

## LE PACHA

### History as narrative

He was born with a silver spoon in a family of strong continuous traditions whose male members were brought up to govern and not to be governed. From his early childhood, he took for granted to give orders and to be obeyed, to be surrounded by servants and slaves. Whims are satisfied; otherwise fits of anger and fury brought the whole house to a standstill.

While his sisters were brought up to be discreet and good-mannered, his character was shaped by stories of Haroun Errashid, the Caliph of Baghdad, with his unlimited power and extended empire, and whose great wealth and excessive luxury made dream Christians and Muslims alike. From his earliest childhood, he dreamt of leading armies, occupying territories, of being seated on a golden throne and acclaimed by the crowd. He was deadly serious about these dreams, though his father dismissed them as mere childish fantasies. His ambitions seemed wild, beyond his age, in excess of his fragile and thin body. Yet to the surprise of the whole tribe, he showed an extraordinary strength of will, solid like a rock in its stubborn fixation on a mysterious goal.

His father, aware of the austerity of the landscape and the harshness of the climate in the south of Morocco, with its isolated mountains and the roughness of its people - who had to struggle with the elements, from violent storms to long-lasting drought, and with each other for the scarce resources, scattered trees in the forest, a brook, some kind of fertile land - had to train him to ride a donkey when he was two years old, a mule at the age of three, and a horse at four. Already at this stage he was skilful in the manipulation of sticks, knives, daggers and swords, and later on of rifles and guns when they were introduced by the French army, with its more modern techniques of killing and maiming. He was so impressed by the new instruments, tools and machines that he participated in most of France's wars, including pacifying the natives. The young man's warrior spirit was a great asset for impressing members of his family and tribe, and also for intimidating other tribes, and using it as an awesome force against his enemies.

Having served many kings, his grandfather, who was a caid, transmitted his power to his father, who in his turn became a caid, and who, like in a system of dynastical inheritance, transmitted his political position to our young man, who became a khalifa first, then a caid of the small village of Télouet. The prestige of authority was a cultural heritage of the Glawa family through generations, and as a result, it became a dominant force of the Glawa tribe and an integral part of its land and sky.

From the simple name of Thami, he became the Glaoui as a caid in the service of the makhzen, for better and worse, serving, but also using to his benefit all the resources of his position as an imposer of the law and a representative of the state; in fact, at the end of the century, the central government was in a situation of despair to bring under control the various tribes, which in an atmosphere of potential chaos, *siba*, obeyed the law of the sword and powder rather than the rule of the law. This spirit of disobedience appealed to the caid, for he all kinds of carrots and sticks to impose order, sometimes through ruthless means which caused blood to colour the landscapes of villages and douars, thus creating a canvas of red horror.

His belief that a reign of terror was necessary for an arena of peace made him an awesome figure now, not only in his small village, but in all the vast spaces surrounding it, eager to embrace a charismatic leader. These days, the mere sound of the name EL GLAOUI triggered gestures of fear and submission, and images of a legendary figure. Glawa, his native

tribe, changed from an insignificant point on the Moroccan map to a territory of fascinating power that launched el harka, caravans of horsemen, and ambitious dreams.

When the French came, in the name of the protectorate, with their civilizing mission and their torch of light with the inscriptions equality, fraternity and justice, the Glaoui was mesmerized by their military regime, their beautiful uniforms, their machinery of magic, their disciplinary management, their logic in occupying space and commanding people. He knew intuitively that his time had come and that it was the moment to shape his destiny with them. He, who was a native of those free amazigh mountains and pure air, became, in front of these foreign men who came from nowhere, like a small child moved by the sight of a gift offered once in a lifetime. His passion to integrate the new tribe of administrators was measured only by the violence with which he tried to tame to obedience his old tribe under the new multicoloured flag.

His allegiance to the Sultan was still visible like an act in the theatre, a *mise en scène*, but in the depth of his heart, he felt love at first sight for these masters from those mysterious lands, whose penetration of the land and permeation of official habitats had left on him a powerful impression of efficiency and swiftness. Like a shrewd fox, he instantly realized in a quick calculation where his interests were.

Aware of the young man's passionate need to be someone, of fame and privilege, the Resident General facilitated the promotion of the Glaoui as a caid to the Glaoui as a pasha, of the pearl of the South: Marrakech. His control of the city was so tight that he extended his authority to nearby villages and towns. Politics remained a family business in the purest traditional form: older and younger brothers play the first roles of government officials in the name of the Glawi tribe in the Glawi territory, which looked now like an empire in miniature: caids and khalifas of all kinds. Playing the sultan against the French authorities and using the Résident Général against the sultan, the Glaoui preserved the winning cards, and felt his political muscles to stretch, and stretched them further by gaining economic power. Once the Glawi land was totally in the Glawa family's hand, le pasha expressed his unquenched greed; like a tumour in a unresisting body, he conquered lands, bought habitats, speculated in Casablanca's and Paris' Wall Streets, acquired estates in various cities, including Casablanca, Fez and Tangiers, some of them just for short holidays. As a jewel on the crown, he built a palace in Marrakech itself, whose luxury and opulence reminded his foreign visitors, who now counted by the dozens, of *One Thousand and One Nights*: a harem with wives, concubines, servants and slaves; singers from the capital of the Othman empire; musicians in the pure Egyptian style, and orchestras with an authentic background in Islamic Spain. This is life and beauty at its height.

