Colonial Relic: Gibraltar in the Age of Decolonization

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Colonial Relic: Gibraltar in the Age of Decolonization

“The colonial world is a world cut in two.”
— Frantz Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth (1958)

As the above epigraph by the celebrated Martinican anti-colonial writer Frantz Fanon suggests, the specter of Manichaeanism has often haunted monographs and manifestoes written in opposition to Western colonialism. Given the gross injustices that Western colonial rule entailed, it is hardly surprising that the myriad complexities of one country’s dominion over another should often be reduced to simple dichotomies. In recent years, however, scholars of colonialism such as Homi Bhabha, Stuart Hall, and Mary Louise Pratt (who were themselves raised in colonies) have produced nuanced studies that depart from black-and-white dualisms to focus instead on the manifold intricacies of colonial situations.

In what follows, I offer a personal reflection on one such situation, that of my birthplace, Gibraltar, a small territory located at the southernmost tip of the Iberian Peninsula, and one of the last remaining relics of Britain’s former Empire. Known as Calpe by the Romans, and as “Tarik’s Mountain” by the Moors, Gibraltar was ruled by the latter from the eleventh to the fifteenth centuries and by Spaniards until the early eighteenth century. (“Tarik’s Mountain,” named after the Muslim general who led the conquest of the Iberian Peninsula, is “Djabal Tarik” in Arabic, the toponym from which “Gibraltar” derives.) A scant two and a half square miles in size, Gibraltar’s territory is mostly taken up by the Rock of Gibraltar, a porous hulk of limestone that rises sheer out of the Mediterranean Sea to a height of 1,400 feet and towers above the bay which it shares with Spain since 1713, when it was ceded to Britain under duress, Spain attempted to recapture it in 1869.

In Gulliver’s Travels, the stubborn stupidity to portray the two countries whose conflicts could not be broken at the time, British and Spain and Spain out-satirize the same declarations and attempted to break over a formidable political status.
which it shares with its Spanish hinterland. Gibraltar has been in British hands since 1713, when at the end of the War of the Spanish Succession Spain ceded the territory to Britain in the Treaty of Utrecht. Insisting that the territory was ceded under duress, Spanish governments of diverse political stripes have repeatedly attempted to reclaim the Rock from the British, by shelling and by siege throughout the 18th century and by dogged diplomacy ever since.

In *Gulliver’s Travels*, the 18th century Anglo-Irish writer Jonathan Swift satirized the stubborn stupidity of the diplomatic wrangles of his age, most notably in his portrait of the two tiny and perpetually warring kingdoms of Lilliput and Blefuscu, whose conflicts were fueled by incompatible claims about whether an egg should be broken at the big end or the small. Reality, however, is always threatening to out-satirize the satirists. While the absurdities of the battles between the Big Endians and the Small can be laughed off as fiction, the real-life disputations between Britain and Spain over the Rock have generated Brobdingnagian reams of diplomatic declarations and memoranda. They have also, it needs to be said, sometimes resulted in human anguish and suffering. For at the core of the three-hundred year old diplomatic dispute over Gibraltar lies not only the question of sovereignty over a formidable limestone mountain, but also the vexed matter of its inhabitants’ political status.

Aerial view of Gibraltar from the south. The airstrip at the territory’s northern end lies on a sandy isthmus that physically connects Gibraltar to the Spanish mainland. Just north of the airfield there is a mile-long fence that marks the political frontier between Spain and Gibraltar. Beyond the fence lies the border-town of La Linea, whose men helped build Gibraltar’s naval dockyard at the turn of the 20th century, and whose women often worked as servants in Gibraltarian homes. Those homes are mostly located on the Rock’s western slope, which descends gradually into the Bay of Algeciras. Because space is so limited in Gibraltar, land has been reclaimed from the sea beyond the old city walls, and the town has thus grown considerably in size.
British by nationality, the Gibraltarians (gibraltareños in Spanish) are in ethnic terms neither straightforwardly British nor Spanish but a complex amalgam of both these and other elements. One of the many peculiarities of colonialism in Gibraltar is that during a time when colonized peoples around the globe were attempting to free themselves from colonial rule, the overwhelming majority of Gibraltarians insisted on remaining loyal subjects of the British Crown. Our ambivalent cultural and political location as a people is the overarching subject of the following essay.

**British Forever?**

At the turn of the 20th century, a British imperial official, Sir C. E. Howard Vincent K.C.M.G., C.B., M.P., author of the preface to a multi-volume State of the Empire series, scanned the sweep of Britain’s imperial sway and pronounced himself satisfied that it should last into a glorious and indefinite future:

> Whether it be surveyed by its territorial extent, by the numbers of its peoples, by the diversity of its climates, by the magnitude of its commerce, by the liberty and loyalty of its inhabitants, nothing that has ever been in the past, nothing that appears possible in the future, can in any way compare to it... Our chance is now. The occasion is ripe. The fruit is ready to our hand. We grasp it, and leave for tomorrow an Empire in the homogeneous strength of which that of today shall pale and

Gibraltar, “the jewel of the Mediterranean”, was a minuscule in the chain of outposts of imperial territories, indeed have seen the ends of world wars, “British Empire still there in the time I was born, feverishly being built, and the world, and the British Empire has jocularly dubbed from the perspective of looking to an untimely end, however, old empire, so some of us had to grow up in one of the last empires.

**“British We Are,**

> Whilst few men were
> Into their bunks to wake.
> Of the old homes fee.
> But with the rising of
> Bugles sound, duty calls,
> The Empire calls !
> —Leopold P. Selye
> *(The Calpean Son)*

In 1954, when the Queen Elizabeth made the royal tour of the British Empire with Union Jack flying, a decade later, two bemused members of the Gibraltar Colony of Gibraltar Committee on Decolonized peoples from the colonial past much closer ties to “British empire” as the British government...
which, self-sustaining, self-supporting, shall
eclipse all the world and be Mistress of the
Land as well as, now, Mistress of the Sea.

Gibraltar, “the key of the Mediterranean,” in
Sir Howard’s grandiose evocation of British rule,
was a minuscule yet strategically crucial link in
the chain of outposts by which the disparate
imperial territories were held together. Given the
unparalleled reach of the Pax Britannica, it must
indeed have seemed in 1900 as though the leg­
ends of world maps would forever proclaim:
“British Empire Coloured Red.” However, by
the time I was born in 1965, Union Jacks were
feverishly being lowered down flagpoles around
the world, and the period which Salman Rushdie
has jocularly dubbed “The Great Pink Age” was,
from the perspective of imperial loyalists, com­
ing to an untimely end. Like old dictators,
however, old empires take a long time to die and
some of us had the curious fortune of growing
up in one of the last redoubts of a moribund
imperium.

“British We Are, British We Stay”

Whilst few men watch, thousands of others creep
Into their bunks to dream their dreams most dear
Of the old homes they must defend and keep.

