

Mohammed V: The Tangiers speech

Seen through the myopic lenses of colonial and post-colonial English history of oratory, the stature of Mohammed V, the Cherifian emperor and sultan of Morocco (1909-1961) is a blur. However when on 10 April 1947 he addressed the crowds in Tangiers, still an International Zone recently evacuated by Spain, the impact of the Discours de Tanger was felt immediately throughout the troubled region, right up to Egypt and the Fertile Crescent, and of course the French Empire — impelled by the fact Arabic is an international language in spite of its dialectical variations, and because Arabic rhetoric responds, across borders, to recognisable forms of address by and large rooted in the Quran and its subsequent traditions.

The Islamic leader who extolled decolonisation in polished yet irrevocable terms and was soon to be deposed and sent into exile (1953), spoke with an oratorical authority that stemmed from two sources. On the one hand, he was a direct descendant of the Prophet through Fatima, and was regarded by his people, and often referred to by France as Caliph or Commander of the Faithful — in the Arab West (the Maghreb) he held the same prestige once vested on the Ottoman ruler in the East. In fact, the day following the speech, acting as imam he personally led the hebdomadary prayer by delivering a second speech, a Friday homily, a rare occasion but indicative of his religious and even doctrinal authority. The homily was a call to 'Arab unity' across obediences, a direct reference to the newly founded Arab League. On the other hand, Mohammed V was the inheritor of a monarchy that, until the Reconquista, practically held sway over Andalusian Spain and gave Islam some of its greatest philosophers — Averroes (Ibn Rushd) — as well as the revered theological Al-Karaouine University (founded in 859). The State of Morocco, contrary to the Arab lands to its east, had maintained its independence ever since its Islamic foundation, twelve hundred years before, both from Christian powers and the Ottoman caliphate. The French protectorate was recent (1912-1956) and the main colonial power (as opposed to the Spanish rule of peripheral territories, some still under Madrid's dominion today) remained all along aware and respectful of the dignity of the Cherifian monarchy. Mohammed V spoke therefore with the dual authority of a 'well-guided' sovereign and the sovereign of a State that in the seventeenth century was treated on an equal footing by Louis XIV, the embodiment of an interrupted political and theological tradition.

It is this long culture of independence that also made Mohamed V a liberatory leader in Africa. After his return in 1955, the Arab monarch whom General De Gaulle had made a Companion of Liberation for having sided with France and not Germany, threw his weight behind another liberation, the decolonisation of Africa; he supported Patrice Lumumba and was a key actor

of the Non-Aligned Movement. The Tangiers Speech precipitated North Africa's decolonisation by giving it a voice, a programme and a vision.

Source

Umar Baha al-Din al-Amiri, Tangiers, printed at the expense of the compiler, no date. The *Discours de Tanger* (as it is usually referred to) has never been published before in any language other than its original Arabic and in an official French translation. This translation contains, at the very end, an added sentence, written by the French Governor General ("Seek your inspiration from the French, friends of freedom that sets this country on the path of prosperity and progress"). Mohammed V refused to read it aloud, which precipitated the dismissal of the Governor General and ultimately the deposition of the Sultan.

There is a private, truncated, film recording of the speech viewable at: http://www.dailymotion.com/video/x12nu_discours-tanger-1947_people .

References

Prône prononcé par feu Sa Majesté le Roi Mohammed V lors de la prière du vendredi, le 11 avril 1947, in the same compilation as above.

Philip Halldén, "What is Arab Islamic Rhetoric? Rethinking the history of Muslim oratory art and homiletics", *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 37 (2005): 19-38.



All praises are due to God only. Salutations and peace be upon the Messenger of God. Of the bounties which only perpetual gratitude can fulfil as an obligation is the bounty of coming together between hearts that unites their presence, purified their [mutual] love, and renders sincere their work for God. Such is the description of the believers of whom our Lord (exalted He is in His might) says, "Indeed, the friends of God, will have no fear nor shall they grieve; those who believe and who used to revere [their Lord]. To them are given glad tidings in this life and the Hereafter; there is no substitute for the words of God and that is the tremendous victory".

The believer is distinguished from the rest of humanity by his or her complete certainty, contentment of soul, depending on his Lord in his movements and stationary moments, during moments of happiness and difficult times. He knows that God the exalted made clear to him all that He made obligatory upon him and in order to discharge it with complete certainty that the Creator

(exalted He be) does not cause to go to waste the reward of the one who works righteously. Therefore, it remains for us to purify our work after strengthening our certainty [of God's promise] and resolve so we may turn out to be true believing servants of God.

