

The smell of mint leaves. European Migrants in Morocco.
Colección Diálogo de Memorias. Diputación de Cádiz, 2009.

In this book, Beatriz Díaz collects lives of European immigrants in Morocco in times of the French and Spanish protectorates, with testimonies of returnees who settled down in Tarifa.

David Cervera. Algeciras
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A HOMELAND LOCATED IN MEMORY

After the emergence of French and Spanish protectorates in 1912, Morocco became a fine ground for job opportunities. Many Europeans, from different countries, crossed the Strait of Gibraltar to get to Morocco. In Spain too, Civil War and posterior Franco's repression, forced many people into that route of exile. In this North African region, all of them earned their living while building a new one for them and their offspring. Such children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren are the crucible of that historical period at that exact location. Their roots sink in European soil, they were born in the realm of an Alawi kingdom and now they live, for example, in Tarifa.

This would be the case of Armando Saluzzo, Giuseppe Lo Bianco (recently passed away), Irene Verissimo, Miguel Burgos, brothers Pepe and Luis Torres, Fernanda Piñero and Michelle Cases. They have in common a European lineage, having seen the light in Casablanca (most of them) and living in Tarifa - except for Lo Bianco, who died in Fuengirola. The reason why Tarifa was their common destination is because either they married a Tarifean native, or because their relatives came from this town. These are the eight testimonies that Beatriz Díaz has collected in her book "The smell of peppermint", which symbolizes the longing for a Moorish mint tea.

The book reproduces and classifies personal experiences that Díaz gathered during her workshop "The story of my life", in its third year of implementation in Tarifa. The initiative, which has also been taken to Los Barrios, invites participants to bring their memories to light through continuous in-group work. The workshop, starting point for this book, decided to make a call to those migrants of European origin but born in Morocco, who returned and settled down in Tarifa in the sixties, shortly after Morocco's independence (1956). The local council and the regional council, who are also the publishers of "The smell of peppermint" as part of the series "Dialogue between memories, funded the project, which started end of 2006.

Yesterday, the Regional Foundation for Culture and the Two Shores Foundation presented the final work at the Kursaal center in Algeciras. Some of the voices that attended Díaz's workshop were there, too. Men and women that have become crucial "pieces of a puzzle"

that Diaz decided to put together to better understand a historical process, as well as the idiosyncrasies of the people that were actors in it.

These personal stories are part of the world's history. Like the story of Giuseppe, that Diaz knew thanks to his daughter. "I was interested in his experience. He had been in a concentration camp during World War II, a camp in Morocco," she explains. Furthermore, the author -born in Madrid but living in Tarifa for five years now- adds: "The families of these people have told me that the book helped them to recall things, to understand them and clarify them."

They witnessed historical events that were silenced up. France, for example, has never really dealt with the darker side of its performance during Second World War. These men and women didn't know why their parents or they themselves were in a concentration camp; they didn't know why so many Italians born in Morocco ended in concentration camps for three years. And it was because Italy had allied with Germany. "What I felt through my conversations with this people is that they were really pleased to have had the opportunity to live that experience: a life among so many cultures, languages and religions. Rather than feeling stateless, they feel with many identities," explains Diaz.

This is the core idea that puts their testimonies together. Michelle expresses it perfectly: "I am French as for my cultural background, but I was born in Morocco. I read books in French; I do care for what happens in France. My father told us 'we are French' and so I keep this idea inside, but then, I go to France and I don't think like the French. We have another mentality. We are not Italian neither Spanish. We have the mentality of Europeans who were born in Morocco, even though there too we are treated as outsiders. Although I am of French cultural background and I live in Spain, Morocco is my country... "