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'The answer lies in the sewers': Captain Aguilera and the mentality of the Francoist officer corps

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On the day the Spanish Civil War broke out, an aristocratic landowner in the province of Salamanca, according to his own account, lined up the labourers on his estate, selected six of them and shot them as a lesson to the others.¹ A retired army officer, his name was Gonzalo de Aguilera y Munro. His estate, called Dehesa del Carrascal de Sanchiricones, was located between Vecinos and Matilla de los Caños, two villages respectively thirty and thirty-five kilometres to the south-west of Salamanca. Although his atrocity was extreme, the sentiments behind it were not unrepresentative of the hatreds that had smouldered in the Spanish countryside over the previous years. Aguilera's cold and calculated violence reflected an attitude common among the big landowners of the latifundio regions of Spain. The violent social conflicts of the period from 1918 to 1921, known as the *trienio bolchevique*, had been crushed by military repression but the consequent hatreds continued to smoulder on both sides. Previously, there had been an uneasy truce in which the wretched lives of the landless peasants were occasionally relieved by the patronising gestures of the owners – a blind eye turned to rabbit poaching and the gathering of wind-fall crops or even the gift of food. The violence of the *trienio* had outraged the landlords who could not forgive the insubordination of *braceros* whom they considered to be almost sub-human. Accordingly, the paternalism which had somewhat mitigated the daily brutality of the day-labourers' lives came to an abrupt end.

After April 1931, the Second Republic's attempts at agrarian reform saw the landowners engaging in rural lock-outs and telling the hungry landless peasants to *comed República* (literally 'eat the Republic', or 'let the Republic feed you'). The gathering of acorns, normally kept for pigs, or of windfall olives, the watering of beasts, or even the gathering of firewood were denounced as 'collective kleptomania'.² Hungry peasants caught doing such things were likely to be given savage beatings by the Civil Guard or armed estate guards.³ In fact, in the latifundio areas of southern Spain, Republican legislation governing labour issues in the countryside was systematically flouted; unionised labour was 'locked-out' either by land being left uncultivated or simply refused work; starvation wages were paid to those who were hired. In words of the newspaper of the principal rural union, the Socialist

¹ Peter Kemp, *Mine Were of Trouble* (London: Cassell, 1957) p.50.

² *La Mañana* (Jaen), 16 January 1934.

³ *La Mañana* (Jaen), 1 October 1932, 21, 27 January, 3, 18 February, 5 April 1933; *El Adelanto* (Salamanca), 19 October 1932; *Región* (Cáceres), 24 February 1933; *El Obrero de la Tierra*, 14 January, 4 March 1933, 6, 13, 20 January, 17 February 1934; *El Socialista*, 21 January, 20 April, 1 July 1933. See also Paul Preston, *The Coming of the Spanish Civil War: Reform Reaction and Revolution in the Second Spanish Republic 1931-1936* 2nd edition (London, Routledge, 1994) pp.101-2, 111, 134-5, 140, 148-9, 184-5.

FNNTT or Landworkers' Federation, 'the owners are deliberately murdering by hunger thousands of men and their families for the crime of wanting to humanise a little their unfortunate lives. Who sows the wind... By the handful, in Spain the seeds of tragedy are being thrown into the wind. Let no one be surprised, let no one complain, let no one be scandalised and protest tomorrow, if these winds provoke a storm of blood.'⁴

After the fall of the Republican-Socialist coalition in the autumn of 1933, the landowners had returned to the semi-feudal relations of dependence that had been the norm before 1931. Consistent infractions of labour legislation led eventually to the FNNTT calling a national harvest strike in the summer of 1934. The procedures for the strike to be legal had been meticulously observed by the union leadership. However, the Minister of the Interior, Rafael Salazar Alonso, a representative of the landowners of one of the most conflictive provinces, Badajoz, saw an opportunity to smash the FNNTT. He declared the harvest a national public service which effectively militarised the land-workers. Strikers were arrested by the thousands and imprisoned hundreds of miles from their homes. The harvest was brought in by machinery and cheap labour from Portugal and Galicia. The FNNTT had been crippled, union members were harassed by the Civil Guard, and estate security was tightened to prevent hunger being alleviated by poaching or the theft of crops. The south was badly hit by drought in 1935, unemployment rose to more than 40% in some places and beggars thronged the streets of the towns. Hatred smouldered. Living in close proximity, the hungry and the well-to-do rural middle and upper classes regarded each other with fear and resentment. Hatreds were intensified during the right-wing campaign for the elections of February 1936 which prophesied that left-wing victory would mean 'uncontrolled looting and the common ownership of women'. Even without such apocalyptic provocation, natural disaster intensified social tension. After the prolonged drought of 1935, early 1936 brought fierce rainstorms which ruined the olive harvest and damaged wheat and barley crops. Left-wing victory in the elections coincided with even higher unemployment. The local middle classes were appalled by signs of popular jubilation, the flying of red flags and attacks on landowners' clubs (*casinos*). Labour legislation began to be reinforced and workers were 'placed' (*alojados*) on uncultivated estates. Landowners were infuriated by evidence that peasant submissiveness was at an end. Those that they expected to be servile were assertively demonstrating that they were no longer prepared to be cheated out of reform. The shift in the

⁴ *El Obrero de la Tierra*, 24 March 1934.

balance of power provoked the anger and the fear of the latifundistas. Many of them joined, financed or expectantly awaited news of the military plot to overthrow the Republic. Even before 18 July, the situation in latifundio Spain had reached breaking point.⁵

When the Civil War began, in latifundio areas of the Republican zone, repressive landlords were in serious danger of their lives from the landless labourers. Aguilera, like others, perceived himself to be taking retaliatory measures in advance. Many landowners joined the uprising, accompanied Franco's columns and played an active role in selecting victims to be executed in captured villages. Their influence was reflected in the fact that, when peasants were shot, they were made to dig their own graves first, and Falangist señoritos shouted at them '(Didn't you ask for a plot of land. Now you're going to have one, and for ever!' (¿No pedíais tierra? Pues la vais a tener; ¡y para siempre!).⁶ The hatred of the landowners for the rural proletariat found an appropriate instrument in Franco's African columns. Explicit parallels were drawn at the time between the left in mainland Spain and the Riff tribesmen; the 'crimes' of the reds in resisting the military uprising seen as identical with the 'crimes' of the tribesmen who massacred Spanish troops at Annual in 1921. The role of the African columns in 1936 was seen as the same as that of the Regulares and Legionaries who relieved Melilla in 1921.⁷ As they moved north from Seville in early August, they used the techniques of terror which had been their regular practice against the subject population of Morocco. Word of their tactics spread a wave of fear before them and villages and towns in the provinces of Seville and Badajoz, El Real de la Jara, Monesterio, Llerena, Zafra, Los Santos de Maimona, easily fell before them. In addition to looting, they annihilated any leftists or supposed Popular Front sympathisers that they found, leaving a trail of bloody slaughter as they went. The execution of captured peasant militiamen was jokingly referred to as 'giving them agrarian reform'. After the capture of Almendralejo, one thousand prisoners were shot including one hundred women.⁸ After the shootings, the remaining women were raped.

⁵ Preston, *The Coming of the Spanish Civil War*, pp.147-53, 245, 259-60; Paul Preston, 'The Agrarian War in the South' in Paul Preston, Editor, *Revolution and War in Spain 1931-1939* (London: Methuen, 1984) pp.159-81.

⁶ Alfonso Lazo, *Retrato de fascismo rural en Sevilla* (Sevilla: Universidad de Sevilla, 1998) pp.11-14; Margarita Nelken, *Las torres del Kremlin* (México D.F.: Industrial y Distribuidora, 1943) p.259.

⁷ Manuel Sánchez del Arco, 2ª edición *El sur de España en la reconquista de Madrid* (Seville: Editorial Sevillana, 1937) pp.18-20.

⁸ Carlos Asensio Cabanillas, 'El avance sobre Madrid y operaciones en el frente del centro', *La guerra de liberación nacional* (Zaragoza: Universidad de Zaragoza, 1961) pp.160-5; Servicio Histórico Militar (José Manuel Martínez Bande), *La marcha sobre Madrid* (Madrid: Editorial San Martín, 1968) pp.24-34; Sánchez del Arco, *El sur de España*, pp.62-81; Juan José Calleja, *Yagüe, un corazón al rojo* (Barcelona: Editorial Juventud,

The deliberate savagery constituted what one scholar has called ‘didactismo por el terror’ (education through terror). The aim was literally to bury for once and for all the aspiration of the landless peasants to collectivise the great estates. Using the excuse of the ‘red terror’, a vengeful bloodbath was unleashed by the rebel columns. These consisted either of the African columns heading for Madrid under the overall command of General Franco or those sent out from Seville by the ‘viceroy of Andalusia’, General Gonzalo Queipo de Llano. In most places, ‘the red terror’ was a feeble excuse. In a wealthy farming community, Cantillana (Seville), where there had been no history of social tension, Queipo de Llano’s forces appeared in the early hours of the morning of 26 July. In the course of the following three days, two hundred people were killed. In Carmona (Seville), for instance, there were two deaths under the Popular Front, which were revenged with the murder of 700. The owners’ view that their labourers were on a par with their livestock was illustrated in Castro del Río, where day labourers were slaughtered using the same technique as that employed with cattle.⁹ In Lora del Río, the Civil Guard, the priest and the local right-wingers had greeted the news of the military uprising by taking arms and creating a stronghold in the town church. It was quickly captured and they were all released except the notoriously brutal cacique. In revenge for his execution, a simulacrum of a trial was mounted in which the judge was a landowner and artillery reserve captain, who, according to an eye-witness, had pretensions to nobility equalled only by his ignorance and brutality. Three hundred labourers, including some women, were ‘tried’ en masse without defence. The crimes of which they were accused ranged from having flown a Republican flag from their balcony to having been heard expressing admiration for Roosevelt. Domestic servants were accused of having criticised their employers. All were found guilty and shot. The executions were followed by a great orgy with drink provided by grateful wine-producers. Advantage was taken of the town’s many recent widows to meet ‘the sexual excesses of that collectivity without women’ (the occupying African columns).¹⁰

1963) pp.90-1, 94-6; Jesús Salas Larrazabal, *La guerra de España desde el aire* 2ª edición (Barcelona: Ariel, 1972) p.64; Herbert Rutledge Southworth, *Le mythe de la croisade de Franco* (Paris: Ediciones Ruedo Ibérico, 1964) p.215; Francisco Moreno Gómez. ‘La represión en la España campesina’ in José Luis García Delgado, editor, *El primer franquismo: España durante la segunda guerra mundial* (Madrid: Siglo XXI, 1989) p.192.
⁹ Antonio-Miguel Bernal, ‘Resignación de los campesinos andaluces: la resistencia pasiva durante el franquismo’, in Isidro Sánchez, Manuel Ortiz, & David Ruiz, editors, *España franquista. Causa general y actitudes sociales ante la dictadura* (Albacete: Universidad de Castilla-La Mancha, 1993) pp.148-50; Antonio Rosado, *Tierra y libertad. Memorias de un campesino anarcosindicalista andaluz* (Barcelona: Crítica, 1979) pp.121-2.

¹⁰ An eye-witness account by a reluctant executioner was published anonymously as ‘El comienzo: 1936 La “liberación” de Lora del Río’, *Cuadernos de Ruedo Ibérico* (Paris), Nos 46-48, julio-diciembre 1975, pp.81-94.