But with the rising sun dreams disappear
Bugles sound, duty calls. Away sweet sleep
The Empire calls and Victory day is near.
—Leopold P. Sanguinetti, “Ashore in Gibraltar”
(The Calpean Sonnets, 1957)

In 1954, when the young and recently-crowned
Queen Elizabeth II visited the Rock during her
royal tour of the Empire, the streets were aflutter
with Union Jacks and patriotic banners. A
decade later, two petitioners from the Crown
Colony of Gibraltar struggled to explain to the
bemused members of the United Nations Special
Committee on Decolonization that while other
colonized peoples might crave independence
from the colonial power, Gibraltarians desired
much closer ties to “the Mother Country.” In 1967,
the British government held a referendum to de­
termine whether Gibraltarians wished to continue under Brit­
ish rule or to pass under Spanish
sovereignty. 12,182 voted to re­
main British whereas only 44
votes were cast in favor of Spain. Thus, while 300 miles east of the
Rock Algerians were fighting a
bitter war of national liberation
against the French, and while
300 miles to the northwest anti­
colonial African nationalists
were serving time in Portuguese
prisons, in Gibraltar the Crown’s
loyal civil servants went about
their duties under the regal
smile that beamed forth from
Her Majesty’s post-coronation
portraits.

My maternal grandfather,
Joseph Romero (“Pepe” to
friends and family), was one
such civil servant. The eldest of
five boys, my grandfather rose
from post-World War I hardship
to occupy a high office in the
colony’s government. For his
lifelong service to the Empire,
my grandfather was awarded
the Imperial Service
Order (the I.S.O.),
and he regarded the day
on which that honor was be­
stowed upon him by the
Governor of Gibraltar (acting on
the Queen’s behalf) as the cul­
mination of his distinguished
career. I remember how as a boy
I would swell with anglophile
pride whenever I saw the initials
I.S.O.
inscribed in bold text next
to my grandfather’s name. Yet I
also remember how the moment
I entered the presence of any­
one from England, of whatever
class, age, gender, or status, I
would feel a peculiar unease
descend upon me like a bad
smell.
For despite our avowed and vaunted Britishness, we knew that no matter how hard we tried we Gibraltarians could never quite be British enough. Hence, perhaps, our histrionic, over-the-top displays of pro-British fervor during the Queen’s visit in 1954, the Referendum in 1967, and the departure from our harbor of Prince Charles and Lady Di as they set out on their honeymoon in 1981. Hence, too, the simultaneous deference and resentment with which many of us regarded British soldiers, settlers, and expats on the Rock. After all, until as late as the 1960s, the needs of the naval base were given priority to those of the civilian populace. Moreover, British Armed Forces personnel and their families lived apart from Gibraltarians, with their own schools, postoffices, places of worship, recreational amenities, and even their own radio station. Furthermore, in a tiny territory where housing was often cramped and substandard, the Governor and the Admiral lived in stately mansions endowed with ample grounds, while most of the best land was in the hands of the Ministry of Defence, whose menacing signs snarled “WARNING: M.O.D. PROPERTY: KEEP OUT.” Little wonder then that a co-worker of mine who would never have doubted his Britishness should risk his job by surreptitiously hanging Her Majesty’s portrait upside down in the British Officer’s Mess whose supply of liquor we were delivering.

His Master’s Voice
but i have
a dumb tongue
tongue dumb
father tongue
and english is
my mother tongue
is
my father tongue
is a foreign lan lan lang
language
anguish
anguish
a foreign anguish
—M. Nourbese Philip (Tobago/Canada)

To ponder my grandfather’s elevated status in the colonial scheme of things was one motive for pride. To have another high-ranking civil servant of my grandfather’s cohort announce to me “Young man, you have excellent diction” in his imported British accent was another. Because I was a good mimic, and perhaps because I intuitively understood at an early age that a posh “Yookay” accent could open doors that might otherwise remain politely shut, I began to shed the characteristic singsong lilt of much Gibraltarian English. These days, I can “pass” as an Englishman if I so choose and I now inhabit the English language with ease. However, during the period when I was learning to enunciate English words in the manner of the broadcasters whom we listened to daily on the BBC’s World Service, I often felt as though I would never quite master the language. On the contrary, I felt as though it would always master me and that I would always be in its thrall, forever bowing and scraping before it. The nagging sense that despite my best efforts I would simply never gain full and confident access to the language of our rulers was, I suspect, bound up with the knowledge that I would simply never be as good as them. For they were so obviously better than us. Whiter. Blonder. Cleaner. More educated. More confident. More efficient. In sum, more civilized.

In part, my sense of inadequacy had to do with my “mother” tongue, Andalusian Spanish. The majority of post-1713 Gibraltarians, since the early 19th century, as being culturally inferior to the colonial administrators, were often reprimanded in front of our teachers, or used little or no English at all. Spanish was not accorded official status in commercial and government education and information was transmitted through the English, although that English often acquired a distinctly Andalusian flavor. When in the 1980s, local
In part, my sense of linguistic and existential inadequacy had to do with the peculiar status of my "mother" tongue, a local version of Andalusian Spanish. That language, which the majority of post-1713 Gibraltarians have spoken since the early 19th century, was widely regarded as being culturally inferior to English, not just by colonial administrators and teachers from Britain, but more insidiously by Spanish-speaking Gibraltarians themselves. As schoolchildren, we were often reprimanded for speaking Spanish in front of our teachers, even though some of us used little or no English at home. Moreover, Spanish was not accorded official status. All written commercial and governmental business, all our education and information, were transacted and transmitted through the medium of the Queen's English, although that English, like our Spanish, often acquired a distinctly local flavor. In fact, when in the 1980s, local radio and TV stations decided to broadcast a handful of advertisements and programs in the language that most of us dreamt in, joked in, and spoke daily, the newspapers were flooded with outraged missives denouncing this base betrayal of our Englishness.

Growing Up Ambivalent
Under the Union Jack

Swearing allegiance to a distant colonial power while living in the shadow of a hostile neighboring one, after World War II Gibraltarians developed an identity that was at once combative and insecure. I remember how a relative of mine would sometimes remark that she
wished we could be a definite people: "Spanish, English, Italian, something!" while British visitors to the Rock would often impatiently ask "Well what are you, English or Spanish?" Part of our definitional predicament is that we have lived for a long time at the intersection of two competing narratives: that of Spanish irredentist diplomacy on the one hand, and that of British colonialism on the other. In neither narrative did we figure prominently as speaking subjects in our own right. Rather, we were mostly consigned to the margins of diplomatic discourse, our actual presence as people almost an afterthought. Indeed, Spanish diplomats testifying before the United Nations went so far as to say that the real Gibraltarians were the descendents of the Spaniards who fled the Rock after its capture by the British. Furthermore, they insisted, the Rock's current residents were nothing other than "an artificial population," brought into being by the British to service the naval base and lacking the minimum criteria of peoplehood. (In the propaganda of the Francoist press, we were depicted in more colorful terms than staid diplomats could permit themselves, as "smugglers," "pirates," and "trogloodytes.")

Who are the Gibraltarians? A touch improbably for a community inhabiting such a small space, the people of Gibraltar are descended from a rich mixed salad of immigrant genes: Italian, Spanish, Sephardic-Jewish, Maltese, Portuguese, English, Scottish, and Irish, among many others. (The surnames in my own extended family attest to this polyglot medley: Alvarez, Romero, Olivero, Caetano, Chiarvetto, Ballantine, Vinet.) Unlike other colonized peoples who can look back to pre-colonial precursors in their efforts to nurture a sense of their distinctiveness, the Gibraltarians came into being after the original Spanish population had fled in its entirety. So unlike the Irish, for instance, Gibraltarians cannot resurrect a past in which their ancestors spoke another language and administered their own laws. Moreover, unlike European settlers in Africa or Australasia, white New Zealanders, say, Gibraltarians could not look to a Mother Country beyond the Rock for a refuge from diverse places and times. A fortress-colony, by definition, has developed into a rebellious community whose every inhabitant is a neo-Mediterranean Britishness. (In the second half of the 20th century, two more groups joined the flow: Indians from the other side of the Straits, and Pakistanis from the Indian side of the Straits.)