But this life of opulence bore only the pasha's signature. In Marrakech and in the countryside, simple poor folks could not find enough food to survive. In periods of drought and famine, they relied on crunches to preserve a certain idea of life as mirage.

In the pasha's pavilions, guests of the highest calibre were invited to enjoy food and landscape, to go on hunting excursions in the forest, or play the golf game: the British Winston Churchill, the French Général de Gaulle, American military figures, politicians of all kinds and Parisian actors and stars. This was not for the *indigenes*, whose labour produced this cosmopolitan light existence of leisure and pleasure. Letters of appreciation and thanks were sent from Europe with the ceremonial opening "His Excellence", "His Excellency, Pasha of Marrakech

Solidly established, not only in Marrakesh, but in the whole south, whose geography became associated with his name, he was given by the French geographers and writers of the colonies the label of *seigneur des montagnes*, an exotic figure, a fiction created by the fancies and fantasies of westerners in pursuit of strong sensations in myths and legends. Spreading his power over plains and mountains, they became his, his property. Then he extended his web-

like influence on Paris itself, where the Glawa tribe shifted to the Seine river: lobbies of all kinds, active like in a beehive, courted his friendship and hospitality. Though he needed an interpreter to translate his thoughts, he felt more Parisian than the Parisians themselves. He candidly expressed his view that at heart he felt to be French; that was why he made the utmost effort to decode and appreciate something as refined and distant from the barren character of the mountains as the opera. To please them and to ape their refined mode of living, he built a golf course in the vast, unlimited space of his palace, not far from desert lands. Like an actor, he played roles and changed masks: the Glawi was a hadj, but also wore the smoking and enjoyed life in this world, in casinos and nightclubs. Unhappy with the mediocre quality of knowledge in his native land, Koranic schools, courses in Arabic and a high degree of patriotism; he was a pioneer in exporting the young to have the highly acclaimed certificate: Made Abroad. Thus, he sent his sons to pursue their studies and gain privileges in the best private schools and universities in ancient countries like France and England. To be sure, his treasure and treasury never dried, though most of his countrymen still struggled to see some light in the dark ages of their primitive lives, poor farming and skeleton donkeys and cows. His name became associated with the power of money, not only making it, but also snatching it by all means.

In a skilful mixture of business and infinitum wealth creation, family tradition, tribal solidarity, political influence embodied in the Pasha, and religious prestige as invested in the status of the hadj, our hero gained complete legitimacy in the full name “His excellency Si El Hadj Thami El Mazouari El Glaoui le Pacha de Marrakech”.

Then one day, in the most unexpected way, and at the zenith of his glory, he made the deadly error of assuming the role of a statesman by defying the Sultan himself for he wanted to be faithful to the family tradition of linear inheritance and blood solidarity by trying to impose one of his sons as a caid in his small kingdom. In the sultan’s palace in Rabat, words of anger and fury shook the roof, and the pasha left unceremoniously, and ordered his members of the tribe not to attend the Beia ritual, with its suggestion of acceptance and obedience. Challenged in this manner, the Sultan ordered his subject through the Grand Vizir not to cross the gate of the palace any more.

“I have always treated him with care and generosity the way a father treated his son. And now, he caused my worst humiliation.” he told his family and the chieftains of the Glawa tribe.

As the sultan was firm with both le pasha for his disobedience and with France for her unwillingness to grant independence for his country, the Glaoui started flirting dangerously with the most fanatic section of the French population in Morocco, which counted more 300.000, and plotting with his political friends in Paris. Like in a Shakespearean play, they started preparing in the dark for a coup d’état, and, in fact, managed to dethrone the legitimate king, and placed instead Ben Arafa, a pseudo political figure used as a puppet by the powerful pasha, in close cooperation with le Résident général. He also managed through the seduction of speech and persuasion to convince powerful caids and pashas to rally to his project.

The child’s dream of being a great man who would seize power and achieve glory was being materialized. Though his locality was Marrakesh, his surveillance extended now to cover the whole territory, in particular its capital, Rabat, where nothing happened without his authorization, since he claimed to know the details of the Moroccan mind’s archaeology. With this immense power, he had a free hand to forge documents, to seize lands, to influence judicial decisions, and to impose caids. Before, he served the makhzen; now, however, he embodied the makhzen, in particular its most despotic aspect.

Slowly but steadily, voices of protest emerged: pamphlets were distributed, grenades were thrown at the enemies of the nation, political decisions were taken in secret places, flags

were waved. Young nationalists expressed their high ideals by fighting the French regime, the pasha of Marrakesh, and the powerful caids who were at the service of colonial dreams.