The near racist contempt of the southern landowners for their peasants had quickly been transmitted to the African Army which had rebelled in Morocco. Already, in the spring of 1936, when the rising was being prepared, General Emilio Mola, its director, and until recently, the commander-in-chief of the African Army, drew up a series of secret instructions. They summed up the extent to which the Army felt no sense of being the body whose job it was to protect the Spanish people from an external enemy. The Spanish proletariat was clearly 'the enemy'. In that sense, the mentality of the Africanista high command reflected one of the major consequences of the colonial disaster of 1898. This was simply that the right coped with the loss of a 'real' overseas empire by internalising the empire, that is to say, by regarding metropolitan Spain as the empire and the proletariat as the subject colonial race. The first of Mola's secret instructions, issued in April, declared 'Se tendrá en cuenta que la acción ha de ser en extremo violenta, para reducir lo antes posible al enemigo, que es fuerte y bien organizado. Desde luego, serán encarcelados todos los directivos de los partidos políticos, sociedades o sindicatos no afectos al Movimiento, aplicándose castigos ejemplares a dichos individuos, para estrangular los moviminetos de rebeldía o huelgas.' ('It has to be born in mind that the action has to be violent in the extreme to reduce as soon as possible the enemy which is strong and well-organized. Of course, all leaders of political parties, societies and trade unions which are not linked to the movement will be imprisoned and exemplary punishment carried out on them in order to strangle any rebellion or strikes.')11 In his proclamation of martial law in Pamplona on 19 July 1936, Mola said 'Restablecimiento del principio de autoridad exige inexcusablemente que los castigos sean ejemplares, por la seriedad con se impondrán y la rapidez con que se llevarán a cabo, sin titubeos ni vacilaciones.' ('Re-establishing the principle of authority unavoidably demands that punishments be exemplary both in terms of the severity with which they will be imposed and the speed with which they will be carried out.')12 Shortly afterwards, he called a meeting of all of the alcaldes (mayors) of the province of Pamplona and told them: 'Hay que sembrar el terror... hay que dar la sensación de dominio eliminando sin escrúpulos ni vacilación a todos los que no piensen como nosotros. Nada de cobardías. Si vacilamos un momento y no procedemos con la máxima energía, no ganamos la partida. Todo aquel que ampare u oculte un sujeto comunista o del frente popular, será pasado por las armas'. ('It is necessary to

¹¹ Felipe Bertrán Güell, *Preparación y desarrollo del alzamiento nacional* (Valladolid: Librería Santarén, 1939) p.123.

¹² Emilio Mola Vidal, *Obras completas* (Valladolid: Librería Santarén, 1940) p.1173.

spread terror. We have to create the impression of mastery eliminating without scruples or hesitation all those who do not think as we do. There can be no cowardice. If we vacillate one moment and fail to proceed with the greatest determination, we will not win. Anyone who helps or hides a communist or a supporter of the Popular Front will be shot.’)¹³

The savagery visited upon the towns conquered by Spanish colonial forces was simply a repetition of what they did when they attacked a Moroccan village. In a broadcast on 24 July, Queipo de Llano commented ‘Al Arahál fué enviada una columna formada por elementos del Tercio y Regulares, que han hecho allí una razzia espantosa, sancionando con ejemplares castigos los excesos salvajes inconcebibles que se han cometido en aquel pueblo’ (‘a column made up of elements of the Legion and the Regulares was sent to El Arahál where they carried out a terrifying *razzia*, responding with exemplary punishments to the unimaginably savage excesses that have been committed in that village’ and threatening that similar *razzias* would be carried out in surrounding towns. Queipo’s broadcast merely touched upon the bare bones of a complex story. When news of the military rebellion reached El Arahál, a small town of 12,000 inhabitants, the local right-wingers who supported the rising had been locked up in the town hall. On 22 July, when a Socialist town councillor tried to release them, some left and twenty three remained fearful that it was a ruse to shoot them. Some armed men from Seville then set fire to the building and twenty three died. When Queipo’s Nationalist column entered El Arahál, they reacted to what they had found with an orgy of indiscriminate violence. They killed one thousand, six hundred of the town’s inhabitants as well as repeatedly raping young women considered to be of the left.¹⁴

The latifundio system, which was the dominant mode of landholding in Andalusia, Extremadura and Salamanca, made it easier for the owners to think of the bracero as subhuman, a piece of property and a ‘thing’ to be punished or annihilated for daring to rebel. To the owners, the entire experience of the Second Republic constituted a ‘rebellion’. The contiguity of Africa and Andalusia ensured that the prejudices of the southern landowners were implemented by Africanistas trained in murdering innocent civilians. The symbiosis between latifundistas and Africanistas was illustrated frequently in the early weeks of the civil

¹³ Juan de Iturralde, *La guerra de Franco, los vascos y la Iglesia 2 vols* (San Sebastián: Publicaciones del Clero Vasco, 1978) I, p.433. See also Hugh Thomas, *The Spanish Civil War* 3rd edition (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1977) p.260.

war. In the province of Cordoba, for instance, the cacique of Palma del Río, Don Félix Moreno, bred fighting bulls which limited the amount of work on his estates. He refused to cultivate his land, using the slogan '*Comed República*' (let the Republic feed you). When the labourers demonstrated against him, he had shot one of them. Before the Civil War, Félix Moreno fled to his palace in Seville. When war broke out, the village was collectivised and food supplies rationed until fields could be tilled and the harvest came in. His fighting bulls were killed for food and the villagers tasted red meat for the first time in their lives. When the Nationalists captured the town on 27 August, their columns were accompanied by Félix Moreno driving a black Cadillac in which he was accompanied by the other prominent landowners of the area. When soldiers rounded up those of the village menfolk that had not fled, he selected ten men to be shot for each of his bulls that had been slaughtered. As desperate men pleaded with him on the grounds that they were his godson, his cousin, linked with him in some way, he just looked ahead and said 'No conozco a nadie'. At least 87 were shot by the soldiers on that day and twice that many over the following days.¹⁵

The hatred of the latifundistas paralleled that of the colonial officers for the subject tribesmen that it was their job to repress. General Sanjurjo had been one of the first Spanish soldiers to make the link between the subject tribes of Morocco and the Spanish left. He made a seminal speech on the subject in the wake of the atrocity at Castilblanco in Badajoz on 29 December 1931, when villagers had murdered in four Civil Guards in an outburst of collective rage at systematic oppression. Sanjurjo's words and the subsequent revenge taken by the Civil Guard was but one of the ways in which the cruelty and savagery of the Moroccan Wars was imported into Spain and used against the working class. Sanjurjo, however, was not the first person to make the link. The Asturian miners' leader, Manuel Llana, wrote after the repression of the revolutionary general strike of 1917 of 'the African hatred' with which the military columns had killed and beaten workers and wrecked and looted their homes.¹⁶

¹⁴ *ABC* (Sevilla), 24 July 1936; Ian Gibson, *Queipo de Llano. Sevilla, verano de 1936* (Barcelona: Grijalbo, 1986) p.174; Carmen Muñoz, 'Masacre fascista en Arahal (Sevilla)', *Interviú*, No.91, 9-15 February 1978, pp.38-41.

¹⁵ Francisco Moreno Gómez, *La guerra civil en Córdoba (1936-1939)* (Madrid: Editorial Alpuerto, 1985) pp.375-82; Larry Collins & Dominique Lapierre, *Or I'll Dress You in Mourning* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1968) pp.62-9, 82-99.

¹⁶ Manuel Llana, *Escritos y discursos* (Oviedo: Fundación José Barreiros, 1985) pp.206-14.

Another major stepping-stone from the terror of Morocco to the wartime terror exercised against the civilian population of the Republic was the repression after the events in Asturias in October 1934. There, the African Army had unleashed a wave of terror that had more to do with their normal practice when entering Moroccan villages than any threat from the defeated revolutionaries. Houses were looted, innocent men, women and children shot at random, women molested.¹⁷ The outbreak of the Civil War was to constitute a quantum leap in the savagery of the views of members of the military high command.

The terror visited upon the rural working class of Andalusia and Extremadura by the Army of Africa revealed much about the attitudes of Spain's colonial officers. On 7 August 1936, in General Mola's headquarters in Burgos, a conversation took place between the recently appointed governor of Burgos, Lieutenant Colonel Marcelino Gavián Almuzarza, and the Director General de Prisiones, Joaquín del Moral. Del Moral asserted that 'España es el país donde la cobardía tiene vestidos más bonitos. El miedo en España se disfraza de pacificación de espíritus, de hechos diferenciales, de conllevancias, de fórmulas. Nadie se atrevió a dar la cara a los problemas fundamentales de la Patria.' ('Spain is the country where cowardice wears the nicest clothes. Fear in Spain is dressed up as resolving conflict, tolerance of the differences between people, coexistence and formulas. No one dared face up to the fundamental problems of the Fatherland.') Gavián declared 'hay que echar al carajo toda esa monserga de Derechos del Hombre, Humanitarismo, Filantropía y demás tópicos masónicos' ('we must get rid of all that drivel about the Rights of Man, humanitarianism, philanthropy and other Masonic clichés'). A lively conversation followed on the need to exterminate in Madrid 'tranviarios, policías, telegrafistas y porteros' ('tram workers, policemen, telegraph-operators and concierges'). One of those present suggested that the notice in apartment buildings that read 'Speak to the concierge before entering' should be changed to 'Kill the concierge before entering'.¹⁸

A couple of days later, Mola revealed even more about the military monarchy. He boasted that his father, who was a crack shot with a rifle, used his wife for his frequent

¹⁷ The literature on the atrocities committed by the African Army in Asturias is considerable. Among the most convincing testimonies are those assembled at the time by two relatively conservative individuals, Vicente Marco Miranda, a Republican prosecutor, and Félix Gordón Ordás, one-time Ministry of Industry with the Radical party. They are reproduced in Margarita Nelken, *Por qué hicimos la revolución* (Barcelona: Ediciones Sociales Internacionales, 1936) pp.172-255

¹⁸ José María Iribarren, *Con el general Mola: escenas y aspectos inéditos de la guerra civil* (Zaragoza: Librería General, 1937) pp.210-11.

imitations of William Tell. The unfortunate woman was expected to balance pieces of fruit on her head and hold others in her hand as targets for her husband to show off his skill. He told his secretary, José María Iribarren, that ‘Una guerra de esta naturaleza ha de acabar por el dominio de uno de los dos bandos y por el exterminio absoluto y total del vencido. A mí me han matado un hermano, pero me la van a pagar.’ (‘A war of this kind has to end with the domination of one side and the total extermination of the defeated. They’ve killed one of my brothers but they’ll pay for it.’)¹⁹

The major polemic on Guernica also threw up a number of astonishing insights into the mentality of the Francoist high command and, in particular, that of General Mola. The massacre of Badajoz was a message from Franco’s African columns to the people of Madrid about what they could expect if they resisted. Mola made it clear that the destruction of Guernica was a similar message to the people of Bilbao. On 31 March 1937, he had opened the campaign against the Basque Country with a proclamation which he broadcast and also had printed as a leaflet which was dropped on the principal Basque towns. ‘If submission is not immediate, I will raze all Vizcaya to the ground, beginning with the industries of war. I have the means to do so.’²⁰ According to the U.S. Ambassador, Claude Bowers, the destruction of Guernica was ‘in line with Mola’s threat to exterminate every town in [the] province unless Bilbao surrenders’.²¹ Mola’s use of aircraft of the Luftwaffe revealed much of his attitude to the war and its purpose. He was obsessed with the total annihilation of Spanish industry as a prelude to building a ‘clean’ agrarian Spain. This is clear from his spine-chilling comments at the time. On 2 April 1937, he clashed with the commander of the Condor Legion, General Hugo Sperrle. Mola wanted Sperrle to destroy Basque industry. With Bilbao about to fall to the Nationalists, this request disconcerted the German. Mola said ‘if half of all Spanish factories were destroyed by our aircraft, the subsequent reconstruction of Spain would be greatly facilitated. However, the Nationalist government could not just destroy industry once victory was assured.’ ‘Spain is dominated in a totally sick way by the industries of Catalonia and the Basque Country. For Spain to be made healthy, they have to be destroyed. The German Chief of Staff Wolfram von Richthofen listened thunderstruck

¹⁹ Iribarren, *Con el general Mola*, p.223.

²⁰ G.L. Steer, *The Tree of Gernika: A Field Study of Modern War* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1938) p.159; Manuel Aznar, *Historia militar de la guerra de España (1936-1939)* (Madrid: Ediciones Idea, 1940) p.398..