Spanish Irredentism, Gibraltarian Exceptionality...
finite people: “Spanish, Spanish!” while British visitors impatiently ask “Well, Spanish?” Part of the problem is that we have lived at the intersection of two overlapping narratives—a Spanish irredentist perspective and, that of British settlers who made only an afterthought, if any, of their Spanish-speaking subjects in their histories. Neither narrative did much for its subjects in our everyday discourse: such subjects are mostly consigned to historiographic discourses as an afterthought. In the present, such testamentary recollections are but a remote echo of the countrymen of today, when most Gibraltarians could not readily identify with a Mother Country beyond the seas. Instead, coming from diverse places and living cheek-by-jowl on a fortress-colony, by the 20th century they had developed into a relatively homogeneous community whose everyday culture was largely Hispano-Mediterranean with a coating of Britishness. (In the second half of the 20th century, two more groups diversified Gibraltar’s gene pool: Indians from the Sind region of what is today Pakistan, and Moroccan Arabs from the other side of the Straits.)

Spanish Irredentism, British Colonialism, Gibraltarian Exceptionalism

In the middle of the 20th century, a number of interlocking factors would contribute to the Gibraltarians’ growing understanding of themselves as British. First, the victors in the Spanish Civil War astutely determined that the British occupation of Gibraltar was the sole issue around which most Spaniards, whatever their political allegiances, could rally. (Such was the energy which successive regimes devoted to reclaiming the Rock that in the 1960s Franco’s Foreign Minister was facetiously referred to as the Minister of the Foreign Affair.) Second, the entire civilian population of Gibraltar was evacuated during World War II. Most of the evacuees were housed in various parts of Britain, where they acquired
a heightened awareness of both their collective identity and of their British nationality. Third, after World War II, the Colonial Office developed Gibraltar’s physical and social infrastructure and began to respond to civilian demands for greater self-representation in government. While their Spanish neighbors lived under a dictatorship in one of the poorest regions of a developing country, by the 1960s Gibraltarians were buoyed by a modestly prosperous economy and by a measure of democratic self-rule. Furthermore, by the time I was born in 1965, young Gibraltarians were not only acquiring an Anglo-centric education on the Rock, many were availing themselves of Government-funded opportunities to study in Britain itself.

Gibraltar’s post-World War II anglicization coincided with the entrenchment in Spain of General Francisco Franco’s dictatorial regime, whose laws and security forces proscribed and quashed any manifestation of regionalism among Basques, Catalans, and Galicians. Unwilling to grant the Gibraltarians their idiosyncratic identity, Franco’s governments portrayed them as a counterfeit people, existing merely to support an imperial base and living off the fruits and labor of the hinterland in parasitical fashion. Much as they tried, Gibraltar’s representatives at the United Nations in the 1960s failed to persuade the Special Committee on Decolonization that Gibraltarians deserved to choose the manner in which they should be de-colonized and that it was appropriate for them to seek a closer association with the colonial power, rather than with the hostile neighbor to the north. In the end, Spain’s argument that its territorial integrity continued to be violated by an imperial usurper won out over the British claim that the Gibraltarians should freely determine their post-colonial dispensation within the parameters established by the Treaty of Utrecht. (According to the Treaty, if Britain were ever to relinquish its sovereignty over the Rock, Spain would be entitled to have it back.)

Having won the day at the United Nations, Spain began to mount increasingly severe restrictions on the passage of people and goods at the border with Gibraltar, always justifying its actions by claiming strict adherence to the letter of the three-centuries-old Treaty. In 1964, ten years after the Queen’s visit to the Rock, the border was closed to all traffic except that of the several thousand Spaniards whose livelihood depended on their jobs in Gibraltar. In 1969, the year when the British government granted the Gibraltarians a constitution that gave them greater autonomy than ever before, Franco’s regime took umbrage at what it considered to be Britain’s calculated rebuff to its interests. While some Gibraltarians began to nurture dreams of political integration with faraway Britain, the large iron gates on the Spanish side of the land frontier clanged resoundingly shut.

The Border/La Frontera

Though it was intended to undermine the colony’s economy, the closure of the border had an opposite effect. Spanish workers on the Rock were replaced by Moroccans and the British government continued to subsidize the territory’s development. While the economy remained afloat, however, the Rock became a claustrophobic place to live, with large families often having to share small apartments. One indication of just how suffocating it became was a series of suicide attempts by men and women hurled from the tall apartment buildings of the Rock itself. A less salubrious event was the splitting of the families that straddled the frontier and overnight. Not so evident were the severing of all direct transportation links, the splitting of families through the rigidities of marriage, language, and everyday culture, the separation of the colony’s infrastructure from that of Spain. Traveling to Spain during those years meant undertaking a能把 down to the Moroccan Atlantic Coast, then journeying back by ferry to the port five miles across the bay. In those years, Gibraltarians communicated with their relatives in neighboring Spain via slow mail or faulty phone lines. On Sundays,
Decolonization enabled those who, having been colonized, to choose the manner in which they would decolonize their territories. In the case of the Gibraltarians, they chose to seek a closer association with Spain, rather than remain under British rule. This decision was not without its consequences, as the Gibraltarians and the Spanish government continued to have differences regarding the sovereignty of the territory. According to the Treaty of 1963, Gibraltar was to be a British overseas territory, subject to having its sovereignty recognized by the United Nations. The Gibraltarians were entitled to have their case heard at the United Nations, where they could present their case for greater autonomy.

In 1964, the border was closed, except that of the several hundred Spanish workers who lived in the territory. In 1969, the year that Spain granted the Gibraltarians the right to have greater autonomy under their regime, some Gibraltarians were unhappy with this and took umbrage. The Spanish government continued to separate the two communities connected by multiple ties of marriage, language, commerce, and everyday culture. The closure of the border, except for a few people, resulted in severe restrictions on the movement of people and goods at the frontier. The closure of the border meant that Gibraltar became a self-sufficient entity, with large families living in small apartments.

The separation of the communities had a profound effect on the atmosphere in Gibraltar. One indication of just how suffocating the atmosphere became was a series of suicides in which young men and women hurled themselves from the tops of tall apartment buildings and from the heights of the Rock itself. A less spectacular index of suffering was the splitting of extended families that straddled the frontier and found themselves divided overnight. Not satisfied with physically separating two communities connected by multiple ties of marriage, language, commerce, and everyday culture, the Spanish government severed all direct transportation, postal, and telecommunications links between Gibraltar and Spain.

