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Extra-ordinary Tangier: Domesticating Practices in a Border Zone

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In this article, we take to task the representation of Tangier as an exceptional, extra-ordinary city, not bound by the usual laws of time and space—a representation conjured up by its literary expats in the early 1950s and still persistent today. We attempt to confront it with a different set of geographical imaginations of what we term, in shorthand, a domesticated more-than-ordinary city. In today's Tangier, notions of exceptionality continue to dominate both touristic and artistic and literary imaginaries, as well as institutional narratives seeking to promote the city as an open space for trade and economic opportunity. We counter such accounts with a set of other geographical imaginations of Tangier, in literary and biographical accounts and artistic practice, a kaleidoscopic view on the city that refracts and reflects vantage and practice points of Tangier as both more than and extremely ordinary. Although Tangier is in many ways a unique case and setting, the points we try to raise here hold valence in other contexts, and we believe can help illuminate some continuing (post)colonial representational habits, cultural as well as geopolitical. **Key Words: border, creative geographies, diasporic dwelling, domestication, literary geographies, Morocco.**

You can be anyone in Tangier. You can remake yourself, rewrite your backstory, reform or deform, indulge your subconscious, cultivate nemeses, or simply start anew. Tingis, Tanja, Tanger, Tangiers, Tangier—even the city takes pseudonyms. It is an edge city, caught between worlds, at the border between east and west, between north and south.

—Shoemake (2013, 1)

In its best known imaginations, those of the writers and artists of the Beat Generation, Tangier is an extra-ordinary place, an “edge city,” a city where everything comes together, where everything is possible. In some ways, the particular history of this point on the map—an interstitial promontory pointing northward from Africa toward Europe that divides the Atlantic from the Mediterranean—makes it difficult to imagine it as being something other than an edge. In this article we attempt a different look at Tangier, shifting our gaze to a different set of sources and perspectives that have not conventionally been part of geographical or literary analyses of the city's imaginings, and that focus on the ways this liminal border space has also always been the site of quotidian, ordinary life.



FIGURE 1 Elisa Chimenti, a lifelong resident of Tangier, with her little black purse, encountering visiting dignitaries. Courtesy of the Fondazione Elisa Chimenti, Tangier.

In seeking out ordinary life in this reputedly extraordinary city, we want to take up the idea of cities defined (also) by processes of domestication (Koch and Latham 2013) that make them livable, emplaced, and dwelled in. In relation to Tangier, a city that has been a focus for each of us in research about the mobile frontiers of Europe (Wagner 2014; Bialasiewicz 2015), we believe it is particularly important to investigate such processes precisely because Tangier has persistently been discursively shaped as exceptional, hidden, and transgressive—to the point of being unreal, a dreamscape, out of place and out of time—from the late nineteenth century until today.

We want to avoid, however, drawing polemical oppositions between an ordinary local and an exceptional foreign;¹ nor do we want to reify the quotidian and domestic. Rather, we would like to follow Crang's (2010) call for cultural geographic work able to "knit back together grand and intimate geographies" and to inhabit "the tension between the significant and the insignificant, the small and the mighty, the trivial and the momentous" (194). To knit Tangier back together, we found particularly useful the metaphor of the kaleidoscope, producing reflections through its multiple internal mirrors, with incoming images refracted into beautiful patterns based on the shape, color, and light of the viewed

object. Kaleidoscopes thus allow for a seemingly infinite multiplicity of refractions and perspectives, and an active remaking of what appears before us. At the same time, gazing through the kaleidoscope we are fully aware that it is our twist of the wrist that allows for the refraction, for the explosion of color; and so in the case of Tangier, fully aware of our own intervention as researchers into the picture of the city that we conjure up. Adopting, then, a kaleidoscopic revisioning of Tangier, we also hope to draw attention to the question of how attending to different voices and different forms of artistic practice can recount different cities, and give space to different modes of place comprehension and place making (Hawkins 2015).

Moving away from singular renderings of Tangier as an almost solely transgressive edge city, we wish to give space here to a wider set of refractions and reflections of Tangier that appear to be most visible in a set of literary and artistic practices of Tangerina women, and their portrayals of a Tangier that is ordinarily, rather than transgressively, extra-ordinary and colorful; reflecting a Tangier that is at once extra-ordinary but also the place where they make their homes. Everyday life requires making “home,” whether that might be interpreted as a private, familial zone lived behind walls, or as engagement with public spaces of routine, habit, and comfort (Ingold 2000; Silvey 2006; Ralph and Staeheli 2011; Brickell 2012). We approach the processes by which residents make the city into a home as domesticating (Koch and Latham 2013) to dissolve some of the spuriously assumed distinctions between living in private versus public spaces; to recognize that the routines, habits, and messiness of ordinary life take place outside of the house as much as inside; and to realize that inhabitable and inhabited cities are responsive to those who work to make them ordinarily livable.

Our choice of focus on Tangerina women is thus informed not simply by the desire to give voice to artistic and literary production that was not as prominent in the Tangier pantheon as some of their male counterparts, although that is certainly not true of some of the figures we discuss (like internationally celebrated contemporary Tangerina photographer and video artist Yto Barrada). It is more broadly an attempt to include in accounts of this city other sources, other vantage points, and other practices, that could allow us to recount a different Tangier, responding to recent calls by cultural geographers to engage in what Shaw, DeLyser, and Crang (2015, 211; see also Crang 2010) evocatively called “the politics and practice of open embrace”—we believe a particularly apt metaphor for the making domestic of a city too frequently defined by its danger and unapproachability. The figures and vantage points that we want to bring to this discussion are ones that we have encountered in our parallel research in the city; their selection is not systematic, yet has a methodological systematicity in that these figures have profoundly influenced how we have both come to understand Tangier as a site in our research.

We suggest that by opening up our geographies of Tangier to include also the artistic and literary practices and intimate biographies of these figures allows for such a kaleidoscopic view of the city, mixing up shapes and colors of light and darkness, consenting to a necessary shift of perspective. Theirs is not telescopic vision, zooming in on certain exceptional goings on to project them to an outside world, but provides rather a series of different vantage—and practice—points, in the very midst and messiness of things. Their perspectives and practices give voice to and make an everyday experience of Tangier, beyond an ordinary city, but not an extraordinary one either; rather, like Tangier’s checkered history, as both more than and extremely ordinary.

To do so, we first recount some of the transitions of Tangier, in its layered histories as Moroccan, diplomatic, and international city. We then revisit our theoretical framing on domesticating Tangier, considering what domestication might mean for inhabitants of this diasporic, expatriate, multinational city. Finally, we turn to a set of historical and contemporary figures and their engagements with the city, figures whose practices we believe evocatively embrace “ordinary” Tangier. These figures serve as a series of snapshots to illustrate our argument (adopting Baban and Rygiel’s [2014] characterization); a series of different refractions of the city and its inhabitants across spaces and across generations.