²¹ Bowers to Hull, 30 April 1937, *Foreign Relations of the United States 1937* Vol.I (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1954) p.290.

then recited to Mola all the reasons why it was madness to destroy a country's industrial base, telling him that 'I have never in my life heard such idiocy'.²²

The attitude of the Nationalists to the left and to the rural and industrial working class made sense only in terms of the post-colonial mentality. The Africanistas and the landowners viewed the landless peasants and the industrial proletariat as a racially inferior, subject colonial race. When they talked about the left, they did so in pathological terms. It was brilliantly summed up by the correspondent of the *Chicago Daily Tribune*, Edmund Taylor: 'The enemy was a complex molecule of a spiritual poison called communism for convenience, but liberalism was the most deadly individual element in it, and the most hated. Introduced into the human organism, this poison acted like a germ virus; not only incurable, but infectious. Certain men known as the Leaders had perversely inoculated themselves with the poison, and like Satan in Catholic mythology, were deliberately trying to spread the infection as widely as they could. As the incarnation of evil these men deserved punishment. Their victims who might have been good Spaniards if they had not had the bad luck to be infected by the Leaders, did not merit punishment properly speaking, but they had to be shot in a humane way because they were incurable and might infect others.'²³ Another, John Whitaker of the *Chicago Daily News*, put it more bluntly; 'The use of the Moors and the wholesale execution of prisoners and civilians were the trump cards of the "best" elements in Spain... I talked with all varieties of them by the hundreds. If I were to sum up their social philosophy, it would be simple in the extreme – they were outnumbered by the masses; they feared the masses; and they proposed to thin down the numbers of the masses.'²⁴

The idea might have figured in such crude terms in the private conversations of army officers. In public, however, rebel propagandists thought it more respectable to talk of a 'movement' to put an end to the Jewish-Masonic-Bolshevik conspiracy in order to defend 'Spain', or to be more precise, a particular and partisan definition of Spain. From this had evolved the idea of a war to the death between España and the anti-España. A revealing gloss on this notion was given by a prosecutor during a court martial in Seville in late 1937.

²² Wolfram von Richthofen, 'Spanien-Tagebuch', in Klaus A. Maier, *Guernica* 26.4.1937. Die deutsche Intervention in Spanien und der 'Fall Guernica' (Freiburg: Rombach, 1975) pp.86-7; Angel Viñas, *Guerra, dinero, dictadura. Ayuda fascista y autarquía en la España de Franco* (Barcelona: Crítica, 1984) pp.102-3.

²³ Edmond Taylor, 'Assignment in Hell' in Frank C. Hanighen, *Nothing but Danger* (London: Harrap, 1940) p.63.

²⁴ John Whitaker, 'Prelude to World War. A Witness from Spain' in *Foreign Affairs*, Vol.21, 1-4, October 1942 – July 1943, p.107.

‘Spanish grandeur was at its height in the Sixteenth Century, when the sun never set on her dominions. Our great century, the century of the mystics, the saints and the artists. The century of the Spanish Empire! Well, do you know how many inhabitants our fatherland had then when it was truly great? Twelve millions! What does it matter is half the population has to disappear if that is what is required for us to reconquer our Empire?’ (Fue el XVI el siglo de mayor grandeza de España. Entonces no se ponía el sol en sus dominios. Nuestra gran centuria. La de los místicos, santos y artistas. ¡El siglo del Imperio Español! Pues, ¿sabéis cuántos habitantes tenía entonces nuestra Patria, y era grande? ¡Doce millones! ¿Qué importa que ahora desaparezca la mitad de sus habitantes, si ello precisa para reconquistar nuestro Imperio?)²⁵

During the march of Franco’s troops to Madrid, the chief reporter of the United Press in Europe, Webb Miller, was deeply shaken by the atrocities that he witnessed at Santa Olalla between Talavera and Toledo. In Toledo, after the liberation of the Alcázar, there were pools of blood in the streets and the footprints of those who had tracked through it were evidence of the mass of summary executions. A Francoist officer explained the policy to him: ‘we are fighting an idea. The idea is in the brain, and to kill it we have to kill the man. We must kill everyone who has that “red” idea.’²⁶ The most extreme version of that theory was expounded interminably by Captain Gonzalo Aguilera, the Salamanca landowner who had shot six of his peasants. He had come out of voluntary retirement, rejoined the army and had been assigned to Franco’s press and propaganda service. His ideas were outrageous, but because he expounded them so eloquently, in excellent English, and without inhibition, journalists found him compellingly quotable. Aguilera was a polo-playing cavalryman and convinced all of the journalists with whom he worked that he was a great all-round sportsman. He was also the fourteenth Conde de Alba de Yeltes, a Grande de España and a major landowner with estates in the provinces of Salamanca and Cáceres. ‘We’ve got to kill and kill and kill, you understand’, he told John Whitaker.²⁷ He was merely expressing the views of his commanding officer, General Mola. Towards the end of July 1936, the French press reported that Indalecio Prieto had been encharged with negotiating with the Nationalists to put an end to the bloodshed. When the General’s secretary showed him the newspapers, he burst out angrily ‘Negotiate! Never! This war must end with the extermination of the enemies of

²⁵ Francisco Gonzálbez Ruiz, *Yo he creído en Franco. Proceso de una gran desilusión (Dos meses en la cárcel de Sevilla)* (Paris: Imprimerie Coopérative Étoile, 1938) p.147.

²⁶ Webb Miller, *I Found No Peace* (London: The Book Club, 1937) p.344.

Spain.’ (‘¿Parlamentar? ¡Jamás! Esta guerra tiene que terminar con el exterminio de los enemigos de España.’)²⁸

Aguilera recounted his biological theory of the origins of the war to Charles Foltz, the correspondent of the Associated Press: “Sewers!” growled the Count. “Sewers caused all our troubles. The masses in this country are not like your Americans, nor even like the British. They are slave stock. They are good for nothing but slaves and only when they are used as slaves are they happy. But we, the decent people, made the mistake of giving them modern housing in the cities where we have our factories. We put sewers in these cities, sewers which extend right down to the workers’ quarters. Not content with the work of God, we thus interfere with His Will. The result is that the slave stock increases. Had we no sewers in Madrid, Barcelona, and Bilbao, all these Red leaders would have died in their infancy instead of exciting the rabble and causing good Spanish blood to flow. When the war is over, we should destroy the sewers. The perfect birth control for Spain is the birth control God intended us to have. Sewers are a luxury to be reserved for those who deserve them, the leaders of Spain, not the slave stock.’ One journalist who laughed at these bizarre notions, was expelled from Nationalist Spain after Captain Aguilera denounced him ‘a dangerous Red’.²⁹

Aguilera was far from unique. Four officers in charge of the foreign press figure frequently in the later accounts of correspondents. The most frequently named were the head of Franco’s press service, Luis Bolín, and, of course, Aguilera. Bolín had been given an honorary captaincy in the Foreign Legion as a reward for his role in securing Franco’s passage from the Canary Islands to Morocco. Wearing breeches and high boots, against which he would rap a riding crop, he strode menacingly among the correspondents with a fierce scowl. Despite the fact that ‘he couldn’t fix a bayonet or put a clip into a rifle’, he wore the uniform always and behaved in a boorish manner that embarrassed the real officers of the corps. According to Sir Percival Phillips of the *Daily Telegraph*, they despised and detested him ‘They think he has no right to be strutting about in their uniform.’³⁰ Bolín, according to Noel Monks of the *Daily Express*, would spit on piles of freshly executed Republican

²⁷ Whitaker, ‘Prelude to World War’, p.107.

²⁸ José María Iribarren, *Con el general Mola: escenas y aspectos inéditos de la guerra civil* (Zaragoza: Librería General, 1937) pp.168-9.

²⁹ Charles Foltz Jr., *The Masquerade in Spain* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1948) p.116.

³⁰ Francis McCullagh, *In Franco’s Spain* (London: Burns, Oates & Washbourne, 1937) pp.104-7

prisoners, many of them mere boys, saying ‘Vermin!’³¹ He was loathed and feared by the foreign press corps because of his frequent threats to shoot newspapermen.³² He would gain a kind of fame by dint of his arrest and mistreatment of Arthur Koestler shortly after the Nationalist capture of Malaga in February 1937.³³

Of the rest of Bolín’s subordinates, one, Lieutenant Colonel Manuel de Lámbarri y Yanguas, was a rather amiable man who, in civilian life, had worked for the magazine *Vogue*.³⁴ Another, a Captain Ignacio Rosales, held views only slightly more refined than those of Aguilera.³⁵ According to Virginia Cowles, Rosales was a Barcelona millionaire.³⁶ He explained to his charges that ‘the masses cannot be taught; that they need a touch of the whip for they are like dogs and will mind only the whip. There is no understanding in such people, they must be got in hand. Held in hand where they belong.’ Like many officers, from Mola downwards, Rosales also had a biological explanation of class conflict in Spain: ‘an influx of strains inimical to Spain through the industrial cities of the coast; of this taint in her bloodstream Spain must cleanse herself. She is purifying herself and will rise up from this trial new and strong. The streets of Madrid will run red with blood, but after – after – there will be no unemployment problem.’³⁷ In fact, ‘organic determinism’ was a central part of Spanish right-wing thinking from José Ortega y Gasset’s *España invertebrada* to Ernesto Giménez Caballero’s *Genio de España*. It was central to the mind-set of army officers.³⁸

Franco himself told a the correspondent of the French newspaper *Candide*, in August 1938, that fascism varied according to national characteristics because each nation was an organism and each national fascism its immune system’s reaction ‘a defence mechanism, a sign of wanting to live, of not wanting to die, that, at certain times, takes over an entire

³¹ Noel Monks, *Eyewitness* (London: Frederick Muller, 1955) p.73.

³² McCullagh, *In Franco’s Spain* pp.104-29; Arthur Koestler, *Spanish Testament* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1937) p.220; Monks, *Eyewitness*, pp.80-2.

³³ Koestler, *Spanish Testament*, pp.223-31; Arthur Koestler, *The Invisible Writing* 2nd Edition (London: Hutchinson, 1969) pp.413-20, 427; Sir Peter Chalmers-Mitchell, *My House in Malaga* (London: Faber & Faber, 1938) pp.269-89; Luis Bolín, *Spain: The Vital Years* (Philadelphia: J.B.Lippincott, 1967) pp.247-9.

³⁴ Virginia Cowles, *Looking for Trouble* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1941) pp.90-4; Harold G.Cardozo, *The March of a Nation. My Year of Spain’s Civil War* (London: The Right Book Club, 1937) p.301.

³⁵ Although he is mentioned by several correspondents, only Virginia Cowles seemed to know his Christian name which she gave as Ignacio, Cowles, *Looking for Trouble*, p.70. He does not figure in the *Anuario Militar 1936*, pp.323, 399. It is possible that the Rosales who acted as a press officer had taken retirement on full pay under the Azaña reforms of 1931 or, like Bolín, simply been given the honorary rank of captain.

³⁶ Cowles, *Looking for Trouble*, p.70.

³⁷ Frances Davis, *My Shadow in the Sun* (New York: Carrick & Evans, 1940) p.136

people'.³⁹ The most extreme version of the doctrine came, as might be expected from the pen of Ernesto Giménez Caballero. In a pamphlet published in the Nationalist zone in 1938, he wrote: 'Nosotros los combatientes hemos visto a Franco en las altas horas de la madrugada, en medio del calor o de la nieve – en páramos, en rincones abruptos, en mitad de un campamento – tendida su alma, distendidos sus nervios sobre el plano de combate, sobre el Mapa de España, “operando en vivo sobre el cuerpo de España”, con urgencia y tragedia de quirurgo que opera a su propia hija, a su propia madre, a su propia mujer amada. Nosotros hemos visto caer las lágrimas de Franco sobre el cuerpo de esta madre, de esta mujer, de esta hija suya que es España, mientras en las manos le corría la sangre y el dolor del sacro cuerpo en estertores' ('we have seen Franco in the early hours of the morning, in the midst of heat or of snow, his soul and his nerves stretched to breaking point, leaning over the battle plan or the map of Spain, operating on the living body of Spain with the urgency and tragedy of a surgeon who operates on his own daughter, on his own mother, on his own beloved wife. We have seen Franco's tears fall on the body of this mother, of this wife, of this daughter, while over his hands runs the blood and the pain of the sacred body in spasms.')⁴⁰ For Franco, as for Aguilera and Rosales, the logic of this argument was that any individual whose ideas did not fit with their conception of the patria was a symptom of a disease and therefore had to be eradicated.

Aguilera gave a slightly different version of the organicist theory to Whitaker. 'You know what's wrong with Spain? Modern plumbing! In healthier times – I mean healthier times spiritually, you understand – plague and pestilence used to slaughter the Spanish masses. Held them down to proper proportions, you understand. Now with modern sewage disposal and the like, they multiply too fast. They're like animals, you understand, and you can't expect them not to be infected with the virus of Bolshevism. After all, rats and lice carry the plague. Now I hope you can understand what we mean by the regeneration of Spain.'⁴¹ Whitaker travelled with the senior staff of the African columns that marched on Madrid. His daily conversations with them convinced him that Aguilera was completely representative of their mentality, differing only in that he spoke perfect English and had no

³⁸ Michael Richards, *A Time of Silence: Civil War and the Culture of Repression in Franco's Spain, 1936-1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) p.18; Juan Carlos Losada Malvárez, *Ideología del Ejército franquista 1939-1959* (Madrid: Ediciones Istmo, 1990) pp.28-30

³⁹ [Francisco Franco Bahamonde,]. *Palabras del Caudillo 19 abril 1937 - 31 diciembre 1938* (Barcelona: Ediciones Fe, 1939) p.261.

