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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 Manichaeism 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

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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 Lilibut 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 Línea, whose men helped build Gibraltar's naval dockyard at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> 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

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*In the foreground, we see the gently rolling hills of Gibraltar's Spanish hinterland, El Campo de Gibraltar. In the middle ground, we see the Rock flanked by the Bay of Algeciras to the right, and by the Mediterranean Sea to the left. In the background, we see the northernmost mountains of Morocco and the Strait which separates them from southwestern-most Europe. Its strategic and commanding location at the entrance to the Mediterranean has bestowed upon the tiny territory of Gibraltar a historical prominence out of all proportion to its size. This crossroads has been the scene of much violence, from the invasion of the Iberian Peninsula by Moors in 711 C.E, through the Spanish sieges of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, to the German bombing campaigns of World War II. In peacetime, the Straits constitute one of the busiest commercial waterways in the world.*

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 legends 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, coming 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 British rule or to pass under Spanish sovereignty. 12,182 voted to remain 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 bestowed upon him by the Governor of Gibraltar (acting on the Queen's behalf) as the culmination 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 anyone from England, of whatever class, age, gender, or status, I would feel a peculiar unease descend upon me like a bad smell.

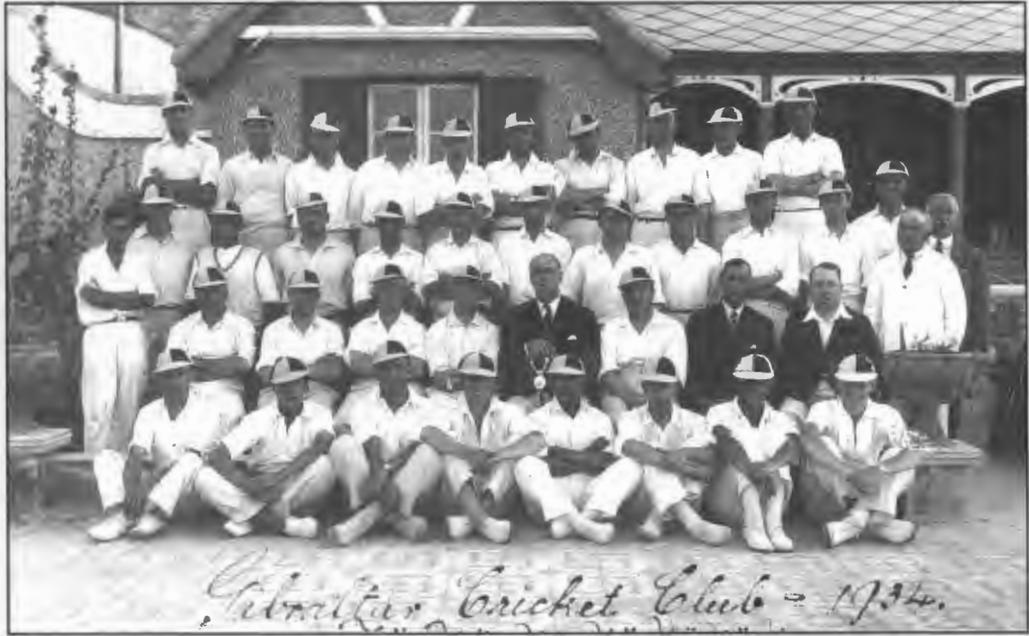
For despite our avowed and vaunted Britishness, we knew that no matter how hard we tried we Gibraltarians could never quite be British enough. Hence, perhaps, our histrionic, over-the-top displays of pro-British fervor during the Queen's visit in 1954, the Referendum in 1967, and the departure from our 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  
l/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*.



Group photograph of the Gibraltar cricket club, 1934. My grandfather, Pepe Romero, is in the second row from the top, six places from the right and smiling. Although cricket is still played on the Rock, it never acquired the mass appeal of two other sports that Britain exported to its colonies, soccer and field hockey.

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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



A solitary Gibraltar Ape gazes at the sunset while perching on a telescope in the Upper Rock. This contemplative fellow belongs to one of the two last surviving packs of wild apes in Europe, both of which live in Gibraltar. The macaque apes are one of many immigrant groups from the Mediterranean basin who have made the Rock their home. It is thought that Gibraltar's apes were imported by North Africans in the wake of the Moorish conquest of Iberia. That invasion was led by Tarik, after whom Gibraltar is named, and by Musa, from whom the Moroccan mountain that we see in the distance takes its name. Djabal Musa and Djabal Tarik are the Pillars of Hercules of Greek legend.