Traveling to Spain during those years meant undertaking a 30-mile trip by ship down to the Moroccan Atlantic port of Tangiers and then journeying back along the Straits by Spanish ferry to the port of Algeciras, located five miles across the bay from Gibraltar. During those years, Gibraltarians wishing to talk to their relatives in neighboring towns would have to rely on slow mail or faulty phone connections via a third country. On Sundays, my family's usual pastime was to take a stroll along the verges of the Rock, where we could see the red-tiled roofs and the wooden shutters of the tenement buildings in the background stand on the foundations of the first town to be built on the Rock, Medinath Al Fath (Arabic for "City of Faith"). The red-tiled roofs and the wooden shutters are reminiscent of Genoa and the Ligurian coast of northern Italy. Most Gibraltarians are partly descended from Genoese immigrants, who began to settle on the Rock in the 18th century. The layout of the streets and houses in this area has remained largely unchanged since the 18th century CE, when Medinath Al Fath was built. In the foreground, we see a section of Gibraltar's redoubtable city walls, built by the British in the 18th century on the foundations of Moorish and Spanish fortifications. The photograph also gives some idea of how constricted Gibraltar has felt to its inhabitants.
time (we were hardly alone in this) was to go for a car-drive around and around the Rock, and up, and down, and around again, listening to tapes of Julio Iglesias's songs all the while. An obligatory stop on our circuit would be the border, or "la frontera" as we called it in Spanish. Along the one-mile fence that marked the boundary between Gibraltar and Spain there lay a barren strip of No Man's Land across which Gibraltarians and Spaniards would shout messages to one another, frequently struggling to make themselves heard over the roar of British jet fighters that took off from the RAF base at the foot of the Rock.

Perhaps the most deleterious effect of the closed border on the collective life of the Gibraltarians was the increasingly brittle and embattled tone it lent to their sense of political and cultural identity. Throughout the 18th century, the Rock's inhabitants had to endure fourteen sieges by Spanish forces and their allies. Despite the vastly different circumstances of the 1970s, Gibraltarians began to refer to their enforced isolation from the Rock's natural hinterland as "the Fifteenth Siege." The siege mentality that emerged during the first few years of the border's closure was to be reinforced after Franco's death when it became apparent that the democratically-elected Spanish governments of the late 1970s and 1980s were intent on pursuing a policy towards Gibraltar that differed little in tone from that of Franco's regime.

The border was partially reopened in 1982, and fully reopened in 1985, when Spain was obliged to do so as a result of its accession to the European Economic Community. (To this day, crossing the border can be a frustrating affair, as Madrid often instructs its officials to go about their business at a deliberately slow pace.) We Gibraltarians lived with a closed border for two decades, during which time the widespread sense of loyalty towards Britain that already existed on the Rock deepened considerably. Correspondingly, attitudes towards Spain hardened. The fact that post-Franco regimes should pursue antagonistic policies towards Gibraltar helped to bury the already unpopular cause of seeking an accommodation with a Spanish government.

"The Town That Thinks Itself a City That Thinks Itself a Country"

A new factor entered Gibraltarian politics in the 1980s, the growing perception that Britain itself wanted a settlement to "the problem of Gibraltar" that would satisfy Spain. As Spain was brought back into the fold of Common Market and NATO Europe, its ties with Britain grew much stronger. Though no British official openly said as much, Gibraltarians began to suspect that Foreign Office mandarins sought to allow Spain to absorb Gibraltar through a slow but ineluctable process of "osmosis." Meanwhile, British Armed Forces personnel on the Rock began returning home and Spanish politicians continued acting as though hard-line rhetoric and obvious attempts to hamper Gibraltar's development would eventually force the Gibraltarians to accept Spanish sovereignty once and for all. Instead, Gibraltarians became increasingly opposed to any negotiations with Spain. (For a Gibraltarian politician to advocate a diplomatic settlement with Spain is currently tantamount to political suicide.)

Moreover, from the late 1980s through the mid-1990s, a nationalistic government initiated a campaign to cultivate the symbolic trappings of nationhood. One invented Gibraltar National Flag, fostering the elaboration of a national identity. On that day, dress up in the red and white "national flag" and red and white similarly-colored balloons. Nationalistic speeches were filled with national rights ringingly and "identity" intoned like a slogan has since transmogrified. While loyalty to Britain remained on the Rock, Union flags were in evidence as much as the border was closed. Indeed, the Gibraltarians had its finger on the pulse of their country when it came to power in the 1980s.

The invention of nationhood by Gibraltarians was actively promoted by the GSLP (Gibraltar Socialist Labour Party) which held power between 1988 and 1995. In government, the GSLP also contributed to an already beleaguered Gibraltarian identity by insisting on nudge Gibraltar towards self-determination. Gibraltar was actively promoted as a "City That Thinks Itself a City That Thinks Itself a Country." To be accused of being a "self-determinist," had long been a political no-no, as the brush of hispanophobia had at it was done not in the public domain, but in the private.

To be accused of being a "nationalist," on the other hand, had long been a political badge of honor for most Gibraltarians. Behind the political scenes lay the tacit claim...
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lar, Gibraltar National Day, was crucial in

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ress up in the red and white colors of the “na­

ional flag” and release thousands of

imilarly-colored balloons into the atmosphere.

ationalistic speeches would be made, our na­

ional rights ringingly affirmed, and the word

identity” intoned like a mantra. National Day

has since transmogrified into National Week.

ile loyalty to Britain remains a potent senti­

ent on the Rock, Union Jacks are no longer as

much in evidence as they used to be when the

order was closed. Indeed, the pro-British mu­

als and slogans that adorned walls across town

(one of the most striking of which was painted

by a great-uncle of mine) are slowly fading and

are no longer being restored.

The invention of nationalist traditions in

 Gibraltar was actively promoted by the contro­

versial administration of Joe Bossano, leader of

the Gibraltar Socialist Labour Party. Riding a

ave of anti-Spanish sentiment, Bossano’s party

came to power in the 1988 elections, largely on a

platform of no concessions to Spain. Clearly the

party had its finger on the pulse of a public that

felt itself beleaguered by Spanish diplomacy. But

the GSLP also contributed to the growing sense

of beleaguerment by insinuating that Britain

anted to nudge Gibraltarians into reaching an

accommodation with Spain over the emotive

atter of territorial sovereignty. More than ever

before, “Spain-baiting” became an integral fea­

ure of Gibraltarian life both in the public arena

and in the private.

To be accused of being soft on Spain, how­

ever, had long been a political liability. What

made the GSLP’s practice of tarring its opponents

with the brush of hispanophilia distinctive was

that it was done not in the name of Gibraltar’s

putative Britishness, but in pursuit of what it

ted “self-determination” for the

Gibraltarians. Behind the banner of self-deter­

mination lay the tacit claim that Gibraltar should

Colonial Relic
be for the Gibraltarians. (One letter writer to *The Gibraltar Chronicle* hinted that if Britain were to lay obstacles in the path of Gibraltar’s self-determination, Gibraltarians might have to emulate the anti-British armed resistance of the Mau Mau!) It was not a big step from there to the suggestion that Gibraltar ought to be an independent mini-state, a political solution ostensibly precluded by the terms of the Treaty of Utrecht. (When Gibraltarians point out that their future should not be held hostage to a piece of parchment signed in 1713, Spanish politicians retort that it is because of that parchment that the Gibraltarians are British.)

