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# **Guns, Culture and Moors**





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## **Guns, Culture and Moors**

**Racial stereotypes and the cultural impact of the Moroccan participation in  
the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939)**

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## **Glossary**

*Africanista* A group of officers and civilians who propagated, supported and participated in creating a Spanish empire in Africa, especially northern Morocco.

*Alférez Provisional* Provisional Second Lieutenant. A class of officer recruited in Nationalist Spain among well-educated young men who held temporary commissions.

*Askari* Arabic for soldier.

*Bandera* A battalion-sized unit. It refers to the Spanish Foreign Legion but also to the *Falange* battalions as well as the Carlist *Requetés*.

*Harka* Irregular units, mobilised upon military need.

*Intervención* The military service in charge of control of native affairs.

*Interventor* Military control officer for native affairs.

*Kaíd* Literally leader. It refers to a tribal chief or a native officer with the rank of lieutenant.

*Mehal-la* Moroccan troops that officially fall under the authority of the Moroccan government and therefore (formally) not part of the Spanish Army, though mostly led by Spanish officers.

*Mejasnía* Moroccan military police.

*Makhzen* The Moroccan government.

*Regulares*: Short for Tropas Regulares Indígenas (native regular troops). A corps of Moroccan troops, officially part of the Spanish Army, that are led by, mostly, Spanish officers.

*Tabor* A battalion-sized unit in both the *Regulares* corps and in the *Mehal-las*.

*Tercio* Refers to the Spanish Foreign Legion.

*Tiradores* Riflemen. Usually refers to regular troops recruited in the region of Ifni and the Sahara.

## Introduction

On an evening of September 1942 Adolf Hitler remarked, perhaps frustrated that Spain's leader General Francisco Franco would not join the German war effort, that Franco 'ought to erect a monument to the glory of the Junker 52. It is this aircraft that the Spanish revolution has to thank for its victory'.<sup>1</sup> That 'revolution' led to the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939). Hitler was referring to the airlift operation in the summer of 1936, the first in military history, that carried colonial troops from Spanish Morocco (see Appendix 1) to mainland Spain to support the military coup (the revolution Hitler refers to) that right wing segments of the Spanish Army committed against the government of the Spanish Republic. Hitler's remark that a monument should be erected to the Junker 52 aircraft, illustrates the vital importance of its cargo: the troops of the Army of Africa, that consisted (in its majority) of Moroccans. The Junkers carried the Moroccans to air bases in southern Spain, mainly Seville. From there the Moroccans spread throughout Andalusia, Extremadura and further on to other parts of Spain, saving the military coup from failure, battling Republicans, defeating them, and spreading terror wherever they went. The Moroccans, or Moors as they were usually known then, became synonymous with terrifying retribution and violent death. The Junkers 52 that brought them played indeed a prominent role in the Spanish 'revolution', but only because of their Moroccan passengers that went to encounter a new world in Spain.

The Spanish Civil War had its origins in the Spanish Protectorate of Morocco, which in turn originated from Spain's loss of its overseas possessions in Cuba and the Philippines in 1898 after a war with the United States of America. A few years after the Spanish-American War, the country was presented with an opportunity to regain membership into the colonial club by dividing Morocco with France. The Algeciras conference in 1906 offered Spain a part of northern Morocco that it was to administer as a protectorate, which was formally established in 1912. The Moroccan venture offered opportunities for the military to regain some of its glory. But this military adventure soon proved difficult. Spain's penetration into its assigned parts of Morocco, even before the official establishment of the protectorate, led to immediate military setbacks. Compulsory military service that required sending young Spanish men to Morocco often resulted in difficulties and was partly responsible for anti-government riots like the famous 'tragic week' in Barcelona in 1909. The necessity to decrease Spanish casualties and thereby the burden on Spanish manpower and internal political protest, were for a great part the reason behind efforts to organise native units, that would bear a great burden of the responsibilities of securing the Protectorate. In that, the Spaniards followed the example of the French army in Algeria.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Adolf Hitler, *Hitler's Table Talk, 1941-1944. His Private Conversations* (New York 2000) 687.

<sup>2</sup> María Rosa de Madariaga, 'Moroccan Soldiers in the Spanish Civil War', in: Eric Storm and Ali Al Tuma, eds., *Colonial Soldiers in Europe, 1914-1945. "Aliens in Uniform" in Wartime Societies* (New York 2016) 161-181, here 161.

The first military units composed of natives, organised and trained along European military lines, were formed between 1911 and 1914, and were called the *Regulares*. Short for *Fuerzas Regulares Indígenas* (native regular forces), they formed the bulk of the Moorish units that served Spain. Along with the *Regulares* the Spanish depended on the *Mehal-las*, units which officially belonged to the Moroccan government and which long pre-existed the Spanish presence. They were staffed with Spanish officers. With initial difficulties, the Moorish units, especially the *Regulares*, proved important during the troublesome periods of armed resistance that Spain faced in Morocco. In 1921, a rebellion led by the tribal leader, Mohammed ben Abdul Krim al Khattabi, in the Rif mountains broke out and led to a brutal war that lasted until 1927, which Spain finally won with tremendous assistance from the French in Morocco.<sup>3</sup> The war was reputed for its extreme methods in targeting civilians, the use of chemical weapons by the Spanish, and perpetration of atrocities towards prisoners of war on both sides. One of Spain's darkest episodes was the defeat of Annual in 1921, one of the most severe military disasters in modern colonial history, in which at least 8000 Spanish soldiers were killed, and which exposed the weaknesses and inefficiencies of the Spanish armed forces. The disaster and its political ramifications (the attempt by opposition political parties to pinpoint responsibility on the King) contributed in large part to the military coup and dictatorship of General Miguel Primo de Rivera in September 1923.

But the same Moroccan campaigns generated a new class of officers and troops that acquired a higher level of military efficiency and a more serious sense of military profession unmatched by other sectors of the Spanish armed forces. These officers led the *Regulares* and the Spanish Foreign Legion, a corps that was founded by General José Millán Astray in 1921, modelled on the French Foreign Legion. Unlike its French namesake, it was comprised of more Spanish recruits than foreigners. These officers were known as *Africanistas*, veterans of the Moroccan campaigns, whose struggles in Morocco led them to form a separate collective identity and *esprit de corps*. In addition, they developed an extreme politically conservative worldview, which saw in liberal politics the reason for the troubles of Spain in Morocco, and a militaristic colonial-based view on how to tackle Spanish politics. The *Regulares*, the *Mehal-las*, and the Spanish Legion formed what was to be known as the Army of Africa.

The Second Spanish Republic, which came into existence after the fall of dictator Primo de Rivera in 1930 and the abdication of King Alfonso XIII in 1931, experienced turbulent years of strife among conservative, liberal, republican, anarchist, and socialist forces that centred around issues of social justice, redistribution of wealth, especially in rural areas in western and southern Spain where 2% of land owners held 40% of the land. Curtailing the influence of the Catholic

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<sup>3</sup> For the Rif war see, David S. Woolman, *Rebels in the Rif. Abd El Krim and the Rif Rebellion* (Stanford 1968), Germain Ayache, *La Guerre du Rif* (Paris 1996), Sebastian Balfour, *Deadly Embrace. Morocco and the Road to the Spanish Civil War* (Oxford 2002), María Rosa de Madariaga, *En el Barranco del Lobo. Las guerras de Marruecos* (Madrid 2005).

Church in public life, including education was a contentious issue. Part of the Church's property was seized by the Republic in its initial years. Also of great importance was the influence of the army in the affairs of the state and the size of its officer corps. To limit the power of the army and combat the inflation in the number of officers, promotions were slowed or even cancelled. Regional autonomies which the leftist government of the Republic was ready to grant, especially in Catalonia and the Basque Country, was a sensitive issue for conservative Spaniards who considered autonomy a route to separatism. These issues were contested both politically and by means of armed violence, whether through local insurrections or assassinations.<sup>4</sup> Following the election of a conservative government, workers' uprisings in Catalonia, and more violently in Asturias, broke out in October 1934. These were ferociously repressed by the Army of Africa under the leadership of General Francisco Franco y Bahamonde, one of the *Africanistas* who spent most of his military career in Morocco. In the wake of the leftist Popular Front's victory in the February 1936 elections, which exacerbated the political polarisation, the *Africanistas* allied themselves with other conservative segments of the military and a collection of monarchists, Catholic conservatives, and fascists, with little to unite them except their fear of sweeping political changes and social revolution that might affect the established social and economic structures. On 17 July, the Army of Africa ignited the rebellion that led to an almost three-year-long war in Spain.<sup>5</sup> The Moroccan troops would play an essential part in the final victory of the insurgents.

The history of the Moroccan participation in the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) is the history of an encounter between two culturally and ethnically different people, and the attempts by both sides to take control of this meeting between two cultures. The question this study seeks to answer is formed by this encounter. To what extent was the Spanish-Moroccan encounter influenced by both the perception of the *Otherness* of the Moroccan soldiers' presence in Spain (i.e. their different racial and cultural background as African Muslims in a European 'Catholic' country) and by the agency of the Moroccan soldiers? In answering this question this study will show how far war can bend, break, or reshape pre-existing limits, prejudices, and taboos that separated Spanish society from the colonial one, and how war shaped Spanish policies towards the Moroccans. But it will also show to what extent war could confirm such limits, prejudices, and taboos. The study will also show to what extent colonials could participate in negotiating the limits and taboos rather than being only on the receiving end of them. The examination of this encounter can shed new light on colonial relations, and on how unique or typical the Spanish colonial case is

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<sup>4</sup> For a general introduction to the Spanish Civil War and its causes see: Paul Preston, *The Coming of the Spanish Civil War* (London 1978), Stanley G. Payne, *Spain's First Democracy. The Second Republic, 1931-1936* (Madison 1993), Ronald Fraser, *Blood of Spain. An Oral History of the Spanish Civil War* (New York 1979), Hugh Thomas, *The Spanish Civil War* (New York 2001), and Anthony Beevor, *The Battle for Spain. The Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939* (London 2006).

<sup>5</sup> For background information on the Spanish armed forces in modern times and the Moroccan military endeavour, see: Stanley G Payne, *Politics and the Military in Modern Spain* (Oxford 1967), and the above mentioned Sebastian Balfour, *Deadly Embrace. Morocco and the Road to the Spanish Civil War*.

in comparison to other European cases. This study sets itself apart from others conducted on the Moroccan troops of the Civil War, in that it lends great focus on the effects of this encounter on the level of the daily life of the Moroccan soldiers in Spain. It attributes a great role, in this encounter, to the factor of the agency of the Moroccan soldiers. This study can also argue that it is the first one to give - through the use of recent interviews and contemporary interrogations - a central role to the perspective of the Moroccan soldiers, whose voice has so far been largely relegated to the background or totally ignored.

### **Colonial soldiers in an international context**

The Spaniards were not the first to dispatch colonial soldiers to Europe to fight a European war. Before them, the British and the French did so during the First World War. After them, the British and the French would again bring colonial soldiers to Europe to fight the Second World War. But while the British and the French brought Indians, West Africans, North Africans, and others to fight Germans, Austrians and Italians, the Spanish Nationalists in 1936 transported Moroccans to Spain to fight other Spaniards and change the political system of their own country. The two world wars were never perceived, by their Western belligerents, as religious wars, while the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) was presented by one of the warring camps (that of General Franco) as a Christian holy war that was reminiscent of the medieval struggle to oust Muslims from Spain. This time however, the Muslims were brought to Spain to win this new crusade. These 'Muslim crusaders' are the subject of this dissertation. Their story and that of the Spanish Civil War starts in Morocco.

This is by no means a comparative study, but it includes references to the experiences of other colonial troops serving in Europe are present in parts of this story. These references serve primarily to shed light on either the uniqueness (or lack thereof) regarding different aspects of the Spanish case study. The Moroccan experience in Spain was preceded by colonials fighting for the British and French armies in the First World War, and succeeded by colonials fighting once again for the British and the French in the Second World War, although the Spanish experience was not necessarily influenced by the First World War nor itself necessarily influenced the Second World War. The Spanish case is a refreshing addition to the repertoire of findings and insights gained from studying the French and British armies, and it will help future comparative studies seeking to investigate the existence or not of European-wide patterns in dealing with the issues arising from the employment of colonial armies, both in the colonies and in Europe.

For a long time there was a neglect, in the public sphere, of the efforts and sacrifices of colonial soldiers in the two world wars. In the case of Morocco for example, its independence (and that of other French colonies) possibly contributed to the decline in recognising the role of the French African troops in the war, until that role was recently rediscovered. Within the French context, the role of Moroccan, and indeed other Maghrebi soldiers was important. The 2006 French

language movie, *Indigènes*,<sup>6</sup> which tells the vicissitudes of Maghrebi soldiers in fighting for France in Europe and their betrayal by the French, left a great impact upon both the French public and politics, and helped pave the way for an increase in compensation for colonial veterans of the French armies.

But the interest in the academic circles predates the aforementioned move. Since the 1980s and 1990s a number of significant historical studies have emerged on the British and French colonial soldiers with a focus on the perspective of the colonial soldiers and treatment of 'racial' and cultural aspects. The publications of Marc Michel and Gilbert Meynier were one of the earliest to treat the role of West African and Algerian soldiers in the French Army, respectively, during the First World War. Echenberg's *Colonial Conscripts* is largely based on archival materials but also utilises oral history through presenting a number of case studies of West African soldiers or better known as Senegalese *Tirailleurs*.<sup>7</sup> Echenberg points to the importance of the slave origins of the soldiers, as no small number of them became free by enlisting. He examines the significant role the Senegalese *Tirailleurs* played during the Second World War and in the post-war nationalist movements. He concluded too that the German captivity experience of some of the soldiers led to the African veterans acquiring a heightened consciousness of themselves as Africans and a demand that equal sacrifices should entail equal rights.<sup>8</sup>

One of the most impressive efforts in researching the role of West African soldiers in the Second World War was that by Nancy Lawler, whose work *Soldiers of Misfortune*, figure more than a hundred interviews with veterans from the Ivory Coast,<sup>9</sup> focusing not only on their hardships in battle, forced recruitment and experiences of captivity, but also their experience of France and their relationship with the civilian population there. Joe Lunn has also collected a large number of interviews of veterans of the First World War and used them in his study *Memoirs of the Maelstrom*. He argues that the racial conceptions the French had of certain types of African soldiers contributed to the high casualties they suffered on the Western Front, while also outlining the change that the war brought in the attitude of the soldiers towards their society and towards the French.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Directed by Rachid Boucharib, 2006. Produced jointly in France, Belgium, Algeria and Morocco.

<sup>7</sup> Myron Echenberg, *Colonial Conscripts: The Tirailleurs Sénégalais in French West Africa, 1857-1960* (Portsmouth 1991).

<sup>8</sup> Marc Michel, *L'Appel à l'Afrique: Contributions et réactions à l'effort de guerre en AOF, 1914-1919* (Paris 1982); Gilbert Meynier, *L'Algérie révélée: La guerre de 1914-1918 et le premier quart du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Geneva 1981).

<sup>9</sup> Nancy Ellen Lawler, *Soldiers of Misfortune. Ivoirien Tirailleurs of World War II* (Athens, OH 1992)

<sup>10</sup> Joe Lunn, *Memoirs of the Maelstrom: A Senegalese Oral History of the First World War* (Portsmouth 1999); Gregory Mann, *Native Sons: West African Veterans and France in the Twentieth Century* (Durham and London 2006). Other works that cover the period of the First World War include, for example, that of Chantal Valensky on the role of French colonials from Madagascar and of Reeves and Derooon those from Vietnam. Chantal Valensky, *Le soldat occulté: Les Malgaches de l'armée française, 1884-1920* (Paris 1995); Maurice Reeves and Eric Deroo, *Les LínhTâp: Histoire des militaires indochinois au service de la France (1859-1960)* (Paris 1999).

However, the study that this work is partly inspired by and modelled on is that of Richard Fogarty, *Race and War in France* (2008). His study investigates French conceptions of race and national identity as reflected in the attitudes and policies the French army and civil administration toward colonial soldiers. He examines the tensions and contradictions between the European racial prejudices the French had and the republican values of universalism and egalitarianism which often resulted in paradoxical policies, for example in the field of mixed romantic relationships or post-war residence in France. He studies the racial impact of French views and policies on the life of the colonial soldiers from a multi-faceted perception that includes tactics, culture, religion, sexual mores and relations and notions of citizenry and French identity.<sup>11</sup>

Since the 1980s David Killingray started to publish studies on the role of African soldiers in the British Army and he is considered one of the leading experts on African soldiers in the British army. His most recent and rich effort tells the story of the half a million African soldiers' experience of the Second World War in the Horn of Africa, Italy, the Middle East and Burma, the greatest mass movement of Africans since the slave trade based on testimonies of the participants.<sup>12</sup> He demonstrates how the 'martial races' theory influenced where recruitment should be most intense. David Omissi is one of the pioneers in presenting the voice of the Indian soldiers who fought in the European battlefields of the First World War alongside soldiers whose language and culture were alien to them. Omissi tells, through the study of an immense body of letters that the Indian soldiers sent home, these men's often unsettling encounters with Europe and European culture.<sup>13</sup>

### **The Spanish historiography on the Moroccans of the Civil War**

Over the decades the Spanish Civil War has generated thousands of historical studies, including many that centred on popular themes, like foreign involvement, the International Brigades,<sup>14</sup> but also on the German Condor Legion and the Italian troops.<sup>15</sup> Yet somehow, Moroccan volunteers escaped being the subject of any dedicated historical studies. They figured in war memoirs, usually in passing, and also in general histories of the Civil War, more often than not as an impersonal uniform collective of blindly obedient and savage warriors, not because there was sincere interest in the Moroccans, but to illustrate the depravity of a regime that would bring these troops to a European conflict. Writing a history on the Spanish Civil War would be difficult without mentioning the role of the Moroccan troops, especially in its crucial first months. However, one

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<sup>11</sup> Richard S. Fogarty, *Race and War in France. Colonial Subjects in the French army, 1914-1918* (Baltimore 2008).

<sup>12</sup> David Killingray, *Fighting for Britain: African Soldiers in the Second World War* (London 2010).

<sup>13</sup> David Omissi, *Indian voices of the Great War: Soldiers' letters, 1914-1918* (Basingstok 1999).

<sup>14</sup> For a broad historiographical overview of the writings on the International Brigades see: Manuel Requena Gallego, 'Las Brigadas Internacionales: Una Aproximación Historiográfica', *Ayer*, 56 (4) (2004) 11-36.

<sup>15</sup> See: John F. Coverdale, *Italian Intervention in the Spanish Civil War* (Princeton 1975), and Brian R. Sullivan, 'Fascist Italy's military involvement in the Spanish Civil War', *The Journal of Military History* 59 (1995) 697-727.

could easily read a general history or watch a documentary on the Tunisian or Italian Campaign of the Second World War, or about the liberation of France, and the occupation of Germany without North African (mainly Moroccan and Algerian) troops figuring at all among the players. This is perhaps due to the fact that, though North Africans played important roles in a number of battles, overall it was American and European troops that took the brunt of the fighting in southern and western Europe. The North Africans along with West Africans formed the bulk of the Free French Forces; however, the magnitude of the Free French contribution to the war, especially in numbers, lagged behind the American or British contribution, and was therefore less prominent, at least in English language historiography.<sup>16</sup>

As already mentioned, reading a general history of the Spanish Civil War, or watching a documentary about it without the role of the ‘Moors’ coming into light would be inconceivable. The initial military coup; the first aerial bridge in military history; the failure of inexperienced regular army units to push through towards Madrid, necessitating the intervention of professional Moroccans; the stories of looting and raping; the personal guard of Franco while overseeing the victory parade in Madrid, all have ‘Moor’ written all over them. Even the ‘no pasarán’ (they shall not pass) war song of the Republicans that promised the Spanish Nationalists with defeat starts its first lines, not with the Italians, Germans or the Foreign legion, but with the Moroccans:

*Los moros que trajo Franco, en Madrid quieren entrar*  
*Mientras queden milicianos, los moros no pasarán*  
[The Moors that Franco brought, want to enter Madrid  
While there remain militiamen, the Moors shall not pass]

That makes even more remarkable the absence of studies dedicated to the Moroccan contingents that fought in Spain until relatively recently. Not even in Morocco are there any historical studies on the subject, whether officially or otherwise. Abdul Haqq Al Miryani’s *Al Jaish al Magrhibi abra al Tarikh* (The Moroccan Army Throughout History), which is a history of Moroccan forces from medieval times to the second half of the twentieth century is a case in point.<sup>17</sup> Published for the first time in 1968 and going through its fifth edition in 1997, it ignores the role of the Moroccan troops in the Spanish Civil War almost completely. While this history devotes 22 pages to the participation of Moroccan troops in the Second World War, it dedicates less than a page to defining the *Regulares*, the *Mehal-las*, and the *Mejasnia* (Moroccan military police) in the Spanish zone, and

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<sup>16</sup> For recent overviews of the role of French colonial troops in the Second World War see chapters 2, 3 and 4 by Raffael Scheck, Nancy E. Lawler and Moshe Gershovich respectively in: Eric Storm and Ali Al Tuma, eds., *Colonial Soldiers in Europe, 1914-1945. “Aliens in Uniform” in Wartime Societies* (New York 2016).

<sup>17</sup> Abdul Haqq Al Miryani, *Al Jaish al Magrhibi abra al tarikh* (Rabat 1997).



only one sentence to the Spanish Civil War.<sup>18</sup> It is an odd omission especially given the fact that the foreword for the study was written by Field Marshall (in Moroccan Royal Army) Mohammed Mizian, a Moroccan who rose to the rank of Lieutenant General in Franco's army and had played a prominent role in the military coup of July 1936 and the subsequent war in Spain. Prior to that he fought with distinction alongside Franco against the Rif rebellion in the 1920s.<sup>19</sup> But perhaps the author did not see the Moroccan participation in the Spanish Civil War that ended with the installation of a military dictatorship as a glorious part of the nation's military history.

It was however in Morocco that a first attempt at a historical explanation of the role of Moroccans in the Spanish Civil War was made. In 1945, Mekki Redondo published, apparently in a very limited edition, a book that centred on the reasons for the Moroccan support of the Nationalists during the Spanish war. Though this early attempt at a historical study had escaped attention for decades until Mohammed Ibn Azzuz Hakim brought it to light by re-publishing it in 1997 under the title *La actitud de los moros ante el Alzamiento*.<sup>20</sup> Redondo starts his book with his memories as a young boy, living in Morocco, whose father enlists in the *Regulares* and is killed at the battle of Talavera de la Reina (to the west of Madrid) not long after crossing into Spain. This loss motivated the son, several years later, to start a journey to discover how Moroccans of the Spanish Protectorate ended up fighting for Franco, primarily interviewing the Moroccan notables in the nationalist movement. While remarkable for its relative frankness, something not possible for many Spaniards in the Iberian Peninsula at the time, the study gave answers about how the Moroccan nationalists in Spanish Morocco weighed their options, ideologically and practically, rationalising their support for the Franco regime.

In 1983, American historian Shannon E. Fleming published 'Spanish Morocco and the Alzamiento Nacional', focusing on the military, political and economic mobilisation of Spanish Morocco.<sup>21</sup> Regarding the recruitment of Moroccans, Fleming significantly discusses the role of the *interventores* (military controllers), commissioned Spanish officers whose mission was to guarantee peace in the Moroccan countryside, and to act as 'advisors' to tribal chiefs. Bargaining with these sheikhs, they initiated the process of recruitment of tribal members for the war effort.<sup>22</sup> The *interventores* had invested much time and effort to stay among the tribes and understand their

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<sup>18</sup> Speaking of the *Regulares*, it states, 'They were all taken to Andalusia in 1936 to help Franco frustrate the conspiracy of the French military men', whatever the author meant by that sentence (though it sounds as if the author suggested France had malicious designs on Spain). Al Miryani, *Al Jaish Al Maghribi*, 268.

<sup>19</sup> Al Miryani's study eulogises the Rif rebellion and devotes 21 pages of text to it, which might have made writing a foreword by Mohammed Mizian rather an oddity, supposing that the Field Marshall had read the book beforehand.

<sup>20</sup> Mohammed Ibn Azzuz Hakim, *La actitud de los moros ante el Alzamiento. Marruecos 1936* (Malaga 1997). Even though Azzuz Hakim is not the author of this work, in bibliographic references he is cited as such. The work cannot be found or located at any library by looking up Mekki Redondo as the author.

<sup>21</sup> Shannon E., Fleming, 'Spanish Morocco and the Alzamiento Nacional, 1936-1939: The Military, Economic and Political Mobilization of a Protectorate', *Journal of Contemporary History* 18(1983) 27-42.

<sup>22</sup> Fleming, 'Spanish Morocco and the Alzamiento', 30.

culture and ways, which generated a mutual liking and respect between the Berber tribesmen and their Spanish military advisors,<sup>23</sup> who relied on a combination of the dispensation of liberal pensions to tribal chiefs and personal charisma.<sup>24</sup> This study, however, focused on Morocco rather than the experiences of the Moroccan soldiers in Spain.

The next significant attempt at studying the role of Morocco and Moroccan soldiers was in 1989, also in Morocco, in the form of a doctoral thesis by Bu Bakr Bu Hadi,<sup>25</sup> which was described as perhaps the first historical research that took the Moroccan soldier as its main subject,<sup>26</sup> and made use of interviews with Moroccan soldiers. Bu Hadi analysed the background for the success of the Nationalist coup in Morocco and the Nationalist recruitment campaign. He focuses on the good relations between the Nationalists and tribal leaders in the regions of the Rif, Jebala and Ait Amran, while also paying attention to the economic context of the Moroccan enlistments, the religious propaganda, the position of the Moroccan nationalists of both the Spanish and the French zone.<sup>27</sup> But the study does not pay significant attention to the ‘racial’ dynamics at play in Spain. The second Moroccan historian to give an extensive review focusing on the Moroccan soldiers, was Abdelmejid Ben Jelloun, who published in 1994, a ‘re-evaluation of the causes of the enrolment of the Moroccans in the Francoist ranks’,<sup>28</sup> in which he, from an ‘exclusively Moroccan angle’ gave a brief overview of motives of the Moroccan soldiers, both material and psychological to enlist in the Spanish Army and go to war (see below).<sup>29</sup>

The first significant Spanish contribution came in in 1991, when the military historian Gárate Córdoba provided an impressive quantitative study of the participation of troops from Morocco in the Spanish Civil War, presenting calculations on the number of Moroccan troops fighting in Spain, an estimation of casualties, the numbers and identities of the battalions, both Spanish and Moroccan, from Morocco fighting in Spain. His study, though the numbers were

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<sup>23</sup> Ibidem, 31.

<sup>24</sup> Ibidem, 36.

<sup>25</sup> The information on the thesis is based on: Abdul Aziz Al Tamsamani Khallouq, ‘Al Maghrib wal Harb al Ahliyya al Isbaniyya’, *Revue Dar Al-Niaba. Etudes d’Histoire Marocaine*, nr. 25 (1990) 59-62. Khallouq, the thesis supervisor, presented a critical review of Bu Hadi’s study. The thesis was kept in the library of the Faculty of Arts at Mohammed V University in Rabat. In 2011 I requested a 30 pages photocopy of the manuscript (the maximum number of photocopied pages allowed) but I was told that since the author had notified the university of his intention to publish his thesis, viewing the manuscript was not possible.

<sup>26</sup> Ibidem, 59.

<sup>27</sup> Ibidem, 60, 62.

<sup>28</sup> Abdelmajid Ben Jelloun, ‘Réévaluation des causes de l’enrolement de marocains dan les rangs franquistes, 1936-1939, sous l’angle exclusif du Maroc’, *Revue Maroc Europe*, nr. 7 (1994) 219-234.

<sup>29</sup> In 1989 two volumes on the *Regulares* were published in Spain although these were more concerned with the uniforms, organisation, and weaponry. José María Bueno Carrera, *Los Regulares. Uniformes y organización de las tropas Regulares Indígenas de Marruecos* (Madrid 1989), and Delfín Salas, *Tropas Regulares Indígenas* (Madrid 1989).

occasionally adjusted by later historians, remains frequently cited because of the useful quantitative data.<sup>30</sup>

Up until the mid 1990s the studies devoted to the Moroccan troops of the Spanish Civil War lacked access to Spanish military and governmental archives on the topic, with the exception of the 1991 study by Gárate Córdoba. As the military and administrative archives under the socialist administration in democratic Spain granted free access to historians, a wave of historical studies on the relationship between Morocco and the Spanish Civil War emerged. In relatively rapid succession appeared: Balfour's *Deadly Embrace. Morocco and the Road to the Spanish Civil War* (2000) which deals mainly with the pre-1936 colonial background of the Civil War; Madariaga's *Los moros que trajo Franco* (2002) which discusses in great deal the propaganda aspects related to the Moroccans, the crimes attributed to them and the situation in Morocco; El Merroun's *Las tropas marroquíes en la Guerra Civil española* (2003) which is in its greatest part devoted to tracking the military operations of the Moroccan troops. In 2004 appeared both de Mesa's *Los moros de la Guerra Civil española*, with a great focus on military organisation, and Sanchez Ruano's *Islam y Guerra Civil española*, a study of almost encyclopaedic proportions but also of fresh field investigations into certain massacres. And in 2005 Gustau Nerín's *La guerra que vino de África* was published with a focus on the *Africanista* establishment within the Spanish armed forces.<sup>31</sup> These studies became standard reference works for authors seeking information on the role of Moroccans in the Civil War.