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 *rea* 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 "troglodytes.")

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,



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 defiant slogan that records the pro-British fervor of the 1967 Referendum. In that year, Union Jacks and slogans such as "British we are, British we stay" were daubed on walls all over town. Many of them remain as reminders of Gibraltar's historic loyalty to Britain. These days, however, many such wall markings are beginning to fade and are not being restored. One of the most striking Union Jack murals on the Rock was painted by a great-uncle of mine, a decorated World War II veteran who saw action with the British Army in Egypt and Burma. When I asked him why he had allowed the mural to fade, he replied with a resigned air that people no longer cared for such symbols of our Britishness.*

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 Anglocentric 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 in-



dication 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 the closed-border 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 pas-

*The oldest part of the city of Gibraltar. 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 18<sup>th</sup> century, and who by the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century formed the largest ethnic group in the colony. The layout of the streets and houses in this area has remained largely unchanged since the 12<sup>th</sup> 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 18<sup>th</sup> 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.

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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 tradition in particular, Gibraltar National Day, was crucial in fostering the elaboration of a new politico-cultural identity. On that day, Gibraltarians would dress up in the red and white colors of the “national flag” and release thousands of similarly-colored balloons into the atmosphere. Nationalistic speeches would be made, our national rights ringingly affirmed, and the word “identity” intoned like a mantra. National Day has since transmogrified into National Week. While loyalty to Britain remains a potent sentiment on the Rock, Union Jacks are no longer as much in evidence as they used to be when the border was closed. Indeed, the pro-British murals 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 controversial administration of Joe Bossano, leader of the Gibraltar Socialist Labour Party. Riding a wave 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 wanted to nudge Gibraltarians into reaching an accommodation with Spain over the emotive matter of territorial sovereignty. More than ever before, “Spain-baiting” became an integral feature of Gibraltarian life both in the public arena and in the private.

To be accused of being soft on Spain, however, 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 termed “self-determination” for the Gibraltarians. Behind the banner of self-determination lay the tacit claim that Gibraltar should

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.)

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### 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 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 Línea, 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 Línea 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.*



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*Gibraltarians cheering a speaker on Gibraltar National Day, 1995. Decked out in the red and white colors of Gibraltar's flag, and wearing tee-shirts which read "Support Gibraltar National Day," the large and patriotic crowd was treated to speech after speech extolling the singularity of "the Gibraltarian nation." Unbeknownst to most Gibraltarians, our national coat-of-arms, the castle and key which appear to the right of the slogan on the banner, was granted to the Spanish garrison town of Gibraltar by that most Castilian of monarchs, Isabela I.*

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%!**

**T**he 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 "llanito"), 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 dis-

tinctive features of the Andalusian variant of Spanish that is spoken in Gibraltar is that it is peppered with Anglicisms, as well as with numerous borrowings from the languages of all the major immigrant communities on the Rock.) When I was growing up, there was a widespread understanding that *yanito* was little more than a quirky splicing of two distinct languages, neither of whose "standard" variants many of us spoke with full assurance. In the 1990s, however, nationalistic Gibraltarians often raised *yanito* to the august status of a separate language, the unique speech of the Gibraltarian people. Admittedly, the notion that *yanito* was our national language was perhaps only held by a few. By contrast, the idea that we were not just a people, but *a nation deserving of national rights*, became widely accepted during that decade.

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 architec-

ture, 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-

lomatic clout to have Gibraltar excluded from various European treaties that would benefit its economy while the British government contrives to remain aloof from the fray.

### **Vecinos-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 barked 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 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 untrammelled 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 institutions and our peculiarity as a people on the one hand, and satisfy the diplomatic needs of these two nations on the other. Publicly, most Gibraltarians will insist that no accommodation is possible or even desirable with a power as inimical to our collective identity and aspirations as Spain has always been. In private, however, it is possible to hear other perspectives. A pro-British former civil servant of my acquaintance, for instance, remarked to me in 1998 that if "the Spaniards had treated us right, we'd all be Spanish by now." Such a remark (and many others like it that I have heard) suggests to me that beneath the veneer of anti-Spanishness which underlies our politics, there is a recognition of a commonality between our neighbors and ourselves which the historical vicissitudes of the second half of

*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.*



the twentieth century have managed to efface, though not quite to erase.

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

read about 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 "Tenk 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 lao 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.

—Jose Saramago, *The Stone Raft* (1986)

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 "national" 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 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 the airport via a separate terminal than those entering 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 "Gib Airport 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

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 in-

ternationalism, 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 ethno-nationalism. 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. ~~XXXX~~

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