TRANSITIONS

It is, of course, no accident that Tangier developed the reputation as an almost unreal space of possibility for nineteenth- and twentieth-century European travelers. More than a century of diplomatic occupancy as the cordoned city of the Kingdom of Morocco where Christian ambassadors could dwell and self-govern laid the groundwork for Tangier to be a space for competing ideologies in which a transient European could escape to a proximate Orient, whether as an adventure seeker or as a fugitive. Tangier’s history is almost riddle-like: a city that was never fully colonized, yet governed by multiple European powers for several decades; a city that was never global, although it stands at one of the most important gateways in Western history, in a geographical location that is an interstitial zone par excellence—bridging continents, connecting a sea to an ocean, and in many moments in time a contact zone between warring states or empires.

Tangier briefly passed from Portuguese to British ownership in the seventeenth century, then was evacuated and returned to Morocco. Almost a century later, in a spirit of openness, the Moroccan Sultan Sidi Mohammed ben Abdallah encouraged foreign kingdoms to establish consulates there, permitting, for the first time, non-Muslims to make their homes inside the Moroccan city walls (Caillé 1967; El Kouche 1996). This open invitation was also a means of holding back the spread of European powers. The establishment of this consular outpost over the next two centuries enabled successive sultans to invite European diplomats in, simultaneously keeping them contained at arm’s length from seats of governance in Fez and Marrakech (Abitbol 2009).

The dominant representation of Tangier as a place at the edge, where anything and everything was possible—where the usual rules and regulations of the state, any state, were suspended—is most closely tied, however, to the city’s unique status as an International Zone from the 1920s until Moroccan independence in 1956. The Statute of Tangier, signed at the end of 1923 and effective from 1925, established the city as an International Zone separate from the French and Spanish protectorates that governed the rest of Morocco. The statute “gave virtually every European state, and the USA, a role in administering the city” (Pennell 2003, 154), creating an economic and political haven with no taxation and a free currency market, and a series of loophole-ripe legal, financial, and governance systems.

For Americans in particular, the freedoms offered by Tangier went even further. The United States had long-standing diplomatic relations with Morocco (the Kingdom was one of the first to recognize U.S. independence, in 1777), and the Treaty of Marrakech ratified by the U.S. Congress in 1787 gave Americans full extraterritorial rights on Moroccan soil until

Morocco's independence in 1956. This made U.S. citizens immune to any municipal regulations. Local laws and taxes did not apply to U.S. citizens, and any legal disputes between Americans and Moroccans were tried in a special court set up in the U.S. Consulate (Pennell 2003). As Landau (1952, 138) wrote in his account of the International Zone, "the American in Tangier is as free and as much his own master as he would be in his own country." It is important, then, to locate the literary and artistic envisionings of Tangier of the 1950s and 1960s (and, again, their persistent echoes today) though the lens of personal and national (geo)political and economic privilege afforded by the particular conditions of the city during this period.

At the same time, however, while such wider economic and political conditions inescapably structured most of what was taking place in the city and its cultural as well as geopolitical representations, for its denizens, Moroccan as well as European (or North American), Tangier was also a quite ordinary, inhabited, quotidian place. The diplomats during the International Zone—and before it—had families and entourages who became as much natives of the city as the Moroccan families who lived there. These families continued—and continue—to live there over generations, considering themselves (and considered) not foreign but European-origin Tangerinos/as.² In transitioning toward the Tangier of international literary and artistic fame, we must keep in mind the atmosphere of these hosts and households, and the accessibility of this "Oriental" city to those Western elites seeking its entrepreneurial opportunities or its diplomatic black hole.

THE TANGIER EXCEPTION

The (extra)ordinary mystery and magic of Tangier is certainly most visibly tied to its depictions by the writers, poets, and artists of the Beat Generation of the 1950s and 1960s or, better yet, by the frequently exaggerated and exoticized links between the Beats and the city that inspired some of them. As Hibbard (2010, 7) argued, "Tangier occupied a place in the Beat imagination, even for those who never visited the place," with the city becoming an ideal site of artistic and personal possibility and creativity. Central to that imagination is the work of certain artists and writers who characterized a Tangier "scene." We focus here on only a few of the many renowned names³ that populate these mythologies to evoke what sort of techniques and trajectories contributed to the extraordinary cut-up—or as we term it, *telescopic*—Tangier that has become the dominating representation and reputation of the city.⁴

First and foremost in this set is William Burroughs's imagined realm of the "Interzone" (an abbreviation of the International Zone), the setting and setting-off point for his novel *Naked Lunch* (Burroughs 1959), and perhaps the best known of these representations:

Tangier seems to exist on several dimensions. You are always finding streets, squares and parks you never saw before. Here, fact merges into dream, and dreams erupt into the real world. Unfinished buildings fall into ruin and decay. Arabs move silently like weeds and vines. . . . Nobody in Tangier is exactly what he seems to be. (Burroughs 1989, 58)

In the imaginations of writers like Burroughs, along with artists like Brion Gysin, Tangier was a dream world that allowed for "fusions and reversals of past and future, fact and fantasy"

(Walonen 2011, 83). Gysin's technique of the cut-up—first experimented at together with Burroughs in Tangier—hinged precisely on the possibility of raw material re-worked into new form by disrupting the usual laws of representation, form, and style, thus allowing direct access to the subconscious (Geiger 2005). Burroughs used the cut-up technique to assemble *Naked Lunch*, but most fully in his subsequent trilogy of novels, *The Soft Machine* (Burroughs 1961), *The Ticket That Exploded* (Burroughs 1962), and *Nova Express* (Burroughs 1964). Gysin's Dream Machine (a mechanical contraption with flashing lights that allowed users to purportedly see other realities), although created in Paris, was experimented in Tangier with Burroughs and was purportedly inspired by Gysin's encounter with the trance-like music of traditional Moroccan musicians, the band of Joujouka.⁵

The artistic and literary technique of the cut-up used by Burroughs and Gysin is, in many ways, a perfect metaphor for the ways in which many expatriate writers and artists chose to imagine and experience Tangier, as an extra-ordinary playground where fact and fiction could be made to seamlessly blend. What is striking is how much such extra-ordinary readings continue to resonate in contemporary representations of the city. Shoemake's (2013) recently published literary guide to Tangier is a perfect case in point, closing with the following paragraph:

Is Tangier made by its fictions, or did it make them? . . . Many have lost themselves here, and many have remade themselves. They have believed in the city's fictions, which have often seemed more real than its phantasmagorical streets, and this vision of an imaginary Tangier, still alive, is the only one worth bringing to the city. Otherwise you will be disappointed. You will find it dirty, aggressive, worn. It is by communing with its ghosts, still walking through its streets on their way to legendary cocktail parties, that the city's beauty will fully be revealed. (259)

It is only by arming yourself with a telescopic vision, only by viewing Tangier through the lens of a particular version or vision of its past, Shoemake suggests (like many before him) that one can truly appreciate this city, and his guide focuses indeed on a highly selective set of itineraries and locations in the city: the spaces of its erstwhile cosmopolitan past (the dive bars, the garden sets of unforgettable cocktail parties, hotel and cafe terraces).