The Glaoui was intransigent and blind in his position against any suggestion of the return of the legitimate Sultan, exiled in the distant island of Madagascar, and whose popularity was remarkably high, even in his absence. The president of the French republic, the prime minister, as well as many politicians began to be aware of the irreversible process of liberation, as aspired at by the king and the nationalist elite, some of which was educated in France, and used, therefore, to the humanist argument of equality and freedom, as developed by the French philosophers of enlightenment. As it saw itself now in the mirror, France was embarrassed at the paradox. Yet, the contradiction within the Glaoui was suppressed by a swift gesture of contempt for the king and especially for the nationalists, who, in his obsessive claim, were plotting to seize power. He dismissed them as mere effeminate bourgeois city – dwellers, with no roots in the profound Morocco of mountains and rivers, of farming and harvesting, of authentic Moroccan traditions with their family solidarity and tribal alliances. In fact, two visions of the world came into collision: one projecting optimistically into the future; the second nostalgic for the past, which is on the brink of collapse. In a strange coincidence, both the Glaoui and his sons came across Oufkir, who would later use despotic means as a minister of the interior to silence any democratic move made by those very young nationalists who struggled for independence. In the popular imagination, his name has remained associated with splitting the blood of visionary young men. One of his victims was a brilliant nationalist called Mehdi ben Barka, whose tragic death is still a puzzle to be resolved by the French and Moroccan courts.

To his horror, le pasha felt, with his sharp intuition that he developed in pig hunting, a shift of policy, a vague sympathy for the nationalist demand, and a respect for the aspiration of the king, Mohamed V. Shaken in his essence as a friend of *la République Française*, he felt manipulated and betrayed. There were those who still lobbied for his case and encouraged his intransigence, but their gesture seemed futile, for a feeling of dark hopelessness pervaded him. He had devoted his whole life to the accumulation of wealth and the acquisition of power, and now in a flash of lightning, the torrent was about to uproot him, leaving him desperate like a lonely orphan.

The charismatic and eloquent figure lost much of his energy, for his body withered and his will weakened. Even his sharp eyes had lost their eagle mesmerising effect. One after another, the caids disappeared from the scene; they abandoned him for more fruitful lands. As for the protectorate, he had now the certainty that it no longer protected him as he was dropped unceremoniously like a rubbish bag, useless, except for hungry vultures which rummaged the town's waste.

Before, he expanded like a cancer tumour, but now he had a cancer of his own, merciless, that ate up his liver and destroyed his sight.

In a gesture of hope and despair, he recovered his shrewd ability to survive total isolation in a Marrakesh that seemed like a desert after the loss, in his pessimistic eyes, of its charming gardens and magic riads; this was now a place of southern desolation. He flew straight to Paris, Saint-Germain-en-laye, where the sultan stayed, and the Pasha of Marrakesh, in a gesture of humility, if not humiliation as it was widely reported by the French press, kissed feverishly both the sultan's feet and the ground on which those feet stood. The proud warrior of the mountains was now in such a pathetic state that he inspired both pity and forgiveness. He could not bear any more the suffering and pain caused by a strangely powerful feeling of guilt on his conscience. The mirror now was fragmented in various parts, and for this reason he was unable to locate the contours of his own features, distorted like those of a ghost. Affected by age and sickness, and a tragic sense of loss, he touched himself to make sure whether he was a body or a corpse.

Sick and old, yet he had to make another strategic move to save his property from dismantling and seizure: thousands of hectares of fertile lands, American cars, bank accounts, in Morocco, Europe and elsewhere. In a letter, subtle, diplomatic, he begged the sultan to treat his offspring as his own daughters and sons, and, therefore, to be their father-figure, a protector and guarantor.

In a curious coincidence, within a very short time, Morocco got its independence, the king recovered his throne, and the nationalists celebrated the auspices of an era of dignity and pride. The Glaoui had already died before his biological death. With his burial, a new page of history was turned.

Unfortunately, the death of one man does not mean the death of a structure, an order, a state of mind, a certain form of culture that invites, encourages, and passively accepts despotic power. The pasha represents a system called Makhzen, with its legitimate call for order and discipline; otherwise the country will be transformed into a *fitna* land, a land of chaos. However, this system has been used and abused for the excessive appropriation of power, the accumulation of privileges, and the creation of rituals of docility and submission. Decades after the pasha's death, small, disguised, and more subtle pashas, caids and khalifas have seen the light, and have proliferated like mushrooms in towns and villages alike. This web has stretched to contaminate various other institutions and fields, manners of doing and forms of speech.

To these days, historians are still struggling with the origin of despotism, which has become an invisible element, hidden in the archaeological layers of the formation of the land and its culture. The pasha remains an eloquent metaphor for someone who governed and controlled for half a century and for whom power was a fetish, an object of desire, a megalomania-disease, and whose authority over family, tribe, town and region, if not the destiny of the country, was undiminished, since without it, he would be driven insane.

While strolling leisurely in Marrakesh these days, I was amazed that both a small hotel in the Gueliz boulevard and a hyper post-modern night-club on the periphery of the town were named THE PASHA. The myth has survived; something fascinating, almost archaic, unspecified, and persistent remains in the unconscious of individuals and collective unconsciousness.