Sebastian Balfour's study deals with the Spanish Civil War only in its last, but very significant chapter. The study was based on public archives but also on an impressive array of private archives, as well as interviews with Moroccan veterans of the colonial and the Civil War. It excels in demonstrating how the war in Morocco initiated much of the resentment that Spanish *Africanistas* developed towards democratic politics and leftist parties in particular. It also shows how the Moroccan experience shaped the worldview of the *Africanistas* who came to regard metropolitan Spain as a frontier, with its own brand of Riffian rebels that needed to be subjected to the civilising mission that the army would undertake. The concept of the *Other* in Morocco was transported to Spain to be applied to the Republican enemies, while the military service of many Moroccans in the Spanish army led to a more positive adjustment of the image of the Moroccans among Spanish officers. Destruction, pillaging, and other colonial military tactics were also carried out in Spain.

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<sup>30</sup> José María Gárate Córdoba, 'Las Tropas de Africa en la Guerra Civil española', *Revista de historia militar*, nr. 70 (1991) 9-61.

<sup>31</sup> María Rosa de Madariaga, *Los moros que trajo Franco. La intervención de tropas coloniales en la Guerra Civil española* (Barcelona 2002); Mustapha El Merroun, *Las tropas marroquíes en la Guerra Civil española* (Madrid 2003); José Luis de Mesa, *Los moros de la Guerra Civil española* (Madrid 2004); Gustau Nerín, *La Guerra que vino de África* (Barcelona 2005).

María Rosa de Madariaga's study depends largely on the administrative archives of Alcalá de Henares, especially those of the Delegation for Native Affairs to discuss the situation of Moroccan troops in Spain and aspects of their daily life. She also relies heavily on British diplomatic records, and both French diplomatic and military intelligence to demonstrate the existence of a number of anti-Francoist rebellions in Spanish Morocco as a result of protests against the recruitment of soldiers and the repression of these revolts. Such rebellions in Morocco would remain invisible should the historian rely solely on Spanish military archives, the existence of which are denied by other historians like Mesa who criticise the use of French sources which contain unreliable and second hand information on the supposed rebellions. The existence of the rebellions has so far not been confirmed by testimonies of Moroccan veterans of the Civil War whom I (and other historians) interviewed, nor in Spanish documentation that I have consulted. Madariaga contributes greatly to the issue of the public 'rehabilitation' of the negative image of the Moroccan soldier, through her extensive use of the contemporary Spanish Nationalist press. Madariaga's stance is clearly pro-Republican and reflected throughout the study in the form of defending the Republic's policy towards Spanish Morocco before and during the war, as well as her condemnation of the use and conduct of the Africa Army.

The study of the Moroccan historian El Merroun is mainly based on the material of the military archives in Ávila, and spends a great deal of effort in tracking the military operations of the individual Moroccan battalions. As such, the study is more of a military history than Madariaga's. While El Merroun conducted a great number of veteran interviews, these sources substantially under-represented in the study, in the form of one sentence here or there with which El Merroun presents a conclusion or a statement on certain topics, such as hospitals, or treatment by officers, without substantial quotes. El Merroun's political stance might not be as clear-cut as that of de Madariaga, but he clearly defends Moroccan troops against charges of misconduct. And while he condemns the Franco regime sometimes for its use of the economically poor situation in Morocco to recruit soldiers, he also regards positively the treatment of Moroccan soldiers by the Francoists and criticises the Republic for its policies towards Spanish Morocco.

The Spanish historian José Luis de Mesa's *Los moros de la Guerra Civil*, is largely a history of the Moroccan units' operations and military hierarchies and is largely based on documents of the Ávila archive but also important unpublished source material, and constitutes a valuable work on the military aspect of the Moroccan participation in the Civil War. But it also takes a political stance in the conflict, lacking any substantial criticism of the Franco regime, and largely acquitting the Moroccan units, and therefore the Franco regime, of any wrong doings. It focuses mainly on non-material incentives as background for the recruitment of Moroccans in Franco's army, as well as criticises claims of the existence of opposition in Spanish Morocco to the

recruitment efforts as unsubstantiated in Spanish documents, a stance I find myself tending to agree with.

Francisco Sánchez Ruano's *Islam y Guerra Civil española*, published in 2004 is the largest yet in terms of its size. While it does not diverge much from the previously mentioned studies in terms of the focus of its research, it distinguishes itself by its impressive effort in consulting not only the national military, administrative and municipal archives in different parts of Spain, as well as oral interviews he conducted with both Spanish as well as Moroccan participants of the conflict. Those interviews took him to Northern Morocco and to the former Spanish Western Sahara, and includes rare interviews with a former Moroccan member of the International Brigade and family members of Field Marshal Mizzian. Ruano is clearly pro-Republican in his stance and criticises El Merroun and other Moroccan historians for 'shielding their compatriots' from accusations of extreme misconduct on the battlefield, even though the reader of Ruano's work will notice that his Moroccan interviewees themselves never produced the confessions he sought. Nevertheless, Ruano's study exonerates the Moroccans from some of the atrocities attributed to them such as the massacre of Badajoz.

Finally, there is the study by the pro-Republican Gustau Nerín, *La guerra que vino de África*, which touches on the role of the Moroccan troops in Spain and the crimes they committed in his view. However, it focuses more on the main *Africanista* commanders, their military, political and personal evolution in Morocco that developed into the lethal enmity against liberal and progressive values, and therefore the Republic, and how they transported their worldview and war practices from Morocco to Spain. His views towards the Moroccan units are clear. They were both perpetrators of crimes against civilians, but were also subjects of racist attitudes of the Spanish Nationalist military.

### **Points of contention**

A number of contested issues form points of discussion among historians. These questions concentrate on two points: the motives for Moroccan troops in joining the Francoist army, and the question of the crimes against civilians and prisoners of war in Spain. It appears that a favourable political stance towards the Republic or Nationalists partly determines the answers to these points of contention. Madariaga and Balfour and the Moroccan historian Abdelmajid Ben Jelloun (along with Ruano and Nerín) are clearly pro-Republican. While others like the Moroccans Ibn Azzuz Hakim and Mustapha El Merroun are clearly less enthusiastic about the Republic, though they cannot be considered pro-Francoist, while De Mesa and Gárate Córdoba have more obvious Nationalist sympathies.

Regarding the motives of the Moroccan troops to participate in the Spanish Civil War, the matter is fairly straightforward for María Rosa de Madariaga who in her *Los moros que trajo Franco*, contends that Moroccan soldiers who fought in the Civil War were 'mercenaries', who

could not in any way be compared to the Republicans who defended their legitimate government, or with the combatants of the International Brigades who went to Spain to defend democracy and freedom.<sup>32</sup> Balfour, in his *Deadly Embrace*, agrees that the reason the Moroccans joined the Spanish Nationalist army was above all economical. According to his definition, the Moroccans were not mercenaries in the strict sense of the word, that is professional soldiers, but rather the majority were civilians who volunteered to military service to earn money.<sup>33</sup> The wages were higher than those usually earned by Moroccans in seasonal labour in Algeria.<sup>34</sup> He does, however, allow in his study for military bonding and comradeship, forged during the colonial war in Morocco in the 1920s, as basis of motivation for continuing the war on the side of the Nationalists.

Among Moroccan historians, Abdelmajid Ben Jelloun, agrees with the definition of Moroccan troops as mercenaries. According to his research, tremendous misery and drought in 1936 in many villages in the Rif pushed great numbers of men to volunteer.<sup>35</sup> He would later adjust his conclusions, based on new findings, arguing that there were, in addition to the ‘macroscopic’ (economic) context, other ‘microscopic’, i.e. personal, reasons including psychological factors such as the love of adventure, a youthful, romantic spirit as well as an inclination towards bellicosity, and even the will of some to exact revenge on the Spaniards by bringing war to the land of the Christians, though the latter seems remarkable given the fact that the Spanish commanders of the Moroccan units were responsible for war and destruction in the Rif during the 1920s.<sup>36</sup>

The Moroccan, Ibn Azzuz Hakim, is a case of how emotional the subject is to some Moroccan historians. In his introduction to Redondo’s *La actitud de los moros ante el Alzamiento*, he is indignant of the negative view, held in Spain, of his compatriots, and asserts that they were twice ‘forced’ to be in Spain, once by the Republic, (an obvious reference to the 1934 Asturian uprising) and later by the Francoists. But in another part of his introduction, he expresses a different view. He argues that what has been written about the Moors as being ‘forced’ to go to war as unfair. For him, what is particularly unfair is to consider Moroccan troops as mercenaries who sacrificed their lives or became incapacitated for a cause that was not theirs, and Hakim presents the religious motives and propaganda as important factors in explaining the enlistment of the Moroccans in the war.<sup>37</sup>

The case of Mustapha El Merroun is interesting too. Sebastian Balfour writes in the epilogue to El Merroun’s *Las tropas marroquíes en la Guerra Civil española*, that El Merroun proved that the reason for Moroccans to volunteer for the war was economic. But an examination of

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<sup>32</sup> Maria Rosa Madariaga, *Los moros que trajo Franco*, 343.

<sup>33</sup> Balfour, *Deadly Embrace*, 277, 313.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibidem*, 272.

<sup>35</sup> Abdelmajid Ben Jelloun ‘La participación de los mercenarios marroquíes en la Guerra Civil española 1936-1939’, *Revista Internacional de Sociología* 46 (1988) 527-541, here 534.

<sup>36</sup> Ben Jelloun, ‘Réévaluation des causes de l’enrolement’, 228-233.

<sup>37</sup> Ibn Azzuz Hakim, *La actitud de los moros ante el Alzamiento*, 45.

the book does not vindicate that point. I find El Merroun partly responsible for the confusion. At one point, he asserts that the material motives were some of the most important for joining the Spanish Nationalist armies, and that recruitment was in fact not totally voluntary since Franco exploited the situation in Morocco to recruit many who were unemployed.<sup>38</sup> El Merroun, however, rejects the ‘mercenary’ term to describe the *Regulares* who fought in Spain. He points out that a mercenary is someone who is attracted by the prospect of profit and who is not sensitive to ideological aspects, a situation which, according to El Merroun, does not apply for the Moroccans of the Civil War for two reasons: first, the vast difference in the daily pay between the Republican armies and militia which reached ten daily pesetas and the Spanish Nationalist army pay of three pesetas. It would be, in his opinion, ‘ridiculous’ to see the three pesetas as a decisive motive when many Moroccans, especially volunteers originating from the French Protectorate in Morocco, could have, still according to El Merroun, found a way to enlist in the Republican armies. Second, the status of the northern zone of Morocco as a Spanish Protectorate, which meant that the inhabitants could be considered Spanish citizens, since the Protectorate would be an extension of Spain. After all, the Republic itself used the Moroccan troops on two occasions in 1932 and 1934 to quell rebellions, not as mercenaries but as part of the Spanish army.<sup>39</sup> I find that despite el Merroun’s assertion, the Moroccan soldiers were not, *de jure*, Spanish citizens, but subjects of a recognised Moroccan king and state. However, I will also note that such considerations did not prevent France from using Moroccans on European territory during the First and the Second World Wars, and the term ‘mercenary’ is not readily used to describe those Moroccans in the French army, or any other colonial soldiers in the French or British armies in both global conflicts.

José Luis De Mesa’s *Los moros de la Guerra Civil española*, who is part of the less pro-Republican side of the historiographical debate, leans towards a heavier emphasis on non-material motives for Moorish troops to volunteer for the Spanish military effort, like religion and the concept of a holy war, the chance to fight ‘those without god’ as well as the chance to fight the ‘French’ who, the Nationalists would claim, were aiding the ‘reds’ and manning their artillery, and also listing, among other reasons, the policies followed by the Republic before July 1936, the anti-Semitism of the Moorish troops (they were supposedly told that they were going to fight Jews in Spain), the good relations between Spanish Nationalist officers and tribal chiefs, as well as the prestige that General Franco enjoyed among Moroccans.<sup>40</sup> The other point of contention among historians of the Moroccans in the civil war concerns the brutal acts for which they were accused. These issues will be discussed at length in the first chapter, and it suffices to say here that the

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<sup>38</sup> Mustapha El Merroun, *Las tropas marroquíes*, 41.

<sup>39</sup> El Merroun, *Las tropas marroquíes*, 187.

<sup>40</sup> Mesa, *Los moros de la Guerra Civil*, 124-130. Sometimes it is not clear whether quotes used by Mesa like ‘the reds would have burnt the mosques and delivered their women to the international volunteers’ or ‘the reds ridicule Mecca’ are quotes given by Moroccans or Spanish Nationalist propaganda. He uses, however among his sources, his own youth memories.

division in opinion on this issue is strongly similar to the division of views regarding the debate about motivations.

A third main point of contention concerns the morality of bringing Moroccan troops, considered foreign, to Spain. One of the leftist foreign critics of Franco is the American historian Herbert Southworth, who accused the Nationalist generals, in his *El mito de la Cruzada de Franco*,<sup>41</sup> of introducing elements alien to Spanish political life, i.e. the African garrisons. He preempts the countercharge that the Republic used African units in 1934 during the Asturian uprisings by stating that it was a rightist government (with Franco in command within the Ministry of War) that brought the Army of Africa into Spain in 1934 and the political left should not be held accountable for that.<sup>42</sup> Gárate Córdoba responds to this view by citing a little-known aspect of a well-known event. In August 1932, Manuel Azaña, the Spanish Republican prime minister, decided to bring *Regulares* of Ceuta to the Peninsula to repress the *sanjurjada*, the coup committed in Seville against the nascent Republic, by General Sanjurjo, a royalist and veteran of the Moroccan wars.<sup>43</sup> As it happened, the coup collapsed almost instantly and no confrontation ensued with the African units that landed in Cádiz. Most members were likely oblivious to the fact that they were sent to fight against their former chief. Had the Republic held control over the Moroccan forces it would, I strongly believe, have used them to fight against the rebels of July 1936.

Given the importance of the Moroccan participation in the Civil War, it is significant to observe that most of the conclusions and moral judgement about the Moroccan soldiers were largely made without giving (or being able to give) the Moroccan voice its rightful place in forming those conclusions or judgement, even though significant efforts had been made to recover that voice. This study builds on those efforts, and enriches them with its own, to finally give that Moroccan perspective a more central position in the debates on the Moroccans.

#### **Primary sources: Finding the Moroccan voice**

While different combatants of the Spanish Civil War, whether Spanish Nationalists or Republicans, as well as European volunteers who came to the aid of one camp or the other, made their stories and experiences of the Spanish Civil War heard, whether by publishing themselves, or by being interviewed for a number of oral histories, it has taken a long time for the voice of the Moroccan soldiers to contribute to the historical knowledge and debates of the war in Spain. This state of affairs is attributed to the fact that most of the Moroccan soldiers who participated in the war were illiterate, and even in the case of the literate, there was no incentive or demand for writing their war

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<sup>41</sup> Herbert R. Southworth, *El mito de la Cruzada de Franco* (Paris 1963).

<sup>42</sup> Southworth, *El mito de la Cruzada de Franco*, 117.

<sup>43</sup> José María Gárate Córdoba, *La Guerra de las dos Españas* (Barcelona 1976) 220.



experiences, even though speaking of their war feats to friends and families or reminiscing about them with other veterans continued.<sup>44</sup>

It is also noteworthy that the Spanish government in Northern Morocco, up until independence in 1956 did not come with an initiative to record the war experiences of the Moroccan veterans in Spain even for propaganda purposes. Mekki Redondo's attempt at finding answers for his father's death ended up being a top-down explanation for the Moroccan support to the Franco regime.<sup>45</sup> In this dissertation, various collections of interviews will be used, whether regarding military matters, religion, culture, or women. It also helps those interested in the Moroccan role in the Spanish Civil War to get information about, instead the relatively faceless Moroccans of that war, the personal experience of the Moroccan soldiers, as human beings with different characters, with motivations, with fears, love, hatred and sense of humour. They, without doubt, constitute a different cultural group, compared to the Spanish or other Western participants of the Civil War. But even the Spanish soldiers or the western volunteers, were not uniform in their experiences.

One of the first – perhaps the very first – scholarly presentation of the accounts of Moroccan soldiers' experiences in Spain to be published, was that by the Moroccan journalist Ali Lmrabet who, in 1989, conducted interviews with three former soldiers of Franco's army on the subject of the battle of Madrid that raged towards the end of 1936, and which was the battle that put a stop to the series of successive victories that had brought the Army of Africa from Morocco to the gates of the Spanish capital, and a battle that, according to Lmrabet, 'demystified the splendor of invincible warriors' and left 'in the memory of that battle the image of exhausted combatants, conducted little by little to commit the worst excesses'.<sup>46</sup> At first his interviewees were not thrilled to meet him, as he was going to write for a Spanish publication. They felt wronged by what they saw as left-leaning hostile Spanish propaganda and blamed the Republic for the duration and suffering of the war. Despite the limited number of interviewees and the sole focus on the battle of Madrid,

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<sup>44</sup> Using the letters of the Moroccans to construct the soldier's own version of the war events would prove futile. Letters to families have not survived the test of time and have been thrown away. What few letters there are now, exist thanks to the Spanish censorship, but the letters preserved in the archives of the AGA, are too few to base a study on them. Either these letters are yet to be found in some undiscovered parts of the Spanish archives, or the Spanish administration gradually lost or destroyed them. It is not logical that the censorship only managed to intercept a handful of letters throughout the entire war.

<sup>45</sup> One scholar who could have undertaken the effort of interviewing the Moroccan war veterans was David Montgomery Hart who published in 1976 an anthropological study, the result of years of field work studying the Aith Waryaghar (also known as Beni Uriagel) tribe which provided many recruits for the fight in Spain. In his study, he touches briefly on the Spanish Civil War and what he thinks were influences on the Rif tribes' members desire to enlist, but otherwise does not seem to have attempted to garner any information on their life in Spain. David Montgomery Hart, *The Aith Waryaghar of the Moroccan Rif. An Ethnography and History* (Tucson 1976).

<sup>46</sup> Ali Lmrabet, 'Los fieros marroquíes en la Guerra Civil. Los últimos o los recuerdos indeseables. Madrid, 1936-39', *Historia 16*, nr. 216 (1994) 22-32.

Lmrabet's interviews remained for some time the sole source on how the Moroccan soldiers remembered the war.<sup>47</sup>

In the 1990s El Merroun conducted a group of interviews with Moroccan veterans, conducted mainly in Tetuan, where he resided at the time. El Merroun has generously granted me especial access to his transcripts of interviews with Moroccan veterans. Neither Madariaga's *Los moros que trajo Franco* nor Nerín's *La guerra que vino de África* use any Moroccan oral sources of its own. Belfour's *Deadly Embrace* did however make use of the author's own interviews with Moroccan soldiers of the Civil War: about 13 veterans and with help of El Merroun, although their use is usually of supportive character to already established findings or drawn conclusions, and the interviews do not necessarily have the character of an indispensable source. Ruano's *Islam y Guerra Civil* is most prolific in using oral interviews with Moroccan veterans, reproducing verbatim both questions and answers of short parts of the interviews. His interview with a Moroccan member of the International Brigades is perhaps his most valuable addition to the repertoire of oral history material, given the lack of material from the perspective of pro-Republican Moroccan volunteers. Still most of his interviews are dispersed within the text and often used haphazardly. Despite their value (also for this study), had the excerpts he uses been taken out of the study, the reader would have hardly noticed their absence.

### **On oral history**

Since this study makes use of oral interviews a word must be said about the advantages and limitations of using oral history and the reliability of its material. In recent decades, oral histories have made a positive contribution to research, carving out their own research paradigm and by the end of the twentieth century this approach has become a respected and accepted technique for social research. The previous homogeneous appetite for written evidence has been challenged by oral histories and, as society has changed, oral histories have evolved to enable those from previously excluded populations to tell their stories.<sup>48</sup> In discussing oral history, Thompson argues that a more fair transformation of the past can be achieved by introducing new evidence from the side of the underprivileged (in our case the Moroccan soldiers), by opening new areas of inquiry, by challenging some of the assumptions and accepted judgements of historians and by bringing recognition to substantial groups that had been ignored.<sup>49</sup> Portelli makes a similar argument as Thompson adding that interviews often reveal unknown events or unknown aspects of known

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<sup>47</sup> Although Ben Jelloun indicates to have had access to interviews with Moroccan veterans, his brief studies do not indicate how many Moroccan veterans he met or any significant anecdotes or quotes. He instead makes references to one of Lmrabet's interviewees. Ben Jelloun, 'Réévaluation des causes de l'enrolement', 232-233.

<sup>48</sup> Elaine Batty, 'Reflections on the Use of Oral History Techniques in Social Research', *People, Place & Policy Online* 3 (2009) 109-121, here 118.

<sup>49</sup> P. Thomson, *The Voice of the Past. Oral History* (Oxford 2000) 8.

events.<sup>50</sup> From this point of view the only problem posed by oral sources would be verification.<sup>51</sup> Protelli reminds us that factual credibility is not the monopoly of written documents, as documents themselves are often the uncontrolled transmission of unidentified sources.<sup>52</sup> A prejudice against oral histories is the insistence that they are distant from events, and therefore undergo the distortion of faulty memory. This problem exists also for many written sources that are written some time after the event they describe and often by non participants.<sup>53</sup> In addition, as Oelofse argues, the true distinctiveness of oral history evidence lies in the fact that it presents itself in an oral form. The recording may be a more reliable and accurate account of an interview than a purely written record, with the interview bringing the information much closer to the human condition. The speaker can also be challenged immediately.<sup>54</sup>

With regard to the reliability of memory, Hoffman and Hoffman propose that certain memories can be so resistant to deterioration with time that they are best described as archival.<sup>55</sup> Archival memories consist of those special memories which, because of their relevance to our conception of ourselves, have been reviewed and pondered to the point that they have become indelible.<sup>56</sup> Such memories, as Marigold Linton explains, are likely to become indelible when an event has certain features. Firstly, it is perceived as highly emotional at the time it occurs. Secondly the subsequent course of events makes the event appear to be a turning point. Lastly, the event must be relatively unique, not blurred by repetition.<sup>57</sup> These conclusions could be applied to the case of the Moroccan soldiers unique and highly emotional experience of the Spanish Civil War, which for the majority must have been a turning point in their lives.

As is the case with all historical sources the oral is also subject to the examination of consistency and accuracy through a process of cross-checking with both other oral testimony and documentary evidence. This point is tackled by El Merroun for his oral material. In an interview with him in Rabat in 2011 he explained that he painstakingly followed the sequence of events, battles, cities and villages conquered, names of commanders, cooperating units, as told by his interviewees and compared them with the *Diarios de operaciones* (war diaries) of the *Tabors* (Moroccan battalions) to which these individuals belonged and other military documents, reaching the conclusion that both versions of events matched, rendering the oral interviews largely

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<sup>50</sup> Alessandro Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories. Form and Meaning in Oral History* (New York 1992) 50.

<sup>51</sup> Alessandro Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories*, 50.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibidem*, 51.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibidem*, 52.

<sup>54</sup> Marietjie Oelofse, 'Applying Principles of Historical Critique: Authentic Oral History?', *IPEDR* 5 (2011) 41-44, here 42.

<sup>55</sup> Alice M. Hoffman and Howard S. Hoffman, 'Reliability and Validity in Oral History: The case for Memory', in: J. Jeffrey and G. Edwall eds., *Memory and History. Essays on recalling and interpreting experience* (Lanham 1994) 107-135, here 128.

<sup>56</sup> Hoffman and Hoffman, 'Reliability and Validity in Oral History', 129.

<sup>57</sup> Cited in Hoffman and Hoffman, 'Reliability and Validity in Oral History', 128.

dependable for the hard data they provide. In the case of this study however, the oral evidence is not primarily used for hard facts or dates, but for general insights. The verification and comparison material I use consists of policy documents, oral history collected by other historians, and contemporary accounts by Moroccan soldiers in the French military archives which will be referred to below. The results I believe, vindicate the oral history approach.

It also does not matter that the oral sources are 'subjective'. The subjectivity of the speaker can be a useful trait. In the case of the Moroccan soldiers, and since this study includes not only the visibility and effects of Spanish policy on the Moroccans, but the Moroccans' own responses to that policy, this subjectivity can even be important. For example Gustau Nerín could make his statement that the Spanish *Africanista* commanders held paternalistic and even vicious racist attitudes towards the Moroccans, that survived even during the Spanish Civil War.<sup>58</sup> But even if he makes a good case for this statement, how relevant would such racism be if the majority of the Moroccan veterans (see chapter 3) argue that they did not experience racism? This discussion on oral history necessitates a presentation of the interviewees and the circumstances that surrounded conducting the interviews.

### **Interviewing the Moroccan protagonists**

In January 2011, I was walking along the fence that separated the Spanish enclave of Ceuta from Morocco proper, following it towards the border crossing, when a patrol of the Guardia Civil stopped me and admonished me for walking in a restricted security zone and demanding that I turn back and follow another path. That meant climbing some steep and slightly muddy hills in rainy weather, the same hills that I climbed, in the same rainy weather, down towards Zaouiat Sidi Ibrahim where lay the isolated home of El Hussein ben Abdesselam. He was an old, short and easily likable man who once formed part of the force of Moroccan soldiers who fought for General Franco during Spain's bloody civil war between 1936 and 1939. One of the few surviving Moroccan veterans of that war, he talked to me about his origins in the French Protectorate of Morocco, how he left home in search of an adventure and ended up in the Spanish army, what he saw in Spain, how he fought, how he received an injury to the head and how he ended the war convalescing in Ceuta where he lived ever since. While I listened to his soft voice and observed his calm manner, his small stature and his overall grandfatherly impression I wondered how anyone could imagine that this man had ever been one of the fear inspiring, vicious, blood thirsty, throat slitting, plundering, raping, senselessly violent Moors, that have forever been associated with the tens of thousands of Moroccans like him who participated in the Spanish conflict. Obviously long decades and a lot of change in physique and character separated the Civil War from the time I met these veterans. I will not deny that I was left with a sympathetic impression each time I met a Moroccan veteran of this war. But I was also consciously aware of this impression, and it did not prevent me

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<sup>58</sup> Nerín, *La guerra que vino de África*, 174, 206-207.

from asking questions on the unpalatable aspects of the conduct of the Moroccan soldiers. Of course I put these question to them rather indirectly ('did any of the other Moroccan soldiers commit such and such') and eased into them while the interview was well underway, following 'neutral' type of question on their participation: their age while enlisting; type of training; reasons for enlisting; battles they participated in; whether they were wounded; relations with other soldiers or officers etc. The importance of these interviews, in any case, lies in the fact that no matter what their past was, the story of the Moroccan participation in the Civil War is not complete without the perspective of its Moroccan participants.

El Hussein in Ceuta, was the second Moroccan veteran I met. The first one I interviewed was Mohammed ben Abdellah Susi who was residing in a house next to the *Regulares* barracks of Gonzalez Tablas and provided to him and his family by the Spanish state, as he remained in Ceuta after Moroccan independence and therefore became a Spanish citizen. Eighty-eight years old at the time, he proudly described his role in the war, but towards the end he told me that his days were numbered and that I would not be seeing him again. He passed away ten days later. Since then I was informed of the death of some of the veterans I interviewed and I assume that most of the others that I have interviewed have since passed away.