⁴⁰ Ernesto Giménez Caballero, *España y Franco* (Cegama, Guipúzcoa: Ediciones Los Combatientes, 1938) pp.30-1.

inhibitions about recounting his theories to any journalist that he could back into a corner. ‘Aguilera would wet his throat with another tumbler of brandy and proceed, to the approving nods and comments of other leading officers of Franco’s army. ‘It’s our program, you understand, to exterminate a third of the male population of Spain. That will clean up the country and rid us of the proletariat. It’s sound economically, too. Never have any more unemployment in Spain, you understand. We’ll make other changes. For instance, we’ll be done with this nonsense of equality for women. I breed horses and animals generally, you understand. I know all about women. There’ll be no more nonsense about subjecting a gentleman to court action. If a woman’s unfaithful to him, he’ll shoot her like a dog. It’s disgusting, any interference of a court between a man and a wife.’⁴²

Captain Aguilera was the son of the thirteenth Conde de Alba de Yeltes, Lieutenant Colonel Agustín Aguilera y Gamboa of the Spanish Cavalry, and a Scottish mother, named Mary Munro. Born on 26 December 1886, he was educated first at Wimbledon College. He followed in his father’s footsteps when, on 5 October 1897, he entered Stonyhurst College, the Jesuit public school in Lancashire, which he attended until 10 July 1904.⁴³ His school career was singularly undistinguished. Despite his later reputation as a gentleman scholar, he was always in the lower part of his class and he left no mark of achievement in sport.⁴⁴ After Stonyhurst, he spent some time studying science and philosophy in Germany. Of that period, he recalled in his autobiography, that he had been much influenced by Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason*.⁴⁵

Aguilera became, after the death of his father on 1 December 1919, the fourteenth Conde de Alba de Yeltes and married Magdalena Álvarez y Ruiz.⁴⁶ The fact of being a Count was something that he made sure was known to every journalist in his charge although, ironically, for some reason, several of them came away with the idea that he was the seventeenth Count. Given that he was prone to boasting, perhaps he hoped thereby to imply

⁴¹ Whitaker, ‘Prelude to World War’, p.108.

⁴² Whitaker, ‘Prelude to World War’, p.108.

⁴³ Letter from Father F.J.Turner S.J., Stonyhurst College Archivist; to the author, 19 May 1999; Arnold Lunn, *Spanish Rehearsal* (London: Hutchinson, 1937) p.70.

⁴⁴ Letter from Father Turner to the author.

⁴⁵ Conde de Alba de Yeltes, *Cartas a un sobrino* (n.p., n.d.) p.28.

⁴⁶ Juan Ximénez Embún, & Angel González Palencia, *Catálogo alfabético de los documentos referentes a títulos del Reino y Grandezas de España conservados en la sección de Consejos Suprimidos* (Madrid: Patronato Nacional de Archivos Históricos, 1951) pp.36-7, 51; J.Atienza, *Nobiliario español: diccionario heráldico de apellidos españoles y títulos nobiliarios* 3ª edición (Madrid: Aguilar, 1959) p.790. Curiously, Gonzalo referred to himself variously as sixteenth and seventeenth count.

that his title was even older than it was. Similarly, he led his friends in the press corps to believe that he had served with great gallantry in the Moroccan War fighting at the head of a unit of mounted Regulares and had distinguished himself because of his courage and a recklessness bordering on the suicidal. One admirer described him as ‘a hard-bitten ex-cavalryman of what I believe is known as ‘The Old School’.⁴⁷ There is no reason to dispute either that he saw action or shared to the full the prejudices of his peers. However, in a war in which the rewards for courage and temerity were significant, as the meteoric career of Francisco Franco showed, his military records show little of significance. He had joined the Spanish Army on 25 February 1908 as a private in the cavalry and was posted to an army stud farm. He took immediate leave of absence until August 1908. When he entered the cavalry academy in Valladolid. To the intense annoyance of his father, he did not use his intellectual ability and was a lazy student. Nevertheless, he graduated as a second lieutenant (alférez) in June 1911.⁴⁸

In 1910, Gonzalo had fallen in love with a celebrated beauty in Salamanca, Inés Luna Terrero. She was extremely rich and, like Gonzalo, spoke English, French and German. She was a progressive feminist who shocked local opinion because she smoked and wore trousers. She was devastated when, in 1911, Gonzalo broke off the engagement in favour of Magdalena Álvarez Ruiz, the daughter of a *cochero* (a man who hired out carriages and cars). Inés Luna Terrero never married and apparently, for the rest of her life, carried a torch for the dashing handsome cavalry officer. Gonzalo’s father was furious and forbade him to see Magdalena.⁴⁹ Gonzalo was posted to Melilla in February 1912, where he spent a month on the staff of the ‘Captain General of the Territory’ before being posted to a series of fighting units. After seeing action, he was awarded the Cruz primera clase del Merito Militar on 10 November 1912. He was promoted to first lieutenant on 13 July 1913. He was then posted to the mainland, remaining in Alcalá de Henares and Madrid. He seemed to lead a relatively privileged existence, spending two months leave in London in the summer of 1914 and taking part in horse trials in Badajoz in 1915. In October 1915, he was posted to the staff of the

⁴⁷ Kemp, *Mine Were of Trouble*, p.49; Lunn, *Spanish Rehearsal*, pp.42, 50.

⁴⁸ Hoja de servicios de Gonzalo Aguilera y Munro, Archivo General Militar de Segovia. The information on his father’s attitude derives from the testimony to the author, 30 July 1999, of the Cronista de la Ciudad de Salamanca, Dr Salvador Llopis Llopis, who has had access to the correspondence between Gonzalo de Aguilera and Inés Luna Terrero.

⁴⁹ Testimony to the author, 30 July 1999, of the Cronista de la Ciudad de Salamanca, Dr Salvador Llopis Llopis, biographer of Inés Luna Terrero.

Ministry of War.⁵⁰ He had continued to see Magdalena Alvarez whom he had set up in an apartment in Madrid. In awe of his father, he kept the relationship a secret. Eventually in 1916, Magdalena became pregnant and bore him a son, Gonzalo, out of wedlock. He continued to support her in the Madrid apartment. Only after his father died was he able to marry her in 1920.⁵¹

On 19 June 1916, because of his fluent German, English and French, he was sent to Berlin where, as a junior military attaché, he assisted in the Spanish Embassy's work protecting prisoners of war until 20 November 1917. What he saw on the both the Eastern and Western fronts, profoundly affected him. However, he seems to have internalised his reactions. At the time, and until thirty years later, it did nothing to diminish his enthusiasm for the military life. He wrote of it in the late 1940s or early 1950s in his autobiographical 'letters to a nephew', ('Como sabes, durante la I Guerra Mundial me tocó estar en Alemania y vi de cerca aquellas montañas de dolor y sufrimiento que lleva consigo la guerra moderna y de las que el individuo no tiene escape posible aquellos montones de cadáveres de hombres, mujeres y niños por las carreteras heladas de Polonia, aquellas ingentes matanzas del Oeste donde además pude observar de cerca las primeras víctimas de gases, que al toser arrancaban tejidos mucosos bronquiales. Aix la Chapelle casi entero era un hospital de sangre y en días de gran batalla veía cargar los camiones de brazos y piernas para llevarlos a enterrar, y en la retaguardia los dolores familiares y la ruina económica. Allí empecé a dejar de ser Cristiano; porque no cabe que una deidad omnisciente y amorosa no tuviera otros medios para conseguir sus fines que a través del martirio y perdición de sus criaturas.' ('I saw up close those mountains of pain and suffering that modern war brings in its wake and which no individual can possibly escape. Those piles of corpses of men, women and children at the side of the frozen roads of Poland, that huge massacres in the West where I could also observe the first victims of poison gas who coughed up thick bronchial mucous. Aix-la-Chapelle in its entirety was a field hospital and on the days of major battles, I saw lorries being loaded with arms and legs to be taken for burial. In the rearguard, I saw the sorrows of families and economic ruin. There I began to cease being a Christian; for it is not possible that a loving and omniscient deity could not find other means to fulfil its ends than through the martyrdom and perdition of

⁵⁰ Hoja de servicios de Gonzalo Aguilera y Munro, Archivo General Militar de Segovia.

⁵¹ Testimony to the author, 30 July 1999, of the Cronista de la Ciudad de Salamanca, Dr Salvador Llopis Llopis, biographer of Inés Luna Terrero. She died in Barcelona in 1953.

its creatures.’)⁵² This experience may well have brutalised him. Certainly, his enthusiasm for the slaughter of the ‘Reds’ during the Spanish Civil War suggested that it had done nothing to humanise him.

On his return from Germany to Spain, he served in mainland posts, in Madrid and Salamanca. He was promoted to Captain in July 1919. He often spent lengthy periods of leave in Paris and London. He took eighteen months leave of absence from March 1924 to August 1925, during which time his second son, Agustín, was born. At some point in his career, he was aide de camp to General Sanjurjo. He was not involved in the successful pacification of Morocco in 1925, although he served again briefly in Africa. In December 1926, he was posted to Tetuán where he was involved at the head of a Tabor of mounted Regulares patrolling and protecting the roads surrounding the town – which could be the basis of his boasts of courageous exploits.⁵³ He remained in Morocco until August 1927, after which he passed into the reserve (situación de disponible) having been seconded to the Military Household of Alfonso XIII and became a personal friend of the King. He retired from the Army in protest at the requirement that officers swear an oath of loyalty to the Republic. He took advantage of the generous voluntary retirement terms of the decrees of 25 and 29 April 1931 promulgated by the newly installed Minister of War, Manuel Azaña.⁵⁴

On the outbreak of war, Aguilera came out of retirement and volunteered for the nationalist forces. He was informally attached to the general staff of General Mola, commander of the Army of the North. Because he spoke fluent English, French and German, he had been given the task of supervising the movements and the production of the foreign press correspondents – sometimes serving as a guide, others as a censor. According to Sefton Delmer, he ‘spoke the best English of all the officers on Mola’s staff’.⁵⁵ His English was so good that, according to Harold Cardozo of the *Daily Mail*, he could easily have been taken for

⁵² Alba de Yeltes, *Cartas*, p.101.

⁵³ Hoja de servicios de Gonzalo Aguilera y Munro, Archivo General Militar de Segovia; *Archivo General Militar de Segovia; Índice de expedientes personales* (Madrid: Ediciones Hidalguía, 1959) I, p.57. His service with General Sanjurjo is not specified in his military records. It is mentioned in *La Gaceta Regional*, 30 August 1964.

⁵⁴ Ministerio de la Guerra, Sección Personal, 21 November 1932, Legajo 416, Gonzalo Aguilera Munro, Archivo General Militar de Segovia. Michael Alpert, *La reforma militar de Azaña (1931-1933)* (Madrid: Siglo XXI, 1982) pp.133-49.

⁵⁵ Informe sobre el Capitán de Caballería retirado, D.Gonzalo de Aguilera Munro, Ministerio de la Guerra, Sección Personal, Legajo 416, Gonzalo Aguilera Munro, Archivo General Militar de Segovia (henceforth Informe GAM, leg.416, AGMS); Sefton Delmer, *Trail Sinister. An Autobiography* London: Secker & Warburg, 1961) p.277.

an Englishman.⁵⁶ Despite his position as liaison with the press, he lost no opportunity to join in the fighting. He was involved in the Nationalist capture of Irún on 4 September. The entire, and extremely bloody, combat was witnessed by the foreign press corps which he led into the town as if they were a unit of the conquering Nationalist forces.⁵⁷ He had also taken part in action in the Guadarrama and Somosierra passes to the north of Madrid as Mola's forces threatened the capital. When Mola's Army of the North finally made contact with Franco's African columns in early September, Aguilera moved south to take the press corps to cover the attacks on Toledo and Madrid. On one occasion, during that advance, Aguilera and Captain Roland von Strunk, a German military observer, in Spain under the cover of being correspondent of the Nazi *Völkischer Beobachter*, fought off Republican militiamen with rifle fire until they were rescued from a perilous position. They were commended for the number of the enemy that they killed. During the siege of Madrid, Aguilera took part in combat action in the Casa de Campo, Pozuelo, Aravaca and Jarama.⁵⁸

Unlike most press officers who felt responsible for the safety of the journalists assigned to them, Aguilera operated on the principle that, if risks had to be taken to get stories then, so long as they were favourable to the Nationalists, he would help the reporters taken them. He regularly took his charges into the firing line and was 'bombed, machine-gunned and shelled' with them.⁵⁹ It was the most frequent complaint of the journalists in the Nationalist zone that they were expected to publish anodyne communiqués while being kept away from hard news. This was more often the case when the Nationalists were doing badly and especially so for journalists regarded as too 'independent'. Even favoured individuals were subjected to humiliating delays while waiting to be issued with passes for accompanied visits to the front.⁶⁰ Accordingly, Aguilera was extremely popular with the right-wing journalists that met him because he was prepared to take them dangerously near to the front and would use his influence with the censor to help them get their stories through. He drove a

⁵⁶ Harold G. Cardozo, *The March of a Nation. My Year of Spain's Civil War* (London: The Right Book Club, 1937) p.63.