Such selective envisioning of Tangier's extra-ordinary spaces and characters is not only the purview of North American Beat nostalgics. In a short volume entitled *Des Tangerois*, contemporary French-Tangerina writer Patricia Tome (2010) recounted the ways in which the city continues to be “dreamed up” by its expatriates of various nationalities for their own needs: an urban conjuring up that is only partially related to the really existing city, and in which Morocco and Moroccans are frequently at most a backdrop:

Tanger la belle, la pute, la rebelle, alanguie et endormie le long de sa grande plage abandonnée et polluée n'en finissaient pas de renaître de ses cendres, un mythe entretenu surtout par la jet-set occidentale, ses amants de passage d'hier et ceux fidèles et oubliés d'aujourd'hui [où] les Marocains restent dans le décor ou font de la figuration, excepte quelques artistes de renom. (42)

She, too, admitted that

Je m'étais crée mon Tanger inspire de mes lectures à la Librairie des Colonnes, à la recherché des fantômes du passé. Je prenais ce que je voulais, je profitais de ce lieu, de mes rencontres, je vivais pleinement entre mon travail de reporter du présent, de l'immédiat, et les personnages vivant hors du temps, dans leur monde parallèle. (10)

Like Tome, Tangier's famous and infamous expats remade the city to their needs, in combinations of fact and fiction that bore varying relation to the city around them (and to its inhabitants).

In his dissection of U.S. literary fascinations with Morocco, literary scholar Brian Edwards (2005) noted Tangier's "special place in the American imagination" (122) already in the late 1940s and early 1950s, before the arrival of the Beats, with the city coming to symbolize excess and boundless possibility in everything from the financial and governmental to the social and sexual spheres. He cited journalist Robert Ruark's description of the city from a 1947 article:

Next to Tangier Sodom was a church picnic and Gomorrah was a convention of Girl Scouts, Hollywood would never dare to do a movie about Tangier because it would be accused of hoking up the script even if the truth about the town were underplayed. [Tangier] contains more thieves, black marketeers, spies, thugs, phonies, beachcombers, expatriates, degenerates, characters, operators, bandits, bums, tramps, dipsomaniacs, politicians and charlatans than any other place I ever saw. (Edwards 2005, 19)

From fanciful characterizations such as this one, to glossy articles describing the magnificent parties thrown by the likes of Woolworth heiress Barbara Hutton in her palace in the Kasbah, "Tangier was good copy in 1950s America" (Edwards 2005, 122), with periodicals ranging from *Forbes* to the *Saturday Evening Post*, the *New Yorker*, the *Atlantic*, *Time*, *Newsweek*, and even *Flair* and *Vogue* publishing substantial articles on the city. In addition, numerous Hollywood movies of the period chose the city as an exotic backdrop. As much as these narratives do reflect the firsthand experiences of Tangier's residents and visitors, they also contribute to what we characterize as telescopic imaginings of the city: peering through lenses, focused on small substrata of city life, viewing (and judging) the perceivable activity from a distance.

This telescopic envisioning of Tangier might have waned post-Beats, but has not expired. The foreign fascination with the city has been revived over the past decade, in terms in many ways similar to those of the early 1950s. A big part of Tangier's continuing allure has relied on the replaying of the myth cultivated by Burroughs and other Beat writers, revived in recent books such as Shoemake's (2013) and countless tourist guides, but also in more academic fora such as the annual conferences of the International Centre for Performance Studies entitled "Performing Tangier" or the 2013 "reenactment" of the 1975 Colloque de Tanger that had brought together some of the leading figures of the Beat Generation (Boyer and Ponsart 2013). Tangier has also begun to feature again in glossy spreads on fashion and lifestyle magazines like *Monocle* (2013) and *T: The New York Times Style Magazine* (O'Hagan 2014), and has attracted the attention of economic fora like the *Financial Times*. A 2006 piece entitled "Tangiers Offers a Profitable New Face" began, indeed, by evoking Ruark's depiction of the city, quoted above, and went on to note that after decades of abandonment by the Moroccan state and global markets, "change was in the air"—and although "there are still hustlers in Tangier today . . . instead of selling drugs or sex, they are now offering properties" (Wright 2006).

As we suggested earlier, it is important to connect these imaginaries of Tangier as an (extra) ordinary place to the city's emplacement within wider geopolitical and geoeconomic agendas, just as in the 1950s also today, as well as the unique conditions of economic and political possibility and privilege that foreigners, and Americans especially, enjoyed in the city. This is the context within which the narratives of Tangier's extra-ordinary urbanity in the literary and artistic production of its American inhabitants (or those who passed through it) need to be read,

as, too, their envisioning of the city as a surreality that no longer responded to the normal laws of time and space, and where experience tended to become altered; a place outside of time and space, where literally everything was possible and available (see Porras-Sanchez 2010, 94).

In the sections that follow, we want to shift our perspective by giving voice to other Tangier denizens who lived and experienced this city (or do so today) in rather different fashion, albeit often sharing the very same spaces and experiences of its extra-ordinary expats—those that in one way or another “made a home” here.

DOMESTICATING TANGIER

Adopting the term *domestication* inevitably draws attention to the question of gender in the dynamics of making home or defining the domestic. Gender is, of course, a key part of the figures and practices we describe here, given that the voices we identify as domesticating the extraordinary Tangier are predominantly women speaking in contrast to literary and artistic geographies dominated by men. Yet, we do not want to permit this dynamic (or our argument) to become underpinned by long-standing gendering divisions between public and private, male and female, or domestic versus exceptional (an even more vexed set of binaries when writing of North African urban spaces). Rather, we want to evoke how home—not the house itself, but the making of a home in the world—is always also political and geopolitical, comanifesting in many spheres and scales (Brickell 2012).

Koch and Latham (2013) posited the term *domestication*, seeking—in opposition to previous characterizations in urban studies—to “use the concept to think more carefully about the qualities that enable spaces to become collectively inhabited” (7). That is, domestication for them is not about the securitization or disciplining of spaces, but rather about paying attention to material and social processes by which “people come to inhabit urban spaces,” and how “publics of all different sorts come to find a home in the city” (14). Public and private life, then, are not posed as polarizations: “We want to understand the public-ness of a space as defined by how the relationship between [public and private] is configured” (14). Public life becomes modes of doing private life in certain configurations of collectively inhabited spaces.