**Of Launches and Llanitos**

The apogee of nationalist fervor under the GSLP government coincided, in not entirely fortuitous ways, with the most flagrant bout of sustained smuggling from Gibraltar into Spain in the Rock’s history. While Gibraltar is heir to a venerable tradition of contraband activity (as the Treaty of Utrecht’s stipulations against such practices attest), smuggling had always been carried out on a relatively small scale. Beginning in the late 1980s, however, numerous fast launches laden with bales of Winston cigarettes would daily depart from Gibraltar’s port, race around the Rock, and illicitly unload their cargo on the beaches of La Atunara, a fishing village close to the border whose rate of unemployment far exceeds the national average. In La Atunara, local youth would squirrel away the contraband into the warren of houses along the beachfront. From there, the cigarettes would later find their way into the hands of discerning Spanish smokers who were willing to pay extra *pesetas* for a chance to savor “el genuino sabor americano” instead of the inferior weed grown in the Canary Islands and sold in Spain under government monopoly in the guise of Virginia tobacco.

Historically, smuggling had largely been the province of the poor on both sides of the border and of a few well-known Gibraltarian families. In the 1990s, however, fast-launch contraband activity cut across all sectors and classes of Gibraltarian society. It involved, among others, respectable merchants who made enormous profits from importing container-loads of cigarettes, salaried middle-class professionals seeking to make some extra income, and working class youth (the “Winston Boys”), for whom smuggling promised daily injections of thrills and riches. At the peak of the trade, the pace at which heaps of ill-gotten cash were generated was only matched by the velocity of the launches. Not only did “el contrabando” make many individuals and families extremely wealthy, it also significantly boosted tax revenues for the local Exchequer. Furthermore, many saw in the fast-launch activity a means of retaliating against Spain for its continued harassment of the Gibraltarians. For its part, while officially decrying the smuggling, the Spanish government did little to stop it. Instead, it availed itself of the opportunity to cast Gibraltar as a den of piracy whose very *raison d’être* was the infringement of Spain’s territorial integrity and the violation of its laws. All over Europe, television viewers were treated to Spanish documentaries and news reports on the endless stream of contraband issuing forth from the Rock.

Eventually, many Gibraltarians turned against fast-launch smuggling, embarrassed by the way it tarnished Gibraltar’s image abroad, and troubled by the culture of crime encouraged at home. Since its activities could not last forever, and that numerous unskilled youth found themselves jobless, Gibraltarians were alarmed by a rise in high-speed chases with the Spanish Guard. Another source of concern was the growing commercial thoroughfare of smuggling for an end to the practice. The government decided to clampdown on the trade and, in response, the Gibraltarians marched on the Rock, thousands marched calling for an end to the contrabando. This time, when a rampaging mob of *Winston Boys* dashed the house of a local who had advocated a close relationship with Spain. This time, cars...
ment far exceeds the Atunara, local youth smuggling ... a chance for a "American" instead of the Canary Islands government monopoly in Spain.

Smuggling had largely been done on both sides of the border. Common Gibraltarian families, fast-launch contraband traders from both sectors and classes were involved, among others, those who made enormous ... "professionals seeking to make time, and working ("yobs"), for whom sn...jections of thrills were generated wastefully by the launches. Not only did this make many individuals less healthy, it also signific... for the local Exchequer in the fast-launch activity, decrying smuggling was not limited to tobacco but often included illegal narcotics as well. Thus, at one of the largest mass dem... on the Rock, thousands marched down Gibraltar's mile-long commercial thoroughfare, Main Street, calling for an end to the contraband. Forced at last to curtail a practice to which it had turned a blind eye (and, it was widely rumored, had even tacitly supported), the GSLP Administration impounded all fast launches. This belated clampdown on the trade triggered off the worst spasm of street violence seen on the Rock since 1968, when a rampaging mob torched the yacht and stoned the house of a prominent local lawyer who had advocated a negotiated settlement with Spain. This time, cars were overturned, po-

troubled by the culture of brazenness that it encouraged at home. Since it was apparent that the trade could not last forever, there was also concern that numerous unskilled young men would find themselves jobless. In addition, many Gibraltarians were alarmed by the deaths of several young smugglers, some of whom were killed in high-speed chases with the Spanish Coast Guard. Another source of anxiety was that smuggling was not limited to tobacco but often included illegal narcotics as well. Thus, at one of the largest mass demonstrations ever held on the Rock, thousands marched down Gibraltar's mile-long commercial thoroughfare, Main Street, calling for an end to the contraband. Forced at last to curtail a practice to which it had turned a blind eye (and, it was widely rumored, had even tacitly supported), the GSLP Administration impounded all fast launches. This belated clampdown on the trade triggered off the worst spasm of street violence seen on the Rock since 1968, when a rampaging mob torched the yacht and stoned the house of a prominent local lawyer who had advocated a negotiated settlement with Spain. This time, cars were overturned, po-

The Bay of Algeciras, called the Bay of Gibraltar by Gibraltarian nationalists. Across the bay from the Rock is the port of Algeciras, the second largest in Spain. In the foreground, we see Gibraltar and La Linea, separated by a border that runs from the crooked jetty on the right-hand side of the picture to the long strip of Mediterranean beach in the foreground. While Gibraltar's hinterland has undergone enormous economic development in the past thirty years, pockets of poverty remain across the Campo de Gibraltar. The Campo's poverty, Gibraltar's wealth, and the Spanish government's monopoly over the sale of tobacco together created an excellent opportunity for contraband. At the harbor pictured here, Gibraltarian smugglers would legally load up their fast launches with bales of Winston cigarettes. From the port they would zip around the Rock and illicitly unload their cargo on the beaches of La Linea just beyond the soccer stadium seen in the bottom right-hand corner of the photograph. At its height in the early 1990s, the tobacco trade employed hundreds of young Gibraltarians and Spaniards and generated millions of British pounds.
licemen attacked, and shop windows smashed as angry smugglers tore up Main Street yelling curses as they went. ("Day of Infamy," declared The Gibraltar Chronicle on its front page.)

Yanito 110%!

The high-water mark of the fast-launch trade coincided with the recrudescence of a particularly crude anti-Spanish sentiment that was often accompanied by a rhetorically overblown pride in our distinctiveness, perhaps best expressed by a popular bumper-sticker slogan that read: "GSLP: Yanito 110%!" "Yanito" (sometimes spelled "Ilanito"), possibly a diminutive of the Italian "Giovanni," a common name among Genoese immigrants to Gibraltar, is the colloquial term by which our Spanish neighbors often refer to us, sometimes in a derogatory tone. It is also the word which we Gibraltarians use, fondly and sometimes self-deprecatingly, to refer both to ourselves and to our local speech, which is characterized by a rapid switching back and forth between Spanish and English. (One of the distinctive features of the Spanish that is spoken here is the way it is peppered with Anglicisms and numerous borrowings from the major immigrant communities.)

When I was growing up I never failed to understand that yanito was a quirky splicing of two distinct if whose "standard" variants, by that age, with full assurance. In nationalistic Gibraltarians it conjured up the august status of a separate speech of the Gibraltarian. For some, it was perhaps only held by some as an idea that we were not just a deserving of national rights during that decade.

In part, this novel sense of franchise resulted in a collective self-affirmation. On the one hand, it seemed to merge with a natural over-emphasis in the other hand, it engendered a degree of interest in the land and fauna, its cuisine, its art, its political and social past, much expression in an exercise focused memoirs, journalistic essays, and television programs. Moreover, as Gibraltar opened up to the outside world, more and more was exposed to a greater variety of culture, therefore. In their homes, Gibraltarians heard about the world from our English, Spanish and other European neighbors, they were also as interested in the prosperous community in Gibraltar also meant that large numbers visited the Rock every day. In addition, at least one million visitors were here annually. While many Gibraltarians solely to stock up on supplies, the colonial and M-
shop windows smashed up Main Street yelling "Day of Infamy," declared its front page.)