Muslims have been overwhelmed by terrors to the utmost degree; the hand of misfortunes has hurled them around with catastrophic results. Knowledge used to be the spring of illumination between us, the beauty of secrets, but we discarded it until our paths became darkened, and our confusion was increased and entrenched through ignorance. Justice was firmly established in our dwelling, disseminated throughout the breath of the courtyards of our lands available to all: the sedentary and the Bedouin; all the servants of God enjoyed it. But we strayed from the straight path until darkness and oppression pervaded our presence and dwellings and transformed into the suppression and oppression of the rights of our principles. Kindness and good were the order among the sedentary and the Bedouins. Extreme generosity and spending in the way of good held sway until avarice and niggardliness took possession of souls and polluted them.

We are the cause of our misfortune that allowed the winds of division to scatter us. The calamities that descended on us were not confined to rifts of the *mashriqi*¹ from the *maghribi*,² but have extended to ripping apart the oneness of the land that used to compete with other lands in its national unity and consolidation. So much so that a man became estranged from his brother, migrating from his place of birth never to visit it again by any means possible.

Through our tremendous heedlessness we squandered the most noble of rights. The unity of our lands was torn asunder because of all the disrespect we sowed and reaped on it. Also we spent the days of our lives in grieving and sadness and were scattered on all important matters. But the Master, Exalted He be, showed us mercy with His guiding inspiration when He granted us sovereignty over these lands. We endeavoured to the utmost of our ability to remedy these circumstances, showing the path to the secret of success, in the now and the future, guided by the teachings of our righteous religion which unites between the hearts of Muslims and guides the Muslim Arab nation to mutual assistance, solidarity and succour. With the establishment of that noble league, which strengthened the bonds between Arabs wherever they are found, enabled their kings and leaders in the [Arab] East and [Arab] West to unite in action and in directing their forward march toward religious

¹ Arabs of the Middle East (editor's note).

² Arabs of the Western Arab World, that is North Africa (editor's note).

guidance, Islamic glory, and Arab honour, we undertook the task to retrieve our bygone glory with all our efforts, by awakening the innermost self, guiding consciences, maturing ideas, and enlightening minds.

And since we knew that this nation's life is contingent upon what its noble predecessors contributed, we took it on our shoulders to disseminate knowledge, both the traditional and the modern. Through the former to adorn our souls and minds with the lights of faith and high moral standards. Through the latter to acquire the means of forward movement through all paths of progress and development and livelihood. Then, by the grace of Allah and His complete assistance, everyone began to live the good results of education armed with ambition to increase their activity of disseminating it widely. Schools were built where Moroccan youth received the seeds of virtue; on the horizons of guidance the happy dawns of felicity began to sparkle. The nation awoke, alert to its rights and treading the most beneficial of paths toward its glory and honour.

However, what a difference there is between what the nation achieved on that path and its final aim; that achievement was only in the beginning of the efforts and it was vital for the nation to sacrifice more before celebrating its happy achievements. Then if the squandering of a Right is the result of the silence of its people, a Right will never be lost when it is upheld by one who demands it. The Rights of the Moroccan nation are not squandered and will never be squandered. For we — by the bounty of God and His assistance — are alert and vigilant for the preservation of the existence of the fatherland, working for the guarantee of its glorious and bright future, and moving in order to achieve this wish that awakens the heart of every Moroccan.

It is our simple duty never to weaken in resolve and seriousness in pursuing praiseworthy endeavours indispensable to and necessary for the national homeland. We remain tirelessly persevering to realize our ambition of preserving our past glory and achieving new progress.

In order to cover all regions and areas of Morocco placed under our complete sovereignty, firmly standing in directing all its affairs as evidence of our beautiful care, we visited at every given occasion all its provinces and territories, from West to East.

The time thus is right for us to visit Tangiers, a capital city, whose position in Morocco we equate to the crown in regard to the parting of the hair. Tangiers is the gateway to Morocco's commerce, the pivot of its diplomacy,³ the

³ Since the eighteenth century and the establishment of numerous Western consulates

outstanding characteristic of its luminous beauties, the most beautiful preface to our glorious history,⁴ built in the early eras of the history of humanity. As long as Morocco blossoms with and takes pride with Tangiers's greatness.

So we renewed with this visit the covenant of the visit made by our sainted grandfather Moulay Hassan to remove it from its very heedlessness of slumber.