The process of meeting veterans in Morocco was not without bureaucratic difficulties. Being a stranger to the country must have played a role in addition to the 'military secrets' mentality that holds sway over the Moroccan Association des Anciens Combattants et Victimes de Guerre (AACVG). My first attempt at interviewing a veteran of the Spanish army was in Tetuan in 2011 when a journalist took me to the Tetuan branch of AACVG where an old veteran of the *Regulares* made his living by selling cigarettes and snacks. Asking him if he would consent to an interview he answered that the head of the Tetuani branch must first give his authorisation for these are 'military matters' and adding in Spanish: 'un orden es un orden' (an order is an order). The head of the branch told me he was not allowed to give such an authorisation and I should ask in Rabat, to which I headed and where I met the secretary general of the AACVG whom I convinced of my good intentions and who therefore authorised me to conduct as many interviews as I wanted. Such obstacles might seem familiar to some researchers.<sup>59</sup> After meeting the secretary general of the AACVG, the doors were opened, and wherever the representative of a local club of war veterans demanded an authorisation, a phone call by the head of the Association in Rabat was enough to ease

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<sup>59</sup> In Chefchaouen one of the members of its branch of AACVG told me in 2012 about meeting an American student a year earlier who wanted to interview one or two Moroccan veterans of the Spanish Civil War and how he was not comfortable with the idea, and how she could write things that would jeopardise the reputation of the country. Me, however, as a fellow Arab and who was not a sensation-seeking journalist but a serious historian, he would trust.

the matter. In the end I managed with the help of the Moroccan Association to interview sixteen veterans of the Spanish army.<sup>60</sup>

The circumstances and settings for the interviews were far from uniform. Two contrasting examples will illustrate this. On June 30<sup>th</sup>, 2011 in the barracks of the *Regulares*,<sup>61</sup> in the Spanish enclave of Ceuta I interviewed three veterans of the Civil War who had come along with former Moroccan members of the Spanish army and led by the AACVG, to celebrate the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the *Regulares* troops. These aging men, former members of the Spanish army, and who came from Tetuan, Alcazarquivir, Chefchaouen, and other places of the north west of Morocco, were members of the association of friends of the *Regulares*, and were invited each year to attend the celebrations in Ceuta, where they were treated to lunch before the parade in the centre of the city at the *Murallas Reales* (royal walls) and to dinner before heading home. In the afternoon of that day I was present in one of the halls of the *Regulares* barracks, when the the Spanish military governor of the Ceuta region entered and saluted the old veterans who in turn enthusiastically saluted back. The military governor gave a speech, thanking the Moroccan old men for their ‘glorious past’, and a gift was presented to the oldest among the veterans. During dinner, a Spanish woman approached some of them and told them that they, the old ones, were the real soldiers who did the job well. Words of praise during the parade also rained on them from the population. It was a festive day, and it seems that every year on this day it is the same. When I interviewed three Moroccan veterans of the Civil War (there were others whom I had interviewed earlier in other places) on that day in Ceuta, they were praising the Spanish army, their officers, or Franco himself, and they were proud of their participation, perhaps quite logical on such an occasion.

A few days later I travelled to Nador, to the north east of Morocco where I interviewed three other veterans of the Civil War, who were not as enthusiastic about their former participation in the war or about the Spanish army or Franco and complaining about their meagre pensions. The Spanish enclave of Melilla is a short drive from Nador (north east Morocco), and has its own *Regulares* units, and as in the case of Ceuta also celebrated the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its *Regulares* corps. But here there was no association of friends of *Regulares* that included Moroccan veterans, and no one from the AACVG was invited each year to attend the celebrations. The contrast between the impression given by accounts of both groups of interviewees, I thought, was not coincidental and reflected the difference between the received acclaim in Ceuta and the lack of it in Melilla. In the end, however, and in terms of the ‘facts’ surrounding their participation in the war, the stories were not quite dissimilar. They agree more often than not.

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<sup>60</sup> I have also interviewed in Morocco, and in France 20 additional former Moroccan soldiers of the French Army, who fought either in the Second World War or the Indochina War or both. The experience of life and war in the French Army, is in many ways similar to those in the Spanish Army.

<sup>61</sup> There are today two *Regulares* regiments in the Spanish Army, one in Ceuta and the other in Melilla. Part of the troops are formed by Muslim residents of the two Spanish enclaves.

Only in three cases did I interview veterans in their homes and in the presence of their families. Two of these were interviewed in Ceuta, and in the third case pure luck led me to interview a veteran in Brussels, the only interview of a Spanish army veteran outside Morocco and Ceuta. In the rest of the cases it was either in the office of the local branch of the AACVG, or in public places, usually in the presence of a member of the AACVG. The interviews were conducted with individuals separately. In some cases, the interview was conducted in a mixture of Arabic and Spanish, and in others completely in Spanish. Local directors of the AACVG stepped in occasionally, on my request, to translate whenever the colloquial Moroccan Arabic proved incomprehensible to me but these were rare instances. Only in one case a veteran of the Civil War declined being interviewed, telling me that he was not able to remember absolutely anything about the war.

In terms of numbers of interviewees, it was a meager harvest (fourteen), considering the tens of thousands of veterans who took part in the war in Spain. Nevertheless, it was a treasure of some sorts. To add to this batch of interviews, the El Merroun archive of oral interviews would by itself guarantee the Moroccan voice in this study. But there is another equally important source for the Moroccan voice that adds value to the collection of oral interviews of later and recent times, not only because of the extra data but because of the significantly different and contemporary nature of this source.

#### **The Moroccan ‘voice’: The contemporary version**

The Service Historique de la Défense, kept in the Chateau de Vincennes, preserves interrogations by French officers of Moroccans who had their origin in French Morocco, enlisted in the Spanish army, fought in Spain and deserted back to the French Protectorate after receiving leave, usually following a battle injury.<sup>62</sup> This group of 147 men is in fact more numerous than the group of veterans who were interviewed by this author and all other previously mentioned historians put together. Nevertheless, this group represents a minority of the Moroccans who fought in Spain. Firstly, because the volunteers from French Morocco were numerically less present in Franco’s army (see chapter one) and secondly, because deserters, whether French Moroccan or Spanish Moroccan, would not have formed more than a very small percentage of the Moroccan contingent, given the fact that in Spain they would have hardly had a place to escape to. In that sense the French Moroccan deserters represent a minority within a minority of the Moroccans who fought in Spain.

Aside from their French Moroccan origin, what makes this group distinct from the group of aging veterans of later decades is that their testimonies took place immediately after their war experience and therefore did not undergo the risks to the memory that come with the lapse of time or any other political or pension-related considerations. However, the fact is that they gave their testimonies to French officers about their activities in the Spanish army when it was against the law

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<sup>62</sup> The files are located in the 3 H series, Box 266.

in French Morocco to enlist in the Spanish forces, and by returning to French Morocco they risked imprisonment of up to six months and in a few cases up to a year. That means that there is a real risk that the interrogated might be willing to bend the facts, regarding the circumstances and motivations to enlist, in a manner that will gain the sympathy of the French interrogators, or to perhaps hide any wrongdoings they might have committed against a European, in this case Spanish, population. Further, having reasons and grievances that drove them to desert means that their experience of the army and war could be different than those who chose not to desert. The interrogations themselves vary in size. The variation might reflect the readiness of each of the interrogated Moroccan soldiers to provide extensive accounts of their adventures, but also the willingness of the French interrogators to ask detailed questions about these experiences. In most of the cases it is obvious that the interest of the French interrogators is mainly focused on technical aspects, like information on the use of tanks and the means to oppose them, aeroplanes, or tactical ones like the sort of cooperation between infantry, armour and artillery. Besides, the French were very interested in information about German and Italian forces.

Considerations about the relationship between Moroccan soldiers on the one hand and Spanish officers and the Spanish civilians on the other, as well as different aspects of the daily life of Moroccan soldiers, seem to have a lesser importance for the interrogators and therefore was not always the subject of inquiry. Nevertheless, these interrogations represent a vital source of information on the participation of the Moroccan soldiers in the Spanish Civil War that has so far been ignored by studies on this topic.<sup>63</sup> The insights these files provide are very valuable (see chapter 3).

### **The structure of the study**

As already mentioned the question this study seeks to answer is related to the extent that both the Spanish authorities (Nationalist and Republican) and Moroccan soldiers (and to a lesser extent, the Moroccan authorities) tried to control the encounter between Moroccan fighters and their Spanish military and civilian environment during the Spanish Civil War. To answer this question this study will focus on the effect the perception of a unique Moroccan-ness (or Moorish-ness) of the colonial troops had on the military roles they were assigned, and how that perception determined the way in which the Spanish Nationalist military leadership dealt with its Moroccan troops. It will also deal with the role the perception of Moroccan soldiers and their agency played in coping with their place in the war, with the Spanish army, and with the way they were treated by their Spanish superiors. The study will show to what extent the Spanish perception of a different Moroccan psyche and cultural background, and the place of the Moroccans in the imperial hierarchy (as protected people) determined the lengths to which the Moroccan soldiers were allowed to cross the Spanish-Moroccan

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<sup>63</sup> The files used in this study concern only those deserters who have actually been to Spain, and not Moroccan recruits who deserted while still in Spanish Morocco, some of them doing so merely days after enlisting.



cultural and racial divide. But it will also how the other perception (that of the Moroccans themselves) of the Spanish-Moroccan cultural divide determined the Moroccans' ability and willingness to cross it.

The role of racial perception in the participation of Moroccan troops in the war in Spain has three broad aspects that are reflected in the three parts of this study. One part is dedicated to the strictly military domain (combat and relations within the army), because the realisation of military objectives was the primary reason to bring Moroccan soldiers to Spain, and because it is in the field combat and military life that the first interactions between the Moroccan soldiers and Spain took place. The presence of the Moroccans soldiers in Spain, and their encounter with the Spanish culture, did not of course revolve exclusively around the military aspect of that presence, and therefore a second part deals with a relatively non-military aspect, and is connected to relations between Moroccans and female civilians in Spain, and religious policy of the Spanish Nationalists towards the Moroccan troops. I say relatively non-military, because even when this aspect is mostly discussed outside the scope of combat, the Spanish Nationalist Army has a lot of influence in this area. The last part is related to the Spanish adaptation, on both sides (Republican and Nationalist) of pre-war prejudices and of the Moroccan Protectorate-related conditions, to the new situation of Moroccan presence in the Spanish peninsula.

Part I illustrates the significance of the Moroccan troops in the Civil War and it displays the role of the racial and cultural prejudices in the way the Moroccans were used militarily and in the way the position of the Moroccans within the army was determined by both the Spanish policy and the agency of the Moroccans soldiers themselves. Chapter 1 gives an overview of the Spanish Civil War and the importance the Moroccan troops had in it. The comprehension of the value of the Moroccan troops is essential in order to grasp the importance of the cross-cultural encounter between Moroccan and Spaniards, both within the military environment as well as the civilian one, and the measures taken by the Spanish (mostly military) authorities to control said encounter. It is the large context within which the issues in the following chapters take place.

Chapter 2 discusses how the Moroccans were, in the Spanish perception, excellent material for war, and that they were apt for specific tactical roles to the exclusion of others. It shows that their 'otherness' could have its tactical advantages vis-à-vis Republican enemies, both soldiers and civilians, which was reflected in the reputation for terror that the Moroccans enjoyed among the enemy, to the benefit of the Nationalists.

Chapter 3 deals with the role of racial perceptions in military life, but outside the scope of combat. It illustrates how the Spanish perceived the Moroccan soldiers as having peculiar psychological traits which necessitated a special treatment by their commanders and that the Moroccans caused disciplinary problems that were different from those encountered with Spanish soldiers. Besides, the longer the war lasted, the more segregated the Moroccan units became from

other non-Moroccan ones. It also shows that the Moroccan soldiers, far from being passive agents of the Spanish army, were often assertive in their demands to be treated fairly, and were selective in choosing to enlist in units that they found more suitable for themselves and in demanding commanders who were more to their liking and more closely connected to their language and traditions.

Part II of the study deals with the role of the perception of race and culture in determining the space the Moroccans had to occupy within Spain outside the military context. This part is divided into two chapters. Chapter 4, which treats the relations between the Moroccans and women, demonstrates how the Spanish Nationalist army and state tried to control mixed sexual relationships. The Nationalists made efforts to prevent marriages between these two different groups, based on arguments of differences in faith, the undermining of the Spanish prestige and the protective mission of the Spaniards in Morocco. There were also hurdles on the Moroccan side against such unions. The chapter shows that the Nationalist army tried to implement this separation between Moroccan men and Spanish women even in the realm of sexual services by importing Moroccan prostitutes to service the Moroccan contingents in Spain.

Chapter 5 examines the Nationalists' policy towards the religious identity and space of the Moroccans. It will become clear that the Nationalists perceived the Moroccans as first and foremost Muslims, and therefore geared their propaganda towards the Moroccans that described the war in Spain in religious terms. The Franco regime paid special attention to the religiousness of the Moroccan soldiers by adapting all the aspects of their life inside and outside the fronts in a way that would respect the boundaries of their Islamic religion. As a consequence, the army fought the attempts of the Catholic Church to convert Moroccans to Christianity, and life in hospitals was organised in a manner that reflected Franco's supposed respect for Islam. Furthermore, the 'respect' for Islamic faith policy of the Franco regime did not only mean allowing the Moroccans to freely practice their faith, but it also meant ensuring that the Moroccans would not step outside their religious space. The Moroccans were both allowed and pressured to be conservative faithful Muslims.

Part III shows the extent of hostility and rejection towards the Moroccans on the one hand and acceptance on the other hand. It shows that the attitudes of both the Republicans and the Nationalists towards the Moroccans had much to do with old racial prejudices, the pre-war history of confrontation with the Moroccans, and the conditions and policies of the Spanish administration in Spanish Morocco. Chapter 6 analyses the relationship of the other side of the conflict, the Republic, with the Moroccans. While the Nationalists were eager to accommodate the Moroccans and temporarily abandon their suspicious attitude towards them, the Republicans were more insistent on adhering to the traditional Spanish enmity towards the 'Moor', and which was translated, especially in the early stages of the war, into a no-mercy attitude towards the Moroccan

soldiers who were often shot by the Republicans upon capture. This uncompromising and suspicious attitude also negatively affected their relations with Moroccan and other North African players who were ready to assist the Republicans in anti-Nationalist endeavours.

Chapter 7 examines the overall attempts by the Nationalists' to balance between including and accepting the Moroccans in Spain on the one hand, and their policy to isolate them as much as possible from interaction with other Spanish units, Spanish civilian society and religion on the other hand. The chapter shows that attempts to create a distance between the Spanish and the Moroccan were two-sided, as often the Moroccan soldiers, the Moroccan authorities and the Moroccan political parties were concerned with keeping their distance from the Spaniards too.

## **Part I**

### **Combat and Life in the Army**

## Chapter 1

### A military overview of the Spanish Civil War and the role of the Moroccan troops

After the Army of Africa took control of North Morocco in an anti-Republican coup on 17 July 1936, a series of rebellions took place in the Spanish Peninsula. Most of Old Castile, Galicia, Navarre, and a number of Andalusian towns fell into the hands of the rebel officers and their rightist allies. The rebellion failed however in Madrid and the large cities of Barcelona and Valencia, as well as the Basque provinces, Asturias, Cantabria, the entire east coast and even the greatest part of Andalusia (See Appendix 2 on the development of the Spanish Civil War). It was evident that a longer military operation was needed if the rebels were to succeed, and for that reason the rebels in the Spanish navy were given the task of carrying the Army of Africa across the Gibraltar Strait. After delivering the first batch of Moroccan soldiers to Cádiz, the pro-Republican sailors mutinied and killed or imprisoned their officers.<sup>1</sup> It was the inability to use the navy to ferry more troops to Spain that brought about the intervention of Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany to the aid of Franco. Mussolini wanted an allied Spain to help secure Italian hegemony on the Mediterranean. Hitler was initially hesitant to intervene but Franco's emissaries, who included German businessmen and members of the Nazi party, as well as Hitler's advisors convinced him of the benefits for Germany and its armed forces to use Spain as a training ground. The Germans and Italians provided, by the end of the third week of July 1936, transport aircraft to carry Legionnaires and *Regulares* to southern Spain.

The French Popular Front government, led by Leon Blum, supported the Republic and initially provided arms to the Spanish legitimate government. Later, due to internal pressure from right wing French parties, and to adhere to the European agreement on non-intervention in the Spanish conflict, the French would stop the supply of arms. Only intermittently would France later open the borders for the flow of more arms. Only the Soviet Union (and Mexico) was ready to provide a steady stream of arms to the Republic. The Soviet leader Joseph Stalin hoped to stem the advance of Fascism in Europe. In return however he received payment in gold from the Spanish government. By the end of 1936 the Republic, fearing the fall of its capital, deposited its entire gold reserves in the Soviet Union. Stalin kept the gold forever. His Communist International (Comintern) helped organise communist volunteers from all over the world (but mainly European communists) to help the Republic. They were formed in the so-called International Brigades.

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<sup>1</sup> A Moroccan sergeant suspected foul play in the ship that brought him to Cádiz. On arrival in the port city, he recognised General José Enrique Varela, under whose command he fought in Morocco, and who took command of the Spanish rebel forces in Cádiz. He warned him: 'you look general, I Hamido of the *harka* [Moroccan irregular unit], by Allah our great *Mulana* [Master], those people [of the] boat are no *miziana* [good]'. Varela offered a platoon of *Regulares* to the captain of the ship on his way back to the Spanish enclave of Ceuta. The captain declined the offer, and the boat was seized by the sailors after its departure. Francisco Sánchez Ruano, *Islam y Guerra Civil española. Moros con Franco y con la República* (Madrid 2004) 161.

On the rebel (Nationalist) side, the war presented dramatic changes. The assigned leader to the rebel side, the exiled General Sanjurjo (who tried to topple the government in 1932), died in a plane crash while departing from Portugal to Spain. General Emilio Mola, also a Morocco veteran, who coordinated the rebellion in Spain, failed to make any fast military progress towards the capital. It fell to the army of Africa under General Franco to deliver the death blow to the Republic. After airlifting colonial troops to the Spanish mainland, the Army of Africa scored a rapid succession of victories against the Republican loyalist army and militia in Andalusia and Extremadura in the fall of 1936. Franco also managed, with the aid of foreign aircraft, to finally prevent the Republican navy from endangering further naval transport of troops to Spain. His army that contained thousands of battle-hardened troops and experienced officers easily swept aside the Republican fighting force, in parts of Andalusia, Extremadura and New Castile, and which consisted of militiamen with little experience in fighting outside urban areas, and an army that lacked sufficient training and any combat experience.

Some revolutionaries on the Republican side exacerbated the military problem by insisting on ignoring military rank and discipline, and electing their commanders on a democratic basis, rather than by military expertise. The revolutionary spirit led to widespread collectivising of industry and agriculture, mainly in zones under control of anarchists. Excesses in the Republican zone, the result of a lack of firm government control during the initial weeks of the war, including the widespread killing of the Spanish clergy, owners of sizable property and other so-called 'enemies of the people', scared off more moderate supporters within the Republic, as well as Western governments. Western diplomats largely ignored the less visible excesses by the Nationalists (because outside of the main cities) which took a more organised form of execution, torture and imprisonment campaigns, in which the Army of Africa took the leading role (accompanied and aided by other security forces and the Falange militia). The terror of the Army of Africa and its military efficiency brought greater influence to Franco, and in the wake of his success in lifting the Republican siege of the Alcazar of Toledo on 27 September 1936, he was chosen a few days later in Salamanca as head of state and Generalissimo of the Nationalist armies.

The spectacular advance of the Army of Africa between July and October 1936 grew slower as the Republican resistance stiffened under the leadership of the socialist Prime Minister Largo Caballero. The militia started to follow regular military discipline and Soviet military advisors and materiel appeared on the scene, particularly the T-26 tanks that were superior to the German and Italian light tanks, and the 'Mosca' and 'Rata' fighter aircraft, that for months successfully faced the German and Italian planes in the struggle to dominate the skies. The Italian force would grow into tens of thousands who made up the Corpo di Truppe Volontari (CTV), while the German military mission consisted of the Condor Legion that was principally an air force, as well as technicians and military advisers and a small armoured force. The later appearance (in 1937) of state of the art German fighter planes in large numbers began to tip the balance in favour of Franco. But in November 1936 it was the Army of Africa that would have to conquer Madrid. While the Republican government evacuated to

Valencia, Madrid prepared for the Nationalist attack. Franco, his Legionnaires and his Moroccans, however, failed to capture Madrid. The prominent role of the International Brigades, the Soviet advisors and materiel in the defence of the capital, and the Spanish communist leaders insistence on halting any revolutionary changes in the Republic and on an alliance with the bourgeois democratic forces while focusing on military efficiency and victory in the war brought great influence to the communists within the Republic.

The failure of the attack on Madrid and subsequent operations to encircle the capital, principally the Jarama offensive and the failed Italian attack on Guadalajara in the spring of 1937, pushed Franco to opting for a piecemeal destruction of Republican territory. During this time the armies of both warring parties started to grow through the introduction and enforcing of conscription.<sup>2</sup> The Nationalists were no longer exclusively dependent on the Army of Africa or the volunteer militias, though the African units still carried out crucial roles. The period that encompassed his northern offensive in Asturias, Cantabria and the Basque country, which lasted from March 1937 until October 1937 witnessed important events. It was during this campaign that General Mola met his death in an air crash, removing the last possible military and political rival to General Franco. During this offensive the Condor Legion launched its infamous raids on Durango and Guernica killing hundreds in each town, raids which were ominous precedents to the so-called strategic bombing campaigns of the Second World War that destroyed complete cities. In May 1937, a civil war within a civil war broke out in the Republican camp, between the communists and the anarchists, that ended with the defeat of the latter and the halting of the revolutionary process that was taking place in Catalonia, and victory for those who insisted on order and concentrating efforts on victory. The May crisis, as it was called, led to the fall of the government of Largo Caballero, who was accused of being too much in favour of the extreme left, especially the anarchists. He was succeeded by the more moderate socialist Juan Negrín. The domination of the communists and their allies of the Republic acquired an almost total character.

The Republic also tried to divert the attention of Franco from attacking the North by launching a costly offensive in Brunete. Franco briefly halted his northern offensive, won in Brunete, and pursued the war in the North that ended with the destruction of a large part of the Republican army. From that moment, the war progressed slowly but steadily in favour of General Franco. Republican counterattacks, such as the winter battle in Teruel (December 1937-February 1938), brought temporary small victories but ended in disaster. Subsequent Nationalist offensives in Aragon brought the forces of Franco to the Mediterranean, separating the Republican territory in Catalonia from the rest of the Republic, and prompting a Republican counter attack, the battle of the Ebro, in the summer of 1938 which became the longest battle of the Civil War and which the Republic fought with numerical and

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<sup>2</sup> For the conscription armies see James Matthews, *Soldados a la fuerza. Reclutamiento obligatorio durante la Guerra Civil 1936-1939* (Madrid 2013).

material disadvantage. A brief moment of optimism shone for the Republic during the Czechoslovakian crisis of September 1938, when it seemed that a European war was about to break-out between Germany and the Western democracies. In that case, the Republic hoped that France would intervene militarily and defeat the forces of German-allied Franco. The ‘peaceful’ solution of the crisis, surrendering Czechoslovakian Sudetenland to Germany, crashed those Republican hopes. Following the battle of the Ebro, the Nationalists overwhelmed Catalonia (November 1938-February 1939) and the fate of the Republic seemed sealed, despite a last desperate offensive in Extremadura (January-February 1939). Tired of war, anti-communist elements in Madrid, including the anarchists, conspired to topple the government with the hope of gaining a merciful peace with Franco. The coup, commanded by Colonel Segismundo Casado, defeated the communists in Madrid who were willing to fight to the end, but failed to elicit from Franco any response beyond an unconditional surrender. In March Madrid surrendered to Franco and the war was officially over on 1 April 1939. Decades of dictatorship by General Franco would follow.

### **The military significance of the Moroccan troops**

That the Moroccan troops played an extremely important military role in the early days, weeks and months of the Spanish Civil War is common knowledge to the students of the Spanish conflict. Moroccan troops and the Legionaries of the Army of Africa occupied much of Andalusia and Extremadura and defeated one Republican army after another until they reached the gates of Madrid. Nationalists, besieged in the Alcazar of Toledo or in Oviedo, could not be relieved by Nationalist Peninsular units and had to hear spoken Arabic or see the red headgears of the *Regulares* to know that salvation was coming. It was the second time that the Army of Africa, with its *Regulares* and Foreign Legion proved that they could save the day. It had already done so with brutal efficiency in 1934 when the Spanish leftists and their Asturian mine workers militia rebelled against the rightist led government in Madrid, and the Peninsular army and security forces faced enormous troubles in trying to combat it. That efficiency was reflected in the heavy losses brought upon the rebels vis-à-vis the relatively few losses for the Army of Africa.<sup>3</sup>

The importance of the Moroccan troops certainly diminished as the Civil War progressed as peninsular armies grew and foreign contingents and weapon technology were flown in. Yet, the Moroccans’ role remained important during the whole period of the war. Perhaps Seidman does not exaggerate when he notes that ‘the Moroccan army may well have been, as a number of perceptive

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<sup>3</sup> The Spanish Foreign Legion suffered 13 fatalities, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Tabor *Regulares* of Ceuta (the only *Regulares* unit to have engaged in combat in Asturias) only seven, even though they included the commander of the *Tabor* sent to Asturias. It is estimated that about 1500 and 2000 died in Spain as a result of the rebellion, of which 320 were soldiers and other state security personnel plus 35 priests. The light fatal casualties of the Army of Africa (a total of 20) speaks to its efficiency, also given the urban nature of the combat with which it was not familiar during the colonial wars in Morocco. José E. Álvarez, ‘The Spanish Foreign Legion during the Asturian Uprising of October 1934’, *War in History* 18 (2011) 200-224, here 222; Carlos González Rosado and Juan García del Río Fernández, *Grupo de Fuerzas Regulares de Ceuta nr. 3. 1915-1985, 70 años al servicio de España* (Ceuta 2012) 198, 200.



observers have labelled it, “the decisive factor” of the war’.<sup>4</sup> There are significant indicators of that important role. These indicators are, among others, their geographical distribution, their share in unit citations and the casualties suffered by them.

First of these is the manner of their distribution after the initial phase of the conflict. Whereas the Moroccan troops formed, along with the Foreign Legion, the Army of Africa between July and early 1937, the Moroccan *Tabors* were later distributed geographically over different theatres and grouped with other Spanish units forming newly raised divisions.<sup>5</sup> This is explained as being the result of the desire to integrate within the new divisions a number of experienced, battle-hardened shock troops that would raise the fighting quality of the new formations. This is demonstrated by the request the Spanish High Commissioner in Morocco Colonel Juan Beigbeder submitted to General Franco in December 1937. Beigbeder, pointing to reasons of raising the military effectiveness of the Moroccan troops, asked in his request for *Tabors* of each group of *Regulares* to be grouped together in the same geographical neighbourhood.<sup>6</sup> Franco responded negatively to the request, pointing that otherwise it would affect the combat value of the grand units.<sup>7</sup>

A second indicator in gauging the military value of the Moroccan units is by reviewing the collective decorations awarded to Spanish Nationalist units for their achievements between 1936-1939. We will take here the examples of the prestigious *Medalla Militar* and the *Orden de San Fernando* or *La Laureada* as it is better known. Around 85 collective *Medalla Militar* have been bestowed on either individual units or groups of units in the Spanish armed forces for services rendered during the Civil War. There are 33 collective citations featuring Moroccan units out of 85 which make these North African units, given their percentages of the total army, overrepresented among recipients of these citations.<sup>8</sup> The image is slightly different with regard to the *Orden de San Fernando*.<sup>9</sup> This has been collectively granted 21 times, of which four times to Moroccan units and twice to the Spanish Foreign Legion. On first sight it might not make the Moroccan units seem to possess a disproportionately high place among the recipients of the collective version of this medal. However, fifteen other *Orden de San Fernando* collective medals were conferred to, among others: two cities, and large collective of units like ‘the forces defending the University Campus’ or ‘several forces fighting at the Teruel front’, operations in which Moroccan troops participated, which would make their share in these citations rise. In fact, only eight times was this military distinction separately

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<sup>4</sup> Michael Seidman, *The Republic of Egos. A Social History of the Spanish Civil War* (Madison 2002) 43.

<sup>5</sup> Thomas, *The Spanish Civil War*, 738.

<sup>6</sup> AGMAV, A.2, L.158, Cp 25. Among other measures, Beigbeder suggested replacing individual leaves with collective ones where whole *Tabors* would enjoy rest along with all their officers, as well as taking measures so that any soldier belonging to a group of *Regulares* would not be assigned to a different group, and if possible to always stay within his *Tabor*. It seems that the first of these suggestions was not followed upon, probably because of the necessities of war.

<sup>7</sup> Franco’s response to Beigbeder, 31 Dec. 1937 AGMAV, A.2, L.158, Cp 25.