In part, this novel sense of our emergent nationhood resulted in a healthy process of collective self-affirmation and discovery. On the one hand, it seemed to lead us away from an unnatural over-emphasis on our Britishness. On the other hand, it engendered an unprecedented degree of interest in the Rock's geology, its flora and fauna, its cuisine, its art and architecture, and its political and social past. Much of this interest found expression in an efflorescence of locally-focused memoirs, history books, paintings, journalistic essays, and television and radio programs. Moreover, as Gibraltar began to open up to the outside world, more Gibraltarians traveled to a greater variety of places than ever before. In their homes, Gibraltarians could also learn about the world from any number of British, Spanish and other European TV channels. They were also as internet-savvy as any other prosperous community in the West. An open border also meant that large numbers of tourists visited the Rock every day. By the late 1990s several million visitors were crossing the border annually. While many day-trippers came to Gibraltar solely to stock up on duty-free goods, others visited the Rock to admire the limestone caves, the colonial and Mediterranean architecture, the military installations, the famous apes, and the spectacular heights of the Upper Rock, from which one can gaze at the southernmost sierras of Spain to the north and to the west and at the Rif Mountains of Morocco to the south.

In many ways, the isolated and parochial garrison-colony in which I grew up is no more. In political terms, however, a stifling air of absurdity still surrounds the "question of Gibraltar" as surely as the large Levanter cloud hovers above the Rock rendering life on the streets below sweltering and uncomfortable. At a time when borders are coming down all over Europe, it seems stubbornly outmoded for Spanish governments to insist that Gibraltar violates the sanctity of Spain's territorial integrity. It seems equally odd, however, for a community of about 25,000 souls inhabiting a territory no larger than two and a half square miles (the actual inhabitable area is about half that size) to imagine itself as a nation and to insist upon its national rights. Communities that define themselves as nations need sovereignty over their own territories. But Gibraltarian nationalism is incompatible with Spanish irredentism, so matters remain at a diplomatic standstill, with most Gibraltarians advocating either free association with Britain or a seemingly unachievable state of independence. In the meantime, Spain exerts its dip-
Vicios Extranjeros/Foreign Neighbors

When I returned to the Rock in 1998 after an absence of six years, the newfound interest in all aspects of our history and cultural personality seemed to me for the most part to be a healthy and refreshing phenomenon. By contrast, the intransigence with which our politicians continued to advocate a policy of no negotiation with Spain, even to the point of not attending talks over Gibraltar between the British and Spanish governments, struck me as counter-productive and self-defeating. Of course, it was dispiriting to note that the policy of the Spanish government towards the Gibraltarians continued to be ploddingly unimaginative and curmudgeonly centralist. Nonetheless, given the psychologically taxing nature of diplomatic gridlock over the Rock, and given too the excellent opportunities for economic and social development that were passing us by, it seemed to me that we could hardly afford to be uncreative and dogmatic in our dealings with Madrid, no matter how complacent and unyielding Madrid might be in its posture towards us.

The long years of living with a closed border not only gave our collective expressions of identity an embattled and restricted feel, but they continued to cast an obscuring shadow upon our views of Spain and of Spaniards. One of the most unfortunate consequences of Gibraltar’s enforced isolation from Spain by Franco’s regime was that it deprived many young Gibraltarians of a complex view of that country. While most of us grew up watching Spanish TV and listening to Spanish radio, and while support for certain Spanish soccer clubs (including Real Madrid!) never died out on the Rock, we were largely ignorant of the ways Spaniards actually lived. Moreover, we tended to confuse the official postures of Spanish governments with the views of individual Spaniards themselves, despite the rich diversity of opinions among the citizens of Spain over the question of Gibraltar, even at the height of Francoism.

In 1988, while spending a semester studying in Madrid (in pursuit of a degree in Spanish from a British university!), I was genuinely surprised to discover that with the exception of the scions of conservative families, young madrileños I spoke with or befriended seemed to care little about Gibraltar’s current politics or its future destiny. (As one student put it to me: “If you people want the Rock, you can keep it.”) I was also impressed by how welcoming young Spaniards were (even conservative ones) towards a Gibraltarian who was telling them, politely but firmly, that he would rather the Rock remain British. However, there was one issue that did provoke consternation among my Spanish interlocutors: the virulence of anti-Spanish sentiment on the Rock. While relations between Gibraltarians and their neighbors have improved steadily since the border reopened, the scorn which my Spanish friends balked at hasn’t entirely died out. Moreover, my sense is that many of my fellow Gibraltarians still regard Spain with a kind of willed ignorance, choosing to know little about its history, its literature, its regions, its forms of government, its problems, and its promise.

Beyond the Border

While it is understandable that our relations with our nearest neighbor have been so awkward a problem in my view, I found myself in my thinking about the psychological dogged insistence that our political advancement and national definition to pass us by. For the geo-political realities of our time (if not always longer all) Gibraltarians perhaps wish to see in their lifetimes reasonable or unjust claims desisted in attempts to reach a settlement. Britain’s interests ultimately include the political future that one its few remaining overseas territories is moving towards.

At the supranational level annually keeps enjoining the United Kingdom and of Spain’s special situations that lead to the Rock of Gibraltar. In their difference, Bossano, the gruffly combative Peter Caruana, the smooth Mr. Bossano and Mr. Caruana have pleaded Gibraltar’s case to the United Nations’ Committee on Decolonization, among other forums, neither has been successful. The United Nations to championed self-determination of the people over Spain’s right to sovereignty. It will be up to Gibraltarians can achieve a hegemonic status of the European Union to make possible for us to seek redress for that entity for grievances anomalous political status, Britain and Spain carry much.
Beyond the Border

While it is understandable if unfortunate that the border continues to cast a shadow over our relations with our neighbors, the more serious problem in my view is that it continues to hem in our thinking about ourselves. In our dogged insistence that our decolonization be effected in a manner that rigorously excludes Spain, we are allowing many exciting opportunities for political advancement and for creative self-redefinition to pass us by. For it is apparent that the geo-political realities of our situation simply preclude the political future that most (although no longer all) Gibraltarians publicly proclaim they wish to see in their lifetimes. However unreasonable or unjust its claims may be, Spain has not desisted in its attempts to recover the Rock, while Britain’s interests ultimately lie in easing diplomatic relations with a key commercial partner and military ally, as well as in divesting itself of one its few remaining overseas territories.

At the supranational level, the United Nations annually keeps enjoining the governments of the United Kingdom and of Spain to institute measures that will lead to the decolonization of Gibraltar. In their different ways, both Joe Bossano, the gruffly combative GSLP leader, and Peter Caruana, the smoothly urbane chief of the GSD (and current Chief Minister), have annually pleaded Gibraltar’s case before the United Nations’ Committee on Decolonization. While Bossano and Caruana have obtained polite hearings, neither has been successful in swaying the United Nations to champion the right to untrammeled self-determination of the Gibraltarian people over Spain’s right to unbroken territorial sovereignty. It will be countered that Gibraltarians can achieve a new status under the aegis of the European Union. But while it is possible for us to seek redress in the institutions of that entity for grievances resulting from our anomalous political status, at the end of the day Britain and Spain carry much greater weight in Europe than we could ever hope to, no matter how elevated the moral ground on which we stand.