Domesticating in our (at times literally) international, urban site is at work within a confluence of gender, migration flows, and the “small and mighty” geographical and literary positioning of Tangier on the edge—sometimes a part of a nation, sometimes a city-state border zone between antagonistic civilizations. For our women, we see domesticating as the ways they were (and are) being present as city residents whose habits become part of its daily fabric, moving through the city in their own circulations of places and networks, and influencing—whether subtly or vociferously—the stories that circulate about that city and make sense of it.

Our configuration of domestication is thus intended to recognize the perpetual hard work involved in making a city into livable space for and by its inhabitants—work that happens, often, in minor frames, but resonates its significance over generational time, in its cyclical pollination of place making. This work involves constant negotiations between collective responsibility and individual goals that, when functioning in concert, can create “inclusive, convivial, and democratic” shared spaces (Koch and Latham 2013, 14).

In Tangier, like in many other cities, this democratic inclusiveness of shared spaces involved negotiating with others from diverse origins; unlike in many other cities, though, the political

status of diverse others in Tangier was often safe under the unique territorial and juridical protection of their national consulates in Tangier. We can consider these women (and their successive generations) as migrating envoys selected by international powers, charged with actively domesticating a city that, in some ways, lies within an extended “homeland” sphere. We read these, then, as markedly diasporic spaces, constantly engaged in belonging to and dwelling in multiple places at once (Wagner 2012), and full of memories, encounters, and practices that make cities into communities, across differences rooted in distant places (Blunt and Bonnerjee 2013) that all contribute to domesticating this extra-ordinary city.

EMBRACING “ORDINARY” TANGIER

In bringing their experiences to the fore, we break our chosen figures across a generational divide. The first series are an elite group of women who arrive in Tangier in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, many as partners to members of diplomatic services, but also as independent travelers who were journalists, or simply wealthy. These women encountered Tangier as a space for raising their families, dwelling in homes, attending to social obligations, or exploring the surrounding countryside. The second set, taken from a more recent generation of contemporary figures, includes women who can be seen as, in literal and figurative ways, descendants of the first group. Many come from families with histories that interweave with diplomatic and other presences of Europeans in Tangier. Their sense of the city and their choice to settle there and to domesticate it (especially as mobile elites) signifies its importance as a home into which they invest domesticating and creative effort.

In and Out of the Diplomatic House

The unique diplomatic and territorial condition of the city throughout the nineteenth and the early twentieth century is the setting through which we come to know about many women who were domesticating the city, being present in and shaping its daily life, because they published accounts of their stay in Tangier. Unlike their male counterparts, who dominate the exploration stories written about other parts of Morocco, literary Tangier in this period is full of women: the wives and daughters of diplomats (Murray 1859; Howard-Vyse 1882; Mansel-Pleydell 1907), as well as their visiting friends from the homeland (Grove 1902; Savory 1903), and the occasional traveler or adventurer starting in Tangier before traveling further (Thomas 1892; Macnab 1902). Sometimes their contributions are buried beneath a father’s or husband’s name on the cover, as the surviving collector of another’s papers or diaries (Drummond Hay 1896; Richardson 1848, 1860a, 1860b). Women pop up as voices of diasporic Tangier, speaking to British and French audiences at home about their daily lives in this exotic yet domesticated space.

As much as they conduct their lives embedded in Tangier, our women often start their stories by framing the city through its English past. Savory (1903, 14), for example, reached back to describe the seventeenth-century British settlement, Thomas (1892, 239) introduced her visit to the town as “having once belonged to England,” and Macnab (1902) placed a frontispiece of the Landing of Lord Sandwich at Tangiers in 1662 to preface her travelogue. The narratives they construct situate Tangier in a line of familiar national history, setting the scene to invite others into their not-so-distant worlds. Even though they might dabble in “Moorish” spaces, their drive

to domesticate this city is construed as rooted in their own Tangerina pasts as much as that of its Tanjawiya residents.

Most striking about these memoirs is the ordinariness they portray of daily life for Tangier's diasporic residents. From their accounts, the city feels like an extension of, predominantly, England; father and son of the Drummond Hay family were the British ambassadors for much of the nineteenth century, and widely considered the most crucial, adept, and integrated envoys stationed in Morocco (K. B. Srhir 2005). The elder Drummond Hay's (1896) memoir, collected by his daughters, includes both the intricacies of diplomatic activity with the fun of British "sport" in Moroccan landscapes. In parallel, Mrs. L. Howard-Vyse (1882) published her diary of her several months' visit to Tangier, of daily invitations to households like that of the Drummond Hays for tea and gossip. Mrs. Elizabeth Heaphy Murray (1859, 77) arrived in Tangier of her own accord, but eventually married into the British Consul, and described how she created her "Moorish home" full of British comforts. Isabel Savory (1903), an adventurer already known for her travels in India, wrote:

Tangier has two sides to it—one native, the other European. The European side is all which appears on the surface, and it swamps the other. Given each of the eleven Powers, with its minister, its minister's family, its secretary, its attaché, its interpreter, its student; add to these a handful of English residents, a handful of English and American visitors, and a handful of varied nationalities thrown in; back them up with the necessary foundation of purveyors, and lower down still a substratum of leeches and black-sheep, greedy Jews, needy Spaniards, introducing drink and tobacco and gambling,—and there you have before you all the elements of a highly civilized town on the Mediterranean shore. It may be Tangier: it is not Morocco.

The Moorish aristocracy themselves speak of the place as "Christian-ridden Tangier," and will have none of it: the Sultan says it "no longer belongs to him." . . . the colony of mixed nationalities fills its off hours together, most successfully, with a round of picnics, afternoon rides, tea parties, and other amusements, implied by "wintering at Tangier"; from all of which any knowledge of Morocco, or association with Moors, is far removed indeed. (24–25)

Tangier as a diasporic city thus takes on the varied habits of its residents, in some ways indeed becoming more "diasporic" than local, although still situated in this exotic locale.

Whereas Savory's perspective was still as a relatively temporary visitor, Mansell-Pleydell's (1907) *Sketches of Life in Morocco* depicts such an ordinary, everyday existence that it becomes difficult to divine anything about the setting that makes it Moroccan. She recounted the daily activities of her children (and servants) in the hillsides around Tangier—picnicking in olive groves, camping in caves—with an occasional dialogue in Arabic, Spanish, or French; a laughing mention of Allah protecting her; and descriptions of the persistently beautiful weather that reminds the reader we are not in England. When she attends a Moorish wedding, or the celebration of a birth, she is partially an onlooker but also enmeshed in diasporic communities—a friend of the family's employer, or a *nasraniya* (Christian) who takes part in wishing the new mother well. Her narrative demonstrates how ordinary this domesticated diasporic city could feel, with languages, people, private, and public intermixing whether at home or outside. The traverses of these women through urban space are at times constrained through modes of gender, class, and ethnic belonging (Bondi 1998), yet they nevertheless contribute to transforming this environment, encountering and embracing "others" in public and private spheres.

