



Sometimes I imagine writing a story about Morocco drawn from my experiences and the lives of people I have encountered since I first went there to do research in 1965. At that time King Hassan II who died last month after 38 years on the throne ruled over the country with an iron hand. Everyday life for the majority of Moroccans seemed harsh and for those with political convictions not in accord with the order established by the monarchy, potentially or actually dangerous. Freedom of expression in writing, or otherwise, was limited.

That was more than a generation ago. The King eventually introduced a degree of democracy, and last year, following elections a government coalition directed by the former opposition parties was appointed. Hassan II has been buried and widely mourned. The monarchy and the system of government that he bequaethed appear to enjoy legitimacy and to be secure. At the same time, in most socio-economic, political and cultural domains profound problems, structural and conjunctural, continue to exist. Yet, freedom of expression has unquestionably increased. The old adage about Morocco that "The more things change, the more they're the same," if it ever held true, is no longer apt. The realities, the voices, the ideas are quite different than those of the mid-1960s. The texts assembled here bear witness to that variety and richness of ways of seeing, describing and thinking about the complex society of today.

One of the characters in my imagined story would be a man from Tiznit who after his imprisonment for political activities in the 1960s found his way to Gennevilliers, near Paris, where he worked in a car factory for 25 years, a man of remarkable dignity, disgression, and likeableness. After a few years in France, a marriage was arranged for him at home, in the Souss. His bride joined him in Gennevilliers. Four children were born before his wife, still in her thirties, fell ill and tragically died. For some years he brought up the children on his own. When they insisted that he remarry, he went home and came back with another wife who in time gave birth to another child. They still live in France, awaiting his full pension. Meanwhile, he has made the pilgrimage to Mecca, had a house built in Tiznit for eventual retirement, and several of his children have married. This is a family epic that reflects many aspects of Moroccan emigration: the attachment to an identity at once Moroccan, Muslim, Berber and French.

Another character, Ijja Bint Sa'id, originally from Massa where she was brought up by the *qa'id*, has lived in Rabat for 40 years, been a *concierge*, a caterer, a musician, a matchmaker of marriages, a maid for Europeans. A tall, large, black woman of enormous charm and energy, one of two co-wives of her late husband and, although herself childless, a second mother to her brother's children. Her tiny apartment in the heart of the modern city is a hub for endless streams of friends, neighbours, relatives—Arabs, Berbers, Europeans, rich, poor, educated or not. She entertains them with food and talk in Berber, Arabic and French, advises, resolves, receives and disperses gifts and loans. She deserves a biography to make her into a heroine of Moroccan virtues.

A few Jewish protagonists will figure in my story to suggest why the formerly large community of some 250,000 Jews, now dwindled to about 5,000, continues to command attention among Moroccans, Muslims and Jews alike. One of them survived the Agadir earthquake, spent many years in prison because of his political activities, and now lives in Casablanca, where he is an industrialist and the acting head of a human rights association especially concerned with exposing corruption. Another teaches at the University in Rabat. He also heads the new Museum of Moroccan Jewish Cultural Heritage in Casablanca, a city in which his wit and humour are much appreciated. The insistence on preserving the idea and reality of a Jewish culture among Moroccans would need some explanation of historical, cultural, sentimental, as well as economic and political factors. The palace, government and much opinion actively encourages the coexistence of Muslims and Jews and an equitable and peaceful settlement among Palestinians and Israelis. The recognition of the role of Moroccan Jews in the country's heritage and identity also re-enforces the demand for tolerance and pluralism in the country and supports the claims for an open society in which ethnic and cultural differences, as well as religious ones, are respected.

Other characters looking for roles in my story are the historian and man-of-letters from Fez, Si Abdesslam Ben Souda, his second wife Zohra, the great love of his life, and his children and grandchildren from several marriages. Si Abdesslam personified the refined urban culture of Fez. The last time I saw him, almost twenty years ago, was when I knocked unexpectedly on his door in the Makhfiya quarter in the old city of Fez where, in his late 70s, he had retired. "Who's there," he called out. "God's guest," I answered; "God's guest is welcome!" he responded. He invited me to share his lunch. A woman brought in a *tajîn* of chicken, onions, honey, prunes and almonds. Without raising his eyes, he said "This isn't Zohra, it's someone else.