⁵⁷ Informe GAM, leg.416, AGMS; Cardozo, *The March of a Nation*, pp.78-87. On the battle for Irún see Hugh Thomas, *The Spanish Civil War* 3rd ed. (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1977) pp. 377-9; Servicio Histórico Militar (Coronel José Manuel Martínez Bande), *Nueve meses de guerra en el norte* (Madrid: Editorial San Martín, 1980) pp.82-4.

⁵⁸ Informe GAM, leg.416, AGMS. Lunn, *Spanish Rehearsal*, pp.42, recounts a similar incident in which Aguilera's companion was 'a French journalist'. It is entirely possible that the anecdote was slightly distorted in being relayed.

⁵⁹ H.R.Knickerbocker, *The Siege of the Alcazar* (London: Hutchinson, n.d. [1937]) p.136; Cardozo, *The March of a Nation*, pp.284-6.

Mercedes despite having a chauffeur named Tomás Santos at his disposal. According to Harold Cardozo, 'it was one of the most temperamental cars I have ever seen. It either rushed ahead at some seventy miles an hour, taking corners in hair-raising style, or else it sulked and the whole line of Press cars was reduced to following it at not much faster than a walking pace.'⁶¹ Arnold Lunn found Aguilera's skilful but carefree driving a terrifying yet exhilarating experience, the key to which he thought was a typically Spanish oriental fatalism and indifference to death. Junkets to the front organized by Aguilera were regarded as particularly exciting given his delight at being under fire and his assumption that the journalists shared his addiction to danger.⁶² Cardozo, for instance, despite his 'hair-raising' driving, regarded him as 'often a good friend to journalists'.⁶³ H.R.Knickerbocker of the International News Service thought him 'our best friend of all the White officers... Captain Aguilera is fifty-two, looks forty, acts thirty, and is the best press officer it has ever been my pleasure to meet, because he really takes us to the news, namely the front.'⁶⁴ Sefton Delmer, despite being expelled from Nationalist Spain by Aguilera, wrote later he would 'always have the warmest affection' for him. While in Burgos, he called him 'Aggy' and they remained friends after the war.⁶⁵ More liberal journalists were nauseated by the Count's political attitudes – a mixture of callous cruelty and high-minded snobbery. In addition to his racism and his sexism, Aguilera was convinced that a crucial issue which would influence the outcome of the war was 'the existence and the influence of satanic powers'.⁶⁶

According to the American correspondent, Edmond Taylor, Aguilera was 'a cultured man with the mannerisms and trick of speech of an officer in the Indian army.'⁶⁷ That was not uncommon in the Nationalist press apparatus. At its Burgos headquarters, the fledgling American journalist, Frances Davis, encountered an officer who spoke Oxford English as he smacked his boots with a riding crop – probably Bolín or Aguilera. After explaining to her that the press would be at the orders of the army, he changed the subject and asked if she had

⁶⁰ Davis, *My Shadow*, pp.130-1, 165, 171. Francis McCullagh, *In Franco's Spain* (London: Burns, Oates & Washbourne, 1937) pp.111-12, Cardozo, *The March of a Nation*, pp.220-1.

⁶¹ See safe conduct issued Salamanca, 23 November 1936, Legajo 416, Gonzalo Aguilera Munro, Archivo General Militar de Segovia; Cardozo, *The March of a Nation*, p.286.

⁶² Lunn, *Spanish Rehearsal*, pp.50-1, 70; Edmond Taylor, 'Assignment in Hell' in Frank C.Hanighen, *Nothing but Danger* (London: Harrap, 1940) p.61, 64; Miller, *I Found No Peace*, p.322; Whitaker, 'Prelude to World War', pp.108-9.

⁶³ Cardozo, *The March of a Nation*, pp.63, 285-6. Cardozo was addressed as 'Major' by the other journalists.

⁶⁴ Knickerbocker, *The Siege of the Alcazar*, p.136.

⁶⁵ Delmer, *Trail Sinister*, p.278.

⁶⁶ Lunn, *Spanish Rehearsal*, p.46.

⁶⁷ Taylor, 'Assignment in Hell', p.61.

The New Yorker, ‘Dashed amusing publication. If you have any copies to spare bring them in with you when you come, eh? Cheerio.’⁶⁸ In the evening, over a drink, Aguilera, in his upper-class English growl, would mesmerise the journalists in his care with his racist interpretation of the war. One dimension of his theory was that ‘the war was a conflict between Nordic and Oriental ideologies, the Oriental element, represented by the Reds, naturally, having been introduced into Spain by the Moors, who in the course of time became the slaves of the northern Spaniards and thus begat the proletariat. The proletariat having been converted to Marxism, an Oriental doctrine which was in their blood anyhow, were now trying to conquer Spain for the Orient, and the insurrection was quite literally a second *reconquista* by the Christian Nordics.’⁶⁹

Arnold Lunn, old Harrovian, prominent Tory and Catholic, thought Aguilera ‘not only a soldier but a scholar’. In the Sierra de Gredos, Aguilera said to Lunn: ‘The Reds are always ranting about the illiteracy in Spain, but if they’d spend a few months living among the mountains they might begin to understand that the people who can’t read are often wiser than the people who can. Wisdom isn’t the same thing as education. I have got shepherds on my farms who are immensely wise, perhaps because they read the stars and the fields and perhaps because they don’t read newspapers.’ He was clearly an element of social discrimination in his views since he also boasted of having a library of three thousand books. He believed it to have been vandalised by the mob in Madrid, a cause of understandable bitterness.⁷⁰ After the Civil War, he wrote two books himself. Only the first, on the atom, was published in 1946. It carried on its frontispiece a note stating that ‘Toda vez que el producto económico que pudiera sacarse de esta obra es destinado a beneficio de las Hermanitas de los Pobres de una determinada provincia, no se regalan ejemplares’ (‘Given that the profits, such as they are, of this book are intended to benefit The Little Sisters of the Poor of a certain province, there will be no complimentary copies’).⁷¹ The second, written in the early 1950s, did not find a publisher. It was an idiosyncratic and autobiographical work in which he developed ideas not dissimilar to those with which he had regaled journalists during the war.⁷²

⁶⁸ Frances Davis, *My Shadow in the Sun* (New York: Carrick & Evans, 1940) pp.98-9.

⁶⁹ Taylor, ‘Assignment in Hell’, p.61.

⁷⁰ Lunn, *Spanish Rehearsal*, pp.50, 59, 70.

⁷¹ Conde de Alba de Yeltes, *El átomo. Sus componentes, energía y medio* (Madrid: Talleres M.Rollán, 1946).

⁷² Conde de Alba de Yeltes, *Cartas a un sobrino* (n.p., n.d.). The book was poorly type-set, presumably at Aguilera’s own expense, but not published. The copy in the Biblioteca Nacional in Madrid contains the later addition of several typescript pages, pasted in, presumably by Aguilera himself.

An English volunteer on Franco's side, Peter Kemp, also asserted that Aguilera was widely read, very knowledgeable about literature, history and science, with a brilliant if eccentric intellect and a command of vituperation that earned him the nickname during the Civil War of *El Capitán Veneno* (Captain Poison).⁷³ He had a long historical view of why the Western democracies were decadent: 'The people in Britain and America are beginning to go Communist the way the French have gone. There's that man Baldwin in England. Doesn't even know he is a red, but the reds control him. And, of course, that man Roosevelt is a howling red. But it goes back further than Baldwin and Roosevelt. It begins with the Encyclopedists in France - the American and French revolutions. The Age of Reason indeed! The Rights of Man! Does a pig have rights? The masses aren't fit to reason and to think. Then you pick up with the liberal Manchester school in England. They are the criminals who made capitalism. You ought to clean up your own houses. If you don't, we Spaniards are going to join the Germans and Italians in conquering you all. The Germans have already promised to help us get back our American colonies which you and your crooked Protestant imperialism robbed us of. And we're going to act pretty soon, you understand.'⁷⁴

Despite his adventurism, Aguilera expected 'his' journalists to toe the line. On 11 September 1936, F.A.Rice, the correspondent of the conservative *Morning Post*, went to Burgos to seek a pass to the front. He was detained and interrogated by Aguilera. He had first met Aguilera on 25 August and had posted a despatch that sought to give a picture of the Stonyhurst old-boy that would appeal to the paper's predominantly Public School readership. He wrote about Aguilera, without mentioning his name, merely as 'a Spanish captain': 'Tremendously efficient, almost impossibly brisk, a good man, one would imagine, in a tight place; I can see him as a prefect at Stonyhurst, greatly respected and not very popular'. In another piece, sent from France and not therefore subjected to the rebel censorship, Rice had used the phrase 'insurgent frightfulness' in relation to the rebel attack on Irún on 1 September. Aguilera objected to both articles. He accused Rice of divulging his name in the first despatch – which he had not done. Nonetheless, Aguilera judged Rice's references to him to indicate 'a not wholly respectful attitude'. Rice pointed out to Aguilera 'that the information that he was an old Stonyhurst boy had been volunteered by himself and was clearly of interest to an English correspondent and that I had not been given it in confidence. He

⁷³ Kemp, *Mine Were of Trouble*, p.50.

⁷⁴ Whitaker, 'Prelude to World War', p.108; John T. Whitaker, *We Cannot Escape History* (New York: Macmillan, 1943) pp.108-110.

suggested that the doubt thrown on his popularity at school twenty years ago, was damaging and actionable.’ What Rice referred to later as ‘these singularly humourless exchanges’ continued with Aguilera’s outrage at the use of the phrase ‘insurgent frightfulness’. He reminded Rice that the journalists would ‘be seriously dealt with’ if they referred to the rebels as ‘insurgents’ or to the Republicans as ‘loyalists’ or ‘Government troops’ instead of ‘Reds’. Aguilera gave Rice a stark choice. He could leave Spain or remain under strict vigilance, without permission to cross the frontier – which was the only way of filing a story outside the Francoist censorship. ‘My messages would be heavily censored and twisted to the insurgent view. Those correspondents who represent journals of policy wholly favourable to the insurgents would have priority in the sending of messages, and as one who hitherto has been admitted to both sides, I had no guarantee when I should be allowed out.’ Rice chose to leave. He was searched at Pamplona, his films confiscated and personal letters read, then escorted to the frontier. Rice’s newspaper, the *Morning Post* commented on his expulsion in an editorial. ‘It proclaims *urbi et urbi* that any news emanating from Right sources belongs rather to the realm of propaganda than to that of fact.’⁷⁵

Aguilera had Sefton Delmer expelled from Nationalist Spain on the grounds that his dispatches published information likely to be of use to the enemy and also were ‘calculated to make the Spanish armed forces look ridiculous’. The report in question had recounted a Republican air raid on Burgos. Delmer had described how a small British plane had inadvertently arrived in the midst of it, attracted the anti-aircraft fire of the Burgos batteries and still landed unscathed. The dispatch, Aguilera told him over a drink, ‘not only encourages the Reds to attack Burgos again. But it makes our ack-ack gunners look inefficient’. Aguilera liked Delmer and so confided in him that he did not give a damn what the reporter said about the artillery since he was a cavalry man himself.⁷⁶

In the case of John Whitaker, whom Aguilera had every reason to regard as hostile to the Nationalist cause, the treatment was altogether more sinister. At first, Aguilera had been sympathetic to Whitaker because he had been decorated with the Italian Croce di Guerra in Ethiopia. He had taken Whitaker on trips which the Nationalist propaganda bureau had vetoed. However, having got to know a number of the field commanders of the African

⁷⁵ ‘A Journalist’, *Foreign Journalists under Franco’s Terror* (London: United Editorial, 1937) pp.26-30. Cf. Herbert R. Southworth, *Guernica! Guernica!: A Study of Journalism, Propaganda and History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977) pp.52, 420, n.62.

columns, Whitaker had begun to evade the ministrations of Aguilera and the press staff. He began to visit the front to see things for himself. Aguilera felt that Whitaker was seeing Francoist methods that he was not meant to. In the early hours of one morning during the march on Madrid, Aguilera turned up at Whitaker's lodgings with a Gestapo agent and threatened to have him shot if he went near the front except on accompanied tours. 'Next time you're unescorted at the front, and under fire, we'll shoot you. We'll say that you were a casualty to enemy action. You understand!'⁷⁷ From a Francoist point of view, Aguilera was entirely correct in his instinct that Whitaker was dangerous. His recollections of what he saw in Spain are among the most blood-curdling, and convincing, accounts of the behaviour of the Army of Africa.