<sup>8</sup> Servicio Histórico Militar, *Galería militar contemporánea*, Vol.IV : *Medalla Militar. Cuarta Parte: Suboficiales, tropa y condecoraciones colectivas* (Madrid 1976)

<sup>9</sup> For these see: Servicio Histórico Militar, *Galería militar contemporánea*, Vol.I: *La Real y Militar Orden de San Fernando* (2<sup>nd</sup> Madrid 1984) and *La Real y Militar Orden de San Fernando. Segunda Parte* (Madrid 1980).

awarded to specific battalions or companies, four among which, as already mentioned, went to Moroccan units: one battalion, two companies and one squadron.

Talking about overrepresentation raises the question of the numbers of the Moroccan troops that participated in the Spanish war and their share of numbers within the Spanish army. Hugh Thomas estimates the probable number of Moroccan participants as reaching 75,000.<sup>10</sup> The military historian colonel Gárate Córdoba, conducting extensive documentary research, put the numbers of Moroccan participants at more than 78,000,<sup>11</sup> while Maria Rosa Madariaga does not diverge too far when estimating the number as being around 80,000.<sup>12</sup> This represents less than ten percent of the total combatants who fought under General Franco between 1936-1939.<sup>13</sup>

The main source of recruitment was the Spanish Protectorate, with the *interventores* and local tribal chiefs playing a significant role. Thanks to their work, recruitment efforts intensified in the Rif, in Jebala and in Gomara. An important meeting, on 20 July 1936, was held in Ajdir (the previous capital of Mohammed ben Abdul Krim al Khattabi) where Soleiman al Khattabi, at the time the leader of the Beni Urriagel (the tribe that had played the main role in fighting the Spaniards during the Rif rebellion), announced that he would join the Nationalists. His tribe would provide a great contingent of soldiers to the Spanish Army.<sup>14</sup> Many ex-rebel leaders would join the effort along with ex-rebel combatants. Another source of recruitment was Ifni and the Sahara, although these less densely populated regions would provide smaller numbers of recruits compared to Spanish northern Morocco. During the first weeks and months, the recruitment did not face difficulties and was even met with enthusiasm. By the end of 1936 and early 1937 the numbers of people enlisting started to diminish (though enlistment never ceased), possibly either due to news of increasing casualties and because of the limits to what the Spanish Protectorate could demographically bear. There were reports and rumours of increasing hostility and even violent resistance to recruitment, especially in the regions that had been most resistant to Spanish invasion,<sup>15</sup> but these are mainly based on French (and to a lesser extent British) reports. War weariness would have, to a certain extent, been present in Spanish Morocco and among some Moroccan soldiers in Spain (see chapter 3), in the same way it existed in Spain itself, as a country involved in a prolonged war. But (as already mentioned in the introduction) Spanish archival material has yet to confirm the existence of armed resistance against recruitment in the Spanish Protectorate.<sup>16</sup> Oral testimonies of Moroccan veterans do not refer to the existence of such rebellions either.

### **French Morocco**

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<sup>10</sup> Thomas, *The Spanish Civil War*, 944.

<sup>11</sup> Gárate Córdoba, 'Las Tropas de África en la Guerra Civil española', 56.

<sup>12</sup> Madariaga, *Los moros que trajo Franco*, 172.

<sup>13</sup> Shannon E. Fleming, 'Spanish Morocco and the Alzamiento Nacional', *Journal of Contemporary History* 18 (1983) 30.

<sup>14</sup> María Rosa de Madariaga, *Marruecos. Ese gran desconocido. Breve historia del Protectorado Español* (Madrid 2013) 326-328; El Merroun, *Las tropas marroquíes en la Guerra Civil española*, 36-37.

<sup>15</sup> Balfour, *Deadly Embrace*, 275; Madariaga, *Marruecos. Ese gran desconocido*, 330, 332.

<sup>16</sup> Mesa, *Los moros de la Guerra Civil española*, 188.

The Moroccan soldiers who fought in Spain did not in their entirety originate in the Spanish zone of Morocco, as many from the French zone enlisted in Franco's army to fight in Spain. But there is a huge divergence in estimates of how important was the French zone as a source of manpower for the Spanish Nationalists. According to Ibn Azzuz Hakim, Moroccans from the French Zone formed two thirds of the total of Moroccans in Franco's army.<sup>17</sup> Ruano mentions the historian J.Wolf putting the percentage of Moors from the southern zone in the Nationalist army as being 75% though Ruano dismisses it as exaggerated and not based on any sources.<sup>18</sup> Balfour asserts that six months into the war 50,000 Moroccans were fighting alongside the Nationalists, of these only one third were from the Rif mountainous region in the Spanish Protectorate.<sup>19</sup> Madariaga on the other hand puts the share of Moroccans from French Morocco at 10% of the total of Moroccans who fought in the Spanish Nationalist army.<sup>20</sup>

The French authorities in Morocco estimated that in July 1936, when the war started, a quarter of the number of the *Regulares* already serving with the Spanish were Moroccans who originated from the French zone. The French started to implement preventive, as well as punitive, measures to curtail the enrolment of new recruits from their zone in the Spanish army and concluded that they were achieving success by the end of 1936, when cases of recruitment were scarce.<sup>21</sup> In early 1937 the Sultan Mohammed ben Yusuf (the future Mohammed V), who was nominally also the sovereign of Spanish Morocco, issued a decree warning those Moroccans enlisting in the Nationalist army to condemn them for rebellion and a punishment of a fine of 200 francs (which could reach up to 500) plus six months of prison.<sup>22</sup> But according to the French authorities in the French Protectorate, the Francoist recruitment campaign intensified starting in April 1937, and the French military cabinet of the General Residence attributed that to the economic situation in eastern and southern Morocco which had its effects on the natives, as well as to the 'spirit of adventure which animates them'.<sup>23</sup> Punitive measures included fining or imprisoning a number of tribal chiefs as well as recruiting agents, with prison sentences varying from one month to one year.<sup>24</sup> A number of returnees were also given prison sentences.

The preventive measures by the French in Morocco led the Spanish Nationalists to refuse to give permission to their soldiers who originated from the French zone to go to their homes to enjoy their leaves. A more drastic measure, perhaps with the issue of Non-intervention in mind, was to officially hide the identity of the Moroccans coming from the French zone. In July 1938, secret

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<sup>17</sup> Ibn Azzuz Hakim, quoted in: El Merroun, *Las tropas marroquíes en la Guerra Civil española*, 187. El Merroun does not specify which publication by Ibn Azzuz Hakim he is citing.

<sup>18</sup> Ruano, *Islam y Guerra Civil*, 221.

<sup>19</sup> Balfour, *Deadly Embrace*, 278.

<sup>20</sup> Madariaga, *Los moros que trajo Franco*, 187-192.

<sup>21</sup> Report by the Residence General in Morocco on 20 May 1937. Service Historique de la Défense (SHD), 3 H 265.

<sup>22</sup> Madariaga, *Los moros que trajo Franco*, 194.

<sup>23</sup> Report by the Residence General in Morocco on 20 May 1937. SHD, 3 H 265.

<sup>24</sup> Report by the Residence General in Morocco on 27 July 1937. SHD, 3 H 265.

instructions from Burgos, the temporary seat of the Spanish Nationalist government, to Morocco ordered that recruits from the French zone should be given new tribal names chosen from tribes living in the Spanish zone.<sup>25</sup> The documents show examples of recruits from the French Zone being assigned new home towns or tribal origins. So soldiers from Marrakech and Casablanca became inhabitants of Alcazarquivir, while those of Fez took Xauen and Alcazarquivir as their home towns. Tribal names changed from Beni Mestara and Beni Serual, in the French zone to Beni Ahamed in the Spanish one, and Beni Kasen to Beni Hamed, and from Beni Sarat to Senhaya and so on and so forth.<sup>26</sup>

The Spanish Nationalist archival military material establishes that in July and August 1938 there were 6215 soldiers originating from French Morocco, fighting in Spain,<sup>27</sup> which makes it highly unlikely that volunteers from French Morocco ever formed a majority of the Moroccan troops in the peninsula, especially given the fact that many had been serving in the Spanish army even before the war started.<sup>28</sup>

### Casualties

The total numbers of participants help to understand the scope of the role of the Moroccan units when examining their combat deaths. These represent the role played by the Moroccan units well, especially when compared to the fatalities of other units fighting for the Nationalist cause. Let us begin with the overall Nationalist fatal casualties. Hugh Thomas estimates the combat deaths of the Nationalists in the neighbourhood of 90,000 and those of the Republicans as being 110,000, or ten percent of total combatants.<sup>29</sup> The Spanish Falangist battalions, for example, which fought on the side of Franco, are estimated to have suffered a ten percent combat death and probably less. The death percentage for Spanish royalist Carlist units was even lower,<sup>30</sup> while the Italians suffered five percent combat deaths during their intervention to aid Franco.<sup>31</sup> It appears to be difficult to document the combat death among Moroccan troops. A figure, widely accepted by specialists in the field is given by Gárate

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<sup>25</sup> AGMAV, C.2301, L.1, Cp.1/19.

<sup>26</sup> See examples in AGMAV, C.2301, L.1, Cp.4/4,5,6,7,8,9,10 and following.

<sup>27</sup> AGMAV, C.2301, L.2, Cp. 1 and upwards. Two historians Gárate Córdoba and Mesa have consulted this material before and came up with different numbers: 5240 and 5830 respectively. See and: Mesa, *Los moros de la Guerra Civil*, 236. Gárate Córdoba made a mistake of basing his numbers on a consultation of one paper giving a summary for all the native regiments (which did not include all numbers) instead of consulting each individual sheet sent by each regiment and then adding up the numbers. As for the difference between my calculations and those of Mesa, that is something which I cannot explain given that I am not familiar with how he made these calculations. The breakdown of the numbers I calculated is as follows: Mehal-la of Tetuan nr 1: 237, Mehal-la of Melilla nr 2: 16, Mehal-la of Larache nr 3: 336, Mehal-la of Gomara nr 4: 466 (260 in Spain), Mehal-la of Rif nr 5: 163, Regulares of Tetuan nr 1: 680, Regulares of Melilla nr 2: 207, Regulares of Ceuta nr 3: 1481, Regulares of Larache nr 4: 1558, Regulares of Alhucemas nr 5: 495, Battalion of Tiradores Ifni: 257 + 365, Battalion of Cazadores San Fernando nr 1: 23, Battalion of Cazadores Las Navas nr 2: 78, Battalion of Cazadores Melilla nr 3: 11, Battalion of Cazadores Cariñola nr 6: 10, Battalion of Cazadores Ceuta nr 7: 5, Battalion of Cazadores Serrallo nr 8: 18, Battalion of Zapadores Morocco (engineers): 15.

<sup>28</sup> The dates present in the archival material suggest that somewhere around 800 were recruited from the French zone before the war, going back as early as 1913, while Mesa estimates the number as somewhere between 1000-1500. See Mesa, *Los moros de la Guerra Civil*, 241. These estimates are far lower than the 5000 made by the French and referred to above.

<sup>29</sup> Thomas, *The Spanish Civil War*, 900.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibidem*, 901.

<sup>31</sup> John F. Coverdale, *Italian Intervention in the Spanish Civil War* (Princeton 1975) 398, 418.

Córdoba who estimated the combat deaths as being a maximum of 11,331.<sup>32</sup> A manuscript edited by the Ibn Azzuz Hakim quotes a document by the Spanish *Delegación de Asuntos Indígenas* which gives the far higher number of 21,800 dead plus 1700 missing.<sup>33</sup> Assuming the total number of Moroccan troops that took part in the war to be 80,000, the combat death estimates given by Córdoba would be higher than 14% of the total number of participating Moroccan combatants, while those quoted in the Indigenous Affairs Department document would represent slightly higher than 27% of total numbers (leaving out the missing). Whatever percentage we accept it represents a significantly higher rate of casualties compared to other units in the Spanish Nationalist camp, and is probably topped only by the pro-Republican International Brigades, which by some estimates might have suffered 33% fatalities.<sup>34</sup> The Moroccan casualties have certainly served to spare many lives on the Nationalist side. As one Spanish Nationalist veteran puts it: ‘the high command of the Nationalist army made a great decision in taking so many thousands of Moors to the Peninsula, for had it not done that, we would have lost half as many more dead Spanish soldiers. In the end, the thousands of Moors who died saved the lives of so many other Spaniards’.<sup>35</sup> To stress the point even more, it is informative to know that some Spaniards who did not respond to the Nationalist call to arms and who were arrested were sent, as punishment, to serve in the Moroccan units which were known to suffer high casualties in combat.<sup>36</sup>

However, there is no documentary evidence that shows that the Nationalist command deliberately sought to increase Moroccan casualties to save Spanish lives. More probably, the Nationalists trusted the efficiency of the Army of Africa more than peninsular units, and casualties of the Spanish Legion were not generally less heavy than the Moroccan ones. In any case, the Nationalists were less dependent, compared to the Republicans, on conscripts to launch difficult offensives, and mainly relied on professional troops and volunteers, including the Moroccans, leaving to most of the Spanish conscripts the less dangerous task of holding positions rather than engaging in costly offensive operations.<sup>37</sup>

The Moroccan soldiers themselves obviously were aware of their own primary role and importance for the military effort and they, both during the war as well as long decades later and not without pride, stressed their role in the first lines of combat.<sup>38</sup> Some Moroccan soldiers thought that Franco’s army was only victorious because of the native soldiers.<sup>39</sup> Others admitted that the Spanish Legion also played its part along with the Moroccans and that both the Moroccans and the legionnaires

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<sup>32</sup> Gárate Córdoba, ‘Las tropas de África en la Guerra Civil española’, 59.

<sup>33</sup> Ibn Azzuz Hakim, *La actitud de los moros ante el Alzamiento*, 190-191.

<sup>34</sup> Coverdale, *Italian Intervention*, 398.

<sup>35</sup> José Llordes Badía, *Al dejar el fusil. Memorias de un soldado raso en la guerra de España* (Barcelona 1969) 72.

<sup>36</sup> Pedro Corral, *Desertores. La Guerra Civil que nadie quiere contar* (Barcelona 2006) 445-446.

<sup>37</sup> Matthews, *Soldados a la fuerza*, 257.

<sup>38</sup> Interview with Mohammed Abdullah Susi, Ceuta, 19 January 2011. See also Republican intelligence Report on 2 November 1938. Sección Nacional de Coordinación, Servicio de Información exterior. International Institute for Social History, Archivo FAI, Cp, 33/5.

<sup>39</sup> Interrogations of Lachmi ben bi Rebbouh and Mohammed ben Allal. SHD, 3 H 266.

were the best troops in the field.<sup>40</sup> Some contrasted their prowess by disparaging other combatants whether Spanish or Italian,<sup>41</sup> although there were also those who highly praised either the enemy,<sup>42</sup> or foreign allies, particularly the Germans.<sup>43</sup>

With a clear idea on the significance of the Moroccan troops in the Spanish war, now it is time to discuss the influence of cultural and racial stereotypes in constructing the encounter between the Spaniards and the Moroccans, an encounter that will deal first with its military aspect.

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<sup>40</sup> Interrogations of Abdeselem ben Lahcene and Ali ben Khammar. SHD, 3 H 266.

<sup>41</sup> Interrogations of Mohamed Ould Mhamed M'kik and Dahmane ben Abdeselem ben Larbi. SHD, 3 H 266. Testimony of Hamido Al Ma'dani, Tetuan, 30 September 1996, El Merroun archive.

<sup>42</sup> Interrogation of Ali ben Hamidou ben Mohand. SHD, 3 H 266.

<sup>43</sup> Interview with Mohamed Al Ayyashi Al Zerki, Ceuta, 30 June 2011.

## Chapter 2

### The Moroccans in the battlefield

*The Moors, the Moors! They cried taken by panic. And the image of the Regulares, tall, dishevelled, filling the air with their shrieks, presented itself to them like an infernal apparition.*

From a diary describing the entrance of the *Regulares* into an Andalusian town.<sup>1</sup>

The Moroccans who fought in the battlefields of Spain were not merely soldiers who were used as rationally as any other source of manpower. Their ethnicity, culture, or both influenced most of aspects of their fighting experience in Spain, including ideas about their employment as soldiers, the tactical role they fulfilled, and the impact they had on enemy soldiers and civilians. There is hardly any aspect in which the cultural identity of these warriors did not influence the military aspect on the battlefield. And it is this influence, varying in forms, that this chapter will discuss.

#### The Moroccan as a combatant

How did the Spaniards perceive the Moroccan troops in terms of special traits, including race, religion, or geography, and how this impacted the way Moroccans were deployed in war? In fact, the role of ‘race’ in tactical thinking becomes apparent by noting that the Moroccan units, most notably the *Regulares*, were not entirely Moroccan. Let us examine the following table that is based on a statistical summary of troops and weapons for the Melilla *Regulares* group.<sup>2</sup>

Tabor	Native troops	European troops	Percentage of European troops to total
1 <sup>st</sup>	440	114	20.57%
2 <sup>nd</sup>	442	98	18.14%
3 <sup>rd</sup>	447	108	19.45%
6 <sup>th</sup>	492	119	19.47%
7 <sup>th</sup>	509	121	19.20%
8 <sup>th</sup>	449	152	25.29%
9 <sup>th</sup>	518	129	19.90%
10 <sup>th</sup>	520	121	18.87%
11 <sup>th</sup>	448	108	19.42%

<sup>1</sup> Eduardo Dominguez Lobato, *Cien capítulos de retaguardia (Alrededor de un diario)* (Madrid 1973) 45. The town which the *Regulares* were entering, was Sanlúcar de Barrameda in Cádiz province.

<sup>2</sup> AGMAV, A.31, L.1, Cp. 7. The 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> *Tabors* were kept outside of this list as the European troops listed in the source totaled 15 and 18 respectively, in comparison to 509 and 496 native troops for each respective *Tabor*, which might either hint to a typing error, meaning that they should be 115 and 118.

**Table 1**

As Table 1 demonstrates, the average percentage of European troops in these infantry battalions was 20.03% for the nine listed *Tabors*. If we put aside the slightly divergent percentage of 25.29% for the 8<sup>th</sup> *Tabor* the average percentage would be 19.30%, which would not diverge greatly from the previous percentage. Roughly speaking, a fifth of the ‘native’ *Regulares* troops were composed by European (i.e. Spanish) soldiers. The 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> *Tabors* existed already before the war and contained the approximately one-fifth portion of European soldiers to the total of troops, while the rest of the *Tabors* in the list were formed after the outbreak of the war and still maintained, on average, the same approximate ratio of native to European troops.

Table 2 indicates troop strength for the *Grupo de Tiradores de Ifni* nr. 6,<sup>3</sup> and gives numbers for September 1939, which is approximately half a year after the war, and therefore does not necessarily reflect the conditions until April 1939. The overall image that is given here does not diverge significantly from the previous Table. This Table shows the following percentages.

Tabor	Native troops	European troops	Percentage of European troops to total
1 <sup>st</sup>	725 <sup>4</sup>	260	26.39 %
2 <sup>nd</sup>	467 <sup>5</sup>	127	21.38 %
3 <sup>rd</sup>	388 <sup>6</sup>	344	46.99 %
4 <sup>th</sup>	383 <sup>7</sup>	96	20.04 %
5 <sup>th</sup>	446 <sup>8</sup>	97	17.86 %
6 <sup>th</sup>	550 <sup>9</sup>	102	15.64%

**Table 2**

Compared to Table 1, this has more extreme differences between the 15.64% of the 6<sup>th</sup> *Tabor* at one extreme and 46.99% of the 3<sup>rd</sup> *Tabor* at the other. Thus far, there is no apparent explanation

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<sup>3</sup> AHMC, Varela, 95/346.

<sup>4</sup> The overall native troop strength was given in the table as 750, but including 25 native sergeants. Whereas in case of European troops, the European sergeants were not included in the 260 number, and put in a separate category for non-commissioned officers. I opted therefore to subtract the number of sergeants in the case of native troops. The same principle of subtracting the number of native sergeants is applied in the following five *Tabors*. Corporals are included in the original table in the category of troops for both Europeans as well as natives.

<sup>5</sup> The overall native troop strength was given in the original table as 478. 11 sergeants were subtracted from this total.

<sup>6</sup> The overall native troop strength was given in the original table as 396. 8 sergeants were subtracted from this total.

<sup>7</sup> The overall native troop strength was given in the original table as 397. 14 sergeants were subtracted from this total.

<sup>8</sup> The overall native troop strength was given in the original table as 457. 11 sergeants were subtracted from this total.

<sup>9</sup> The overall native troop strength was given in the original table as 563. 13 sergeants were subtracted from this total.



for the extremely high number of European soldiers in the 3<sup>rd</sup> *Tabor* compared to the others, and whether this increase in the European percentage of soldiers occurred during the war or after it ended. As an anomaly the 3<sup>rd</sup> *Tabor* will be barred from the calculation of the average percentage of the European troops in this *Grupo de Tiradores*. This leaves an average of 20.26% of troops composed of Europeans, which is not very different from the average percentage of European troops vis-à-vis the total that is given by Table 1 of the Melilla *Regulares* Group. To strengthen these numbers with yet another example, the records from the Group of *Regulares* in Ceuta show that the three infantry *Tabors*, which the Group possessed before the start of the war contained 1833 soldiers, of whom 1452 were ‘Moors’ or 79.2% of the total.<sup>10</sup>

Why was there a need for an average of 20% European troops in these so-called native units? The ratio of European troops to total men has varied throughout the entire war and in all native units. José Montes Ramos notices that during the Civil War the five *Regulares* groups increased their infantry battalions to 51 and their cavalry ones to five, comprising 70,000 troops of whom 63,000 were natives,<sup>11</sup> which means that 10% of the *Regulares* were European. In addition, Gárate Córdoba gives a detailed overview of the *Tabors* dispatched to Spain during different stages of the war, estimating the number of the natives within each infantry *Tabor* or cavalry squadron. For example, according to Gárate Córdoba, on the night of 18 July 1936, 1235 troops of *Regulares* of Ceuta were shipped to Cadiz, among whom 1146 were natives,<sup>12</sup> meaning that less than 8 % of the soldiers were Spanish. Two *Tabors* of *Regulares* of Tetuan, comprising 1000 troops were airlifted to Spain between 20 and 30 July, among whom 930 were natives.<sup>13</sup> Until the end of September 1936, 9746 troops passed to the Peninsula, of whom 9183 were natives, or more than 94%. Gárate Córdoba indicates that he made estimations of the proportion of soldiers within *Tabors*, 25 to 30 Spaniards per *Tabor*, possibly more if officers were included.<sup>14</sup> However, he in a later page of his study states that Europeans formed 22% of effectives of a *Regulares Tabor*,<sup>15</sup> whereas the tables he presents, in almost all the cases, the Europeans form less than 10% of the total troops in native units.<sup>16</sup> It is probable that due to circumstances of war, and the demographics

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<sup>10</sup> Corporals are included with the soldiers. The two cavalry squadrons of the Groups contained 262 soldiers of which 226 or 86.2% a slightly higher percentage of Moroccans compared with the infantry battalions. González Rosado and Del Río Fernández, *Grupo de Fuerzas Regulares de Ceuta nr. 3*, 203.

<sup>11</sup> José Montes Ramos, *Los Regulares* (Madrid 2003) 35.

<sup>12</sup> José María Gárate Córdoba, ‘Las Tropas de Africa en la Guerra Civil española’, 18.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibidem*, 20.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem*, 18n13.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibidem*, 33.

<sup>16</sup> There is a confusing passage in Gárate Córdoba’s study. He states, while giving the numbers of the Moroccan troops passing to the peninsula between 6 and 14 October 1936, that the data did not explicitly put the number of native troops and therefore he tried to deduce them by subtracting 35 Europeans from the total, ‘in accordance with the proportion that existed in the composition for *Tabors* of 588 men in total and 456 natives, that is, 22% of Europeans’. *Ibidem*. Subtracting 35 from 588 does not result in 456. Besides, as we have seen, the numbers he gives show, in most cases, less than 10% of Europeans among troops passing to the Peninsula.

in Morocco, there was no possibility to provide all the new native units with 20% European troops, at least not during the initial stages of war, and probably most of native units contained among their ranks 10% or less European troops.<sup>17</sup>

In any case, there was a European component within the native units, which so far, has not been explained. Documentation of the Civil War period does not discuss this question. José Montes Ramos, however, notices that when the *Regulares* were created, it was decided, in order to provide them with the most possible cohesion, to include a sizable nucleus of European soldiers and officers, as the army sought to exploit the ‘warlike aptitudes of both the Spanish and the native personnel’,<sup>18</sup> which is a repetition of the royal decree of July 1914, that Montes Ramos cites earlier in his text. It stipulates that to provide the *Regulares* troops with the utmost cohesion, they should be provided with a nucleus of European personnel that should form 20% of the troops.<sup>19</sup> Although Montes Ramos does not explain (neither does the royal decree) what the different aptitudes between Spanish and Moroccan soldiers were, there is no shortage of commentators to point to these differences. These were perceived differences that, in Spanish eyes, led to different tactical employment of Moroccan troops, even though both Spanish and Moroccan soldiers followed similar training methods and tactical instructions in the use of fire arms.

Before examining the ‘warlike aptitudes’ of the Moroccans, and what kind of soldier the Spanish thought the Moroccans were or were supposed to be, it must be noted that despite the military importance the Moroccan soldiers had in the Civil War, most of the Moroccan volunteers who fought in Spain had no previous fighting experience. As José Montes Ramos notices, by the time the war started, only 2000 of the *Regulares* were veterans of the colonial wars against Abdel Krim.<sup>20</sup> As one military report complained in November 1936, the pacification and disarming of the Moroccan Protectorate (in the 1920s) had led to the loss of ‘the inclination to use arms’ in some places.<sup>21</sup> Most of the interviewees for this study, and the majority of the deserters from French Morocco who gave their testimony on their war experiences in Spain, had never touched a weapon before enlisting in the Spanish Army, as they were very young when they joined, even though some yearned to have the experience of managing a rifle. One could, however, add to the already mentioned 2000 men with combat experience, a number of ex-members of *Regulares* who would have re-enlisted in 1936 after they had left the army following the pacification campaign; members of the *Mehal-las* (and ex-members who would have re-enlisted); as well as former rebels

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<sup>17</sup> Interviews with Moroccan veterans, and especially interrogations of deserters from the Francoist army by officials in French Morocco do not provide information in this regard. The interrogation reports of French authorities in Morocco contain questions and answers regarding the composition of companies to which the deserters belonged, and they give ethnic background of officers and non-commissioned officers, as well as the number of troops in a company but no breakdown of the ethnicity of the soldiers.

<sup>18</sup> Montes Ramos, *Los Regulares*, 38.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibidem*, 36.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibidem*, 46.

<sup>21</sup> Report to General Franco, 3 November 1936. AGMAV, C.2384, L.166, Cp 9

who had experience fighting against the Spaniards. Still, people with prior combat experience would have formed a minority among the Moroccan soldiers who went to Spain. Why did the Spanish believe the Moroccans would be good soldiers? In what way should they be used? What were their strengths and weaknesses?

### **The uniqueness of a Moroccan soldier**

Besides the obvious benefit of reducing Spanish casualties in the Spanish Civil War and the Moroccan wars before that, which prompted the foundation of the *Regulares* units in the first place, the Spanish believed that Moroccans belonged to a 'martial race'. Writing in the *Ejército* (Army) magazine, one Spanish officer, Hermenegildo Tabernerero, stated that the Moroccans 'are warriors by nature and possess in the utmost degree the characteristics of the perfect infantry man: sober, fast walkers, agile, disciplined, strong, capable in the coup de mains, tenacious in the defence and fierce in the attack. Besides, they have an instinct that is to be envied, for making use of the terrain which they know to apply perfectly during the advance as well as during retreat'. Therefore, he concluded, forces that are constituted by such elements 'can and should be, naturally excellent'.<sup>22</sup> Since he wrote this piece two years after the end of the Civil War, the notion of a 'martial race' had clearly survived the test of the Civil War.