Zohra has gone to God. In the name of God, eat!" I did and learned that after the 40 day period of mourning, his eldest son had asked the midwife of their quarter to find a widow for his father to marry. This arrangement seemed a reasonable way of coping with grief and old age and, one might cynically add, of continuing to eat well! Several years later, I phoned Si Abdesslam, only to be told that "he had gone to God." I think that were he still amongst us he would have liked and joined in with these voices from Morocco.

For this special number of the review, I wanted some texts that would relate the sorts of tales that I have imagined writing. So many Moroccans seem to me characters out of novels! Their narratives, experienced or fantasized, are often filled with artistry and fancifulness. Si Abdesslam would enchant me with his descriptions of Fez then and now, of the relations and intrigues and events that had transpired and were taking place, and the interpretations he gave to them.

The challenge of the review to present original texts by and about the peoples and cultures of the Mediterranean is mostly taken up by writers of fiction and poetry and by those prepared to express themselves in the the first person singular. From the outset of this number I wanted to collaborate with a co-editor from Morocco and to prepare an Arabic version, as well as our usual English/French format, in order to reach an Arabic-reading audience, and more Moroccans. The well-known novelist and critic Mohamed Berrada happily agreed to participate. We realised that it would be impossible to present a comprehensive view of Moroccan literature or culture, and decided to favour contributions by less familiar writers and, particularly in regard to fiction and poetry, give some priority to those who write in Arabic and are less known in translation. At the same time, other literary expressions would be included—from the Moroccan Arabic dialect, from Tachelhayt Berber, from French, Spanish and English—in the original language, and in translation.

The second part of the volume contains what may be termed non-literary texts: eye-witness accounts or personal stories, interpretations, analyses. Most of them defy easy categorisation. For example, Abderrahmane Lakhsassi's informative and humorous tales about mint tea and Mohamed Tozi's childhood visits to a pilgrimage-fair; Abdelhai Diouri allows us to listen to a Gnawi musician telling his life story, and Abdelmajid Hannoum takes us into the circle of a Meknes storyteller. We have richly textured perceptions of Rabat-Salé by Michèle Jolé, the meditations and observations of Zakya Daoud, a detailed account by Clifford Geertz of what modernity means in a place like Sefrou, Abderrahmane Moussaoui's Algerian views of Morocco, and a reflexion on certain

economic processes from Alain Roussillon. Our readers may at times feel displaced, taken on someone else's voyage to an unimagined place or along an unfamiliar avenue of questioning. But this amalgam of texts and images is only partly a series of Sindbad voyages. Thus for example, there are also the text and photographs of children living in the streets of Casablanca by Souad Guennoun and an account of unwed mothers by Fenneke Reysoo, painful incursions into some of the less attractive aspects of contemporary Morocco.

What's clear from this burst of writing and of art is that the country and its people are on the move, that nothing is the same. A friend illustrated this by the following story: "Recently," she said, "in the course of a discussion among friends concerning the status of women in Morocco, a filmmaker was asked for his view. He replied that he wasn't qualified to speak on the general subject, but that he could say something of possible interest about the woman who had brought him up, his uncle's wife."

This is what he recounted: "In the early days when my aunt wanted to go to visit her parents, she would say to me: 'Ask your uncle if he would be kind enough to permit me to go to see my parents.'"

"Some while later when my aunt wanted to do the same thing, she said to me: 'Go tell your uncle that I would like to visit my parents.' Later still and for the same purpose, she said to me: 'Inform your uncle that I'm going to see my parents.' Most recently she said to me: 'When he comes back, tell him that I've gone to see my parents! (*milli yji gul lo mshit nshuf walday*).' That's where things are at in that household. The remaining possible scenario is that she will one day say: 'If he asks where I am, tell him that I've gone out, perhaps to see my parents!'"

My conclusion from this story and from reading these texts is that if we listen carefully to the voices assembled here, perhaps we'll have a clearer idea of where we, and you, and they may be going.

*Paris, August 1999.*