After Franco's armies were halted at Madrid, Aguilera both accompanied journalists and took up arms in the various battles around the capital in early 1937 that followed. During the Francoist effort to close the circle around Madrid, he fought in the battle of Jarama. He also played a dual role throughout the Nationalist campaign against the Basque country during the spring of 1937. He took part in fighting having attached himself to the Brigadas de Navarra and he also continued to watch over the press corps. During the attack on Bilbao, he entered the city before the bulk of Mola's forces accompanied by some of the more hot-blooded and reckless members of the press corps. Aguilera, his colleague Major Lambarri and a group of journalists including Harold Cardozo of the *Daily Mail*, were mobbed by an enthusiastic pro-Nationalist crowd. Cardozo and the other journalists were wearing the red berets of the Carlist *requeté* and felt embarrassed to have been *fêted* under false pretences. Major Lambarri merely laughed saying 'I was kissed by much prettier girls than you'. Cardozo felt that, in contrast, Aguilera was seriously displeased. 'His strict military mind and his personal political tendencies made him view this involuntary association of foreigners in what he looked upon as an occasion for intimate Spanish patriotic rejoicing with rather a jaundiced eye, and he was somewhat sarcastic and biting in his comments.'⁷⁸

⁷⁶ Delmer, *Trail Sinister*, pp.277-8.

⁷⁷ Whitaker, 'Prelude to World War', p.109.

⁷⁸ Informe GAM, leg.416, AGMS; Cardozo, *The March of a Nation*, pp.286-301. In civilian life, Lambarri was a designer for *Vogue*, Reynolds & Eleanor Packard, *Balcony Empire* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1942) p.54.

Like the entire Francoist press service, Aguilera was involved in the cover-up after the bombing of Guernica. This involved the intense vigilance of ‘untrustworthy’ journalists who tried to get near the ruins of the town and the expulsion of those who wrote unwelcome reports. It also extended to giving strong guidance to sympathetic journalists as to how their articles should be written.⁷⁹ In this regard, there took place an incident that was to cause him, and his superiors, some embarrassment. This was the arrest of Hubert Knickerbocker during the campaign against the Basque country in April 1937. Knickerbocker was a journalist who, through his articles in the Hearst press chain, had done much for the Francoist cause.⁸⁰ He was halted at the frontier when he attempted to cross from France into Spain. This sign of growing intolerance of foreign correspondents on the Francoist side was interpreted by the American Ambassador, Claude Bowers, as meaning that ‘there must be something in the present situation that General Franco does not care to have blazoned to the world.’⁸¹ Despite being told that he could not proceed into Spain, Knickerbocker sneaked over the frontier. He was caught and imprisoned in San Sebastián for thirty six hours. He was released only after a considerable fuss was made by Randolph Churchill. Knickerbocker was then expelled from Spain. Believing that his plight was the consequence of a denunciation by Captain Aguilera, Knickerbocker exacted revenge in a highly effective devastating fashion. He simply published, in the *Washington Times* on 10 May 1937, an account of Aguilera’s anti-Semitic, misogynistic, anti-democratic opinions and, in particular, his claim that “We are going to shoot 50,000 in Madrid. And no matter where Azaña and Largo Caballero (the Premier) and all that crowd try to escape, we’ll catch them and kill every last man, if it takes years of tracking them throughout the world.”

Knickerbocker’s article was quoted extensively in the U.S. Congress on 12 May 1937. It may be presumed to have been a significant propaganda blow against the Francoists, coming as it did shortly after the bombing of Guernica. Aguilera, rendered as a mythical Captain Sánchez, was quoted as saying ‘It is a race war, not merely a class war. You don’t understand because you don’t realize that there are two races in Spain – a slave race and a ruler race. Those reds, from President Azaña to the anarchists, are all slaves. It is our duty to put them back into their places – yes, put chains on them again, if you like.’ Furious about

⁷⁹ Herbert R. Southworth, *Guernica! Guernica!: A Study of Journalism, Propaganda and History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977) pp.64-7, 334-5, 337.

⁸⁰ *Foreign Journalists*, p.7.

⁸¹ Bowers to Hull, 12 April 1937, *Foreign Relations of the United States 1937* Vol.I (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1954) pp.279-80.

F.D.Roosevelt's election, he said 'All you Democrats are just handmaidens of bolshevism. Hitler is the only one who knows a "red" when he sees one.' His most commonly used expression was 'take 'em out and shoot 'em!' He believed that trade unions should be abolished and membership of them be punishable by death. His beliefs on the pernicious effects of education had also been expounded to Knickerbocker: 'We must destroy this spawn of "red" schools which the so-called republic installed to teach the slaves to revolt. It is sufficient for the masses to know just enough reading to understand orders. We must restore the authority of the Church. Slaves need it to teach them to behave.' He had repeated to Knickerbocker views about women roughly similar to those to which he had treated Whitaker: 'It is damnable that women should vote. Nobody should vote – least of all women.' Liberty was 'a delusion employed by the "reds" to fool the so-called democrats. In our state, people are going to have the liberty to keep their mouths shut.' The Jews, he believed, were 'an international pest'.⁸²

After the excitement of the Basque campaign, Aguilera was transferred from Mola's general staff to the Delegación del Estado para Prensa y Propaganda.⁸³ It made little difference to his readiness to be directly involved at the front. He took part in the subsequent assault on Santander, again accompanying the Navarrese Brigades. He actually entered the defeated city on 24 August 1937, accompanied by the correspondent of the *Times* two hours before any other Nationalist forces. He drove through thousands of Republican militiamen, still armed but utterly paralysed and dejected by the rapidity of their defeat.⁸⁴ Shortly after, Virginia Cowles found herself in the recently captured city. Captain Aguilera offered to drive her to León where she would be nearer Franco's headquarters as he continued with his attack on Asturias. He still had the pale yellow Mercedes on the back seat of which he kept two large rifles and 'a chauffeur who drove so badly he was usually encouraged to sleep'. Wearing cavalry boots and spurs, a cap from which a blue tassel swung, he drove as if riding a race-horse. Since the roads were clogged by refugees and Italian troops, he would drive along cursing at other traffic. He occasionally complained 'You never see any pretty girls. Any girl who hasn't got a face like a boot can get a ride in an Italian truck.' He gave little sign of being on his best behaviour for a foreign correspondent. If anything, the brutality of

⁸² Southworth, *Guernica! Guernica!*, pp.52, 419-20, nn.59, 60.

⁸³ Informe GAM, leg.416, AGMS.

⁸⁴ Informe GAM, leg.416, AGMS; Kemp, *Mine Were of Trouble*, pp.99-101; General Sagardía, *Del Alto Ebro a las Fuentes del Llobregat. Treinta y dos meses de guerra de la 62 División* (Barcelona: Editora Nacional, 1940) p.106.

his speech was inflamed by the presence of Miss Cowles, an attractive woman who looked a little like Lauren Bacall. On stopping to ask the way and asking someone who turned out to be German, he said 'Nice chaps, the Germans, but a bit too serious; they never seem to have any women around, but I suppose they didn't come for that. If they kill enough Reds, we can forgive them anything.'⁸⁵ 'Blast the Reds!' he said to Virginia Cowles, 'Why did they have to put ideas into people's heads? Everyone knows that people are fools and much better off told what to do than trying to run themselves. Hell is too good for the Reds. I'd like to impale every one and see them wriggling on poles like butterflies...' The Captain paused to see what impression his speech had made, but I gave no reply, which seemed to anger him. 'There's only one thing I hate worse than a Red,' he blazed. 'What's that?' 'A sob-sister!'⁸⁶

During the attack on Gijón, Aguilera spotted a long line of men with picks and shovels. 'Red prisoners, captured at Santander', he told his journalistic charges. I hear they built one of the mountain roads in eight days. Not much chance for sleep, eh? That's the way to treat them. If we didn't need roads I would like to borrow a rifle and pick off a couple'.⁸⁷ Virginia Cowles asked another officer if the ordinary soldiers in the Nationalist Army knew why they were fighting. Keen to oblige, the officer amiably picked a young soldier at random and asked him. The boy replied 'We are fighting the Reds'. She asked him what he meant by 'the Reds', and he said, 'The people who have been misled by Moscow.' Why did he think they had been misled? And he answered: 'They are very poor. In Spain it is easy to be misled'. This innocuous answer infuriated Aguilera who was listening. He rounded on the boy, 'So you think people aren't satisfied?' The terrified boy stammered 'I didn't say that, Señor' to which Aguilera replied brutally 'You said they were poor. It sounds to me as though you are filled with Red ideas yourself.'⁸⁸ By now, Captain Aguilera regarded Virginia Cowles as a Red herself as a result of a slight remark. When he was ranting about the sheer destructiveness of the 'Reds' because they had blown up a bridge, she had observed that perhaps they were simply trying to block the Nationalist advance. The suggestion that the 'Reds' were motivated by military logic rather than intrinsic evil provoked him to glare at her and snap 'You talk like a Red'. With a hostile report on her unreliability, he put events into

⁸⁵ Virginia Cowles, *Looking for Trouble* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1941) pp.86-7.

⁸⁶ Virginia Cowles, *Looking for Trouble* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1941) p.90.

⁸⁷ Cowles, *Looking for Trouble*, p.92.

⁸⁸ Cowles, *Looking for Trouble*, p.93.

train for her to be arrested. Fortunately, for her, a chain of chance encounters permitted to get to the French border.⁸⁹

Aguilera's English admirer, Peter Kemp, wrote after the war 'Loyal friend, fearless critic and stimulating companion that he was, I sometimes wonder if his qualities really fitted him for the job he was given of interpreting the Nationalist cause to important strangers. For example, he told a distinguished English visitor about shooting six of his farm labourers – *'Pour encourager les autres, you understand.'* Kemp's doubts derived from Aguilera's 'original ideas on the fundamental causes of the Civil War. The principal cause, if I remember rightly, was the introduction of modern drainage. Prior to this, the riff-raff had been killed off by various useful diseases; now they survived and, of course, were above themselves. Another entertaining theory was that the Nationalists should shoot all the boot-blacks.' 'My dear fellow', Aguilera explained to Kemp, 'it only stands to reason! A chap who squats down on his knees to clean your boots at a café or in the street is bound to be a Communist, so why not shoot him right away and be done with it? No need for a trial – his guilt is self-evident in his profession.'⁹⁰ After Peter Kemp's memoirs were published, Aguilera took out a writ against him because of the story about shooting the farm labourers. According to his publishers, Kemp withdrew the story – to little avail, since the book was already out of print. In any case, he had repeated the story to others, including the correspondent of the French Havas Agency, Jean d'Hospital.⁹¹ Clearly, it never occurred to him that his disquisitions were sufficiently remarkable to find their way into print.

Although Aguilera was uninhibited when talking with journalists, particularly if he thought they were right-wing sympathizers of the Francoist cause, he never forgot his job as a propagandist for that cause. When the Nationalist armies conquered Asturias, the repression carried out by the Moorish Regulares and the Legion was particularly fierce.⁹² It is hardly surprising that Aguilera was anxious to ensure that no photographs were taken of soldiers carrying umbrellas or pushing bicycles lest it give the impression that they were looting. Nevertheless, he was not above a little looting himself, and 'was heard murmuring that there

⁸⁹ Cowles, *Looking for Trouble*, pp.95-9.

⁹⁰ Kemp, *Mine Were of Trouble*, p.50.