Therefore we made its blessed presence a priority to inspect its preserved affairs, bringing to its shores the glad tidings of care and escorting to its population clear evidences of consideration and supervision that they may know they are in the first row of our sincere and loyal subjects and the distinguished vanguard of the forces of reinforcement among workers. We came as a loving and caring father to attend to all of Tangiers's concerns and visit all its areas. A father who is deeply committed to all the duties incumbent upon him and is ready to execute them in order to soothe his conscience, please his Lord. [A father who] raises up with his country in a way that retrieves for it its past glory and the necessary ambitions it must nurture to regain its Rights and to endeavour toward progress that will place the entire Morocco as a whole⁵ among the league of countries and most civilized and refined nations.

On this we made our covenant with Allah and towards which we pledged all our talents and resources. We await very soon the result of the conference which will be convened to reflect and deliberate on Tangiers's concerns hoping that the voice of the Moroccan people will be heard in order to arrive at the rights we hope for. The renewal of this covenant throughout these lands where our Cherifian⁶ convoy has descended, brought us tremendous happiness. We met with our caliphal representative in Tetuan⁷ whose resolve and complete preparedness to moving ahead is known in complete agreement with the whole of our principles as to what pleases God (may He be glorified).

We are confident that all our subjects who obey his authority will dispense to

the Sultan used Tangiers as a *de facto* diplomatic capital (editor's note).

⁴ Since Roman times, Tangiers had been the geopolitical key of the region, as much Southern European as it was North African (editor's note).

⁵ At that stage Morocco was split between the Spanish Protectorate in the North, the main French Protectorate, the International Zone of Tangiers and Spanish Sahara or Rio de Oro in the far South (editor's note).

⁶ The Moroccan sultan is a direct descendant from the Prophet, hence the qualification.

⁷ Moroccan city, then the capital city of the Spanish Protectorate.

him sincere advice as is obligatory on every believer without which unity cannot be completely realized. We also hope that the outcomes of this gathering will be abundantly praiseworthy in all the avenues of good by the will of Allah. The requests of our subjects in Tangiers have reached us; some of them which were implementable have been addressed in assistance to them. We will, with the help of God, devote all our efforts to them until they achieve all their desire and they praise, by the bounty of God, their good fortune. We are only calling them to efforts that are in line with their ambitions manifested in perpetual tranquillity and prevalent dignity. Indeed the best of progress is borne from movement untouched by recklessness and not interspersed by instability.

On this we have appointed in every city and every region of our kingdom men whose sincerity and competence we set great hopes on. We assigned them the duty of vigilant and committed representation on our behalf for the public welfare of this nation and the guarantee of its civic and legislative rights. This sublime duty requires that one forgoes personal interests for the sake of the national interest. Position is not an avenue to using authority for something other than which it has been created for. Rather, employment is an institution which aims, foremost and finally, at serving the welfare and benefit of our loyal subjects, relieving them from the yoke of oppression and ignominy, extending assistance, and promoting all social, economic and cultural projects that aim at enlightening the minds [of people], raising the standard of living and improving the difficulties of living. In summary, every functionary whom we appointed as our official representative in a region, area or city must endeavour and strive to his utmost to provide for the people while enjoying all [benefits] that are conferred through obedience to the Cherifian throne, sincerity and loyalty to the Alaouite crown. This crown has worked for centuries, with all strength it was given, for the preservation of the existence of this nation, the wellbeing of its different regions, and the happiness of its various classes.

In light of all this, we instruct government officials, pashas, caids, judges, and all functionaries whom we accorded our trust and favoured with our support to reflect on the momentous national duty placed upon their shoulders. Let them abide by tractability in conduct and mutual relations, justice and fairness in court trials, experience and determination. Let us be cognizant to whatever is directed to every single duty so that we may discharge all duties without any negligence or fear and cowardice. There is no excuse for laziness that impedes and frustrates. Let us equip ourselves with that which spurs us on and away from deadly impotence, and toward hard effort which gathers and puts in order all that is scattered. There is no honour for those who vie in dereliction of their duties and in weakness and there is no future for the

impotent. Let us move toward the sources of knowledge that enliven the hearts and let us be receptive to its radiant light by which the darkness of mishaps is removed. Let us advance toward science that enlightens those who reflect and ponder the paths of useful endeavours and toward works whose benefits are the best defence against covetousness.

If you welcome and accept the sincere calling and advices we have directed to you, you would have been delivered, now and in the future, from the abysses of ruin and destruction. It will be possible for you to live honourable and august among mankind once you have removed from your hearts the despair that kills. Be well acquainted and aware of the duties your pure and strong religion places upon you so that you may realize through it a perfect felicity. To this end does the Exalted Creator call us when He says in His wise Quran, "Whoever holds onto [the way of] Allah has been guided to a straight path".⁸



*Introduced by Ph.-J. Salazar and translated from the Arabic by
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⁸ Quran, 3: 101 (editor's note).