In some ways, these lesser known women set the stage for later Tangerinas—women of European origin who domesticated Tangier beyond the confines of the diplomatic corps, and whose lives and work can be seen as more public forms of domestication of the city. Specifically, we think of Emily Keene, a governess who famously married the Sharif of Wazan (Ouazzane), and became an international symbol of crossing spiritual and cultural borders (Keene 1911; El Yamlahi 1996), and of Elisa Chimenti (pictured in Figure 1), not a migrating wife but a daughter of Tangier from Italian parentage, who became a prolific recorder of regional folklore alongside her own novels of Tangerina Morocco (Chimenti 1942, 1958, 1959; Zemmouri 2006). Their public lives, as ordinary and extraordinary women of Tangier, might be read as the culmination of the many diasporic women who preceded them, publishing their ordinary lives in Tangier as literary domestications of this border city. In the section that follows, we provide snapshots of two such figures who made and are continuing to make extra-ordinary spaces in Tangier.

Domesticating Beyond Borders

The two women to whom we wish to draw attention to in this final section of the article are publisher Elena Prentice and photographer and video-artist Yto Barrada, two of contemporary Tangier's best known cultural figures. Albeit in different ways (and aimed at different audiences), the work of both is an attempt to counter the still dominant literary (and tourist) tropes of the city's extra-ordinary surreality, dream, and unreachability; it is an attempt to domesticate the city by refracting and embracing (to reecho Shaw, DeLyser, and Crang 2015) a multiplicity of urban actors and spaces that are at once local and cosmopolitan; at once European and Tangerina. The work of both explicitly confutes cartographic and identity boundaries. We read it as, rather, emblematic of the sort of "local cosmopolitanism" that Dear and Leclerc (2003) described in the making of "postborder cities" on the Mexico–U.S. border: a borderlands cosmopolitanism that is grounded "in the experiences of migration and diaspora in space" and "daily reinvents unanticipated pathways for living and original means for personal and collective visioning" (Dear 2011, 14).

The "continuing flip-flop of insider-outsider perspectives" invoked by two of the artists cited in Dear's (2011, 16) account of the "creative" remaking of border cities, is precisely the sort of kaleidoscopic practices that Prentice and Barrada engage in, giving voice to some of the daily seeping in of one world into another. The flip-flopping of perspectives is quite different for the two figures. Whereas internationally renowned Barrada, praised by critics for the almost theoretical approach to the city, stresses the "ordinariness" of her work, Prentice takes on something that appears local and "ordinary"—the spoken dialectal Arabic, *darija*—and makes it exceptional, as we describe in the next section.

Figure 2 is immediately recognizable to most readers as the same text translated into three languages: French, Arabic, and English. The middle version, however, is in fact something much more complicated: a text that is marked in several ways (morphosyntactically and lexically) as dialectal Moroccan Arabic, or *darija*, written using the Arabic alphabet. It appears on the page rather innocuously—especially to a reader who might not be familiar with discourses on Arabic as a language and alphabet—but reflects a vital debate taking place in Morocco, as in other Arabic-speaking places, about when and how dialects might be considered valid as written languages beyond modern standard Arabic (MSA).

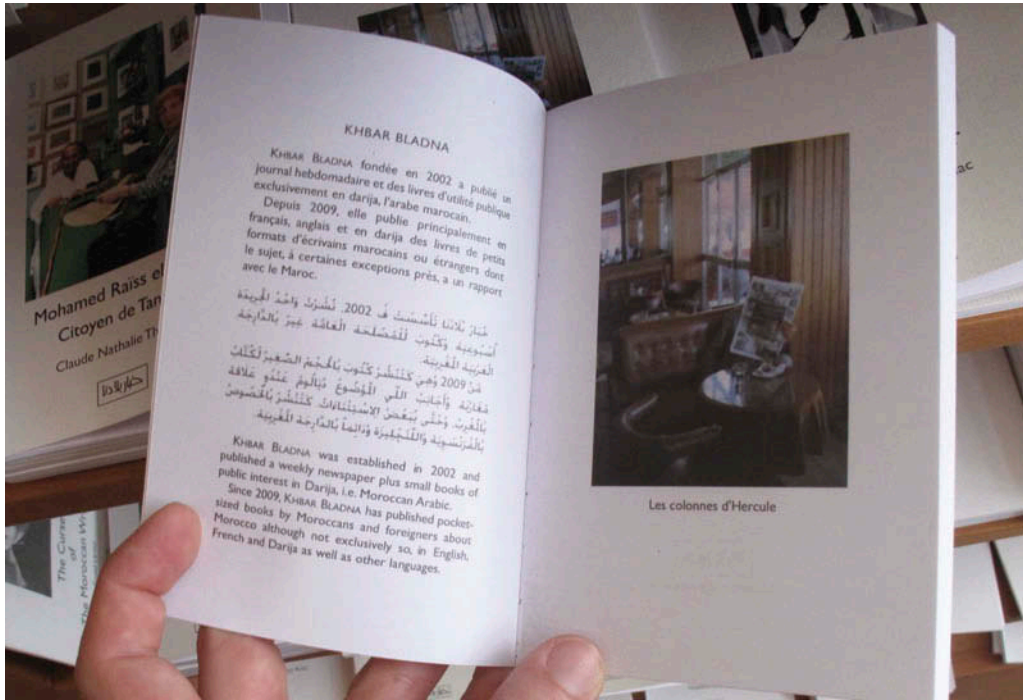


FIGURE 2 Frontispiece of Khbar Bladna volume. Photo by Lauren Wagner, 2015. (Color figure available online.)

The publishing house Khbar Bladna, founded in 2002 by Prentice, is one of several actors that has taken a somewhat revolutionary stance in this debate by publishing material written in *darija* using an Arabic alphabet (Figure 3 captures the display of Khbar Bladna's current volumes at Tangier's historical Librairie des Colonnes). We consider Prentice as one of the women making something extra-ordinary in Tangier because her intervention to deliberately and vociferously promote *darija* as a language that can and should be used in the written form (thereby contradicting the almost ubiquitous ideology against such usage) has contributed to valorizing the most ordinary thing in Morocco—the slang or “kitchen language” that most Moroccans use in their daily lives. Her presence in Tangier specifically is also no accident. Born in the United States, she is the granddaughter of a U.S. Consul General during the period of the International Zone, where her mother spent a large part of her childhood (Péraldi 2008). Quite literally, then, she is a descendent of the diplomatic corps of women (and men) who were engaged in making Tangier their home.

