

## WHAT THE EUROPEAN PAPERS SAY

FREDERIC BARBERÀ

## Morocco, Past and Present

Anyone with some knowledge of the history of the Iberian peninsula knows about its Muslim past. Even the Catalan town of Lleida where I was born was governed by Ibn Halil as late as 1149, when it was conquered by the Count of Barcelona. Eight and a half centuries later, most of the fruit pickers in the Lleida region come from North Africa, where some of them lived poorly on the land before deciding to go North, often putting their lives at risk. Many of these labourers are aware that the land where they are foreign workers once was the landscape shaped by their forbears. Even place names like Albatàrrec, Almatret or Alcarràs where they now earn a living remind them of a more glorious past for their race.

I'm writing this article from a village in the Moroccan province of El Haouz, with a landscape very similar to that of the Lleida region. The combed lines of trees filled with fruit, the arrogant poplars and the unruly reedbeds all seem to stand as precise correlatives for the other fields less than a thousand miles North, if it weren't that here mechanical exploitation hasn't yet become wide spread. According to the Moroccan daily *Le Matin* various projects for rural development have been launched by the state in this rural area. Their multiple goals in the long run seem to be "to promote the area's economic potential as well as to reduce poverty, protect natural resources and create decent professional conditions for rural women". In the short run, these projects seem to deal mostly with irrigation and provision



of drinking water. These noble objectives however may have little effect on the national unemployment rate, which affects 1.4 million Moroccans, of whom 85 percent live in urban areas, where the appalling working conditions also push many to migrate.

The terms for a general solution to this situation was already pointed out fifty years ago by French writer and 1952 Nobel prize winner François Mauriac, for whom Morocco be-

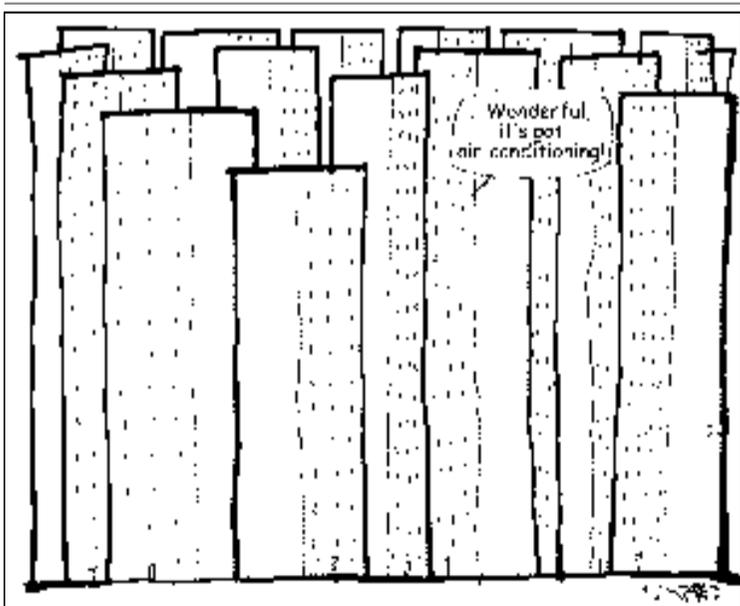
came the main battlefield in his anti-colonial struggle, a natural conclusion to his opposition to Nazism, Fascism and Francoism. Thus Laurent Greilsamer in *Le Monde* last Thursday reminds us that in the summer of 1954 when French papers were exalting military action in unruly North Africa, Mauriac stated that what was much needed was "an offensive against low salaries, unemployment, ignorance and poverty". In June 1954 Mauriac also

claimed amnesty for political prisoners in the French colony of *outré-Méditerranée*. Sadly, in addition to unemployment, ignorance and poverty, the independent Morocco of today also holds thousands of political prisoners behind bars. Thus whereas *Le Matin* is filled with complacent headings like "Today holidays are a part of life", "The Prince Moulay El Hassan: dynastic continuity and permanence" or optimistic reports on the king's address to Chirac on France's National Day that "France and Morocco are united by a common destiny" and that the new "Euro-Mediterranean space must be built on the shared universal values of liberty, peace and prosperity", the weekly *Maroc Hebdo International*, with restrictions to its distribution, warns its readers that "in an environment known to be constraining, this journal has succeeded to maintain and develop its wide range of information as well as its independent approach to and analysis of reality". The price, however, has occasionally been high, including legal processes and confiscation.

In the evening, in my hotel room, checking the photos taken during the day on my digital camera, I think it's somewhat strange that I should have gone so far to see those familiar images. Among the photos, I spot a smiling little girl with a black dress, photographed in the afternoon silence of the poplars and the reedbeds.

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## THE STING BY JAP



## COMMENTARY

STEPHEN BURGEN

## Just dying to get there

Just another weekend, just another Monday story. Thirty-two dead on the roads this weekend, 12 of them under thirty years old. A slight improvement on the previous weekend, with 38 dead, 21 of them still in their prime. The rumble of breast-beating can be heard for about 24 hours, then it's back to business as usual on the charnel house that passes for road travel in this country.

What can be done? It is not difficult to stop drivers from speeding and drink-driving, the principal

cause of the carnage. In Britain, the United States, Australia and New Zealand, for example, it is just not acceptable to drink and drive anymore. If you go out in a group, someone is always nominated as the nondrinker. How often do you hear anyone in this country say, *before the sobremesa*: "Who's driving?"

The remedy is simple: you hammer home the message of the damage done to other people's lives by drinking and driving, then reinforce it with effective policing and heavy penalties. The minimum punish-

ment in Britain is the loss of your licence for one year. That hurts and, as it is increasingly difficult to work without a car, it costs.

If you ban smoking in cinemas people don't smoke there and if they do, it is the public who tells them to stop. It becomes self-policing. This is what has happened with drink-driving in the above-mentioned countries, backed up with rigorous policing. If it can happen there, it can happen here. But, as the old therapy joke goes, first the light bulb must want to change.



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