army and another unofficial one, for whose behaviour he is not necessarily to be held responsible, is definitely a part of Mohammed the Fifth's policy, as indeed there is every reason it should be. (In the Ifni hostilities the Royal Army is used purely defensively, on the "Moroccan" side of the border.)

The obvious question for the European mind to pose here is: how safe is it to have an unofficial army which is stronger than your official one? But the query does not occur to the Moroccan, because his faith in both the Sultan and the Djij Tsahrir makes their aims indistinguishable, and to him the mere postulating of such complexities and difficulties is sheer defeatism. And who can be certain that the man in the street is not correct? There is assuredly no proof that the Sultan is not in absolute control of his realm. It is true that such a supposition would necessarily alter somewhat the popular international conception of the Sultan as a staunch defender of democracy and the status quo, but is not a monarch's first responsibility to his country? When *Time* crows that Mohammed the Fifth is unconditionally with the West, it is referring only to his present foreign policy and not to what he does within his own kingdom, which is after all his own affair. In Moroccan opinion the Royal Army and the Army of Liberation are the right hand and the left hand, and

each one is fully aware of what the other is doing.

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Tangier of the dubious bars, the *maisons closes*, the pimps and panderers, the smugglers and refugees from Scotland Yard and the F.B.I., the old Tangier that tried valiantly if unsuccessfully to live up to its inflated reputation as a "sin city", is dead and buried. By day the place does not look very different from the way it has always looked, but its nocturnal aspect would shock a native returning home after two years' absence. "Gone! Shut!" he would murmur as he searched for the familiar landmarks in streets and alleys unexpectedly dark and deserted. For the social reformers have passed this way, and their war is waged loudly against prostitution and drunkenness, and with slightly less fanfare against homosexuality and hashish-smoking. The first year was a tough one: the inhabitants of Tangier, among all Moroccans the only urbanites who had not been through at least a minimal period of terrorism and suffering, simply refused to believe that the Istiqlal was serious when it announced its clean-up campaign. Strong-arm squadrons imported in part from other cities had to be used to convince them, since the local police appeared to share the general incredulity. Street brawls were constant nightly occurrences a year ago. Now, the prisons crammed to bursting with offenders, the population is sufficiently certain of the party's seriousness of purpose for political commandos to be no longer in evidence, and for the police to be adequate to the situation. But there is a catch: the Tangier police force had to be entirely disbanded and its members replaced by men from other parts of the country. It was inevitable that this substitution of personnel should give rise to widespread local dissatisfaction. The Tangerines were accustomed to recognizing all the faces among the officers of the law in their tiny world, and they were recognized in turn. Now personal indulgences are finished; law enforcement has become mechanical, anonymous, and with anonymity comes a certain ineptitude. As a Moroccan lawyer remarked the other day: "Every kid who ever carried a sandwich to a terrorist in hiding has been rewarded with a policeman's uniform and a revolver." The indignation of the native populace is analogous to that which would result if, say, Monaco were suddenly to be thrown open by the French and the Monegasque police replaced by French gendarmes; Tangier had become that provincial and hermetic. The only special privilege it retains is the right to buy and sell

foreign currencies. From all other points of view it is just one of the Moroccan cities, still livelier than most in spite of the blue laws (Casablanca, Fez and Meknès are lugubrious), because the economic crisis gnawing at Morocco has not made as much headway here as elsewhere, but definitely no longer a place apart, operating to the advantage of get-rich-quickers from all over the world and at the expense of the poorer inhabitants, as was the case before.

Tariffs on imported goods have risen steeply, so that the European way of life costs about double what it did two years ago. The Moroccans, however, who subsist principally on Moroccan products, are a little better off than they were, since although the prices of local commodities have also increased, the higher earning capacity of most sections of the population more than compensates for the rise. It is unfortunate that along with the general improvement in living conditions has come the menace of growing unemployment. The danger at present is partially mitigated by military enlistments. The enlargement of an army, be it official or unofficial, is no true solution, obviously, but it can provide a temporary dike against the encroaching discontent, and probably for a longer period than would be thinkable in most other countries. The Sahara is a big place.

The atmosphere is that of an *entr'acte*; people are waiting for the spectacle to recommence. "What do you think will happen?" you ask them, but their replies are vague and contradictory. The only clearly expressed, heartfelt wish which emerges is the one that no responsible European wants to hear put into words, the one that highlights, albeit without clarifying, an aspect of the basic cleavage between the contemporary Moslem and "Western" viewpoints: "May there soon be another great war. Then we shall have our chance."