The insert is the standard front inside cover of one of the many small books Khbar Bladna now publishes on topics of local interest, ranging from a discussion on the role of Tangier in cinema to the brief memoirs of longtime European residents in Morocco. The series reflects, indeed, the presence of an ordinary cosmopolitan community in Tangier and elsewhere in Morocco.

The initial efforts of *Khbar Bladna* were in a weekly newspaper of that title (*Our Country's News*), published from 2002 to 2006 and distributed free of charge, which used the Arabic



FIGURE 3 Display of Khbar Bladna volumes at the Librairie des Colonnes. Photo by Lauren Wagner, 2012. (Color figure available online.)

alphabet to write *darija*. To frame why publishing in this format reflected a somewhat revolutionary act, we can refer to ongoing, multifaceted debates on language ideologies in Arabic (Suleiman 2003) and language standardization in Morocco (Ennaji 2002; Miller 2011; A. M. Srhir 2012), through a Bourdieusian lens on symbolic power and capital of standardized languages. Bourdieu (1991) demonstrated how the institutional support and maintenance of standardized languages—in his case, the valorization of a Parisian-centric, *Académie Française*-delineated French over the many other dialects found in France—becomes a symbolic system of limited access, inhibiting class mobility of those who cannot master it. Being able to speak, read, write, and understand the “right” language is essential to asserting symbolic power in political functions and in the institutional frameworks that support them. Although the example in France

is of a highly centralized and secular institution, the many Arabics and their many standardizations across the Arabic-speaking world engage multifaceted institutions: religious debates on a “true” language of the Quran (Haeri 2003), a mutually intelligible MSA that is taught in schools and universities across the Arab world (cf. Holes 1995), and the role of Arabic in colonial struggles for independence and nationhood (Suleiman 2003), not to mention in battles for extranational, Islamic nationalisms against Western oppression (Walters 2015). Suffice to say, standardized Arabic serves many symbolic functions, both as a political object that unites Arab nations with a common language that can be transmitted in all forms of media and as a division between education levels for those who are able to master it in written and spoken form. A key part of this debate is also in the writing of Arabic itself: as the language of the Quran, which is, in principle, forbidden from being translated, as it is the written word of God (Haeri 2003), although MSA has supplanted Quranic Arabic as a simplified and modernized common language.

In ordinary life, however, there are no native speakers of MSA. Although many dialects are mutually intelligible, the language of the media is frequently a regionally accented version of MSA, where even then some accents are symbolically more central than others (S’hiri 2002). Most media consumers will learn to understand the many variations they might come into contact with on a regular basis. In Morocco, for example, the afternoon soap operas shown on one of the two state-owned main television channels are frequently broadcast in a Lebanese or Egyptian dialect; the evening news is delivered in MSA and French, with Spanish and Amazigh-language versions broadcast at different daily intervals.⁶ Being able to produce a standardized language, or, more important for class mobility, to read and write it, is a much more difficult task, however—especially if there are no standardized written iterations of “your” language (for most Moroccans, *darija*).

Promoting literacy by providing materials written in *darija* was a central, explicit, long-term goal of *Khbar Bladna* (Elinson 2013, 718). Prentice explained the ideology of the publication as being news in a language anyone can understand, that should be accessible to those who might be disadvantaged in traditional schooling (E. Prentice, personal communication). The design of the newspaper purposefully used the Arabic alphabet and not the Latin one (that might be legible for many *darija* speakers also familiar with spoken and written French) to smooth a literacy transition from one’s everyday language into the more strict grammar and alternate vocabulary of MSA. Although that might seem a self-evident and altruistic pursuit in a place where the most recent literacy rate is estimated at 67 percent (World Bank 2011), it presented a challenge to pervasive ideologies about what can be written using Arabic script (Miller 2011; Elinson 2013).

Darija, existing exclusively as a spoken language, uses many morphosyntactic and lexical items that do not exist for other Arabics, reflecting contact with Amazigh languages and with French (Srhir 2012). Simply writing them in Arabic script as a newspaper article becomes an orthographic act of standardization, and presents challenges to the “correct” way of transliterating what, ideologically, only exists in spoken language. It brings a written permanency to colloquial artistic forms, like poetry and music (Caubet 2005). As texting and online communication became more common in Morocco throughout the 2000s, *Khbar Bladna* seems now a precursor to inevitable shifts in standardization and codification, which now often incorporate both Arabic and Latin scripts as needed. Although hers was not the first publication in some version of written *darija*, Prentice’s extraordinary move became more solidified in 2006, with

the publication of a single issue of the major Moroccan news magazine *Tel Quel* suggesting that *darija* be recognized more explicitly and institutionally as a language of Morocco, followed by a spinoff magazine—in *darija*—from the same publisher (Miller 2011; Srhir 2012; Elinson 2013).⁷ The bringing together in Prentice’s publishing initiative of Tangier’s local-international languages (English and French) with *darija* is indicative, to our mind, of the sort of “local” (Dear and Leclerc 2003) or domestic cosmopolitanism we alluded to previously, giving voice to a kaleidoscopic copresence of a diversity of modes and scales of place making.

Like Prentice, Tangier’s best known artistic figure today, Yto Barrada, is similarly building something extra-ordinary in the ordinary lives of Tangier residents. A prize-winning photographer, video and installation artist, and the 2015 winner of the Abraaj Group Art Prize, Barrada was born in Paris in 1971 of Moroccan parents. She studied history and political science at the Sorbonne and later at the International Center of Photography in New York. Her work has been exhibited at Tate Modern (London), MoMA (New York), Renaissance Society (Chicago), Witte de With (Rotterdam), Haus der Kunst (Munich), Guggenheim (Berlin), the Centre Pompidou (Paris), Whitechapel Gallery (London), and at the 2007 and 2011 Venice Biennales. She was the Deutsche Bank Artist of the Year for 2011, after which her exhibit *Riffs* toured widely. Barrada is also the founding director of the Cinémathèque de Tanger, opened in 2007, in the renovated 1938 building of the Cinéma Rif, situated in Tangier’s main square, the Grand Socco (see Figure 4). The Cinémathèque is Tangier’s premier cultural hot spot today. It hosts international film festivals and houses a film archive, but its café is also a gathering place for the city’s young and not-so-young hipsters. At the same time, it offers an impressive range of workshops and educational activities for children, women’s groups, and aspiring local filmmakers and artists (Cinémathèque de Tanger 2012; see also Figure 5).

As for many of the women whose biographies we recounted in the previous section, Barrada’s dual location and biography are important in giving her the sort of diasporic but local perspective that she herself identifies as crucial to her work. Her status as both a European outsider and Tangier insider (in Barrada’s sense, a very well-connected insider, as she comes from a family of prominent political dissidents, and is the daughter of one of the founders of Tangier’s best known women’s and children’s rights associations, DARNA) allows her work to speak to global as well as local audiences, indeed very frequently explicitly contesting such divides in her art. As Salti (2007) noted in her review of Barrada’s work, she uses “forms and compositions directly opposed to an Orientalist or exoticising sensibility” (103).