⁹¹ Letter from Cassell & Co. to Herbert R. Southworth, 27 March 1968, and interview of Southworth with d'Hospital, 14 September 1968, Southworth, *Guernica! Guernica!*, p.418, nn.47, 48.

⁹² Juan Antonio Sacaluga, *La resistencia socialista en Asturias 1937-1962* (Madrid: Editorial Pablo Iglesias, 1986) pp.5-6.

was something very thrilling and tempting about it, and that after all it was not a bit like ordinary robbery'.⁹³

On one occasion, while driving Arnold Lunn, Aguilera was incensed by a pedestrian who was too slow in getting out of the way when he blew the horn of the speeding Mercedes. He simply accelerated towards the young man, who leapt for safety. 'A fellow did that to me the other day', he told Lunn, 'but luckily for him my brakes are good. While he was recovering from the shock of being missed by inches, I jumped out, seized him by the scruff of the neck and bundled him into the car. The village was near the top of the mountain pass, and I drove downhill for eight miles while he whimpered beside me. I then turned him out of the car, and left him to walk home. I bet he sweated before he got there. That chap was a typical Iberian. You know your *Don Quixote*, don't you? Well, Quixote is the conquering Franco-Norman type, tall, fair, blue eyes, and so on. Sancho Panza, on the other hand, is a sturdy, thick-set Iberian. There was nothing wrong with the Sancho Panzas until the Reds got hold of them, but of course they'll never produce leaders.'⁹⁴ On another occasion, he shot his chauffeur for running his car off the road. 'He was a red all the time', he explained.⁹⁵

Aguilera told Lunn one day 'It is the melancholy duty of our generation to act as the ministers of exemplary justice. We can only save Spain from a repetition of these horrors if we impress upon the minds of this generation a fact of supreme importance, the fact that there is a God in heaven and justice on earth.'⁹⁶ Aguilera was wonderfully complacent. On the Moors, he said, 'We are proud to fight side by side with them, and they are proud to fight with us. After the Moroccan War we sent soldiers to govern them, and had no trouble until the Spanish Republic started sending politicians. If that had lasted, we should have lost Morocco.'⁹⁷ His view of the Moors of the Regulares and the Legion was not shared by other observers. Edmund Taylor wrote 'they had carried with them out of Africa a spiritual atmosphere like the stench in the den of a beast of prey, stench of carrion and of the beast.'⁹⁸

⁹³ Cecil Gerahty, *The Road to Madrid* (London: Hutchinson, 1937) p.35.

⁹⁴ Lunn, *Spanish Rehearsal*, p.62.

⁹⁵ Whitaker, *We Cannot Escape History*, p.115.

⁹⁶ Lunn, *Spanish Rehearsal*, p.63.

⁹⁷ Lunn, *Spanish Rehearsal*, p.66.

⁹⁸ Edmond Taylor, 'Assignment in Hell' in Frank C.Hanighen, *Nothing but Danger* (London: Harrap, 1940) p.68.

John Whitaker regarded Captain Aguilera as merely the mouthpiece for many on the Nationalist side. Indeed, precisely for this reason, Luis Bolín kept a tight rein on the press officers. According to Sir Percival Phillips of the *Daily Telegraph*, the majority of them ‘are young grandes or diplomats, amiable weaklings for the most part, ruled by Bustamente [a pseudonym for Bolín] with a rod of iron. He telephones them at all hours of the day and night, scolding, ordering but never advising, and, as a result of this drilling, they never express an opinion, even on the weather, lest some correspondent should cable that such-and-such a view is held “in G.H.Q.” or “in well-informed circles” or “by spokesmen of the *Generalísimo*”... they also keep all officers away from us as carefully as if we had the plague’.⁹⁹ Despite Bolín’s efforts, it was not difficult to find many with views similar to those of Aguilera. Rosales’ theories were like those that Taylor, Knickerbocker, Whitaker and others had heard from Aguilera.

If the views of Aguilera could be dismissed as simply the exaggerations of a bluff soldier, perhaps more significance could be attributed to the writings of a man like Dr Enrique Suñer, who had been professor of pediatry at Madrid University (catedrático de Pediatría de la Universidad Central) before the war and was vice-president of the Education and Culture Committee of Franco’s military government, the Junta Técnica del Estado (vice-presidente de la Comisión de Educación y Cultura de la Junta Técnica del Estado). In 1937, he surveyed the blood shed during the war. He saw two kinds of blood. On the one hand, there was that ‘of conscious criminals, authors of the blood sacrifices that we suffer, of vile brutes, with worse instincts than those of wild beasts’ (de conscientes criminales, autores de las hecatombes que padecemos, de viles brutos, con instintos peores que las fieras). On the other, blood flowed ‘from noble Spanish breasts – soldiers and militiamen – generous youth, full of an abnegation and a heroism so immense that their wounds lift them to the status of the demigods of Greek myth’ (de hidalgos pechos españoles – militares y milicianos – jóvenes generosos, llenos de abnegación y de heroísmo tan inmensos, que sus heridas los elevan a la altura de los semidios de las leyendas helénicas). P.5 Then he asked ‘And all this horrific mortality, must it go without its just punishment? Our spirit rebels against a possible impunity of the pitiless individuals who caused our tragedy. It is just not possible that Providence and man leave without punishment so many murders, rapes, cruelties, pillages and destructions of artistic wealth and the means of production. It is necessary to swear before

⁹⁹ McCullagh, *In Franco’s Spain*, p.112.

our beloved dead that the deserved sanctions will be executed with the most holy of violence' (Y toda esta espantosa mortandad ¿ha de quedar sin el justo castigo? Nuestro espíritu se rebela contra una posible impunidad de los despiadados causantes de nuestra tragedia. No es posible que la Providencia y los hombres dejen sin castigar tantos asesinatos, violaciones, crueldades, saqueos y destrucciones de la riqueza artística y de los medios de trabajo. Es menester, con la más santa de las violencias, jurar ante nuestros muertos amados la ejecución de las sanciones merecidas.)¹⁰⁰

Referring to Republican politicians, Suñer wrote 'these horrific, truly devilish men. Sadists and madmen working with professional thieves, fraudsters, armed robbers and murderers have occupied the posts of ministers, undersecretaries, senior civil servants and all kinds of important jobs' (estos hombres horriblos, verdaderamente demoniacos. Sádicos y vesánicos unidos a profesionales del hurto, de la estafa, del atraco a mano armada y del homicidio con alevosía, han ocupado carteras de Ministros, Subsecretarías, Consejos, Direcciones Generales y toda clase de puestos importantes). 'Wild boars and cloven-hoofed beasts running through parliament, in such of sacrificial victims to bite with their fangs or smash with their hooves. ... Monsters in the style of Nero, leaders of sects and their agents, murdered the greatest hope of the Fatherland: Calvo Sotelo. ... Galarza, Casares Quiroga: these are his most symbolic executioners! Behind them stand the freemasons, the socialists, the communists, the Azañistas, the anarchists, all the Jewish leaders of the black Marxism that has Russia for its mother and the destruction of European civilization for its motto. Spain has been before and is once again the theatre of an epic combat, cyclopean, the action Titans against apocalyptic monsters. The programmes laid out in the "Protocols of the Elders of Sabios de Zion" have began to become reality' ("jabaliés" y "ungulados" corriendo por el que fué Congreso de los Diputados, en busca de víctimas propiciatorias de sus colmilladas y de sus golpes de solípedos... Monstruos neronianos, directores de sectas y ejecutores de las mismas, han asesinado a la máxima esperanza de la Patria: Calvo Sotelo.... Galarza, Casares Quiroga: ¡he aquí sus más simbólicos verdugos! Detrás de ellos quedan los masones, los socialistas, los comunistas, los azañistas, los anarquistas, todos los judíos dirigentes del negro marxismo que tiene por madre a Rusia y por lema la destrucción de la civilización europea. España ha sido y es teatro de un combate épico, ciclópeo, acción de titanes contra monstruos

¹⁰⁰ Enrique Suñer, *Los intelectuales y la tragedia española* 2ª edición (San Sebastián: Editorial Española, 1938) pp.5-6, 166-7, 171.

apocalípticos. Los programas expuestos en los “Protocolos de los Sabios de Sión” han empezado a cumplirse).¹⁰¹

The final objective of this war, wrote Suñer without conscious irony, was ‘to achieve a just, moral life, aimed at strengthening the race. For this it is necessary to flee all kind of intolerance and sectarianism, seeking inspiration only in equity and the benefit of all our citizens. ... For this ideal programme to come about, it is necessary to bring about the total extirpation of our enemies, of those front-line intellectuals who brought about the catastrophe’ (lograr una vida justa, moral y encaminada a la fortaleza de la raza. Para ello hay que huir de toda clase de intolerancias y de sectarismos, inspirándose solamente en la equidad y en el beneficio de todos los ciudadanos.... Para que este programa ideal pueda cumplirse, hace falta practicar una extirpación a fondo de nuestros enemigos, de esos intelectuales, en primera línea, productores de la catástrofe).¹⁰²

The desire to eliminate any intellectuals that could remotely have contributed to the liberal culture of the Republic led Suñer to send numerous denunciations to the rebel intelligence service, the Servicio de Información Militar. At the end of June 1937, he denounced the family of the distinguished medievalist and philologist Ramón Menéndez Pidal, President of the Spanish Academy (Academia de la Lengua). A conservative, Menéndez Pidal was in exile, terrified of being the victim of the left. Suñer also denounced Menéndez Pidal’s wife, the feminist and philologist María Goyri, who had been the first woman in Spain to earn a university degree (1896) and later a doctorate (1909). Suñer claimed that she had perverted her husband and children and was one of the most dangerous people in Spain ‘de las personas más peligrosas de España. Es sin duda una de las raíces más robustas de la revolución’. He denounced their son-in-law, the physicist Ramón Catalán, as a Communist and demanded that he be placed under police surveillance.¹⁰³

After the civil war, Gonzalo Aguilera went to London, possibly on some sort of espionage mission. He regularly wrote articles on scientific subjects, especially the atom, for his local Salamanca newspaper, *La Gaceta Regional*. He retired from the army as a Lieutenant Colonel and returned to his estates and his books. He summarised his findings on

¹⁰¹ Suñer, *Los intelectuales*, pp.166-7.

¹⁰² Suñer, *Los intelectuales*, p.171.

the atom into a book. He also wrote a set of ‘letters to a nephew’, a remarkably erudite mixture of oblique memoirs and philosophy written in the late 1940s and early 1950s. The range of reference was staggering, from the *Osservatore Romano* to the reports of the American Psychiatric Association, from Greek myth to Leibnitz¹⁰⁴ Their virulent anticlericalism confirmed the process of disenchantment with the Catholic Church that apparently began on the Eastern front during the First World War. Together with his savage account of the golden age of Spanish history so dear to Francoist rhetoric, it also accounts for the fact that they were not published.¹⁰⁵ The work was riddled with signs that he found the return to civilian life extremely difficult. It began bitterly with the statement that his life had taken place in isolated meditation and surrounded by mistrust. He attributed this to ‘la desgracia de usualmente haber sabido más que el corro en que circunstancialmente nos encontrábamos o por siempre haber manifestado el disgusto o menosprecio que nos producían las descabaladas opiniones de los osados y de los arbitristas’ (‘the misfortune of having usually known more than the chorus in which we found ourselves and of always having expressed the disgust or the contempt provoked in us by the half-formed opinions of the daring and crackpots’). He claimed to have been accused of being a rebel and unadaptable which he thought inevitable since he felt himself to be surrounded by ‘de hipocresía, mentira, envidias y chicanería’ (‘hypocrisy, lies, envy and trickery’). He was disgusted with the political context, feeling that the moral certainties of the war had been replaced by compromise and the emasculation of ‘principios firmes’ (‘firm principles’). In a reference to his retirement from the army in 1931 and his war service, he wrote: ‘Toda la vida hemos procurado servir a la Patria de balde y sin ulterior intención de prebendas y emolumentos. Varias veces por hacer frente a la corriente desorbitada y a la injusticia hemos afrontado graves perjuicios propios y con la tristeza de no haber conseguido gran cosa.’ (‘All my life, I have tried to serve the Patria freely and without any ulterior motives of prebends or emoluments. Several times, by dint of opposing the tide and injustice, I have faced serious personal disadvantage and the sadness of not having achieved much.’) In this regard, he was delighted that a friend had told him that he was ‘más loco que don Quijote’ (‘crazier than Don Quijote’) for criticising the Catholic Church¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³ Diego Catalán, *El archivo del romancero: historia documentada de un siglo de historia* (2 tomos) (Madrid: Fundación Ramón Menéndez Pidal, 2001) pp.256-9.