The idea of a 'martial race' had been utilised in the campaign to recruit Moroccans for the war effort. Colonel Beigbeder, the Commissioner for Native Affairs and later High Commissioner in Morocco, gave a speech in a recruitment meeting directed to a number of tribes in which he 'recalled to the minds of his audience that it had long been a tradition of the Moor that it was a disgrace for a man to die in bed. There could be no nobler death than to die in battle, in the full flush of manhood, for noble ideals'.<sup>23</sup> The image of the Moroccans as people born for war and enamoured with arms was propagated in the war propaganda in Spain. For example, a memoir published in 1937 referred to an injured Moroccan soldier, 'I have here one Moor, one of those who are fighting for Spain. He carries in his belt a machete, a *gumía*, a Russian rapier, a sabre. This does not matter. He carries what he could take from the enemy. But that yes! The rifle has much importance. The rifle must be the best that he has seen. He asks for it with true eagerness, and when he has it, he caresses it, takes care of it, and sleeps and eats with it and loves it more than a woman of his liking'.<sup>24</sup>

The notion of warrior races is one that also dominated military thinking in the British, French and Dutch empires, and so it was not a new discovery by the Spanish. The British in India 'discovered' the martial races to be located mostly in the northern part of the country, in regions like Punjab, the North West Frontier, Rajputana and the United Provinces. Soldiers from communities in these regions were supposedly both loyal and effective. The martial race discourse inverted negative

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<sup>22</sup> Hermenegildo Tabernerero, 'Fuerzas Jalifianas', *Ejército*, nr. 19 (1941) 52-56, here 55.

<sup>23</sup> Rosalinda Powell Fox, *The Grass and the Asphalt* (Puerto Sotogrande, 1997) 104.

<sup>24</sup> Francisco de Armas, *Estampas de la guerra: Del frente de Asturias* (Las Palmas 1937) 127.

colonial images of barbaric otherness. One of the purposes of the martial race theory that the British first developed was to inspire. By putting a positive and gloss on the men's cultural difference, it encouraged white officers to trust their troops, to respect their qualities, and to get more from them. The idea could help sustain the army, for any regiment is likely to work better and fight harder if its officers are persuaded that they command near-perfect soldiers.<sup>25</sup> The French also had their own martial races or *races guerrières*, with a hierarchy of their own, that put West Africans on top as infantrymen, followed by North Africans, of whom the Moroccans were put in the lead, followed by Algerians and Tunisians. Indo Chinese, for example, were relegated much lower in this hierarchy as infantrymen, though they were deemed better suited for either technical or labour duties.<sup>26</sup>

For the Spaniards, the notion of Moroccans as natural born warriors was already developed in the early twentieth century as a result of the difficult campaigns to establish their presence in their protectorate in Morocco. But if the French and the British had large multi-racial empires and could afford the luxury of choosing which race to recruit from, the Spanish had a small empire that consisted of northern Morocco, the Moroccan region of Ifni, and the Sahara, as well as the small territories of Equatorial Guinea. As it happened, it was Morocco that provided the pool from which the Spanish recruited their soldiers. The Moroccans were not only the 'warrior race' to recruit from, they were practically the only colonial 'race' to choose from. One might perhaps have distinguished between the men from Ifni and the Sahara on the one hand and the Riffians on the other hand, but that does not seem to have occupied the minds of the Spanish commanders or to have played any significant role in their deployment. This does not say, in any case, much about how racial perception was a determinant in the way Moroccans were used in combat. In this regard, an article that appeared in the Spanish army magazine *Ejército* is illustrative.

In 1952, José Alonso Mayo, an infantry captain and veteran of the Civil War published in *Ejército* 'A Psychological Investigation on the Moroccan Soldiers and Those of the Sus'.<sup>27</sup> Mayo had joined the *Regulares* as a second lieutenant (*Alférez*) during the Civil War, and on the first day an incident made him determined to study the characteristics and 'especial customs' of these soldiers. One day during the war food was being distributed to native soldiers of the *Regulares* in a Spanish village. This raised the curiosity of neighbours who came to attend the scene. One of the Moroccan soldiers separated from the formation and tried with signs to communicate with some potential acquaintances without obeying the order of the Spanish sergeant who told him to get back in the formation. Tired of this disobedience the sergeant struck him with his whip. This had

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<sup>25</sup> David Omissi, *The Sepoy and the Raj. The Indian Army 1860-1940* (London 1994) 25.

<sup>26</sup> Richard S. Fogarty, *Race and War in France. Colonial Subjects in the French army, 1914-1918*, 72-77.

<sup>27</sup> José Alonso Mayo, 'Un breve ensayo de investigación psicológica sobre los soldados marroquíes y del Sus', *Ejército*, nr. 144 (January 1952) 29-43.

the immediate effect on the rest of the soldiers who threw their plates on the ground, breaking the formation and causing major confusion. Mayo who had joined the unit merely half an hour prior to the incident inquired about the reason for the disturbance; the answer, which came after calmness was restored, was that the punishment was just in itself, given how manifest the disobedience was, but they could not tolerate that it was administered in the presence of women because that constituted a 'great shame for everyone'.<sup>28</sup> It was the first insight Mayo had into the psychology of Moroccan troops.

Several years after this incident, Mayo wrote the article in which he expounded on how religious and geographical background influenced the quality of Moroccan soldiers, and how such background determined the tactical advantages and disadvantages of the Moroccans, and therefore how to employ them in combat. He started with the influence of Islam, which as an expansionist faith, had contributed to the creation of a 'warrior spirit' that was maintained (even after Islam could not expand its frontiers anymore) through internal strife. He saw the participation of the Moroccans in both the First and the Second World Wars, as well as the Spanish Civil War as a vehicle by which the 'contained tension' escaped and by which the 'eternal fire' was kept burning.<sup>29</sup>

Having explained the 'warrior spirit' by religious factors, Mayo continued to comment on the physical and psychological strengths and weaknesses of the Moroccan as influenced by his religion. He explains how polygamy, the ease in which a man can divorce his wife, and the exaltation of bodily pleasures led the 'uncultivated masses' to resort to submitting to carnal instincts in a way that wastes health and morale; therefore, the 'physical yield is poor, and the morale deficient'. But on the positive side, he deals with an aspect of belief that he finds advantageous in military terms, that is the *Mectub*, or the belief that destiny is written, and that a man will die 'whenever he has to die' and not at any other moment 'if it is not written'. The writer found the consequences of such fatalism socially lamentable since it was a hurdle against progress. However, such belief also produced valour, as death would not come 'even if the enemy wants it', and that it would not be wise to think of 'what will happen tomorrow because it will be as it is written'.<sup>30</sup>

Moving from religion to the environment and its influence, Mayo continues his argument through his observation of the difficult life Moroccans in the Spanish Protectorate led in poor terrain that was either dry or mountainous. Coupled with their fatalism and resistance to foreign ways, and the lack of a feudal regime, they were both 'simple' and 'little hard working'. Living in a harsh environment and with little to do meant that the Moroccans of the Spanish protectorate were bestowed with the virtue of 'patience'. But perhaps the most important factor Mayo mentions

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<sup>28</sup> Jose Alonso Mayo, 'Un breve ensayo de investigación psicológica' 34.

<sup>29</sup> Ibidem, 30.

<sup>30</sup> Ibidem, 31.

was the role of feet as a ‘principal vehicle’. He observed that for most of the simple people the usual mode of transport was ‘feet’, since every family had only one donkey and mounting it was a privilege given to the more elderly members. Given the monotony of life, and the need to acquire provisions from the weekly tribal markets, members of the tribes were constantly on the move, making them good walkers and resistant to heat and fatigue. This last point contradicted the earlier remark Mayo makes about Moroccans having a poor physical yield, a contradiction that he fails to explain explicitly. Mayo observed yet a further advantage of Moroccans being good walkers. As these trips took place during day and night, Moroccans developed good eyesight and a good sense of orientation.<sup>31</sup> The article concluded that the Moroccan had a number of factors; the most important were as follows:

A-positive factors: a warrior spirit – valour – sobriety – astuteness – patience – being good walkers – resistance to heat – resistance to fatigue (limited), good eyesight (during day and night) and a good sense of orientation (also during day and night).

B-negative factors: poor physical yield (long term)<sup>32</sup> – deficient morale (in specific situations and aspects) – being easily insubordinate – little hardworking.

C- factors that could be both positive or negative: bloodthirsty instincts and monetary appetite.

Mayo finally recommended the best way to tactically employ the Moroccan troops, and noted that the Moroccan infantrymen were suitable for: coup de main operations, go-between missions, ambushes, pursuit of the enemy, mountain operations in temperate weather, cleaning operations, and defences. As cavalymen, they were suitable for reconnaissance, pursuits, and charges. The operations for which he considered the Moroccans *little* suitable as infantrymen were attacking strongly organised positions, breaking the frontline, garrison duties in the rearguard, and guarding prisoners,<sup>33</sup> though these last two points are not properly explained. As cavalymen he found that the Moroccans were little suited for duties other than those already mentioned.<sup>34</sup>

In a way, Mayo’s words explain why part of the troops of the *Regulares* and *Tiradores* units were formed by Spanish soldiers. The Spanish soldier, if his logic is followed, would close the gap where the skills and psychological aptitudes of the Moroccan soldier were wanting. Mayo’s analysis of how the religion and environment of the Moroccans influenced their value as

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<sup>31</sup> Ibidem, 34.

<sup>32</sup> It is by adding (long term) to the ‘poor physical yield’ attribute, and (limited) to the ‘resistance to fatigue’ one that Alonso Mayo perhaps is trying to reconcile the contradiction referred to above.

<sup>33</sup> The unsuitability for garrison duty in the rearguard is not explained. Perhaps the whipping incident is meant to illustrate how it is not suitable to place the Moroccans among civilians.

<sup>34</sup> Jose Alonso Mayo, ‘Un Breve Ensayo de Investigación Psicológica’, 34.

soldiers may have been written in 1952, but must have been reinforced by his experiences of the Spanish Civil War. In many ways it reflects opinions of Spanish witnesses of the war, many of whose testimonies and points are repeated by Mayo. It is apparent that an ideal tactical employment of the Moroccan, as imagined by Mayo was often applied in combat in Spain. As the role of the cavalry was of diminishing importance in the war, and as their numbers were naturally far inferior to those of the infantry, the focus will be on the infantrymen.

Mariano Fernández Aceytuno, in his study published in 2001 on Ifni and the Sahara, agrees with many of Mayo's points. While Mayo spoke about Moroccans in general, Aceytuno makes a number of specific points with regard to the inhabitants of Ifni and the Sahara that relates their environment to their combative capabilities. For example, he distinguishes between the *Ba Amrani* people from Ifni and the *Saharaouis*. He concludes that since the *Ba Amrani*'s are more sedentary, they are suitable for defence as they will 'stick to the ground and defend it with nail and teeth', while the more nomadic *Saharaouis* are suitable for attack, since they supposedly lack a sense of property ownership, and therefore are more prepared to act in open space and undertake operations of an offensive character.<sup>35</sup> Because of the harsh conditions in the Sahara, the nomads have learned to be astute hunters and trackers, and have developed good hearing capabilities, an excellent sense of orientation, and patience in the face of hunger.<sup>36</sup>

General Varela had already, years before, confirmed some of these stereotypes of the Moroccan soldier. Talking to the *Telegrema del Rif* in July 1939, he stated that the Moroccan was '[m]agnificent as an *infantry* soldier. He is the man of war in all notions for his special characteristic and audacity which allows him to attack with *surprise*. He is the warrior par excellence, enduring and fierce. He bears the pain like the best soldier in the world. He is more suitable for the *offensive* [*Italics added*]'.<sup>37</sup> In a nutshell, General Varela, who spent many years leading Moroccan troops in Morocco and Spain, described what he thought were the advantageous characteristics of the Moroccan as a soldier, and how and in what role he should be employed: an infantry man, during attack and preferably conducting a surprise operation.

Lower rank officers and soldiers also confirm ideal ways to employ Moroccans as stated by Mayo. An officer of the Spanish Foreign Legion, Francisco Cavero y Cavero, wrote in 1938 about operations in the Aragonese front, and how the Republicans were present at a rising called Pueyos de Larrés, while they threatened the town of Sabiñánigo in Aragon. One of the commanders looking at what the Nationalists were up against, remarked how tiring it would be to climb the rising only as a tourist (let alone climbing it while fighting). That is why, noted Cavero, it was the right decision to send ahead the Moroccans of the *Mehal-la*, for the Moroccans climbed

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<sup>35</sup> Mariano Fernández-Aceytuno, *Ifni y Sáhara. Una Encrucijada en la Historia de España* (Dueñas 2001) (Kindle edition 2015, retrieved from Amazon.com). Chapter VII.

<sup>36</sup> Fernández-Aceytuno, *Ifni y Sáhara*, chapter VII.

<sup>37</sup> *El Telegrama del Rif*, 26 July 1939

it, each on his own, while hiding ‘the way they know it’, and hunting the unaware Republicans, before handing the top over to the Legion.<sup>38</sup> He had already expressed his admiration for the Moroccans who, before an attack, ‘crept towards their starting point, as only the Moors know how to creep’.<sup>39</sup> Foreign opponents of the Moroccan troops noted also their good use of the terrain. The British volunteers of the International Brigades, during the battle of Jarama, noted that the Moroccans were experts at finding cover in open ground and within seconds their entire skirmish line would disappear.<sup>40</sup> A South African volunteer of the British Battalion considered the Moroccan’s ability to ‘exploit the slightest fold in the ground... amazingly skilful. Bobbing up and down, running and disappearing again’, they advanced while all the time maintaining accurate fire, a feat made more impressive as they ‘had to travel more than two thousand yards... with no apparent cover’.<sup>41</sup>

As for the supposed night vision capabilities of the Moroccans, a Spanish veteran of the war wrote, thirty years after the war, how it was a relief to have Moroccans assist in guarding duties in Melilla at the start of the war, for ‘it provided confidence and security to have them at our side to do the guarding [duties], for they did not even blink, and in the night, as I understood, they have eyes like those of cats, that is to say that their visual system enlarges and they see things in plain darkness. Besides they have the hearing of a lynx: they detect every sound’. Much later, on the battlefield in the Peninsula itself, these perceptions were confirmed. The shrieks and incessant shooting of the advance guard of the Moroccans ‘struck awe, in a big way, at the soldiers in the trenches of the reds, who were always wary of having so close the Moroccans who were so agile and accurate in managing the rifle in addition to their sharpness and night vision like grand felines’.<sup>42</sup> Such perceptions of Moroccans having extraordinary night time capabilities extended to some officers who led those soldiers. One Lieutenant Pahisa of the *Regulares*, described his soldiers as the ‘Moroccans proved themselves especially in the night. During the day [they constitute] nothing, but in the night protected by darkness the Moroccan was fearsome’.<sup>43</sup> Interestingly, one Moroccan veteran agrees with the advantage the Moroccans had at night. ‘Those communists were very strong, but they did not take into account the Moroccans and their fighting, because we the Muslims attack at night’.<sup>44</sup>

### **Coup de main attacks**

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<sup>38</sup> Francisco Cavero y Cavero, *Con la Segunda Bandera en el frente de Aragón. Memorias de un alférez provisional* (Saragossa 1938) 51.

<sup>39</sup> Francisco Cavero y Cavero, *Con la Segunda Bandera en el frente de Aragón*, 34.

<sup>40</sup> As quoted in Ben Hughes, *They Shall not Pass! The British Battalion at Jarama* (Oxford 2011) 80.

<sup>41</sup> As quoted in Hughes, *They Shall not Pass!*, 81.

<sup>42</sup> Llordes Badía, *Al dejar el fusil*, 53, 120.

<sup>43</sup> Fernando Estrada Vidal, *Los que estuvimos en la batalla del Ebro* (Barcelona 1972) 368. Pahisa noticed that the Moroccans were also ‘but they were at the same time enduring and disciplined’.

<sup>44</sup> Testimony of Abdelkader Amezian, Tetuan, 9 November 1993, El Merroun archive.



In light of such stereotypes, and the perceived superiority of the Moroccan in matters of surprise and in dark environments, it is not surprising that quite often they were used to conduct so-called coup de main operations. Some of these operations are shrouded in a myth of extraordinary capabilities and cruelty. A member of the British battalion tells a harrowing story about one nightly deadly incident involving Moroccans, during the battle for the *Ciudad Universitaria* in Madrid.

It was out in University City...we were holding a very rough line... when one of our French comrades was separated from us in an advanced position. It was... quiet... and he slept like the rest of us, except for those on guard. In the night Moors crept forward, found him... and ... gouged out his eyes as he lay there helpless. We heard his screams...[but by the time] we found him they had killed him and fled.<sup>45</sup>

There are two famous examples concerning the heavily contested battle at the Jarama River (to the south of Madrid) that was fought in early 1937 as part of the effort to encircle Madrid. One example concerns a British company which supposedly allowed itself to be captured by a group of Moroccans who gained access to the British trench by simply singing the *Internationale*,<sup>46</sup> which of course had nothing to do with savagery, but it might have been a reflection of the belief in the deviousness of the Moroccans. It is more probable that the affair was caused by lax security measures and good faith on the part of the British.<sup>47</sup> The other, more dramatic, example concerns a *Tabor* of Moroccans who on 11 February 1937 ‘silently worked their way in the dark’ to the Pindoque railway bridge, where they, as Hugh Thomas puts it, knifed the sentries of the pro-Republican French André Marty Battalion ‘one by one’. This might have happened the way it is described by Thomas and such daring achievements are not lacking in military history.<sup>48</sup> Although it takes an extreme amount of amateurism on the part of the French sentries to let a complete battalion – or even part of it – approach them to a knifing distance, and dispatch them one by one

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<sup>45</sup> Hughes, *They Shall not Pass!*, 77.

<sup>46</sup> See the examples (and the sources Thomas used) in Thomas, *The Spanish Civil War*, 572, 575.

<sup>47</sup> Ben Hughes relates, citing British veterans, a similar incident on the Jarama front, on 13 February 1937, involving the singing of the *Internationale* and the clenched fist salute, except that the singers were identified as Spanish soldiers, probably from the Spanish Legion. Some British soldiers were confused, as they observed a similarity between the advancing party’s uniforms and those of the Spanish loyalists. Others thought this was a ‘mass desertion from the Fascist lines’. By the time the mistake was realised, it was too late. Hughes, *They Shall not Pass!*, 147.

<sup>48</sup> The same stratagem was used the same day at nightfall on another sector, San Martín de la Vega, using again Moroccan troops the victims being Spanish guards this time. *Ibid*, 572. The operational history of the 3<sup>rd</sup> *Tabor* of the *Regulares* Tetuan confirms that in the early hours of 12 February (4.00 a.m.) the unit conducted on the bridge of San Martín de la Vega a coup de main with two companies crossing it and reaching the advanced enemy posts which were taken by surprise (it does not mention whether cold steel was used in this surprising attack), costing the attacking force six casualties. AGMAV, A.10, L.462, Cp 18.

without raising alarm.<sup>49</sup> More probably, one or two guards, fast asleep were dispatched by the use of knives and the rest were killed by hand grenades.

But the treacherous knife-wielding Moroccan who kills everyone with cold steel rather than rely on the safety of the hand grenade or the rifle suits a more exotic and macabre image, which is more what Spanish and Western audiences expected and tends to disregard the negligence of the victims.<sup>50</sup> The Nationalist propagandist, Víctor Ruiz Albéniz described one such coup de main on the Jarama in a way that (certainly unintentionally) demystified the fiendish image. He related on 14 February 1937 that every day at nightfall, a 'red guard' was raining 'the most obscene' insults on the Nationalists. Five 'Moors planned to give them their deserved punishment', and at night jumped the walls where they had observed the enemy only to find the Republicans asleep. The result was capturing a number of prisoners, and killing another number while the rest fled leaving behind two machine guns and nine rifles, for which the five were rewarded with a thousand pesetas.<sup>51</sup> Daring indeed was the raid but the results were hardly surprising given the gross negligence of the Republicans.

Peter Kemp, a volunteer for the Spanish Foreign Legion also noted the use of the Moroccan soldiers for daring operations. In his memoirs, published in 1957, he remembered that 'a half-platoon of *Regulares* occupied two rooms of a ruined house next to ours; they had nothing to do with the defence of the position, but were there for sniping, reconnaissance and an occasional coup de main raid'.<sup>52</sup> From the statements of a Nationalist deserter from a *Tabor* of the *Regulares* who defected to the Republicans in January 1939, it is clear that although the percentage of Moroccans in his *Tabor* of 550 men was only 50% (which possibly indicates problems in finding enough Moroccan recruits), a group of 40, specialising in coup de main operations was formed,

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<sup>49</sup> Peter Kemp a British volunteer in the Spanish Legion, refers to an inspection he made of the corpses of a company of Frenchmen that was destroyed by *Regulares* while [i.e. the Frenchmen] trying to cross a bridge (he does not name the bridge) on the Jarama. Although he does not specify the day of his inspection nor that of the destruction of the company, it clearly, given the context, takes place somewhere around 11 February 1937. It is not simple, though, to tell whether he refers to the same stealthy attack on 11 February (since he was not present at the engagement), or whether they are two different incidents despite the great similarities - Republican French volunteers destroyed by Moroccan *Regulares* on a bridge on the Jarama in February. But if it were the same incident then the state of the corpses bearing only traces of knifing work should have attracted Kemp's curiosity, which is not the case. Peter Kemp, *Mine were of trouble* (London 1957) 71-72.

<sup>50</sup> In his 'Una trompeta lejana. Las Brigadas Internacionales en la Guerra de España: Una reconsideración sesenta años después', *Espacio, Tiempo y Forma, Serie V, H. Contemporánea*, nr. 12 (1999) 225-238, Michael Alpert contends that despite the undeniable valor and self-sacrifice that the International Brigade volunteers demonstrated, their efficiency and the military expertise of their leaders is questionable, and is by far outweighed by the moral effect their presence had in the Republican army.

<sup>51</sup> Víctor Ruiz Albéniz, *Las crónicas del Tebib Arrumi*, Vol.II : *Las campañas del Jarama y el Tajuña* (Valladolid 1938) 53-54.

<sup>52</sup> Peter Kemp, *Mine Were of Trouble*, 59. He apparently liked this Moroccans who were 'were happy, giggly little men - some of them fairer in complexion than myself, and one of them red-haired. They soon became very friendly and would bring us cups of sweet mint tea'.

‘exclusively from Moroccans’ under the command of a Spanish lieutenant, and it seemed that they were going to ‘act very often’.<sup>53</sup>

There is an anecdote, recounted by a Moroccan veteran that shows how a similar operation was conducted. Al Filali of the *Regulares* Larache recalled in 2011 one such coup de main, somewhere in Catalonia. One day the captain commanding his company called for four volunteers to plant a flag on a hill where ‘the reds were entrenched’. He and three others started their climb on 10.30 in the morning, ‘we went crawling on our hands and feet up there, through a forest’. They reached the positions of the Republicans and waited until dark, when they saw that the single posted guard was sleeping. A comrade of Al Filali named Al Hussein, was carrying a ‘machete’ with him; he asked Al Filali to keep an eye on the guard and to shoot him if he stirred, while he crawled towards the guard, then slit his throat. They dealt with the rest of the enemy using hand grenades as they were carrying six bombs each. As some Republicans were killed and others fled, the *Tabor* advanced and took to the hill. For this operation Al Filali and the others were promoted to the rank of corporal.<sup>54</sup> A similar incident was told, in 1996, by another veteran who described a difficult enemy position that the *Tabor* could not take. When the night fell, volunteers were asked to lead an assault and ‘we attacked only with grenades, and then the *Tabor* would follow us in the attack’.<sup>55</sup>

One rescue operation, however, does seem to belong, as Mesa puts it, to the realm of motion pictures. At the Catalanian Collell monastery, a group of Nationalist aviators and an even greater number of pro-Nationalist women were imprisoned by the Republicans; there were fears that before retreating, the guards would execute the inmates. To prevent that, the *Mehal-la* of Tetuan was tasked with conducting a raid on the monastery. The plan, suggested by a Moroccan officer was to reach the monastery, passing as Republicans, then knock on the door and take advantage of the confusion to liberate the prisoners. The approach took place at night, in trucks and on foot, when a Spanish officer in the company of a couple of Moroccans knocked on the door. When a trusting Republican guard realised who they were after opening the door, he was killed with a knife. The units of the *Mehal-la* poured in and all the resisting defenders were killed. More than 260 female prisoners were freed (the aviators had already been evacuated).<sup>56</sup> One Moroccan interviewee, also a member of the *Mehal-la* of Tetuan, relates this incident in 1996, though with some different details. 160 women according to him were freed, along with a ‘German alférez [lieutenant]’, possibly a pilot. Although it would seem remarkable that this German pilot would be left behind after the other airmen were, according to the account Mesa

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<sup>53</sup> Report by the Republican Army of the Centre, on the interrogation of a Nationalist deserter, 14 January 1939, AGGC, EM (2), 59, nr. 8.4.

<sup>54</sup> Interview with Al Filali Abdelkader, Alcazarquivir, 21 February 2011.

<sup>55</sup> Testimony of Hamido Al Ma’dani, Tetuan, 30 September 1996, El Merroun archive.

<sup>56</sup> Mesa, *los moros de la Guerra Civil*, 117. For this Mesa quotes J Maynar Ferrer, *Mehal-las Jalifianas. Algunos recuerdos* (unpublished work).

quotes, evacuated.<sup>57</sup> Despite these examples which might point to a preference by Spanish Nationalist commanders to use Moroccans in night operations and stealthy raids given their supposed capabilities, one must not forget that such operations would not have been uniformly successful, nor that the Moroccans were the only ones who conducted such operations. One must not forget either that the Moroccan troops in their majority, and most of the time, were deployed in traditional military attacking (and also defensive) roles, even if they were deemed exceptionally efficient at adapting to the terrain or to nocturnal situations.

### **Moors versus tanks**

In addition to night operations and surprise raids, Moroccan soldiers were also particularly connected with a special anti-armour tactic that was first used during the Spanish Civil War, i.e. the use of incendiary bottles against tanks, or what is commonly referred to as the 'Molotov-cocktail'.<sup>58</sup> There are many instances that were witnessed where bottles were used to destroy or disable Soviet tanks, which were superior in both armour and weaponry to Nationalist (mainly German and Italian) tanks, and an increase in the role of the Moroccans in such attacks. Albert Bartels, a German observer of the war, noted that 'many Russian tanks fall in our hands. Many were destroyed by our Pak-guns or taken by the petrol bottles of the Moroccans'.<sup>59</sup> Colonel Von Thoma, chief of German armoured operations in Spain, remembered, after World War II, how he had offered 500 *pesetas* to anyone who would capture a T-26 (the daily pay in the Nationalist army was three *pesetas* at the start of the war). 'The Moors', Thoma continued, 'bagged' a lot of those tanks,<sup>60</sup> an accomplishment that these infantrymen achieved, presumably, using mainly the bottles. By the end of the war, 30-60 Russian tanks had been captured and organised in at least two tank companies in the Nationalist army.<sup>61</sup> In addition to monetary reward, it seems that such daring tactics also entailed promotions for those who volunteered and succeeded in disabling tanks.<sup>62</sup> The Russian commanders and observers also pointed to Russian tanks being sneaked upon and destroyed by Moroccans during nightfall.<sup>63</sup>

As it was not, however, an easy endeavour for individual soldiers to burn a tank, the process had to take place from an extremely close range and, not rarely, meant the death of the attacker, especially in an open field. It is not surprising that some of those who attempted to do it were rewarded with the prestigious *Medalla Militar*. The earliest date for which an action

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<sup>57</sup> After the liberation, this veteran continues, the troops sat and drank tea. Testimony of Hamido Al Ma'dani, Tetuan, 30 September 1996, El Merroun archive

<sup>58</sup> The term 'Molotov Cocktail' was only coined by the Finns who used petrol bottles against Soviet armour during the Winter War (1939-1940).

<sup>59</sup> Bartels, unpublished memoirs, 128, 143.

<sup>60</sup> B.H. Liddell Hart, *The Other Side of the Hill. Germany's Generals, their Rise and Fall, with their Own Account of Military Events 1939-1945* (London 1951) 123.

<sup>61</sup> Kowalsky, *La Unión Soviética y la Guerra Civil española. Una revisión crítica* (Barcelona 2003) 219.

<sup>62</sup> Interrogation Bel Kassem Ould si El Hassan ben Larbi. SHD, 3 H 266.

<sup>63</sup> S. Krivoshein, 'Los tanquistas voluntarios en los combates por Madrid', in: R. Malinovski ed., *Bajo la bandera de la España republicana* (Moscow 1967) 319-342, here 331-332.

involving burning a tank by an infantryman was awarded the prestigious *Medalla Militar*, is 4 November 1936 on which a Moroccan, Sid Mohamed Ben Larbi Al Fasi, from the *Regulares* of Tetuan group burned a tank, killing its crew. Other Moroccan examples followed and were awarded the same medal.<sup>64</sup> Although Spanish Nationalist soldiers also adopted the tactic (as did Republicans), and some were awarded the *Medalla Militar* for their bravery in attacking enemy tanks using this dangerous method, the Moroccans were disproportionately represented among the recipients of this medal for attacking tanks, and the image of the Moroccan as the main protagonist of the bottle tactic prevails.