At this juncture, it seems to me that with regard to our political future we Gibraltarians have two broad options before us: (1) we prolong the gridlock by continuing to insist ad nauseam that no negotiation is possible with the hostile nation to the north, grumbling all the while at Spanish obstructionism and British perfidy; (2) we negotiate a settlement with Britain and Spain that will safeguard our collective identity and aspirations as a people on the one hand, and satisfy the diplomatic needs of both entities for grievances resulting from our anomalous political status, at the end of the day.

Looking ahead, at this point in history, to what our decolonization beef may mean, but they feel, but they feel, but they feel, but they feel...
A Rock ape enjoys an orange peel on a typically sunny day. Named after members of the British royal family, the apes are one of Gibraltar's major tourist attractions. Legend has it that should the apes ever die out, Gibraltar would return to Spanish sovereignty. When he was apprised of this legend during World War II, Sir Winston Churchill ordered that the apes be looked after with due care. Nowadays, there are more apes on the Rock than ever before, thanks largely to the tourists who over-feed them.

Underpinning the foreign policy of our main political parties is our often cited but vaguely-explained cultural identity. While that identity is real enough, it is neither monolithic nor static. A little awareness of our history makes it clear that this is so. For instance, before World War II, all forms of cultural expression in Gibraltar, whether high-brow, middle-brow, or low, were primarily Spanish in character. At the Theatre Royal on (Queen) Victoria Parade, Spanish zarzuelas commanded loyal audiences, while local writers such as Solly Azagury and Louis F. Bruzon wrote essays and plays in a formal and effortless Castilian. In those years, Gibraltarians would
have managed to efface their community and its neighbors in *El Espectador* and *El Anunciador*, two local Spanish-language daily newspapers. And, to refer once again to my own family, while she could convey her thanks with an awkward if gracious "Thank you," my paternal grandmother, Amelia, never mastered more than a couple of stock phrases in English, despite the years she spent in England as an evacuee. Emily, my maternal grandmother, was of a slightly higher social station than Amelia, and could therefore speak a bit more English. Her favorite daily distraction, however, was to listen to Spanish melodramas and songs on Radio Algeciras every afternoon.

Even after decades of anglicization, the aroma of Spanish cuisine and the strains of Andalusian flamenco remain ubiquitous on the Rock. True, they vie with the smell of fish and chips and the latest sounds from the British pop-charts (as well as with the material expressions of our other cultures and of the global mass culture), but they are a much more intimate part of our daily lives than our stated political preferences would suggest. And how could things be otherwise between neighboring communities? Once again, Gibraltarians and campogibraltareños are marrying one another, while increasing numbers of yanitos are choosing to live al otro lado de la frontera (on the other side of border). Also, whereas in the past London would have been the obvious destination of any young person wishing to leave Gibraltar, nowadays many Gibraltarians live and work in Madrid and in other Spanish cities. Closer to home, the immediate hinterland has become an extension of our recreational space. On the weekends and during holidays, whole colonies of Gibraltarians can be observed taking over Spanish beaches, Spanish restaurants, and Spanish shops. When I recently asked a friend why general elections were held on a Thursday these days, he reminded me that they’d been held on Thursdays for some time now. Then he quipped, “and anyway, on Fridays everyone heads off to Spain!” Small wonder, then, that while we consider our political position to be based on impeccable principle, it often seems to our neighbors as if our intransigence is a symptom of a privileged petulance.

Like our cultural identity, our political institutions are also the product of a particular and recent history and not just immutable emanations of our unchanging uniqueness. For the better part of the 20th century, Gibraltarians struggled patiently to wrest political autonomy from a grudging colonial power. Having finally achieved it, we are understandably reluctant to give it away, especially to a nation-state that has in the past been loath to grant its minorities home rule. But as was the case during the brief years of the Second Republic, the memory of which was eclipsed by the long night of franquismo, Spain’s regions now enjoy much internal autonomy, a status guaranteed by the Spanish Constitution. Of course, not all citizens of the autonomous regions are satisfied with autonomy. In particular, some Basques still hanker after independence. But do we want to be trapped in the kind of deadlocked polarization that continues to afflict the Basque Country twenty-five years after the death of Franco? Or should we rather seek a new solution to an old problem that while entailing some sacrifices could enable us to carve out a niche for ourselves in the contemporary world? Personally, I no longer see any reason, other than the lingering suspiciousness
ingrained in us by our size and by our history, why we could not preserve our autonomous institutions and singular cultural personality under an overarching political dispensation that included Spain in its framework. If the Catalans can remain unassimilated, prosperous, and bilingual (the latter to a degree that Gibraltarians haven’t quite achieved) within the confines of the Spanish state, why can’t we?

Gibraltar and the New Europe
They switched on the television news, the news is broadcast hourly, and they saw Gibraltar, not simply separated from Spain, but already at a considerable distance, like an island abandoned in the middle of the ocean, transformed, poor thing, into a peak, a sugarloaf, a reef, with its thousand cannon out of action.


In The Stone Raft, a wry fictional fantasy by the Nobel Prize-winning Portuguese novelist, Jose Saramago, the Iberian Peninsula abruptly breaks away from the rest of the continent and slowly begins to drift away from Western Europe. In a smaller version of this brusque and unexpected severing, Gibraltar breaks away from the Iberian Peninsula and becomes an island unto itself. While Saramago’s novel gently mocks long-standing stereotypes about Spain and Portugal as nations on the margins of European civilization, it also pokes fun at the separatism and centrifugalism that have marked the history of Iberia, a history which includes that of tiny, breakaway Gibraltar. By the time The Stone Raft was published in 1986, however, Spain and Portugal were moving towards greater integration with Western Europe’s economic, political, and military structures. Meanwhile, Gibraltar was emerging from its enforced isolation at the southwesternmost tip of the continent. Thus, while in the 1980s the old Spanish tourist industry watchword “España es diferente” (“Spain is different”) gave way to the motto “¡Somos Europeos!” (“We’re Europeans!”), Gibraltarians began to wonder whether a solution to the diplomatic uncertainty over the Rock might not lie within the increasingly federalist structures of the European Union.

Europe adds a complicated fourth dimension to the diplomatic triangulations over Gibraltar. In various European institutions, Spain affirms that it is absurdly anachronistic for Britain to still have legal title to a piece of Spanish territory that it acquired in an act of colonial plunder. In response to this claim, Gibraltarians retort that it is patently atavistic for Spanish governments to insist on the inviolability of their territorial integrity when frontiers are coming down all over Western Europe. What is not often remarked upon in Gibraltar is that our own intransigent position on the matter of our sovereignty is also at odds with the spirit of European integration which is blowing down Europe’s internal borders. Moreover, while we cling tenaciously to the notion that only we have the right to determine our future, and while we imbue the concept of sovereignty with an almost mystical power, we have little say in decisions affecting our community that are being made by corporate executives, by NATO planners, and by diplomats and bureaucrats in Madrid, London, and Brussels.

