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# Cuadernos de Gibraltar

## Gibraltar Reports



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# THE SAN ROQUE TALK

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Not Mintoff enough?

In recent weeks there was a minor trauma for many in Gibraltar. BBC cut off access to iPlayer and it is understood that even the Foreign Office intervened to try and save the situation. More of that later.

What might that incident tell you about a community that gathered in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century?

One of the early great Gibraltarians was Aaron Cardozo, who in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century was a personal friend of Nelson, was gathering provisions from North Africa and Spain to supply the Navy.

He was leader of the Jewish community and spent much of his fortune for the benefit of the Gibraltar community –as well as building his famous house, now the City Hall.

Many would recognise that that spirit has not changed in Gibraltar.

But Spain has changed a great deal in the past 50 years, the last 30 of which I have been a journalist.

Even as recently as 1985, when the border opened fully, Spain was relatively isolated from immigrants of other cultures other than relatively wealthy expats from the north.

The difference between Gibraltar and Spain until the 1970/80s was the level of democracy, within the limitations of a colonial system, contrasting with the realities of a dictatorship burgeoned in a bloody civil war.

But another difference was the diversity of culture on the Rock in which many people of the Campo had been participants prior to the 1969 border closure.

Against Spain's history of cultural isolation successive waves of immigrants Jews, Genoese, then Maltese and finally Indians worked to gain acceptance to Gibraltar's multi-cultural and religiously tolerant society. Let's not forget also the rich Masonic history in Gibraltar much despised by the Franco regime.

What were common factors that combined these various ethnic groups? Commerce certainly, but also a common interest in preserving community interests in a relationship

<sup>1</sup> *Director del diario Gibraltar Chronicle*. Conferencia impartida en el Seminario «Gibraltar–Campo de Gibraltar ¿Cómo normalizar las relaciones?», celebrado en el marco de los Cursos de Verano de San Roque, el 18 de julio de 2014.

with the colonial power. Critical to that was the position of Spain as antagonist. The outcome was a productive financial triangle of tension.

Up to 1969 the Campo plays a critical part in the relationship with Gibraltarians and local life.

Not just providing labour and taking back better income than was otherwise available in the area but also in a long history of marriages and family relations. The names of Gibraltarians reflects the cocktail that had been mixed over the centuries.

### **SNAPSHOT OF 1969**

This is the height of the cold war.

UK wants to preserve both military interests and growing commercial and political relationship with Spain. The border closes yet thousands of expats and tourists pour into Spain to holiday and to live.

At that moment Gibraltar with its airport might have been the first hub of commercial tourism in what become the Costa del Sol as we know it. Gibraltar had two hospitals, and relative wealth which UK undertook to sustain with financial aid.

Then Franco dies six years later but the border remains closed even longer – another decade.

When it does open under Felipe Gonzalez the hopes of some kind of lasting agreement to an end of tension rapidly disappear. Felipe must balance the complexity of Spain's historic sentiments collectively expressed as the continued claim over sovereignty.

Spain, after all, has suffered immensely, left behind in the progress of Europe and with deep wounds from the Civil War which are now today finally being revisited and which still cause controversy in clashes between Spain's left and right causing grief to many families searching for the lost relatives.

### **GIBRALTAR**

But in 1985 many of us hoped that relations between Gibraltar and the Campo might ignore the higher politics of sovereignty. Though Gibraltar had long been relatively better off economically the Rock's economy had now reached its lowest point in modern times.

Until 1984 MoD represented 70% of the economy (now around 7%) but with the closure of the major part of the naval base it dropped radically.

The Brussels Agreement is born and there is soon pressure from Britain for better

relations. Yet, in the background lies doubt and mistrust.

At the height of the problems which saw the 1967 referendum - not independence but essentially the choice 'with UK or with Franco' - we also have the 1969 Constitution.

These were the foundation for an ambition for decolonisation within the post-war tradition of the diminished British Empire and the then emerging Commonwealth.

Enter trade unionist Joe Bossano then an integrationist until 1975 when Roy Hattersley the British Labour minister comes to Gibraltar to reject integration with Britain.

Papers just recently released from the archives in UK from 1982 have a letter from the then Governor Sir William Jackson to the British Foreign minister recognising that Bossano will come to power and referring to Machiaveli and Mintoff as comparisons.