Were Moroccans perceived as better suited to this type of tactic? Or was the initiative taken by Moroccan soldiers in return for monetary reward or promotion responsible for this state of affairs? In one case, a Moroccan deserter claimed that anti-tank guns were not available in the *Regulares* battalions, but only in European ones, or with the artillery units, and therefore Moroccans could only use bottles of petrol and hand grenades.<sup>65</sup> That claim does not mean that Moroccan troops were always left to their own devices. Perhaps the perceived stealthy capabilities of the Moroccan soldiers, as well as their supposed extraordinary adaptability to the terrain and their skilful use of it, was combined with the eagerness for rewards, to establish the higher profile as tank destroying infantrymen, compared to Spanish infantrymen. But even then, those who would take such a tremendous risk would have been a minority among the Moroccan soldiers. Almost none of the Moroccan soldiers interviewed (whether deserters interviewed by French interrogators, or veterans interviewed by historians) admitted to have themselves destroyed tanks or even used bottles to attack tanks. One veteran confessed that although he was issued with a petrol anti-tank device for the eventuality of repulsing a tank attack, he threw it away rather than keep the bottle and use it as intended, because he did not deem the risk worth it.<sup>66</sup> In that respect, the majority of the Moroccan soldiers were probably rather comparable to the majority of Spanish soldiers.

### **The difference between Spanish and Moroccan soldiers**

It has become clear how the background of the Moroccans was used to justify in the way the Spanish army should employ them, but it would be interesting to come across texts comparing the Spanish soldier with the Moroccan soldier in terms of martial qualities. Obviously, areas where Moroccan soldiers had an advantage have been discussed above. But how does the Moroccan soldier stand vis-à-vis the Spanish one? Two opinions here compare the Moroccan soldiers with those of the Spanish Legion or the *Tercio* as it was also known, that was seen to be among the

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<sup>64</sup> Citations for Moroccans attacking tanks using petrol include a March 1937 attack by a corporal from the Tiradores de Ifni; a May 1937 attack by a corporal with his soldiers from the Tiradores de Ifni; an August 1937 attack by a sergeant from the Tiradores de Ifni ; an October 1938 attack by a Moroccan soldier. Servicio Histórico Militar, *Galería militar contemporánea*, Vol.IV: *Medalla Militar. Cuarta parte*.

<sup>65</sup> Interrogation of Larbi ben Sellam. SHD, 3 H 266.

<sup>66</sup> Interview with Masoud Bellah, Brussels, 5 November 2011.

strongest units in the Spanish army. The first opinion is that of a Nationalist propagandist and war commentator Manuel Gomez Domingo who wrote in 1937:

The Tercio is something, the Regulares something else. We need a clarification so that we would not fall behind the common planes of logic. The Tercio is a force of shock the value of which must be measured by the same heterogeneity of the elements that compose it. A rocket of released rage, an impetus of an erupting thing that resounds without limits nor concrete zones, like the sonorous thunder of the sea. In the Regulares the potentiality and efficacy that live in its weapons is rooted in the same antipode of the Legion: it is born in the homogeneity of the whole, in the similarity of one psychology, in the peculiarities of a race that is born, lives and dies for war. In the “tabor” the West utilises as natural elements, [or] let us say as raw material, the untamed nerve, the unsettled anxiousness, the restlessness and the covetousness that is native to the Riffian man so as to project them towards a warlike improvement.

Hence, the native, after submitting to the modern way of soldiery, multiplies his natural efficacy and bravery: ‘And thus comes the high contribution during the campaign achieved by those melancholy, strong, enduring men’ of the *Tabors of Regulares* ‘which are commanded by officers who are carefully selected’.<sup>67</sup> Vague words and expressions, though perhaps, for their propagandistic nature, they were meant to be moving rather than a sound military analysis, but it is telling how his words reduce the Rif Moroccans to a group possessing one homogenous psychology that lives and dies for war.

Lieutenant Pahisa, who led *Regulares* troops, has a somewhat easier way of comparing the Moroccans with the soldiers of the Legion: ‘As a combatant, the difference between the Moroccan and the Legionnaire was absolute. The Moroccan, I told you already that his advantage lay in surprise. Attacking head-on was not his strong point. The Legionnaire, on the contrary, confronted the enemy courageously, with gallantry and guts. He went to kill, prepared to die. He knew that he belonged to a corps of shock of legendary fame, and that he could not cheat his comrades nor the enemy who was in front of him. The green shirt weighs a lot’.<sup>68</sup> This is an interesting choice of words from someone who commanded Moroccan *Regulares*, though certainly there are other Spanish officers with Moroccan experience who would not agree with Pahisa’s suggestion that the Moroccans lacked the courage to attack head-on. The disproportionately high casualty rates among Moroccan troops should make one disagree with Pahisa’s suggestion. But his words suggest that he would have used the Moroccan troops in the roles and ways he thought they were suitable for.

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<sup>67</sup> Manuel Gómez Domingo, *Guerra* (Valladolid 1937) 21-22.

<sup>68</sup> Estrada Vidal, *Los que estuvimos en la batalla del Ebro*, 369.

It has by now become obvious that Moroccan soldiers almost exclusively served as infantrymen and to a lesser extent (numerically) as cavalrymen. They were trained to use rifles and hand grenades. Many of them operated machineguns with excellence and mortars. But they did not serve any medium or heavy artillery pieces, neither did they serve as tank crews,<sup>69</sup> even as drivers of vehicles of their own units, and certainly they did not pilot airplanes, with one honorary exception.<sup>70</sup> Administrative tasks were apparently also not deemed suitable for Moroccans. The chief of the Ceuta *Regulares* Group suggested, in October 1938, to the General Staff the creation of the non-commissioned rank of *Brigada* (which existed in other units of the Spanish army) in the *Regulares* in order to assist the company captains.<sup>71</sup> Given the administrative and tactical assignments of this rank, and the fact that the administrative tasks could consume significant time and effort, the chief of the *Regulares* suggested the creation of two *Brigadas* for each company, one administrative occupied by a Spaniard. The other, tactical in his functions would be a *Brigada Indígena*, whose functions would require little technical instruction; the natives would fulfil this role competently as it is closer to the ‘temperament and the warrior spirit of the native soldier’.<sup>72</sup> There is one aspect of the otherness and difference of the Moroccan that could be used for military purposes which was not touched upon explicitly by the theorists and commanders who advised on the use of the Moroccans, and that is using the Moroccans as a psychological weapon.

#### **The Moroccan as a psychological weapon**

It has already become clear how some in the Spanish military attributed to the Moroccans human physical capabilities that were far beyond average. But the Nationalist propaganda could go a step further in depicting the Moroccans, as well as their fellow African based Legionnaires, as invincible. The Nationalist propagandist, Ruiz Albéniz, known since the time he served as physician in Morocco as *El Tebib Arrumi* (the Christian Doctor), treated his readers to a tale of immunity to sickness that distinguished the Moroccans of the *Regulares* and the *Mehal-las* as well as members of the Spanish Legion. His story takes place while the Nationalist troops arrive at the University City on the outskirts of the Spanish capital, which must be in November 1936: One

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<sup>69</sup> In one hospital an injured Moroccan soldier was stating his intention that after ‘I am cured and have to return to the front I want them to send me to the tanks instead of infantry’, believing that he would be thus less exposed. A nurse tried to convince him that it was dangerous to be a tank crew, that he had to be in a turret which had observation slits and that the enemy would aim at the slit and it would be easy to target it. ‘Yes- meditated the Moor loudly – but the thing is, in infantry, the whole thing is a slit’. Antonio Corral Castanedo, *Esta es la casa donde vivo y muero* (Valladolid 1992) 236.

<sup>70</sup> This exception concerns Si Muley Mohamed ben El Mehdi, the brother of the Khalifa, the highest Moroccan authority in the Spanish Protectorate, who rose to the rank of Major in the air force and flew as an observer as part of different squadrons of sea planes between October 1936 and February 1938. De Mesa, *los moros de la guerra civil*, 64. De Mesa does not specify where did this prince fly or whether he flew over any militarily active terrain.

<sup>71</sup> This rank equals the French rank of Adjutant.

<sup>72</sup> AGMAV, A.1, L.26, Cp. 20. The suggestion to create the rank of *Brigada Indígena* was also accompanied with the suggestion of the creation of the rank of *kaïdes provisionales* to compensate for the losses in native officers, and to give a stimulus to the professional careers of the native troops that had been ‘stagnating’ and therefore create some satisfaction in the ambitions of these troops.

*Bandera* of the Legion and one Moroccan *Tabor* billeted in the Alfonso XIII National Institute of Hygiene. The Legionnaires and the ‘jametes’,<sup>73</sup> given the lack of variety and tastiness of their ‘menu’, rummaged around in that building and found rabbits, guinea pigs, chicken, kittens, all of which were used to prepare new dishes for the troops. All that food did not, according to Ruiz Albéniz, produce a single casualty even though:

those rabbits were inoculated with typhus, the guinea pigs with the plague, the chicken with cholera and the cats with we do not know what other devilish pathogenic germ of those established as the most deadly for the human species. They ate them so deliciously, and till the next one! Bacilli for the Legion? Vibrions for the Regulares? Come on, come on, formalities, gentlemen, formalities! We are dealing with “men”, real men, whom not even a thunderbolt could break.<sup>74</sup>

The ‘Christian Doctor’ must have had the intention of reassuring his readers, in the context of the extreme difficulties that accompanied the attempts to penetrate Madrid, that the troops trying to occupy the capital are not only alright, but are humanly superior to anything the enemy could put in the field, even though the event he described might not have ended as well as he put it.<sup>75</sup> Ruiz Albéniz’s story was only one manifestation of reassuring Nationalist followers at the home front, that wherever the Africans are everything would be fine.<sup>76</sup> For the Nationalist defenders of the besieged city of Oviedo, it was the sight of the Moroccans, in October 1936, that brought relief to the surrounded defenders, with cries of ‘moros en la cuesta’ (Moors on the hills), an ironic reminiscence of the Spanish famous danger alert ‘moros en la costa’.<sup>77</sup> As one of the city defenders put it ‘they [*Regulares*] were distinguished by their headgear. If it were other soldiers you would not know to which camp they belonged because they all wore the same, we knew that

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<sup>73</sup> Jamete refers to ‘little Mohammed’ or perhaps little Ahmed which was at the time usually written Hamed with the H pronounced as a Spanish J, and often use as a generic name, in sometimes entreating but also patronizing way to refer to the Moroccans, the same way ‘morito’ (little Moor) is used.

<sup>74</sup> Víctor Ruiz Albéniz, *Las crónicas de El Tebib Arrumi*, Vol., *El cerco de Madrid* (Valladolid 1938), 146, 147. The volume contains a series of newspaper articles and radio speeches he gave, in his capacity as ‘official chronicler of the General Quarter of the Generalissimo’ between October 1936 and March 1937. The excerpt comes from a text he wrote on 2 January 1937.

<sup>75</sup> Hugh Thomas relates the same episode, the protagonists of which are only Moroccans, and it ends, expectedly, with them suffering losses from eating the animals kept for experimental purposes, though Thomas does not mention whether the losses were fatal. Thomas, *The Spanish Civil War*, 470.

<sup>76</sup> The *Pravda* Soviet correspondent Mijail Koltsov for example quotes in March 1937 Italian prisoners as saying that their officers promised them that ‘shortly the Moors will arrive, they will move forward and then we will see who shall be victorious!’ Koltsov proceeds to mock the ‘Roman Fascists’ and ‘pure Aryans’ who prefer moving behind African battalions. See, Mijail Koltsov, *Diario de la Guerra de España* (Madrid 1978) 381. There is, however, the strong possibility that Koltsov made up that story precisely to mock Fascism and Nazism, and how to do that better than to use the Moroccans?

<sup>77</sup> Ronald Frasier, *Blood of Spain. An Oral History of the Spanish Civil War* (New York 1979) 254.



Franco had finally sent two Tabors of Regulares to liberate Oviedo'.<sup>78</sup> But the psychological edge that the African troops, especially the Moroccans, provided was not mainly to reassure the Nationalist power base and its allies, but more importantly to instil fear in the Republican enemy in ways that included the impression that the Moroccan soldiers were somewhat beyond human.

One day in the fall of 1936, when the Nationalists had not yet approached Madrid, the *Pravda* correspondent, Mikhail Koltsov, who had feared leaving Spain before ever setting eyes on the mythical 'Moors' managed to finally meet two injured Moroccan soldiers. Talking to them he found their smile 'confident' and their tales 'simple and honest'. 'How could these men', he wondered, 'even if completely healthy and armed, inspire such an amount of fear?'<sup>79</sup> He was referring to the many occasions, early in the war, in which the appearance of Moroccan troops or the mere mention of their presence sent waves of panic through the ranks of Republican militia and even among regular army units. In some cases this resulted either in flight or refusal to fight and abandon cities, a recurrent phenomenon in, among other regions, Andalusia.<sup>80</sup> Over some villages, Nationalist planes threw leaflets warning the population to surrender or the 'Moors' would be sent in, which would result in men fleeing to the mountains and the 'Moors' occupying the village anyway.<sup>81</sup> Even in villages where people had never met any 'Moors' and where the 'Moors' were not anywhere near, panic spread. The British writer and poet, Gamel Woolsey, who was residing in a village near Málaga, described how one day she woke up to find old and young women in her kitchen who were 'all in terror of the Moors, and afraid to stay in their own houses'. 'They will come and cut off our heads', they said to her and asked whether they could come to seek refuge in her house, as an English woman, at the 'fatal hour'.<sup>82</sup> In other towns and villages in Asturias people had experienced the Army of Africa in 1934 during the workers' rebellion (or were very close to where it happened and therefore witnessed it). The image of the 'Moor', inherited from the Middle Ages, that was one of magic, myth, and distrust, was widespread. The 1934 events, as well as the Civil War, later added to that image a level of cruelty and ferocity that instilled in many Asturians a disdain mixed with fear towards the Moroccans.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Testimony of Fermín Alonso Sábada, in: Amaya Caunedo, Irende Díaz, Pedro Alonso, *Asturias, 70 años, 70 voces. Testimonios y memorias de una guerra* (Oviedo 2007) 73-74.

<sup>79</sup> Koltsov, *Diario de la Guerra de España*, 105.

<sup>80</sup> José Luis Conde Ayala, *Julio colero (Instantes de guerra)* (Antequera 2011) (Kindle Edition 2012 retrieved from Amazon.com) Chapter XVI.

<sup>81</sup> Interview with the Moroccan journalist Mohammad Bilal Achmal who had interviewed his late father, a veteran of the Civil War and the counter-guerrilla operations following it, and facilitated this information to me. Tetuan, 7 January 2011.

<sup>82</sup> Gamel Woolsey, *Death's Other Kingdom* (London 2004) 39. 'I don't think they ever had the least idea of who was fighting or why. They had heard of old wars against the Moors, and thought that those evil days had returned', commented she on those rural women. *Ibidem*, 62.

<sup>83</sup> Valentín Álvarez Martínez, David Expósito Mangas and David González Álvarez, 'El Cementerio Moro de Barcia: Breve Acercamiento a su Estudio', in: Comisión de Artes, Arquitectura y Urbanismo ed., *Actas I Congreso de Estudios Asturianos 2006. Vol.V* (Oviedo 2007) 130-150, here 135-136.

The Republic, to avoid the discouragement of its supporters, hid the news of the arrival of the colonial forces for a few days.<sup>84</sup> According to a Nationalist intelligence report, citing officers who deserted to the Nationalist line, there was a ‘curious incident of panic’ that took place in Madrid on the 27<sup>th</sup> of October. Some bulls, on the way to the slaughterhouse escaped, which led to cries of ‘que vienen los toros!’ [the bulls are coming!]. Some militiamen thought hearing ‘que vienen los moros!’ [the Moors are coming!], threw their arms and entered one of the entrances of the metro.<sup>85</sup> In fact, the reputation of Moroccans was so terrifying that during the Battle of Brunete in the summer of 1937, Galician fighters on the Nationalist side were ordered to dress like Moors to scare their Republican enemy.<sup>86</sup> Members of the British battalion in Spain were already aware of the fearsome reputation of the Moroccans, and they feared and loathed them, even though only a handful had met Moroccans before the battle of the Jarama. ‘The worst blokes we ever came across were the Moors’, remembers one of the British veterans. ‘God they were vicious... They’d put the fear of God into you. They were death or glory blokes [who] thought they’d be going to heaven as soon as they were shot’.<sup>87</sup> Another British veteran stated ‘[They] didn’t sit around doing nothing. If they’re in the line, they’re in the line and they’re always looking to kill someone’.<sup>88</sup>

Even as late as 1938 the idea of the presence of the Moroccans made even non-Spanish volunteers nervous. Captain Piet Laros, a Dutch member of the International Brigades described that during the retreat of his Dutch company to Gandesa in 1938, they ‘marched with the cover of the left and right flank, and behind every tree they saw a Moroccan soldier. You had to take that out of their heads “there can’t be any Moroccan here”, that was a nervous situation’.<sup>89</sup> But it was in the summer and autumn of 1936 where the fear reached a peak; a period in which the advance of the Nationalist troops some have called *avance a gritos* (advancing by shouting) in reference to the shrieks of the Moroccans that announced their presence, and prompted some Republican leaders to reprimand their troops and assure them that the Moors were ‘men like you’.<sup>90</sup> ‘Men like you’ is an interesting comment. Does it imply that some among the supporters of the Republic did not think of their Moroccan adversaries as regular human beings? That is what many Moroccan veterans actually express during interviews. ‘The other people [the Republicans] thought we were devils who had horns and ate people. Among them someone would cry “Moros, Moros” and then panic

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<sup>84</sup> Nerín, *La guerra que vino de África*, 170.

<sup>85</sup> AHMC, Varela, 69/591.

<sup>86</sup> Michale Seidman, *The Victorious Counterrevolution. The Nationalist Effort in the Spanish Civil War* (Madison 2011) 42.

<sup>87</sup> Ben Hughes, *They Shall not Pass!* 76- 77.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>89</sup> Hans Dankaart, Jap-Jan Flinterman, Frans Groot and Rik Vuurmans, *De oorlog begon in Spanje*, (Amsterdam 1986) 81.

<sup>90</sup> Ruano, *Islam y Guerra Civil española*, 247.

would spread. The Germans, the French, the Italians, the Poles, the Belgians, the Hungarians, the Czech, the Swiss, the English, the Scandinavians, everybody runs'.<sup>91</sup>

That the Republican combatants, let alone their international allies, thought of the Moroccans, even for a short while, as devils with horns can of course be excluded. Although it is not quite impossible to imagine that people in some remote mountainous villages who rarely ever saw a foreigner in their lifetime let alone a 'Moor', would let centuries old myths influence their preconceived ideas of the Moors, and so '[t]he Spaniards were surprised because they heard that the Moroccans had horns, while we do not have horns'.<sup>92</sup> But even more than 'horns' was the conception that the 'Moor' was, in terms of skin colour, quite black. In many places 'people would approach us to see that our white colour was not artificial'.<sup>93</sup> A remark echoed in the La Comuna valley in Aragon, where horror stories were spread with regard to the behaviour of the army that came from Spanish Morocco. A few decades after the war, people from the region, trying to explain the use of the Moroccan soldiers, stated that 'Franco had promised them that when they die, they will return to earth as *whites*, and they were used everywhere in the first lines. The *black* hired killers were half savages, and they plundered and arsoned out of pure desire to destroy. [Italics added]'.<sup>94</sup> It is interesting to notice that these people in La Comuna believed that the Moroccans themselves thought that they would return to earth after death (and as whites), whereas one Moroccan veteran believes that it was the Spanish who 'thought "moro tiene cuernos",<sup>95</sup> that if he died in Spain he would come back to life in his country. They [the Spanish] said so'.<sup>96</sup>

The fear or shock that some Republican units felt when confronting Moroccans on the battlefield could possibly and partly be related to the unnerving shrieks the Moroccans let out while attacking; shrieks that might have sounded both novel and unearthly to the ears of the inexperienced Republicans. One Nationalist lieutenant speaks, in the course of fighting in 1936 and early 1937, of these 'howls' in such a way as to give the impression that they actually mattered during the battle as the 'air fills with savage howls, that at times freeze the blood and at others inflame us. They are my Moors who, while running towards the enemy cry, shoot and howl...'. Interestingly he describes on another occasion the Moroccan soldiers howling 'as demons', while observing at yet another engagement that the 'continuous howling of the Regulares must terrorise them [the Republicans], because soon it can be observed how fire is decreasing on their part'.<sup>97</sup> But this howling was not always effective, though it left its impression on the foreign

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<sup>91</sup> El Merroun *Las tropas marroquíes en la Guerra Civil española*, 202.

<sup>92</sup> Testimony of Al Massari, Tetuan, 31 March 1994, El Merroun archive.

<sup>93</sup> Testimony of Abdelkader Amezian, Tetuan, 9 November 1993, El Merroun archive. He attributed the fear the population had of the Moroccans to Franco himself. 'Franco used us to scare the Spaniards'.

<sup>94</sup> D.A. Vos, 'De tijd dat La Comuna verdeeld was', *Leidschrift* 3 (1986) 85-135, here 107.

<sup>95</sup> 'The Moor has horns'.

<sup>96</sup> Interview with Mohamed ben Al Ayyashi Al Zerki, Ceuta, 30 June 2011.

<sup>97</sup> Pablo Montagudo Jaén, *1936, Regulares. Diario en el campo de batalla* (Marston Gate 2011). Pablo Montagudo Jaén published here the scattered diaries of his grandfather Juan Jaén Martínez-Campos who

volunteers of the Republic who also thought those cries were used to scare the Republicans. As one British paper cited a British doctor at the Jarama in early 1937, 'at night he Moors steal down the hillside and crawl towards our lines. Then, when they are quite near, they jump up, and uttering fiendish cries to frighten our men, rush forward. But our lads are not frightened, and in many cases those wild cries of the Moors have been their last'.<sup>98</sup> A Nationalist officer wrote about an operation in La Caseta, on the Aragon front, where a surprise attack was conducted against Republican positions and ended with the Republicans retreating. He noted that despite the disappearance of the surprise element 'the shrieks of the Moors while they jumped to the assault with hand grenades' shattered the enemy's morale.<sup>99</sup>

Less than the perception that the Moors were too black for Spanish taste or that they had head outgrowths which would render them less human, or the blood freezing howls, it was indeed the horror stories about the barbarities supposedly committed by Moroccans which precipitated the panic-stricken reaction of many Republican troops when encountering the Moroccans. Many acts of horrifying brutality involving mutilation, mass murder, executions and rape were ascribed to them. The marching of the Army of Africa through Andalusia and Extremadura, and the massacres that accompanied them and especially the massacre in Badajoz in August 1936, had led the Republicans' imaginations run wild about the Moors who usually figured as the main actors in these stories. These horror stories were partly true, partly imaginary, and partly deliberate fabrications. But an important role in the creation of this reputation was the alien and 'exotic' nature of these troops, which combined with the traditional Spanish image of the medieval menacing Moorish enemy, and which let the fantasy fill the gap when facts were wanting. The Moroccan image of savagery apparently became a criterion, adopted by even some of the Nationalists, and against which brutality was to be measured, even when the Civil War was over. A propaganda pamphlet at the end of 1941, directed by the Red Army towards Spanish volunteers of the Blue Division fighting on the Eastern Front, contains a letter by a prisoner of war, in which he laments how he was deceived by the propaganda of the Falangists that claimed that the 'red soldiers are worse than the Moors'.<sup>100</sup> However, a Nationalist army chaplain observed, roughly twenty years after the war, that it was the 'reds, with their horrifying propaganda' about the savagery of the Moroccans who were responsible for making their people jump at the sound of 'los moros!'.<sup>101</sup>

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was an *Alférez Provisional* (provisional lieutenant) commanding a company of *Regulares* during the war. However, it is Montagudo Jaén who is listed as author of the publication, and it is under this name that it can be located. It is a similar case as the memoirs of Mekki Redondo and their editor Ibn Azzuz Hakim.

<sup>98</sup> *The Daily Worker*, 18 February 1937.

<sup>99</sup> Gonzalo Sastre Molina, 'Operaciones nocturnas. (Un caso concreto de nuestra Guerra de Liberación)', *Ejército*, nr. 176 (1954) 33-38, here 35.

<sup>100</sup> Letter by prisoner R. Navarro to the soldiers of the Blue Division. AGMAV, C.2005, Cp. 12, D.3/6.

<sup>101</sup> Juan Urra Lusarreta, *En las trincheras del frente de Madrid. Memorias de un capellán de requetés, herido de guerra* (Madrid 1967), 109. Despite this fear of the 'Moors', this chaplain is of the opinion that the

An example of stories of atrocity which turned out to be false is given by the British volunteer in the Spanish Legion, Peter Kemp. During the battle of Jarama in 1937, a French company of the International Brigades was destroyed, upon crossing a bridge over the Jarama, by Moorish troops. Reports circulated about French corpses castrated by the Moors. Kemp and a German press photographer examined the bodies of the French. Although stripped of their outer garments, the corpses, left in their underclothes, bore no traces of mutilation.<sup>102</sup> It seems that even the massacre of Badajoz could be blamed on others rather than the Moroccans. In 2004, Sanchez Ruano made headlines in the Spanish press when he presented new information on the massacre. In his study, based on oral resources, he presents the massacre of civilians and prisoners of war as being the work of the local *Guardia Civil* rather than the Moroccan/Legionnaire troops.<sup>103</sup> That, however, does not prevent Ruano from accusing the Moroccan troops of criminal behaviour. He presents a great deal of interesting material (archival and oral) and his conclusions with regard to excesses and particularly rape charges levelled at the Moroccan troops are remarkable. All his Moroccan interviewees without exception denied committing any excesses like mutilations of bodies of the enemy or committing rape,<sup>104</sup> even though Ruano dismisses these denials. He ascribes excesses like the mutilation of dead bodies to tribal belligerent traditions.<sup>105</sup> His judgement and explanation on the matter is that ‘they [the Moroccan soldiers] were always in the vanguard and their lives were worth nothing, and so they hardly valued the lives of others, who were neither compatriots nor Muslims’. Their victims were the enemy, from ‘the country of the reds’.<sup>106</sup>

For Maria Rosa de Madariaga, also pro-Republican like Ruano, the occurrences of atrocities, pillage, mutilation, and rape are not only an accepted fact, but constituted the standard practice of the colonial forces, both Moroccan and Legionnaire, in Morocco. Such practices continued in Spain and were systematically exercised until the end of 1936, and less systematically thereafter but still existent, with the ‘red’ enemy replacing the ‘savage’ Rif rebel as the object of such acts. Those kinds of excesses were, she explains, committed by both Moroccans as well as Spaniards of the Army of Africa, and not only sanctioned, but in general encouraged by the Nationalists commanders. Moroccan soldiers who committed rape in Morocco without being punished by their Spanish commanders did not refrain from committing them in Spain.<sup>107</sup>

The same line of argument, as that of Madariaga, is given by Sebastian Balfour: atrocities committed by members of the Legion and the *Regulares* were sanctioned by their commanders.

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conduct of the Moroccan troops was disciplined and correct, with perhaps isolated cases, related more to theft than to any other case. *Ibidem*.

<sup>102</sup> Peter Kemp, *Mine were of trouble*, 71-72.

<sup>103</sup> Ruano, *Islam y Guerra Civil española*, 175-194.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibidem*, 379.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibidem*, 244, 246, 247.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibidem*, 381.

<sup>107</sup> Madariaga, *Los moros que trajo Franco*, 297-299, 306, 307, 311-315.

One reason for this, according to Balfour, is that they knew no other form of war than colonial war in which massacre and looting was common practice and second nature.<sup>108</sup> The same is the case with rape. For Balfour, the European colonisation of Africa was not only a political, cultural, and economic experience, but a sexual encounter as well, with rape and sexual exploitation a common feature of racist domination by the invaders.<sup>109</sup> According to Balfour, it seems that some commanders gave Legionnaires and Moroccans the freedom to scour a town they captured for an hour for booty and women, a common practice in the Moroccan wars.<sup>110</sup>

Pro-Francoist historians tend to downplay the image of brutality associated with Moroccan troops, as it would automatically damage the image of the Franco regime that brought them in the first place. So someone like Gárate Córdoba naturally attacks what he considers the myths about Moorish ‘apocalyptic horsemen’ who, as some kind of ‘Moro Juan’, go about raping ladies, an image designed to instill fear in the civilian population, especially during the defence of Madrid. While in fact mounted horsemen were scarce because of lack of horses, the difficulty to transport them across the straits, and their limited application in modern combat.<sup>111</sup> His opinion on the conduct of Moroccan troops is that it reflected the behavior of a soldier who would wage war with no more savagery than his opponent,<sup>112</sup> a statement which could be interpreted in more than one way. Does it mean that the Moroccans conducted themselves reasonably well or does it mean that all in this war behaved in a horrendous fashion and that the Moroccans had their equal share?