In recent years, Gibraltarians have begun to lobby the institutions of the European Union in an effort to bypass the bilateral conversations over the Rock’s future to which the British and Spanish governments committed themselves in the Brussels Agreement of 1984. It is possible that the fruits of lobbying and of litigation will lead a majority of voting Gibraltarians to recognition they deserve, or to strengthen the diplomatic status of Gibraltar within their legal arguments before Western Europe, Gibraltarians see Spain’s denial of our self-determination as a violation of a fundamental right that also be read as an indication of an alleged economic and personnel connection with governments may in effect be nullifying our right to decide our own future. But beyond experiences of frustration at the borders and the wry cartoonishness of tired centralist reactions, we have rather little to come to terms with. Including Spanish regionalist movements, the peninsula’s airport has experienced a new development, our own status is not as high as that of other countries, and we cling to tired centralist notions of how relations between neighbors to achieve a mutual agreement, the question of Gibraltar’s airport. Built before the Second World War on land which was never ceded by the Treaty of 1936, it is now used by Spanish tourists traveling to Andalusia, as well as by Gibraltar’s own. This is not true of our airport, built upon them by the British and Spanish governments in an agreement that allowed for joint use of the airport by British and Spanish travelers seeking to enter Gibraltar and would allow British and Spanish air traffic controllers to share Gibraltarian soil but not control.

ority of voting Gibraltarians in the future, their interests are being granted recognition they deserve, or to strengthen the diplomatic status of Gibraltar within their legal arguments before Western Europe, Gibraltarians see Spain’s denial of our self-determination as a violation of a fundamental right that also be read as an indication of an alleged economic and personnel connection with governments may in effect be nullifying our right to decide our own future. But beyond experiences of frustration at the borders and the wry cartoonishness of tired centralist reactions, we have rather little to come to terms with. Including Spanish regionalist movements, the peninsula’s airport has experienced a new development, our own status is not as high as that of other countries, and we cling to tired centralist notions of how relations between neighbors to achieve a mutual agreement, the question of Gibraltar’s airport. Built before the Second World War on land which was never ceded by the Treaty of 1936, it is now used by Spanish tourists traveling to Andalusia, as well as by Gibraltar’s own. This is not true of our airport, built upon them by the British and Spanish governments in an agreement that allowed for joint use of the airport by British and Spanish travelers seeking to enter Gibraltar and would allow British and Spanish air traffic controllers to share Gibraltarian soil but not control.
The history of Iberia, a historiographic mosaic, reveals that breakaway Gibraltar was published in 1980. Portugal was moving towards the European Community, a project with Western Europe, and its military structures are emerging from its enforceable nature. The easternmost tip of the continent, the 1980s, the old Spanish proverb "España es diferente" gave way to the most recent, "We're Europeans!" A curious wonder whether a sober assessment of uncertainty over the Rock and the increasingly federalist European Union.

The complicated fourth dimension regulations over Gibraltar, the institutions, Spain affirms that Spanish sovereignty over Gibraltar is not often remarked. We, the Spanish governments, claim that their territorial identity is being coming down all over Europe, and that is not often remarked that our own intransigent spirit of our "national" sovereignty, with the spirit of Europe, is being down Europe's identity. However, while we cling to the idea that only we have the sovereignty, and while we need sovereignty with an almost infinite certainty over the Rock of Gibraltar, the majority of voting Gibraltarians to feel as though our interests are being granted the respect and recognition they deserve, even if the actual diplomatic status of Gibraltar remains at a stalemate. In their legal arguments before the tribunals of Europe, Gibraltarians solemnly affirm that Spain's denial of our self-determination amounts to a violation of a fundamental human right. This assertion doubtless contains some truth, but it can also be read as an indication of our rather privileged economic and political location. Spanish governments may indeed be guilty of curtailing our right to decide our own political future. But beyond experiencing long moments of frustration at the border and besides having to listen to tired centralist rhetoric from Madrid, we have rather little to complain about. The surrounding Spanish region has become our weekend playground, and while El Campo De Gibraltar has experienced significant economic development, our own standard of living remains higher than that of our neighbors.

There is one major issue on which we Gibraltarians could meet some of Madrid's demands: and cooperate with our immediate neighbors to achieve a mutually beneficial arrangement, the question of the joint use of Gibraltar's airport. Built by the British during World War II on land which Spain insists was never ceded by the Treaty of Utrecht, the airport is now used by Spanish nationals and by British tourists traveling to southeastern Andalusia, as well as by Gibraltarians themselves. In 1987, in pursuit of the mutual cooperation enjoined upon them by the Brussels Agreement, the British and Spanish governments signed an accord that allowed for joint administration of Gibraltar's airport by British and Spanish authorities. Travelers seeking to enter Spain would exit Gibraltar and would completely bypass Gibraltarian immigration authorities. Moreover, Spanish air traffic controllers would be working on Gibraltarian soil but not under Gibraltarian jurisdiction.

Hearing that the Airport Agreement signaled the erosion of Gibraltar's Britishness, thousands marched down the Main Street with banners proclaiming "No Concessions" and "Gibraltars Not For Sale!" while Gibraltar's legislative body unanimously voted against the Agreement. Nearly a decade and a half later, there is no sign that joint use of the airport is being considered. Meanwhile, the Spanish government has excluded Gibraltar from European air liberalization accords that could bring travelers to Gibraltar from all over the European Union and spark a major economic take-off in the region. Politicians from El Campo de Gibraltar will often tell the Spanish media that the central government's policy towards Gibraltar is frankly misguided and anachronistic. However, they also point out that Gibraltarians could also be more flexible, especially over the matter of the airport's joint use, an arrangement, they point out, which would benefit communities on both sides of the border.

While we Gibraltarians continue to be almost obsessively preoccupied with our cultural identity and our territorial sovereignty, a few miles down the Straits thousands of Africans annually attempt to enter "Fortress Europe" in an effort to find a livelihood which Western colonialism and post-colonial misrule have denied them. Many die in the treacherous crossing, or are captured by the...
David Alvarez

Spanish Coast Guard and sent back to an uncertain fate, or manage somehow to enter a Europe where they are largely unwelcome. Perhaps comparing our plight to that of refugees fleeing dictatorships and destitution can restore the "problem" of Gibraltar to more reasonable dimensions. More positively, meditating on the nature and possible future of the new Europe can lead us to imagine a more friendly and productive coexistence with our neighbors than we have hitherto been capable of.

At present, there are clearly two radically different conceptions of Europe taking shape. On the one hand, there is the idea of Europe fostered by Haider and Le Pen, a Europe of xenophobia, militarism, and economic inequity. On the other hand, however, we can also note a countervailing tendency towards greater tolerance and equity. Were it to integrate itself with its resource-rich hinterland, Gibraltar could spearhead the local version of the movement towards a just and prosperous Europe. Given its long-standing traditions of ethnic and religious diversity, given its linguistic polyphony (in addition to English and Spanish, Sindi and Arabic should rightly be considered languages of Gibraltar), given its large port, its material wealth, its democratic institutions, and its legacy as the crossroads of two continents and two great bodies of water, Gibraltar could embody the spirit of a new European internationalism, one anchored in prosperous regional economies and founded on respect for universal human rights.

To achieve this state of affairs would no doubt involve making some diplomatic concessions. More importantly, it would entail viewing the world through a wider prism than that of ethnonationalism. Instead of chasing after the false certitudes of ethnic or national purity, we Gibraltarians would be boldly crafting a novel sense of our place in the Iberian and Mediterranean sun. In doing so, we would doubtless be abandoning some of the ways in which we know ourselves now. At the end of the day, however, we would finally be accomplishing the most difficult yet most liberating decolonizing act of all, the decolonizing of the mind.

Works Consulted


for Beth Westra

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