Beyond the assessments of critics, Barrada herself stresses her “exceptionally normal” relationship to the city and the subjects of her artistic practice, witnessed in the interview she gave following her award as Deutsche Bank’s Artist of the Year in 2011: “I work with reality. I don’t have a lot of imagination” (Vernissage TV 2010). In his introduction to the exhibition catalog accompanying Barrada’s *Riffs*, Hutte (2011) observed that her photographic and video work are marked by a “profoundly humanist and political attitude. She does not elevate herself above the photographic subject, does not exploit it in order to take a ‘good picture’ but rather shows it from a familiar perspective, from a perspective of intimacy” (10).

This familiar perspective persists even in Barrada’s most explicitly political work, such as her seminal photographic essay *A Life Full of Holes: The Strait Project* (Barrada 2005), focusing on Tangier’s increasingly harsh border regime. This work has been lauded by multiple critics for the ways in which it draws attention to “the politics of bare life at one of the most murderous

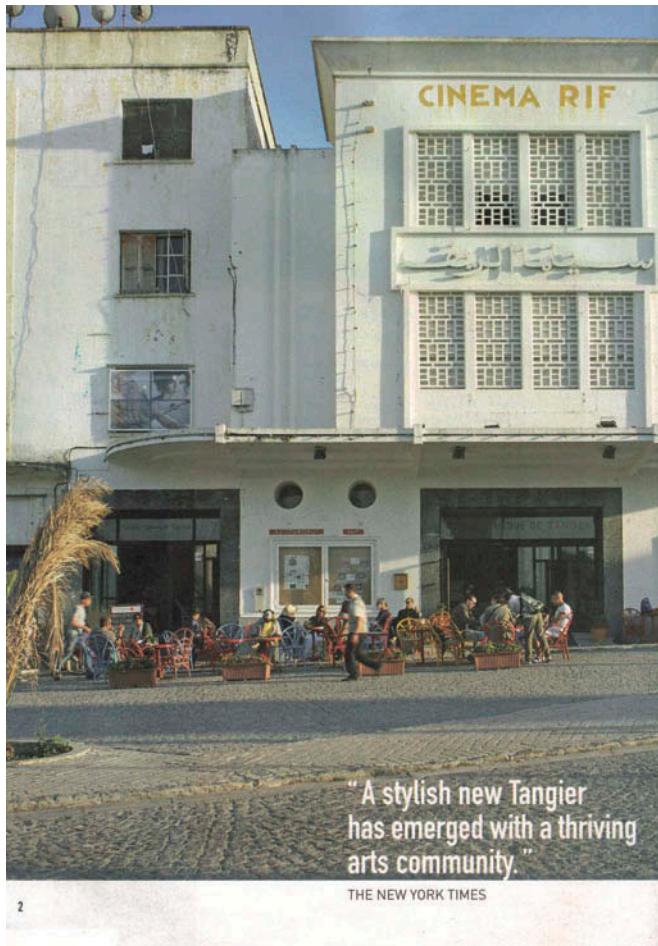


FIGURE 4 The Cinémathèque de Tangier. Courtesy of the Cinémathèque de Tanger, 2012. (Color figure available online.)

borders of Europe” (Demos 2013, 95). Yet even this photo essay on the violent politics of the European Union (EU) external border escapes a facile and patronizing didacticism and draws attention to the ways in which this border space is inhabited, becomes as she phrases it, “an existential—but also very real, material—waiting room.” As curator Okwui Enwezor (2011) suggested in his analysis of Barrada’s installations, her work “conspires to bring to legibility a series of pictorial scripts enmeshed and written into the photograph itself” (23); its main purpose is giving image and voice to political subjectivity. The subjects of Barrada’s exhibition might be the objects of the interventions of the EU’s border policing attempts, but they are also many other things besides.

Interviewed by Higgie for the art magazine *Frieze*, Barrada herself was careful to make that distinction:

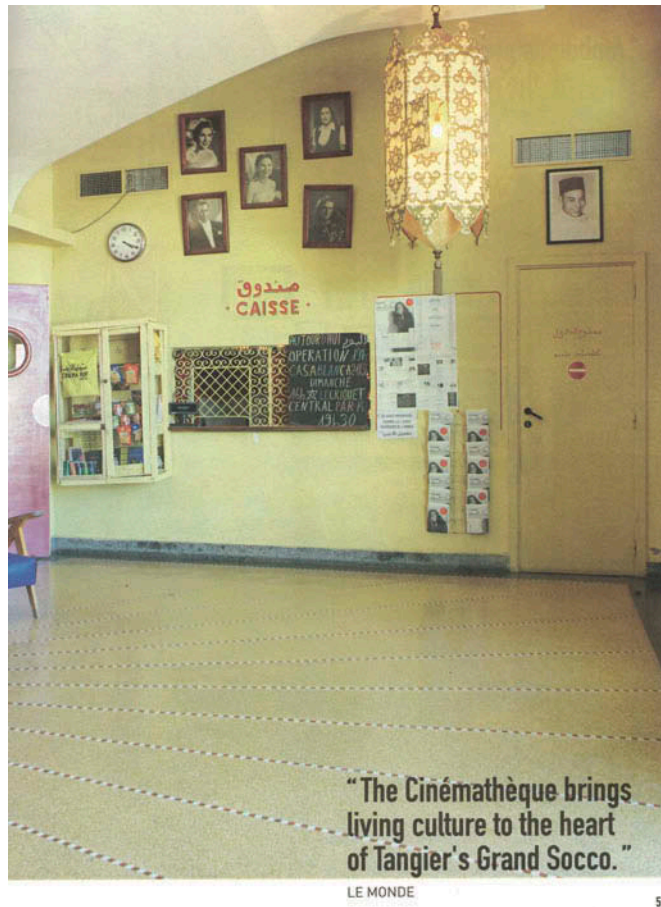


FIGURE 5 The Cinémathèque de Tanger. Courtesy of the Cinémathèque de Tanger, 2012. (Color figure available online.)

You're suggesting that I represent disempowered, passive people in my work and that the art viewer is privileged, empowered. But the characters I represent aren't the victims of some superior power: in their own way, they could be saboteurs. Even the men sleeping in public parks in my series "Sleepers" (2006) may look like they're dead but they're only taking a nap [N.B. the focus of this work is on migrants toward the EU who become "trapped" in Tangier, waiting to cross the border]. I don't see passivity there. I am attentive to what lies beneath the surface of public behaviour. I am a big reader of Jonathan Swift. In public, those oppressed accept their domination, but they always question it offstage. The subversive tactics, strategies of class contestation and forms of sabotage used by the poor is what I try to locate. These characters could well distract you from the big picture, and it's a challenge to maintain the right distance. I am not idealizing some kind of figure of everyday resistance. (Higgle 2011)

This comment is useful to underline how Barrada's explicit purpose is not to romanticize the ordinary and the local, or to exoticize urban exclusion and poverty, or in this case also the exclusionary regime of the border that cuts across the Straits of Gibraltar. It is, rather, exactly the sort of attempt to stitch together "the small and the mighty," the "little things and little people" and global flows (and border regimes), that Crang (2010) described.