El Merroun, not an anti-Republican historian, but with strong Moroccan sentiments, rejects what he considers fabrications about brutalities and especially rape based on his interviews with Moroccan soldiers, arguing that severe punishments by the Nationalist armies were deterrent enough.<sup>113</sup> Of course one must understand that if there were atrocities that were falsely attributed (like the Badajoz massacre according to Ruano) to Moroccan soldiers, there are indeed incidents where Moroccan soldier did commit what amounts to be crimes of war. For example, there is enough documentary evidence to show the shooting by Moroccan soldiers of Republican prisoners of war, by orders of their Spanish officers,<sup>114</sup> although this would not make them unique as both Spanish Nationalists and Republicans did the same. But there is also scarce and exceptional admission in oral testimonies that unarmed people were shot. According to an ex-soldier of the

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<sup>108</sup> Balfour, *Deadly Embrace*, 286.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibidem*, 3.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibidem*, 293.

<sup>111</sup> Gárate Córdoba, *La guerra de las dos Españas*, 221.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>113</sup> El Merroun, *Las tropas marroquíes*, 203. ‘Unbelievable’ is the comment by Ruano on this assertion by El Merroun. Ruano, *Islam y Guerra Civil española*, 245.

<sup>114</sup> Take for example the engagement at Seseña (between Toledo and Madrid) on 29 October 1936, where after repelling a Republican attack twelve Republican soldiers were captured. The report of the commander of the Moroccan unit that captured them explained that since these prisoners were captured with arms in their hands they were executed. The text might give the impression that this was a matter of regular practice. AHMC, Varela, 69/429.

*Regulares* of Larache, his unit captured two ‘rojos’, one of them a doctor, both unarmed and took them to the Spanish commander. When asked why they brought these prisoners, they answered ‘[we] said that we found them and we brought them. He told us “next time kill them, wherever you find reds kill them”, so he called a corporal and told him to execute them’.<sup>115</sup>

While Gárate Córdoba obviously meant with his ‘Moro Juan’ that it was the Republic that was instilling fear in the civilian population of Madrid (and it was), that does not mean that the Nationalists were not doing the same. There is no documentary evidence, or a ‘smoking gun’ for an elaborate, explicit, and thought-out psychological warfare scheme on the part of the Nationalist command to use the Moroccan troops as an instrument of fear. If there was a policy then it was implicit and spontaneous.

The first time the psychological factor of the mere presence of the Moroccan soldiers played a role, took place in Cádiz with the arrival of the first batch of the *Regulares*. The civil governor of the port city, Mariano Zapico who chose to remain loyal to the Republic, had entrenched himself in the government building, fending off the attacks of the rebels, trusting in the invulnerability of the building, and rejecting General Varela’s demands to surrender. ‘Never!’ was his answer,<sup>116</sup> until he observed in the morning of 19 July 1936 the turbans of the Moroccan soldiers arriving to the city. Fearing that their attack would end with a massacre, he surrendered.<sup>117</sup> When the military governor of Cádiz, who had sided with the rebels, told General Queipo de Llano in Seville (who faced a stronger armed working class militia opposition than the one in Cádiz), how easy his triumph was thanks to the fear for the Moroccans, Queipo was impressed. He demanded from Pinto to send him the Moroccan *Tabor*. Pinto refused because the situation in Cadiz was not yet completely stable, neither was that of the neighbouring villages. Queipo threatened Pinto with negative consequences, but General Varela intervened and an agreement was reached to send Queipo a Moroccan company (the 3<sup>rd</sup> company of 1<sup>st</sup> *Tabor* of *Regulares* Ceuta), which Queipo used to drive around Seville constantly to impress the Sevillian workers.<sup>118</sup>

General Queipo de Llano, the man who led the Nationalist rebellion in Seville and conquered the city gained infamy through his radio chats in which he threatened the Republican adversaries with a horrible fate. He put the fear of the Moroccan forces to use in his radio broadcasts, even before they arrived. On 18 July Queipo announced on the radio: ‘Troops of the Tercio and the *Regulares* are already on their way to Seville, and when they arrive, those troublemakers will be hunted like vermin’.<sup>119</sup> He continued to threaten resisting towns and villages with setting deadly examples. On 21 July, after an attack on the *Regulares* near the town of

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<sup>115</sup> Testimony of Al Bouyekra, 21 April 1996, Tetuan, El Merroun archive.

<sup>116</sup> Ruano, *Islam y Guerra Civil española*, 160.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibidem*, 161.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibidem*, 162.

<sup>119</sup> Ian Gibson, *Queipo de Llano. Sevilla, verano de 1936 (Con las charlas radiofónicas completas)* (Barcelona 1986) 132.

Carmona (on the road between Seville and Cordoba), he threatened with punishing the place and to make 'Carmona remember the Regulares for a long time'.<sup>120</sup> The following day he announced that the place suffered 'an exemplary punishment that will remain in memory for a long time'.<sup>121</sup> Other 'examples', according to Queipo, followed.<sup>122</sup> He also threatened female Republican fighters. On 29 August, commenting on the battle of Talavera de la Reina (to the west of Madrid), he mentioned capturing 'many male and female prisoners. How happy will the Regulares be, and how envious La Pasionaria'.<sup>123</sup> Queipo was responsible for much of the propagation of the fear and the image of savagery that was attached to the Nationalist military campaign and the troops of the Army of Africa.

If the massacre of Badajoz was not the work of the Moroccan and Legionnaire troops of Colonel Yagüe, then his implicit admission to an American journalist to have shot the 'reds', must be seen as a means to scare the enemy into avoiding a fight, occasionally succeeding as witnessed by the many occasions of flight demonstrated by Republican militia early in the war. In the end, even some of the Moroccans themselves believed that Franco did use them as a tool to terrify the Republicans.<sup>124</sup> This tells that the mere presence of the Moroccan soldier in the field, along with his image of brutality, his howling, his imaginary inhuman nature, and aside from his actual fighting capabilities, had distinctive tangible tactical advantages on the field which the presence of a Spanish peninsular soldier might not have had.

The psychological effect of the presence of the Moroccan soldiers reflected also on the way the Nationalist command was to plan the immediate aftermath of the war. On 10 February 1939, in the wake of the collapse of Catalonia, and anticipating a Republican surrender at any moment, the General Quarters of the Generalissimo issued a number of instructions on how to maintain order and achieve a most effective disarming of the Republicans. Among the twelve instructions, there are two that concern the Moroccan troops. One of these (instruction nr. 5) called for distancing, as soon as possible, the surrendering soldiers from 'our troops' so as to allow for as little contact as possible and to entrust the task of guarding the prisoners to forces that could be trusted completely, 'preferably' the *Regulares*. The other instruction (nr. 9) dealt with the entry of populated areas, which had to be done by Spanish forces, while the *Regulares* and the *Tercio* should 'avoid doing it'. These forces would have to remain outside as forces of reserve under the most 'severe discipline'.<sup>125</sup> It is interesting that while one instruction is designed to keep a distance between the African units and the Spanish population, the same African units are preferred when it

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<sup>120</sup> Ian Gibson, *Queipo de Llano. Sevilla, verano de 1936*, 146.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibidem*, 151

<sup>122</sup> *Ibidem*, 174.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibidem*, 431. He referred to the Spanish communist female politician Dolores Ibarruri, known as La Pasionaria, who became an icon of Republican resistance, declaring that the Nationalists '*no pasaran!*' (shall not pass!). For the rape of Spanish women by the Moroccan troops see chapter three of this study.

<sup>124</sup> Testimony of Abdelkader Amezian, 9 November 1993, Tetuan, El Merroun archive.

<sup>125</sup> AHMC, Varela, 87/580, 581.



comes to closely guarding the future population of the prisons. We could infer that the element of ‘otherness’ in the *Regulares* units and their fearsome reputation would, in the eyes of the Nationalist command, apparently be an obstacle to the smooth and peaceful subjugation of popular centres now that that these centres were expected to willingly surrender rather than be taken by force, while the same ‘otherness’ would seem an advantage against the dangers of fraternisation with enemy prisoners. Once again, the foreign nature of the Moroccan troops had its military value, and shortly afterwards the assignment of *Regulares* units to prisoner camps guarding duties was being implemented.<sup>126</sup>

As the Nationalists gained advantages from the fearsome reputation of the Moroccan troops, the Republic also built on that reputation to exhort its followers to fight to the bitter end, especially when defending Madrid. The communist female icon, Dolores Ibárruri, known as *La Pasionaria* famously decried ‘the savage Moors, drunken with sensuality who run amok raping our girls, our women in the villages that have been trampled by the fascist hooves...Moors, brought from the Moroccan *aduars* [Arab villages] from the most uncivilised of the Riffian settlements and rocks’.<sup>127</sup> The first lines of the famous Republican song *No Pasarán* start with ‘the Moors that Franco brought, want to enter Madrid’ and ends with ‘the Moors shall not pass’, a sign that the defenders of the capital were first and most concerned with the ‘Moors’ before any other Spanish enemies; and proud to have stopped the ‘Moors’. If they could stop these Moroccans, then anything else was possible. That is to say that the Moroccans in this case were used as a psychological weapon but with goals reverse to those of the Nationalists. More interestingly there is evidence, on one occasion at least, that the Republicans not only wanted to take advantage of the psychological effect of the presence of Moroccan soldiers, but in fact some wanted to create circumstances that would lead to the destruction of Moroccan troops by creating outrageous acts committed against civilians.

There is an undated document in the archive of the anarchist Federación Anarquista Ibérica (FAI) in Amsterdam which is part of a general plan of action, to be taken by Republicans in the Nationalist rearguard. It is not very clear to whom it was presented: anarchist leadership, or part of the Republican command. An interesting aspect is the ‘colonial’ section of the plan recommended infiltrating or buying ‘some Moors in the military expeditions that are sent to Spain to instigate these forces to commit violations and acts of violence in Spanish territory, and if this is used well it will lead to wide protests and it will produce large scale executions of Moors, which could be used later in Morocco in the action that will be organised among its population’.<sup>128</sup> If it

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<sup>126</sup> As is the case, for example, with the Army of Levante instructing, on 27 February, the Castille Army Corps to designate *Regulares* battalions for duties of guarding surrendering enemy units and organizing and taking custody of the ‘concentration camps’ established in its sector. AHMC, Varela, 87/582.

<sup>127</sup> See Miguel Martín, *El colonialismo español en Marruecos (1860- 1956)* (Paris 1973) 181.

<sup>128</sup> International Institute for Social History, Archivo FAI, CP, 61C/Es.12.

were not for the presence of this document, the mere suggestion of such a plan might have seemed to belong in the realm of conspiracy theories. The overall plan was rejected by a higher command, though no comment was given on the specific ‘colonial’ section of the project. Aside from insurmountable obstacles in putting such a plan into action which might make it unrealistic, its sheer cynicism with regard to the lives of the Spanish civilians leads to questions. If there were some in the Republic who thought nothing of using their Moroccan enemies to commit acts of violence against the civilian population which the Republic is officially defending, so as to stimulate the growth of the negative and brutal reputation of the Moroccans, then surely there must have been more people willing to fabricate facts and haphazardly ascribe all kinds of brutalities committed in the war to the Moroccans.

### **The Moroccans meet the civilians**

Republican plans did not in the end determine the relationship between Moroccans and Spanish civilians, although it was obviously good for the Republican propaganda that such a relationship should be challenging. But how do Moroccan veterans, approximately 60 to 70 years later, perceive their own relationship with the Spanish civilians and the fear the latter held towards them? When commenting on Spanish civilians, Moroccan veterans agree on two points. The first is that Spanish civilians were afraid of Moroccans. The second is that such fear was, in the view of these veterans, unfounded. As Stitou Bouinou sums up, although in the beginning civilians were afraid of Moroccans, with the passage of time and as the Spanish ‘got to know us’, relations became friendly. ‘They treated us well and we them too’.<sup>129</sup>

When it comes to the fear the Spanish had of the Moroccans one word was frequently uttered: ‘cuernos’ (horns). In the memory of many Moroccan veterans, the image many Spaniards had of them was of scary beings with horns. A number of veterans stated that the Spaniards thought ‘*moro tiene cuernos*’ (the Moor has horns),<sup>130</sup> ‘Franco used us to scare the Spaniards, so much that the people would come closer to ascertain that our white colour was genuine and not artificial’.<sup>131</sup> Besides inhuman attributes, some of the veterans were aware of the fear of looting. One veteran remembered that in Catalonia there was a saying among the population advising to lock the doors because ‘que vienen los moros a llevar conejos’ [the Moors are coming to carry away the rabbits].<sup>132</sup> Another Moroccan, present in the war and who worked in the legal affairs of a military unit, commented that ‘[we] the soldiers went there to make not to break. The army was free, if we entered a city and you wanted to loot and plunder, go plunder you are free, one thing

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<sup>129</sup> Interview with Stitou Bouinou, Zumi, 21 May 2012.

<sup>130</sup> Interview with Abdesselam Mohamed Al Amrani, Ceuta, 30 June 2011.

<sup>131</sup> Testimony of Abdelkader Amezian, Tetuan, 9 November 1993, El Merorun archive. Masoud Ballah was also of the opinion that Franco used the Moroccans as bogeymen. Interview, Brussels, 5 November 2011.

<sup>132</sup> Interview Masoud Ballah.

[however] and that is to respect the unarmed civilians'. Those deviating from the law would face court martial and then 'we would kill him'.<sup>133</sup>

If the civilians were afraid of Moroccan soldiers it was not because of any wrongdoing on their part, or so the veterans overwhelmingly claim. A veteran noted that the civilians 'knew their laws and we knew our laws. [If] you commit *falta, fusilar* [if you commit a wrongdoing, you will be shot]'.<sup>134</sup> Some claimed that 'theft was punished',<sup>135</sup> and that 'we entered the town and it was not allowed to take anything except clothes and bombs. You would not take money because it could not be spent'.<sup>136</sup> Others, however, admitted that 'when we entered the first time we would collect the booty', but they were also followed by the *Guardia Civil* and the *Guardia de Asalto*, and 'we left the village to them because they were better knowledgeable of their populations'.<sup>137</sup> More amusing is the admission by Abdelkader Amezian that 'when we were in Aragon, the *askaris* [soldiers] would loot and plunder, but when we entered Catalonia, they [the superiors] advised us that people there are nasty and do not want anyone to commit aggression against them'.<sup>138</sup>

In any case, the consensus is that the Moroccan soldiers did not physically maltreat the civilians. Far from it, some even spoke of very friendly relations and mutual help. Al Hussein ben Abdesselam, spoke of how his unit, upon landing in Algeciras, found the population in a state of poverty and need, and 'Spanish women and children who came begging for food. The *kaïd* [native officer] ordered food from our rations to be distributed for we had plenty'. Thereafter, the troops were taken by train to the Jarama River and 'when we arrived there, it was the people who distributed food to us because they had plenty'.<sup>139</sup> Abdelkader Amezian, the same veteran who admitted that Moroccans looted in Aragon and were warned not to do so in Catalonia, also presents an image of good relations. 'We, on the contrary, were lenient on them, we would give them chocolate and bread and food. And the people would welcome us in their homes'.<sup>140</sup> Others remembered the 'Christians' who 'would come to us and wash the clothes in return for money',<sup>141</sup> or the kind women of the villages who knitted headgears and other 'presents' for the Moroccan soldiers.<sup>142</sup>

### **Post war terror of the Moor**

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<sup>133</sup> Testimony of Mohammed Al Ayyashi Al Bakouri, Tetuan, 7 April, 1994, El Merroun archive.

<sup>134</sup> Interview Kendoussi ben BouMidien, Nador, 4 July 2011.

<sup>135</sup> Testimony of Al Siddiq Al Kumaili, Tetuan 24 September 1994, El Merroun archive.

<sup>136</sup> Testimony of Mhaush, Tetuan, unclear date (1995), El Merroun archive.

<sup>137</sup> Testimony of Ahmed ben Abdullah Al Omari, Tetuan, 12 April 1994, El Merroun archive.

<sup>138</sup> Testimony of Abdelkader Amezian, Tetuan, 9 November 1993, El Merroun archive.

<sup>139</sup> Interview with Al Hussein ben Abdesselam, Ceuta, 24 January 2011.

<sup>140</sup> Testimony of Abdelkader Amezian, Tetuan, 9 November 1993, El Merroun archive. He continues that 'Wherever we went to consume they would give us a receipt or a *carte visite* so that if something happens to you they [the army] would know where you ate'.

<sup>141</sup> Testimony of Ben Al Siddiq Tetuan 21 May 1996.

<sup>142</sup> Interview with Masoud Ballah, Brussels, 5 November 2011.

The awe inspiring presence of the Moroccan units was probably a factor in the continuation of their employment in post-war Spain against remnants of the Republican army, composed of fighters who fled and refused to surrender and some civilians who joined them later and became known as Maquis. In the early post-war period, mixed forces of Moroccan troops, forces of the Legion, civil guards, and Falangists were entrusted with finding and destroying these bands of anti-Franco resistance. These forces operated mainly in the regions of Córdoba, Asturias, Orense, Leon, Ciudad Real, and Valderrobes.<sup>143</sup> As the Spanish historian Secundino Serrano puts it, ‘the relation of these troops with the different populations followed the line of the behaviour of an occupation army: the lootings were frequent and the obituaries intensified’. Serrano cites two 1940 examples of this occupation army behaviour, in the Cordoban region. In the first, ‘the Regulares killed three neighbours’, and in the second, ‘colonial troops poured boiling oil into the ears’ of the father of one of the anti-Francoist guerrilla fighters.<sup>144</sup> Despite these cases, the intensity of the violence must have been far lower compared to the active phase of the war that preceded this post-war period. After 1940, the role of the army diminished in fighting the guerrillas. The situation then changed in 1943 to 1944 as guerrilla activities increased, and the defeat of friendly Nazi Germany loomed, which converted the guerrillas into a real threat that materialised in the operation *Reconquista de España*, a failed invasion of northern Spain by 4000 guerrillas. The regime detached the army including companies of *Regulares* troops to regions with concentrations of guerrillas or sensitive regions, using *Regulares* for example to guard the border with France,<sup>145</sup> or maintain order in Málaga and Granada.<sup>146</sup>

The post-war experience of the Spaniards with regard to Moroccan troops differed from place to place and from time to time, varying from violent experiences, as mentioned above to more benign ones, as was the case with an Asturian female who was interviewed by Madariaga. During the 1940s, this interviewee, called Sole, witnessed Moroccan cavalymen who were dispersed in villages, occupying requisitioned houses. ‘They did not interfere with anyone and had good relations with people, but we all feared them’.<sup>147</sup> As Madariaga notices, the fear towards the Moroccans is curious given the correct behaviour of the troops. She considers it an instinctive

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<sup>143</sup> Secundino Serrano, *Maquis. Historia de la guerrilla antifranquista* (Madrid 2001) 79. According to the documents of General Varela, the Spanish Army’s Asturias Column that was organised in August 1939 to capture or kill the *huidos* or those who fled to the mountains, was composed of 16 Moroccan *Tabors*, forming the overwhelming majority of the infantry units of this column. AHMC, Varela, 95/251-252.

<sup>144</sup> Secundino Serrano, *Maquis*, 79.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibidem*, 140.

<sup>146</sup> Jorge Marco Carretero, *Resistencia armada en la posguerra. Andalucía oriental, 1939-1952* (PhD diss. Universidad Complutense de Madrid 2011) 104.

<sup>147</sup> Madariaga, *Los moros que trajo Franco*, 378.

rejection due to the inherited prejudices against the Moors, as well as their bad reputation as a result of horror tales.<sup>148</sup>

In his study on the Maquis, *Historia de los Maquis. Entre dos fuegos*, David Baird gives special attention to the Andalusian region of Frigiliana where he conducted a number of interviews with elderly citizens. One notices, in the study, that whenever the Civil Guards are mentioned, the Moroccan *Regulares* are very often mentioned in the same breath. A *Tabor* of *Regulares* was destined to the regions of Málaga and Granada, and a part of it was stationed in Frigiliana. The consequences of causing problems with Moroccan troops were manifested in 1950 in an incident which, apparently, led to traumatic memories for the villages long after.<sup>149</sup> A Spanish supporter of the guerrilla, to prove his loyalty to two prominent guerrillas, whom he wanted to join and who asked him to demonstrate his loyalty by doing something strong, attacked a Moroccan soldier who was taking a bath, knocking him down and causing injuries before fleeing. The fellow Moroccans of the attacked soldier, who eventually recovered, destroyed the attacker's house and his belongings but failed to find any guerrillas. The Civil Guard then took it upon itself to search for 'the usual suspects', relatives of guerrillas, and detained three young men. They were found dead with their bodies badly beaten. It is not clear how they met their fate. Some neighbours maintain that the three were delivered by the Civil Guards to the *Regulares* who took their revenge on them.<sup>150</sup> No Moroccan soldier was attacked in Frigiliana afterwards. By the early 1950s the guerrilla movement in Andalusia, and the rest of Spain for that matter, was all but destroyed and as a consequence the Moroccan troops were withdrawn in 1951.<sup>151</sup>

Another anecdote in another part of Spain, Asturias, that took place also in 1950 is also demonstrative. This was the case of the elimination of Adolfo Quintana Castañón, known shortly as Quintana. In the documentary *Guerrillero Quintana*,<sup>152</sup> one of the neighbours recalled that the forces that traced Quintana and wanted to attack him, along with another guerrilla called 'El Canario', 'even wanted to call the Moors' who were quartered nearby, but that the captain in charge of the 'Moors' rejected the suggestion saying 'it is not a military issue. If the Moors intervene they will burn the town', although, apparently, the Civil Guards were instructed to 'burn the town' if it were necessary to prevent their prey from escaping. However, a Moroccan veteran who volunteered for the Spanish army in the middle of the 1940s, and moved to Asturias where his *Tabor* was for a certain period stationed, indicates clearly that the Moroccans did participate in the operation to liquidate Quintana. His recollections of Asturias as a dangerous region, where at least

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<sup>148</sup> Ibidem. In the same rural municipality of Sole there used to be a Spanish military commander who terrorised the whole population and who was therefore called 'Moro Juan'. Asked by Madariaga why was he thus called, she answered: 'because he was very bad'.

<sup>149</sup> David Baird, *Historia de los Maquis. Entre dos fuegos* (2008 Cordoba)

<sup>150</sup> Ibidem, 113-115, 227.

<sup>151</sup> Jorge Marco Carretero, *Resistencia armada en la posguerra*, 315.

<sup>152</sup> Directed by Luis Felipe Capellín, 2013.

one Moroccan *kaíd* was killed and his body was mutilated after going out alone, though the veteran does not mention when this happened. Before returning to Morocco, his unit took part in eliminating Quintana, who was searched for in Gijón and Oviedo. ‘We kept looking for him. He came to Asturias only at night... one time they caught sight of him in Gijon, and when he came, he entered his sister’s house, where we surrounded him, and the shooting started’.<sup>153</sup> Whatever the case, the comments by the neighbour in the documentary demonstrate, as the Frigiliana case, the fear of the Moroccan troops, and therefore the rationale behind their continued employment in low-level armed conflicts for which other Spanish security services and army units should be better suited to tackle.

Some Moroccan veterans lived to talk about this episode in post-war fighting. Any violent act on their part towards the civilian population was absent from these memories, at least as they were revealed to their interviewers. Speaking about his memories in post-war Spain, Al Sebtaoui states that after the war, in which he took part, he was sent to Oviedo, the capital of Asturias, ‘we went to catch the chiefs of the *rojós* who were hidden there in the mountains, and would come down at night to commit crimes. We were in guard duty and we would hold their families captive to pressure them to surrender’.<sup>154</sup> This is a rare admission of repression towards civilians, though without inflicting physical violence. Abdelkader ben Mohamed was sent with his *Tabor*, after the end of the war, to Alcazarquivir in Morocco, only to be sent once again to Spain, to Asturias where he stayed for two years as ‘we went around in the mountains looking for *rojós*’. The efforts were fruitful as ‘we caught someone called Barrasco and his gang. That gang was roaming the mountains and they would go to their cousins [fellow Spaniards] and steal from them and drink there and stay in their houses and they would leave them nothing. No one of them [i.e. the gang] was left. We caught them all and killed them’.<sup>155</sup>

### **The guerrilla who let the Moor go free**

Given the violence that sometimes characterised the presence of Moroccan forces in Spain during the post-war period, and the fear that the Moroccan forces were supposed to inspire in the local population as well as the guerrillas, the encounter one Moroccan soldier had in post-Civil War Spain with a pro-Republican guerrilla fighter is both remarkable and atypical. This soldier’s name was Dandi Mohammed. His destiny could have been to fight and perhaps die at the Russian front. Joining the army in 1943 he was destined to be in the Spanish Division of Volunteers, better known as the *División Azul* (Blue Division).<sup>156</sup> Around 1500 men from Morocco, according to him (in 2011), were to join the Blue Division in Russia. They even received the uniforms with the insignia of the blue unit. In the end, this did not happen as ‘things went badly for the German

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<sup>153</sup> Testimony of an unnamed veteran of the *Regulares*. Date unclear, Tetuan, El Merroun archive.

<sup>154</sup> Testimony of Mohammed ben Amar ben Al Hashmi, Tetuan, 24 June 1994, El Merroun archive.

<sup>155</sup> Interview with Abdelkader ben Mohammed, Alcazarquivir, 21 February 2011.

<sup>156</sup> Interview with Dandi Mohammed, Tetuan, 15 February 2011.

army', so the group was distributed to the different regiments, and he ended up with the *Regulares* of Ceuta.<sup>157</sup> But in 1946, now part of the ranks of the Tetuan regiment, he set foot for the first time in Spain, the land where his father had died on the Teruel front in 1937. Like father, like son, he was in Spain to confront Republicans who now had already acquired the title of Maquis. He was to stay in Spain for a remarkable period of six years, conducting search operations and intelligence gathering, as part of the reconnaissance battalion of the Tetuan *Regulares*, mainly in Galicia and Asturias. 'In that area we had the task of reconnoitring the villages, counting the numbers of houses, the cattle, where is the water coming from, where do they drink the water, whether there are roads or not, whether there is a forest or not'.

His battalion always operated in conjunction with a detachment of the Civil Guards. 'We went to a village and closed all the roads'. The *Regulares* would allow anyone to enter but no one to exit except with an authorisation by the Civil Guards. The *Regulares* would leave only after the Civil Guards had finished their search in the village. But then when he had set foot in Spain 'there were no big battles, they had cleaned almost everything', and Dandi never had the chance to fire his weapon against the guerrillas though he came in close contact at least twice, one of them could have ended his life. He explained that:

[t]he *Guardia Civil* had their file: so and so is Maqui who is the son of so and so from this village. The municipal police would not catch the Maquis, even if they found one in the street, except if something at the moment was being committed. Only the *Guardia Civil* [would catch them]. So when they tell us to close the village down, if someone gets out with no authorisation from the *Guardia Civil* we take him to the *Guardia Civil*.

As for the attitude of the civilians towards the Maquis, he thought they were:

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<sup>157</sup> It seems that there were a number of Moroccan volunteers who wanted to be sent to the Russian frontlines, but few who managed to go. According to Juan José Negreira Parets in his *Los Divisionarios. Soldados baleares en la División Azul*, in June 1941, 181 Moroccans from the 4<sup>th</sup> Tabor of *Regulares de Tetuan*, who were stationed in Ibiza presented themselves as volunteers for the Blue Division along with 21 Spanish members of the same unit. Their request was rejected as the Spanish command was interested first in reinforcing the defences of the Spanish Balears against a possible invasion, either by the Allies or Italy. In March 1942, the opportunity was open for volunteers from the Balears to enlist in the Blue Division. 150 Moroccans presented themselves, but they were rejected again. Negreira believes that it had nothing to do with their 'Arab' origins but with not fulfilling a set of criteria related to political past. Negreira thinks however that the demonstration of will to volunteer reflects a 'barracks psychology', meaning that in the face of an appeal for volunteers nobody would say no, although Negreira does not explain why such an appeal would be made if the respondents were to be rejected beforehand. José Miguel L. Romero, "Los Divisionarios" 181 moros voluntarios contra Stalin", *Diario de Ibiza*, 24 February 2011. Accessed 25 August 2014: <http://www.diariodeibiza.es/pitiuses-balears/2011/02/24/181-moros-voluntarios-stalin/465559.html> . There is evidence however of a Moroccan presence in the Blue Division, though quite miniscule, as in Colonel Martínez Esparza's mention of a Moroccan member of the *Regulares* who was present in November 1941 in Possad, Russia. José Martínez Esparza, *Con la División Azul en Rusia* (Madrid 1943) 319.

forced to help the Maquis. If they do not help them they [the Maquis] kill them. If someone in the district reports on one of the Maquis they come and kill that man. The people feared them. They were dangerous, and they would come to get money. They would send a letter asking someone to bring two, three or four millions at such hour and if not, then they will kill you. If that *señor* does not get the money ready they come and kill him.