Mintoff refers to the Malta independence movement and although Bossano never vocalised such a direction, the open frontier saw Gibraltar move into in a different direction to that which UK had evidently hoped.

The ideal position for UK for a long time was that Gibraltar be economically stable, cheap for UK but sufficiently dependent on a relationship with Spain to enter dialogue which would manage the situation.

That same year documents, also revealed recently, show that Hassan, then Chief Minister, was reflecting on whether or not Spain might talk about Andorra type proposals. Spain was not interested, nor was UK.

Hassan, a Jewish leader of a Catholic community had held the community together from the Second World War and made its people a united cultural identity. He simply became too old to take Gibraltar further to that famous solution that escapes everyone but which certainly was not a deal to hand sovereignty to Spain. He argued for some token gesture to Spain and virtual independence on a British linked Rock.

The Campo in 1985 was the scene of hope after misery but with the entry of Spain into the EU the two decades of relative prosperity were about to begin. Now it was the Campo that would have the new hospitals though, again, La Linea would be left behind, returning to build increasing dependency on the new prosperity in Gibraltar.

There was realistic optimism in the relationship between Gibraltar and the Campo but it was also clear that the Madrid agenda would never make that easy. An effort for relations between both sides never really got very far. But Spain was looking ahead, not back, and socially it had moved from being conservative, compared to Gibraltar, to modern and liberal.

Bossano brings with him in 1988 two major policies: economy and education.

In 1985 Gibraltar had some 180 students in Britain.

Bossano wins the 1988 general election and soon introduces scholarships for all Gibraltar students who obtain a place at a British university. Today there are always some 600 Gibraltarians studying in UK.

With Spanish culture having been rejected during the closed border years and Spanish taught in schools only as a foreign language a new era of Gibraltarian is born. Post-colonial, English speaking and with a growing sense of national identity.

Bossano also reclaims land, builds houses and develops the service industries and is the first Gibraltar chief minister truly running the economy.

His fall in 1988 was the almost exclusively the result of the mad indulgence of the launch era.

But it was Bossano who in 1992 having won a general election with 73% of the vote is secretly trying to negotiate an alternative to the Brussels process. This is rejected because John Major fears the impact it may have on his new process of talks with Northern Ireland.

What follows is a path of tension, good and bad weather with Spain for a decade.

1992 is also, not surprisingly, the moment Bossano begins to turn to the UN and starts the campaign for decolonisation. That is later in 1996 continued by Peter Caruana though he reopens at the same time the politics of Hassan of dialogue without confrontation.

The distrust reaches a crucial moment with the 2001 joint-sovereignty attempt but Caruana's efforts, culminating in the referendum, prove Gibraltar is now a united and modern. Ironically the joint-sovereignty deal is rejected by a Spain obsessed with total sovereignty.

Everything then has to wait for the unexpected arrival of Miguel Angel Moratinos and a new politics of understanding.

And it happens. The front pages of the Gibraltar Chronicle cease to be almost solely about the frontier and problems with Madrid and a new focus on domestic issues re-emerges. The Instituto Cervantes discovers a market for teaching Spanish to Gibraltarians and many middle class Gibraltarians – not just the Sotogrande rich –, are comfortable buying homes in Spain. Enter economic crisis. Enter Margallo.

Two more comments.

Why the concern about the BBC iPlayer... because in the new era of the internet

Gibraltarians live in the world that they choose. Their links with Britain closer than ever. Without real and peaceful, democratic normalisation that will continue to be the case.

Cultural ties between Gibraltar and Spain, but for a handful of academics, is reduced to touristic excursions and recreational trips.

Sovereignty. If you look around the world it is the more despotic countries that are rowing about sovereignty, the modern ones are engaged in debates about rights and obligations. I think we all talk too much about sovereignty.

How do I feel about Margallo? One question I would ask is have I wasted 30 years backing dialogue rather than confrontation. In retrospect, should Bossano perhaps have been more like Mintoff? Perhaps. That might have forced a solution that would be better for us today.

But democracy is everything and it is dialogue.

The referendum in Scotland displays the importance of that kind of debate. Cameron recognises that he must give the Scottish the choice. So one last question to you. If Cameron had treated the Scots as Margallo treats Gibraltarians, how do you think the Scots would vote this September?



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