To further illustrate our argument, we want to draw attention to one of her more recent video works that make the city and its spaces familiar, engage them as Hutte (2011) suggested "from the perspective of intimacy": Barrada's (2011) video installation *Hand-Me-Downs*, created from a series of home movies from the 1950s through the 1970s gathered from a French archive. The film, part of her 2011 Venice Biennale exhibit, assembles fragments of these anonymous home movies into a seemingly seamless montage, with a narrated voiceover by the artist herself. In "Tangerine Dreams and Magic in the City: A Conversation between Negar Azimi and Yto Barrada," Barrada talked about the process of creating that work and its inspiration drawn from Tangier's flea markets, as "public spaces of weak legitimacy, places on the fringes of official culture" (Azimi and Barrada 2011, 127–28; see Figure 6: Friperie). She highlighted in particular the "tactile" experience of going through discarded familiar objects:

In flea markets and junkyards . . . I learned about chance associations, the [different possible] histories of objects . . . part of the pleasure of the flea market may be the freedom of still having this space to ourselves. The goods are anonymous, the people are marginal operators in a grey economy

The *Hand-Me-Downs* installation is indeed a sort of wondrous kaleidoscope that allows Barrada to recompose a story about Tangier that is partially connected to her own biography, and partially "a script of a mythologized post-colonial upbringing" (Goldsmith 2011), playing with identitary and spatial signifiers, French, North African, European, Tangerine. Pictures from Barrada's own family album feature, in fact, alongside the recomposed anonymous photographs and home movie clippings gathered from the French archive. As Vogl (2013) argued in her analysis of the video installation, this refracting and reflecting of images plays with and mocks both a distinct cinematic form—the "sunny colonialist cine-film"—and also the handed-down "clothing" of colonial domination and colonial memory.

In *Hand-Me-Downs* and in her other works, Barrada's is an explicitly tongue-in-cheek play with urban fact and fiction, with Tangerine biographies and the spaces with which such biographies are connected: abandoned villas and pools or the empty key holders of an elegant apartment building now in disrepair (see Figure 7: Casiers a clefs).

Barrada, in fact, described her work in the *Hand-Me-Downs* installation as similar to the act of weaving together different pieces of fabric:

[M]y grandmother was, and my aunts are, excellent at embroidery and knitting. When I'm at the flea market I gravitate towards fabrics. Textiles are always tactile. Handling them goes beyond the eyes; there are smells, too. (Azimi and Barrada 2011, 128)

The weaving metaphor deployed by the artist, assembling scraps of the fabrics of various Tangerine lives found and "smelled out" at local flea markets evokes a very different sort of place-making practice: as we suggest in our opening paragraphs, one that is both more than and extremely ordinary.



FIGURE 6 Friperie, from *Riffs* (Barrada 2011). Courtesy of the artist and Sfeir-Semler Gallery Hamburg/Beirut. (Color figure available online.)

CONCLUSION

The recomposition of familial and public pasts of Tangier practiced by Barrada is an evocative example of the sort of refracting, kaleidoscopic practice of the ordinary making of cities more than ordinary. Her photographs of the half-ruins of sumptuous villas of the diplomats of International Tangier whose abandoned gardens today provide momentary refuge to migrants pushed back from Europe's borders bring together the many pasts and presents of the city, and its always multiple presences. They also, precisely by capturing daily and prosaic moments



FIGURE 7 Casiers a clefs, from *Riffs* (Barrada 2011). Courtesy of the artist and Sfeir-Semler Gallery Hamburg/Beirut. (Color figure available online.)

and spaces—home movies of children at play, piles of family snapshots (see Figure 8: Barrada family album), young men asleep on park benches and in abandoned gardens—force us to reconsider how we frame the exceptional, the extra-ordinary. All the instances listed earlier speak to Tangier’s multinational, multilayered pasts and presents, to its border condition—and yet how differently from some of its better known narratives of exotic allure and danger.

What is particularly striking is how the work of Barrada—just as the accounts of some of the women who preceded her—engages many of the same urban “raw materials” and experiences that inspired other literary and artistic figures to portray Tangier as exceptional and, as such,



FIGURE 8 Barrada family album, from *Riffs* (Barrada 2011). Courtesy of the artist and Sfeir-Semler Gallery Hamburg/Beirut. (Color figure available online.)

unfathomable and incomprehensible to the European gaze. It also complicates (and often turns inside out) the many preordained distinctions between private and public spaces, and thus draws attention, following Koch and Latham (2013), to the countless different ways in which Tangier's denizens, past and present, transient or rooted for generations, are actively domesticating the city.

We believe that the points we make here about Tangier also hold valence in other contexts, in cities that are perhaps less obviously liminal and exceptional, but that nonetheless (as all cities

do) bring together a diversity of memories, encounters, and practices in daily life—not necessarily as ordinary cities, but as practices and legacies of domestication that actively make collectively inhabited, kaleidoscopic spaces. Attending to different voices and different forms of artistic and literary practice allows for multiple refractions of such place making, giving space to differently extra-ordinary geographies.

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NOTES

1. In doing so, we fully acknowledge the work of other urban geographers who have problematized (and reinvigorated) the notion of ordinary cities. Nonetheless, we do not want to bind our use of the term to that particular literature, as our intended meaning in this article is rather different.
2. As opposed to the term used to mark Moroccan-origin *Tanjawi/ia*; for an explanation of this distinction, see Edwards (2005, 86).
3. Most notably absent among them being Paul and Jane Bowles. See Mullins (2002), Green (1991), or Dillon (1980) for an overview.
4. Of course, Americans are not the only ones to have written on Tangier; see El Kouche (1996) for an encyclopedic overview, ranging from Turkish dignitaries to French scholars, to native daughters and sons.
5. On Gysin in Tangier, see the recent retrospective published by *Khbar Bladna* (2013; the very publishing house we discuss subsequently); see also Hoptman (2010) and Ferez Kuri (2003).
6. To highlight the continuing pertinence of these debates today: the showing of Egyptian soap opera *Lo'bat al-Mawt* during Ramadan 2015 dubbed into *darija* drew anecdotal complaints that the characters should speak their "normal" Egyptian dialect, which everyone understands anyway.

7. Elinson (2013), in particular, documented the many, many subsequent iterations of written *darija* in literature, translations, and poetry.

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