¹⁰⁴ They are undated but there are internal references to the international press which make it clear that he was writing until, at least 1953, *Cartas*, pp.110, 123, note to p.126.

¹⁰⁵ He demolishes the Francoist glorification of Spanish history in *Cartas*, pp.151-76. The work is informed by anticlericalism throughout but see especially nota del asterisco de la página 218.

¹⁰⁶ *Cartas*, pp.1-2, 91.

The ideas with which he had regaled the members of the press corps in his charge during the civil war were now refined. He was profligate with extremely erudite references to Aristotle, Cicero, the fathers of the Church, a host of medieval philosophers, Calvin, Galileo, Spinoza and Descartes. These were juxtaposed to bizarre statements such as the following: ‘lo que aquí llamamos higiene política es lo que los Ingleses dicen “Wisdom”’ (‘by political hygiene, I mean here what the English call wisdom’) and ‘la palabra revolución es de significado esencialmente Satánico, el primer revolucionario en el mito cristiano fue Luzbel’ (‘the word of revolution is of essentially Satanic significance since the first revolutionary was Lucifer’).¹⁰⁷ He was particularly proud of his readings in English literature, philosophy and history, making ample reference to Shakespeare, Marlowe, Hume, Adam Smith, Gibbon, Buckle, Darwin, J.S.Mill, Bentham and George Bernard Shaw. He made comparisons between the Spanish Inquisition and Soviet Communism, linking the Holy Office and the GPU. This did not imply any softening of his views on communism – it remained ‘la negra nube de Oriente’ (‘the black cloud from the east’) and ‘inmenso tumor maligno’ (‘immense malignant tumour’). The problem was rather the communist elements of early christianity.¹⁰⁸

In politics, in the midst of a discussion on the relative merits of different races, he wrote of the ‘patente superioridad’ (‘patent superiority’) of the white man. In a variant on the racist ideas purveyed to Whitaker and his colleagues, he divided humanity into the ‘Nordic-European races’ and ‘the Afro-Asiatic masses’, indicating that ‘el estado centralista, como su nombre indica, es el más adecuado para regir los destinos de las masas inferiores’ (‘the centralist state, as its name suggests, is the most appropriate to rule over the destinies of inferior masses’). ‘En África, con el sistema nervioso particular de la raza negra, en que las excitaciones adquieren formas más o menos epilépticas, solamente el ritmo continuado acompañado de un pandero o tambor produce unas formas místicas extasiales muy curiosas y como son gentes simplistas su misticismo degenera en lubricidad sexual.’ (‘In Africa, with the nervous system peculiar to the black race, in which excitement acquires more or less epileptic forms, it requires only a continual rhythm accompanied by a tambourine or a drum to produce mystical forms of ecstasy, and since they are simplistic people, their mysticism degenerates into sexual lubricity.’)¹⁰⁹ He was particularly interested in proving the ‘las

¹⁰⁷ *Cartas*, p.6.

¹⁰⁸ *Cartas*, pp.32, 71, 97.

¹⁰⁹ *Cartas*, pp.66-8, 114.

anormalidades sexuales en las gentes inclinadas al sacerdocio' ('sexual abnormalities of people inclined to the priesthood') and that 'al cristianismo siempre se han sentido atraídos las mujeres y los eunucos' ('Christianity has always attracted women and eunuchs'). Misogyny abounded: he claimed that a woman who reached thirty still a virgin becomes a 'soltera agria, que para la tranquilidad de todos está mucho mejor detrás de unas rejas de clausura' ('bitter spinster who, for the peace of everyone else, is better behind the bars of a cloister'). Echoing his remarks to Whitaker about a man's right to kill his wife, he wrote 'el adulterio toma características de crimen cuyo inmediato castigo con muerte de los culpables por el esposo ultrajado ha sido aceptado como ley natural en todas las sociedades hasta que aparecen los síntomas decadentes de las civilizaciones.' ('adultery is a crime whose immediate punishment by the death of the guilty pair at the hands of the outraged husband has always been accepted as the natural law in all societies until the appearance of the symptoms of the decadence of the civilization'.) He also produced a defence of the chastity belt as a necessary weapon against female promiscuity, on which he blamed the degeneration of the race in terms of the introduction of cancer, sexual perversion, mental instability and abnormal skin pigmentation.¹¹⁰ The central theme was, however, anti-clericalism: 'ahí está nuestra España y los países cristianos en que las órdenes han ejercido casi un monopolio de la educación y cuanto más en sus manos, mayor ha sido la decadencia material y ética y más propensa la corrupción' ('in Spain and other Christian countries where the religious orders have exercised a near monopoly of education, the more control they have had of education, the greater has been the material and ethical decadence and the greater the tendency to corruption.')¹¹¹

Gonzalo became a well-known 'character' in Salamanca. He was an assiduous member of a tertulia of doctors which used to meet at the Café Novelty in the Plaza Mayor in Salamanca. He would make the daily journey to the provincial capital on a motorcycle wearing a crash helmet and his uniform trousers. He was considered to be a local eccentric. All the bookshops of Salamanca used to keep interesting new books for him on the reasonable assumption that he would buy them. To the booksellers and the doctors alike, he was known for his bottomless erudition. Apart from the doctors, he had hardly any friends. He had acquaintances among other landowners but none ever achieved any kind of closeness with him. His conversation was considered fascinating although his irritability did not encourage friendship or intimacy of any kind. He was spoke often of writing a book about 'a strange

¹¹⁰ *Cartas*, pp.82-3, 88-9, 92-5.

¹¹¹ *Cartas*, pp.91

personage in Africa'.¹¹² He could not reconcile himself to civilian life and, as he got older, became increasingly difficult, abrasive and bad-tempered. He neglected his estates and his house, both of which were badly run down.

He developed persecution mania. His wife became so afraid of his violent rages that, in late 1963, for her own protection, she asked her two sons to come and live at home at the Dehesa del Carrascal de Sanchiricones in Matilla de los Caños in the province of Salamanca. The elder, aged forty-seven, Gonzalo Aguilera Alvarez, was a retired cavalry captain. He had fought in the Civil War and been badly wounded. While in hospital, he had fallen in love with Manuela Lodeiro, a nurse at the military hospital in Lugo. In an echo of his own father's reaction to his relationship with the socially inferior Magdalena Alvarez, the Conde had reacted furiously and forbidden them to marry. They did so anyway and settled in Lugo, where they had a daughter, Marianela. The younger son, Agustín Aguilera Alvarez, a thirty-nine year-old farmer, also had a difficult relationship with his father. Accordingly, he had settled first in Zamora where had married Angelines Núñez. More recently, they had moved to Jerez de la Frontera with their two daughters and young son. Knowing only too well the irascibility of their father, and despite the inconvenience for their own families, the two sons agreed to their mother's request and spent as much time as possible in Sanchiricones watching over their father.

After a year, things had not improved. The family reluctantly discussed having Gonzalo declared mentally incapacitated and placing him in psychiatric care. For fear of scandal and with a natural horror of seeing the head of the household declared insane, they hesitated. Finally, they put the matter in the hands of a lawyer in Salamanca. Given that Gonzalo now suffered bronchial problems and rarely attended the *tertulia* in the café in the Plaza Mayor, it was possible to fabricate the pretext of a visit of two medical friends in order to have him diagnosed. A psychiatrist, Dr Prieto Aguirre, accompanied by another doctor, Emilio Firmat, came to the conclusion that Gonzalo was paranoiac. He became so difficult that his sons rearranged the house to provide him with a separate apartment with his own television and his books. They hid all the many guns and knives, which, as an assiduous hunter, he possessed. He believed himself to have been kidnapped and imprisoned by his family. At the beginning of August 1964, he had even written a letter to this effect to the

¹¹² *El Caso*, 5 September 1964.

judicial authorities in Salamanca. He had wild fits of rage, shouting threats and insults from his solitary apartment. He would occasionally find weapons and, in mid-August, his sons took a flick-knife away from him. The legal process to have him committed, however, was lengthy and tortuous.

Before anything could be done, Gonzalo completely lost his mind. After lunch, at 4 o'clock on the sultry afternoon of Friday 28 August 1964, his younger son Agustín went into the Count's room to look for some papers. When his father complained of sore feet, Agustín knelt and started to massage his feet. Bizarrely echoing his beliefs on how to deal with bootblacks, Don Gonzalo began to abuse his son, pulled out a rusty Colt revolver that he had hidden and shot Agustín without warning. Badly wounded in the chest, Agustín turned and staggered out of the room. His brother Gonzalo, alerted by the sound of the shots, ran into the room and the Conde shot him full in the chest and in the arm. Stepping over his elder son's corpse, he then set off in search of Agustín in order to finish him off. He found him lying dead at the door of the kitchen. He then calmly reloaded his revolver. His widow, Magdalena Alvarez, aged seventy-two, came out of her room. When she saw him glaring at her while reloading his pistol over the body of his son, she locked herself in another room as her husband came looking for her. Since the farm labourers stood back, frightened by the sight of Gonzalo waving his revolver threateningly, she was obliged to escape through a window. The Civil Guard was called by the estate workers and they ordered Gonzalo to throw down his gun and come out with his hands in the air, which, his fury spent, he did.

After surrendering, still in his pyjamas, he sat outside the house for more than three hours quietly awaiting the arrival of the investigating judge from Salamanca. His wife, beside herself with grief and rage, screamed at him '¡Asesino, criminal!' ('Assassin! Murderer!') Until calmed down by the farm workers, she shouted to the Civil Guards, '¡Matarlo que es un salvaje' ('Kill him, he's a savage'). He was arrested and taken to the Provincial psychiatric sanatorium of Salamanca where he was detained. He and his Civil Guard escort were taken to Salamanca in the car in which the reporters of the local newspaper, *La Gaceta Regional*, had arrived at the house. Those journalists who interviewed him recounted that, en route, he chatted amiably to the driver. He spoke about various cars that he had had at different times, about the traffic system established in France and about the poor state of the roads – 'hablo para no acordarme de lo sucedido' ('I'm talking to put what had happened out of my mind'), he said. When he was told that he was being taken to a psychiatric clinic, he commented that

psychiatrists are not usually in their right minds (*en sus cabales*) and said ‘ a los que fueron a verme les llamé médicos de pueblo y se enfadaron conmigo’ (‘I called the ones that visited me village quacks and they got angry with me’).¹¹³ During his time in the psychiatric hospital, he apparently entertained himself by loudly insulting the nuns who staffed it.¹¹⁴ His daughter-in-law, Concepción Lodeiro López, and granddaughter, Marianela de Aguilera Lodeiro, escaped the carnage because they had gone to Lugo to make the arrangements for the girl’s wedding. The wife and three children of Agustín were in southern Spain. Gonzalo never stood trial and died in the hospital nearly eight months later on 15 May 1965.¹¹⁵

It would be wrong to believe that Aguilera’s earlier rantings were simply the fruit of the extraordinary psychological disturbance which finally emerged in the tragic denouement of this family. There is little doubt that he was utterly typical of others such as Bolín and Rosales who had been chosen by Mola, and accepted by Franco, as appropriate spokesmen for their cause. One officer had told Webb Miller that “‘we must kill everyone who has that ‘red’ idea.” Another amiable, attractive, intelligent young insurgent officer told me he had himself executed seventy-one men.’¹¹⁶ There is even less doubt that Aguilera’s views were close to those of Mola, Franco, Queipo de Llano and other senior Nationalists. Rather than simply concluding that Aguilera was mad, it would be more fruitful to consider the extent to which his – and their – psychological disturbance derives from the internalisation of such ideas.

¹¹³ Documentación sobre Gonzalo de Aguilera y Munro, remitida a su viuda, Legajo 416, Archivo General Militar de Segovia; *El Adelanto* (Salamanca), 29, 30 August, 1 September 1964; *El Caso*, 5 September 1964; *La Gaceta Regional*, 30 August, 1 September 1964.

¹¹⁴ Testimony to the author, 30 July 1999, of the Cronista de la Ciudad de Salamanca, Dr Salvador Llopis Llopis, biographer of Inés Luna Terrero.

¹¹⁵ Interview of Mariano Sanz González with the Director of the Hospital, Dr Desiderio López, 27 October 1999.

¹¹⁶ Miller, *I Found No Peace*, p.344.