The first time this Moroccan veteran met the Maquis it almost ended with his capture. The soldiers used to go to cafés or the bodegas or even to a verbena where there was ‘singing and dancing, during the day of San Jose or San Pedro etc. The girls would start singing. Well, we were soldiers so we went to look, to enjoy. When we arrive there, there is nothing but wine’. And then the Maquis arrived. Dandi and his comrades did know first that there were Maquis among the partygoers. A group of men approached them and started a conversation while drinking, asking the Moroccans how and why they came to Spain. ‘We answered: we were forced to come. Spain is the master in Morocco and they brought us here to serve...almost forced’. A few hours passed before the soldiers decided that it was time to retire. One of their Spanish drinking companions then told the Moroccans that they were not going anywhere and that they ‘will come with us to the countryside’. ‘We are the Maquis!’ he added, revealing a sub-machine gun that was tucked inside his greatcoat. The menacing scene developed into one of drama. With an embarrassed smile, Dandi remembers ‘we were so young so we started weeping and some of us said: “I left my mother [alone], this cannot be!”’. The menaces and entreaties lasted for half an hour, at the end of it the guerrillas decided, (whether out of mercy or to prevent reprisals), to let the young men go. Reaching their barracks Dandi and his companions informed their superiors of the presence of the Maquis. By that time, their captors had left the village. It was a terrifying experience, and after that the young Moroccans moved only in twos or threes but never accompanied by a Spaniard. There was no room for trusting a Spaniard. ‘If a Spaniard offered us to go with him and have a cup of coffee [we would say]: no’, Dandi concluded. It seemed as if the Moroccan troops were doomed to be distanced from the general population, whether by their own acts of aggression or as a result of being targeted by the anti-Francoist forces.

#### **North Africans in the French Army**

In many aspects, the racial perceptions the Spanish had towards the Moroccans, and the role these perceptions played in employing Moroccan troops were similar to the situation of Moroccan and other North African troops, as well as other African troops in general in the French Army during both world wars. As Richard Fogarty comments, the North Africans stood high in the hierarchy of the so-called martial races, just below the West Africans. Among the North Africans, the French considered the Moroccans superb attacking troops, with a more warlike temperament than their



conscripted Algerian neighbours or the Tunisians for that matter. During the First World War, and after attacks, the Moroccan troops would be pulled off the line because they supposedly disliked defensive duties. Before the introduction of Moroccan troops to the fighting in Europe the French War Ministry informed French officers that Moroccan troops were 'courageous', 'sober' and 'good marchers', as well as being better marksmen than Algerians, especially certain among them of the 'Berber race'.<sup>158</sup> Although the Algerians were deemed less warlike than the Moroccans, they were still considered a martial race. As one French Army report noted, the Arabs and Berbers were a warlike race, for whom war was not an accident, but something to be accepted as normal, including death in it. The report then comments that such fatalism makes good soldiers.<sup>159</sup> As their Moroccan counterparts, they were deemed better suited for the attack, and much less for defensive duty, digging or manning trenches. It was necessary to move them frequently to stave off boredom.<sup>160</sup> The Moroccans and Algerians, childlike and simple, supposedly craved wide open action that they could find on the Western Front unless on the attack.<sup>161</sup>

That was one of the reasons why the martial hierarchy of the French was topped by the French white soldiers, against whom every other warrior race was to be compared. While West and North Africans could display courage and attacking spirit, they did not have the stoicism of the French soldier, his intelligence, spirit of initiative or self-discipline. That is why the French, during the First World War thought Moroccan troops ill-suited for tasks such as patrol duty or reconnaissance missions where French supervision would be less and independent action necessary. Nor could officers afford to leave them on their own, due to their 'instinct for piracy', which could lead them to commit acts of pillaging and rape.<sup>162</sup> While the Moroccans in the Spanish Civil War enjoyed a terrifying reputation among their Republican enemies, in the case of the First World War, it seems that this role was filled by black West African troops whose elite warlike characteristics included savagery, and towards whom the Germans, according to some French officers, developed an irrational fear.<sup>163</sup>

The perceived limited qualities of the North African soldiers, and colonial ones in general, led to inclusion of white French troops in the lower ranks of colonial native units. White men, with their preeminent quality of calm self-sacrifice were supposed to shore up their less reliable comrades under fire and help sustain their morale.<sup>164</sup> Practical reasons were also at play, such as the necessity to police the behaviour of potentially unreliable natives, especially when the Muslim Ottoman Empire joined the war alongside Germany. Technical reasons were also important. The

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<sup>158</sup> Fogart, *Race and War in France*, 78.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibidem*, 80.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibidem*, 81.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibidem*, 82.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibidem* 79.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibidem*, 85.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibidem*, 59.

French Army did not believe the natives were capable of performing specialised tasks that required good knowledge of French or technical knowledge (such as being liaison agents, telephone operators, clerical personnel), so they were mostly excluded from artillery units, or from using machineguns or any other duties that went beyond the West and North African less complicated roles of attacking and of managing rifles.<sup>165</sup> As such, and since white soldiers filled all the administrative and technical positions, the white component in native battalions was, in 1915, to be raised to 20% of total men in each company.<sup>166</sup> That is equal to the (theoretical) percentage that was decided in 1914 with regard to the *Regulares* troops, and with partially similar reasoning behind it.

The French perceptions did not change much after the end of the war. As Moshe Gershovich argues, while the French superiors used to hail Moroccan soldiers for their courage and resilience, submission to rigorous discipline and dependability, one trait rarely ascribed to Moroccan soldiers was initiative or any similar quality associated with intelligence. Moroccan soldiers were often depicted as ‘born warriors’ but hardly the material to be trusted with complicated, skills-related tasks.<sup>167</sup> Such assessment could still be found in a 1939 study of Moroccan soldiers, which noted the will of some recruits ‘to learn more or less complicated mechanics’, but acknowledged also that ‘Moroccan specialists—radio transmitters, vehicle drivers, etc.—are rare since their training is long and more costly than that of French youth’.<sup>168</sup> Also, in regarding the Moroccan *Goums* the French thought that Moroccan *Goumier* ‘works with his instinct’, and ‘does not reason, he follows his chiefs with confidence’ and ready to accept anything. However, only his chiefs, by showing example, can maintain him through desperate situations. A *Goum* unit without its (obviously European) chiefs is a ‘simple band of fugitives’.<sup>169</sup> It is not surprising then that the practice of putting white troops among native ones continued, though the percentages could be much lower than the 20% of the First World War. A French document in 1943 on the Moroccan *Goums* troops gives for a *Tabor* 833 natives plus 65 French officers, under-officers and specialists.<sup>170</sup>

### Conclusion

The Moroccans, rather than forming just another group of soldiers, were considered combatants with special qualities and aptitudes predetermined either by their religious or ethnic background. Special traits were assigned to them, such as agile walkers, excellent night vision, and a cunning

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<sup>165</sup> In comparison, the Moroccan soldiers during the Spanish Civil War did use machineguns and even mortars.

<sup>166</sup> Fogarty, *Race and War in France*, 61-62.

<sup>167</sup> Moshe Gershovich, ‘Memory and Representation of War and Violence: Moroccan Combatants in French Uniforms during the Second World War’, in: Eric Storm and Ali Al Tuma, eds., *Colonial Soldiers in Europe, 1914-1945. “Aliens in Uniform” in Wartime Societies* (New York 2016) 77-94, here 79.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibidem*, 92n15.

<sup>169</sup> ‘Ce que sont les Goums marocains’, June 1943, 5. SHD, 3 H 2475.

<sup>170</sup> *Ibidem*, 2

ability for surprise attacks. The Moroccans were therefore sometimes tactically used according to these preconceptions, even though the realities of the battlefield meant that they were not always deployed according to the ideal the Spanish commanders had of them. In that way they resemble colonial combatants in other European armies. The perception of the otherness of the Moroccan served the Nationalists well by using the Moroccans to instil fear among the Republican enemy, a fear that continued well beyond the end of the formal hostilities in April 1939. In some respects, there were many Moroccan veterans who confirm the stereotypical traits that were ascribed to them and the roles that they were assigned to. While they were also aware of the terrifying image they had and the psychological impact they brought with them to the battlefield, most protested that such image was mostly not based on reality, and that they were innocent of the horrendous deeds attributed to them. The otherness of the Moroccans not only in great measure determined their use in the battlefield, but also the relation they had with their army. It is to that aspect that the next chapter turns.

### Chapter 3

#### The Moroccan and his army<sup>1</sup>

This chapter deals with the relation between the Moroccan troops and the Spanish army outside the scope of tactics and the military role assigned to the Moroccans by their Spanish commanders. It will examine how the Spanish army tried to keep the Moroccan soldiers contained within a Moroccan sphere by the use of separate Moroccan units and separate facilities that were oriented towards the Moroccan units. It will examine how the relationship between the Moroccan soldiers and their Spanish officers reflected the prejudices the Spanish had about the distinct psychology of the ‘Moor’. But it will also examine how the Moroccan soldiers themselves remembered this soldier-officer relationship. These reminiscences will illustrate that the perception of this relationship is not uniform, and ranges from the positive, even to the point of adulation on one hand, to the extremely negative on the other hand. The chapter will also demonstrate that in many occasions the Moroccan soldiers were not only at the receiving end of the policy and practice of the Spanish army, but that they could themselves influence their conditions should they perceive unfair treatment from the superiors. It will examine causes of dissatisfaction among the Moroccan troops as well as forms of expression of such disgruntlement: complaints, demonstrations of protest, individual desertions and mass unit-size mutinies.

#### Moroccan units for Moroccans

That the Moroccans mainly served, during the Civil War, in Moroccan majority units of the Spanish army was the desire of both the Spanish Army and the Moroccan soldiers themselves. One veteran remembered that when he moved from the French zone of Morocco to enlist in the Spanish zone ‘two Spanish soldiers met me and using signs and pointing to their uniforms tried to tell me to join them, but then a corporal of the *Regulares* came and told me to join them as there were other Muslims’.<sup>2</sup> The recruits did not only prefer Muslim majority units but they also preferred to be around their kin. One veteran remembered that the Spaniards ‘had promised not to disperse the volunteers of the same tribe. The old ones told us that it was encouraging in combat’.<sup>3</sup> Putting members of the same tribe together in the same units also helped to surmount problems of communication.<sup>4</sup> It would have certainly maintained the bonds necessary to hold small units in combat, especially if members of such small units did not enjoy enough time to build the needed bonds of comradeship.

This however does not mean that Moroccans did not serve in other units that had a Spanish majority among their members. Unlike the French Foreign Legion in Morocco, which did not accept

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<sup>1</sup> A large part of this chapter appeared as “‘Moor No Eating, Moor No Sleeping, Moor Leaving’”: A Story of Moroccan Soldiers, Spanish Officers and Protest in the Spanish Civil War’, in: Eric Storm and Ali Al Tuma, eds., *Colonial Soldiers in Europe, 1914-1945. “Aliens in Uniform” in Wartime Societies* (New York 2016) 207-228.

<sup>2</sup> Interview with Al Hussein ben Abdesselam, 24 January 2011, Ceuta.

<sup>3</sup> Maadani, a Moroccan veteran, talking to Lmrabet, ‘Los fieros marroquíes en la guerra civil’, 24.

<sup>4</sup> El Merroun, *Las Tropas Marroquíes en la Guerra Civil Española*, 200.

Moroccans in its ranks,<sup>5</sup> there were Moroccans in the Legion, but also in the *Bandera de Marruecos* of the Fascist Falange and other Spanish units.<sup>6</sup> But it seems that with the passage of time most of the Moroccans who enlisted in such units regretted their choice and desired to move to Moroccan majority units.<sup>7</sup> According to Nerín 25% of the Falangist Moroccan *Bandera* members were Moroccans, and still racist attitudes were widespread in it.<sup>8</sup> Balfour thinks that the Moroccans found it difficult to adjust to the culture of the Spanish Legion.<sup>9</sup> Not only Moroccan individuals were present in majority Spanish units, but Moroccan units were also inserted in larger Spanish formations. This had its tactical justifications, but it also reflected an attitude of distrust on the part of Franco towards metropolitan conscripts, because he thought that they were imbued with leftist ideas. To guarantee the fidelity of the conscription troops, until 1938 they were not used without the accompaniment of either Moroccan troops or Legionnaires or Falangist or Requeté volunteers.<sup>10</sup> This is attested to by one of the veterans from *Regulares Ceuta*, whose company was transferred to a Spanish *Cazadores* battalion, until November 1938, where they had the task of guarding its members and prevent them from deserting to the Republicans.<sup>11</sup> Apparently, by 1938 the rationale was not compelling anymore, as the Republic was clearly on the losing side. In July 1938 General Orgaz proposed to Franco to dissolve the Moroccan companies that had been attached to the *Cazadores* battalions, to complete their combative efficacy and compensate for their inexperience. The reason for the dissolution, Orgaz gave as ‘the inconvenience that always is produced by the coexistence in one unit of elements of such different psychology’, and given that the reason for the inclusion of such Moroccan companies in the otherwise Spanish battalions is no more relevant, and given the diminishing numbers of the members of the Moroccan companies it would be better to dissolve them and send their elements to the *Regulares*. Franco, in answering Orgaz, approved of the suggestion.<sup>12</sup>

Yet, and despite the arguments of Orgaz, one must not forget that even in Moroccan majority units, there was a percentage (as discussed in chapter 2) of Spanish troops that could reach 20% of the total effectives in a *Tabor*, although that percentage was possibly lower than that for most of the *Tabors* during the greatest part of the war. It is difficult to ascertain how the relationship was between the Moroccan soldiers of these *Tabors* and the Spanish members of the same units. This issue does not figure in the documentation, and hardly in testimonies by the Moroccan veterans, whether deserters speaking to French interrogators or old men being interviewed by historians in more recent times. This

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<sup>5</sup> Moshe Gershovich, ‘Memory and Representation of War and Violence: Moroccan Combatants in French Uniforms During the Second World War’, in: Eric Storm and Ali Al Tuma, eds., *Colonial Soldiers in Europe, 1914-1945. “Aliens in Uniform” in Wartime Societies* (New York 2016) 77-94, here 92n14.

<sup>6</sup> Nerín, *La guerra que vino de África*, 171.

<sup>7</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>8</sup> Ibidem, 174.

<sup>9</sup> Sebastian Balfour, ‘El otro moro en la guerra colonial y la Guerra Civil’, in: J.A. González Alcantud ed., *Marroquíes en la Guerra Civil española* (Granada 2003) 95-110, here 106.

<sup>10</sup> Nerín, *La guerra que vino de África*, 170.

<sup>11</sup> Interview with Kendoussi ben Boumidien, Nador, 4 July 2011.

<sup>12</sup> Orgaz to Franco, 15 July 1938. AGMAV, A.2, L.161, Cp. 40.

indicates that either the numbers of Spanish soldiers in the units of those veterans were very marginal, or very isolated, or that there were very little problems worth mentioning in documents or worth lingering in memories. Mohammed Abdullah Susi mentioned the relationship between Moroccan soldiers and Spanish ones as being always positive,<sup>13</sup> although he did not specify whether those Spanish soldiers belonged to *Regulares* units or that they belonged to other ones. Whether his opinion represents the majority of what other Moroccan soldiers thought, remains to be confirmed.

### **Uniforms and emblems**

Not only the Moroccan majority units served to create a separate space for the Moroccans, this function was also in a way played by the uniforms and emblems of the Moroccan units. The uniforms of the *Regulares* form part of the exotic image of these units, helping them to create the esprit de corps that characterise them. The ‘idiosyncrasy’ of the Moroccans was taken into the uniforms, as the leadership that designed them knew how to incorporate in the clothing the characteristics of the Rifian and Berber countryman and enriching them with colourful accessories.<sup>14</sup> Until 1943 there was no official regulation governing the uniforms of the Moroccan troops in the Spanish army, but General Berenguer, who founded the *Regulares* in 1911, deemed it necessary that the uniforms of the Moroccan soldiers should fit with the native environment in Morocco and their individual parts drawn from the traditional clothing of the Moroccans. The distinctive elements of the Moroccan military attire were the: *serual* (trousers that have a baggy form); *alquicel* (a Moorish cloak, usually white in color and relatively light in weight, more often worn by the cavalry troops); *sulham* (a somewhat heavier cloak than the *alquicel*. In the Spanish army it had either a blue or a red color); *chillaba* (a long loose fitting robe, with long sleeves and a hood, usually made of wool); and *gandora* (unlike the *chillaba*, it does not have a hood, and its sleeves are short. It was more proper for summer campaigns). The headgear consisted of the *tarbuch* (fez), or a white turban. The European troops were to wear the same clothing as the Moroccans with the exception of the *serual*, which were replaced by European style trousers, distinguishing them from the Moroccan soldiers.<sup>15</sup> Moroccan officers also were distinct from their European counterparts, as they wore the broad *serual* and had to wear either the *tarbuch* or the turban as headgear and never wore the European cap. The European officer had the freedom however to choose between the European cap or the Moroccan *tarbuch* which many chose to wear.

As has been mentioned in chapter 2, the presence of Moroccan soldiers in many instances had a psychological edge, encouraging beleaguered Nationalist troops and spreading anxiety or even panic among Republican ones. The clothing of the Moroccan troops obviously played an important part in this regard as it made them easily distinguishable. A famous example of the use of the Moroccan clothing came in Seville in July 1936 when General Queipo de Llano resorted to letting colonial troops drive around the city and regularly changing attire to give the impression that a far larger force was

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<sup>13</sup> Interview with Mohammed Abdullah Susi, Ceuta, 19 January 2011.

<sup>14</sup> Montes Ramos, *Los Regulares*, 48.

<sup>15</sup> González Rosado and Del Río Fernández, *Grupo de Fuerzas Regulares de Ceuta nr. 3*, 107.

present. One Moroccan veteran remembered the episode commenting that when ‘we landed in Jérez, we mounted lorries to Seville. We entered it in the morning. They would put *chillabas* on us, and they would take us and then bring us back wearing *gandoras* to trick the people into thinking that another army has arrived, and another time [we were] in [regular] uniform’.<sup>16</sup>

Not only the Moroccan attire provided a psychological advantage but it also apparently brought prestige to its wearers and those who surrounded themselves with those wearing it. Many young Spanish officers wore the *chillaba* as well as some Nationalist commanders who made their military careers in Morocco. One Spanish officer mused about:

this curious phenomenon which is the inclination that has developed among the superior commands of having a personal escort of “natives” or legionnaires, when there were many native units (without quotation marks) which have distinguished themselves as well as any, and every young man of these lands is [as formidable] like a castle. But there are those that do not rest until they have behind them a Moor with an umbrella or half a dozen of legionnaires, even if they were from San Sebastián.<sup>17</sup>

His remark is interesting, especially his mention of the quotation marks, as he suggests that some officers either took ‘natives’ who were not soldiers to become personal guards, or these guards were not even ‘native’ at all, only clothed to look so. The most famous of these escorts were of course the Moorish Guard of General Franco, who were distinguished with their white capes and turbans, whether on foot carrying rifles, or on horse, carrying spears, with their rifles slinging on their backs. Also significant was the symbolism that the Moroccan attire carried with it, whether worn by the soldiers or by their Spanish commanders. When Madrid surrendered on 28 March 1939, the Republican officer charged with delivering the surrender, Adolfo Prada Vaquero, met in the ruins of the University City with Colonel Eduardo Losas, the commander of the 16<sup>th</sup> Division who was wearing a striped *chillaba*. The picture of that meeting seems like the ultimate symbol of the victory of the Moroccan army and its *Africanista* officers over their Republican opponents.

The distinct features of the attire of the Moroccan troops was not always a blessing, and often that Moroccan attire was not even available anymore during combat. The red *tarbush* formed a dangerous item easily recognisable from the air,<sup>18</sup> obliging soldiers to remove it and replace it with a khaki coloured turban.<sup>19</sup> In some units, the longer the war progressed the less the attire of the Moroccan soldiers conformed to either the standards of the army or the Moroccan traditions. As one veteran put it ‘during the war the clothes do not remain the same, because due to plenty of lice we

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<sup>16</sup> Testimony of Ahmad ben Abdullah Al Omari, Tetuan, 12 April 1994, El Merroun archive.

<sup>17</sup> Jorge Vigón Suerodíaz, *Cuadernos de guerra y notas de paz* (Oviedo 1970) 201.

<sup>18</sup> Pablo Montagudo Jaén, *1936, Regulares. Diario en el campo de batalla*, 52.

<sup>19</sup> Testimony of Abdelkader Amezian, 9 November 1993, El Merroun archive.

would throw the clothes away and take others from inside the front, civilian clothes.<sup>20</sup> Such shabby conditions became reason for complaints among some soldiers,<sup>21</sup> and a partial reason for desertion among others. One soldier, however, was lucky not to wear a traditional Moroccan headgear, which probably saved his life or at least freedom from imprisonment. In 2011 he described how one night, after the fall of Teruel in the Nationalist hands, his company, now reduced in numbers, was ordered to climb Peña Juliana, a rising on the Teruel front. He was in forward position with two others, and when the morning came they moved forward only to discover that the company had retreated. ‘Suddenly the enemy came. We were lucky that we were wearing the same headgear [as the Republicans], so they thought we were from their own side’. According to this veteran, he and his two companions acted like they were part of a Republican attacking formation. Perhaps the lack of enough light in the early morning hours and a sufficient distance prevented their recognition. The three managed to sneak away and return to their unit where ‘the officer, when he saw me, embraced me and lifted me in the air’.<sup>22</sup>

The emblems of the Moroccan troops served a similar function as the uniforms, in that they were supposed to relate to the Moroccans by figuring the Islamic crescent, and that they served to further distinguish Moroccan troops from Spanish ones. Some of the banners of larger formations such divisions also figured Islamic symbols like the ‘hand of Fatima’ in the emblem of the 13<sup>th</sup> Division (see appendix 4). One must also assume that they had the same psychological effect the Moroccan uniforms had in the battlefield.

### **Discipline**

In 1957, a Spanish officer and veteran of the Civil War recounted an incident which he described as ‘very expressive of the character of the Moors’. During operations on the Andalusian front in early April 1937, a position that was defended by both Spanish peninsular (the 6<sup>th</sup> Granada regiment) and Moroccan *Regulares* soldiers was coming under heavy attacks and bombardments from the Republicans for a couple of days. During a lull in the fighting, a Moroccan soldier, ‘one very young, who perhaps was no more than seventeen years old’, faced his commanding Lieutenant and told him: ‘Moor no eating, Moor no sleeping, Moor leaving’. More than 24 hours had passed without any supplies coming in, and all the cold food provisions were spent. But despite of this, ‘no Spaniard had complained about such an exhausting situation’. The Moroccan took hold of his rifle and tried to translate his words into deeds. He was seriously reprimanded by his officer, while the enemy started their pre-attack fire. While the young Moroccan was walking to the rear the officer threatened to apply disciplinary measures and he prepared his pistol, as ‘the demoralisation of one could infect the rest’. Then, a more ‘mature’ *Regular* with a ‘copious black beard’ intervened and took the would-be deserter

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<sup>20</sup> Testimony of Al Ayyashi, Tetuan, 11 November 1993, El Merroun archive.

<sup>21</sup> See below.

<sup>22</sup> Interview with Al Hussein ben Abdesselam, Ceuta, 24 January 2011. Although he does not specify the year of this incident, the events and the locations mentioned point clearly to either spring or summer of 1938.



by the arm, bringing him back to his position and later telling the lieutenant: 'I told him where the Spaniard stays without eating, drinking or sleeping, the Moor, his brother, has to stay'.<sup>23</sup>

This anecdote is interesting because of the 'expressive of the character of the Moors' comment by its author. He did not elaborate what he meant by that. Was it expressive in the sense that the 'Moors' were impatient or whimsical? Or that they were stubborn and rebellious? Or that they did not enjoy the necessary endurance capabilities to withstand adverse situations? Regardless, what the anecdote illustrates is that the Moroccan soldiers were far from the blindly obedient warriors, or passive followers.

The idea that the Moroccan soldier was a different breed of warrior with a special psychology, and for whose leadership officers of special aptitude were needed was an idea that preceded the Spanish Civil War. This supposed fact was mentioned on the first page of the first issue of the magazine of the Spanish army in Morocco *Revista de Tropas Coloniales* in 1924.<sup>24</sup> But this idea also survived the test of the Spanish Civil War into later years. An article in the army magazine, *Ejército*, in 1946, found that the:

Moor of Jebala and the Rif, and specially this last, is not similar to those of other Moroccan regions. These Moors were famous for being disrespectful towards authorities, for being rebellious towards orders, for having always lived in conflict with the *Makhzen* [The Moroccan government] and for being indomitable in their vengeance. They are all to the contrary if they are ruled well and with justice. They like to be under the protection of a strong but fair authority. They need the chief, the guide, the adviser, even for the most minimal details in their life, and that spiritual director is the Officer of the *Intervención* when he knows the psychology of the Moor and gives him an example in virtues, because otherwise he would never exercise the indispensable influence'.<sup>25</sup> The author, who became director of the Army museum after the Spanish conflict, concludes that 'generally, the Spanish Moor is so obedient that he dispenses with his sentiments in order to obey. That is why he is a good soldier'.<sup>26</sup>

According to the author the Moroccan soldier not only needs a strong and fair hand, but he is basically in need for a leader for everything. Rather immature is the Moroccan soldier that this article portrays. It is a view that is also reflected in a 1945 army document titled 'Justification for the creation of the Inspection of the *Regulares* Groups', which came to argue against the loss of the peculiarity of the *Regulares* units, that had become at that time integrated within army divisions, which precluded the independent form of life these units enjoyed before. The document explained that the *Regulares*, since

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<sup>23</sup> Manuel Justiniano y Martínez, 'Dos defensivas de nuestra Cruzada de Liberación. (Recuerdos e impresiones de un alférez de complemento)', *Ejército*, nr. 204 (1957) 45-52, here 48.

<sup>24</sup> Gonzalo Queipo de Llano, 'Nuestro proposito', *Revista de Tropas Coloniales*, nr. 1 (1924) 1-2, here 1.

<sup>25</sup> Luis Bermúdez de Castro, 'Moros y Cristianos', *Ejército*, nr. 73 (1946) 49-54, here 50.

<sup>26</sup> Bermúdez de Castro, 'Moros y Cristianos', 50.

their creation, had their peculiar manner of functioning that differed from the rest of the army. It also observed that the ‘Moor is generally very religious and a lover of his traditions’ and though he does not reach extremes in following his traditions and many times could be indifferent, he does not take kindly to those who ‘force him to act against them’. More importantly it explained that the ‘Moor is a volunteer but with a concept that is very different from the Spanish volunteer. For the simple fact of enlisting in the army he thinks that the government which he is serving has to support him, help him and solve for him his problems, both official as well as the more intimate family-related ones’. The ‘Moor’ basically, according to this document, was loyal to who pays him, supports him and treats him well. The document then continues to emphasise the differences between the *Regulares* and other Spanish army units. The mode of recruitment is not the same, neither are the forms of promotion, nor should the same rules for leaves be followed as the Spanish, given the different religious festivities, neither should the training programs be the same. The document then proceeds to warn against imposing ‘our customs’ without caution and avoidance of clashing with the Moroccan traditions.<sup>27</sup>

Although both texts were written in the 1940s, they must have taken their cue, at least partially, from the experience of the Civil War. The Spanish army leaders thought that the Moroccan soldiers were a different and sometimes difficult type of soldier that needed guidance from officers who were more familiar with his idiosyncrasy, a reference that often emerges in both official documents as well as military publications. This ‘idiosyncrasy’ was partially the reason why the Delegation of Native Affairs operated in Spain during the war to intervene in the affairs of the Moroccan soldiers, as well as Moroccan civilians who were needed to provide services for those soldiers, and why this Delegation intervened in all Moroccan affairs without distinguishing between military and civilian matters, as the Moroccans themselves, according to this office, did not make that distinction.<sup>28</sup>

### **Moorish officers**

The necessity to have a different approach towards the Moroccan soldier was also one of the main reasons why the position of ‘Moorish officer’ was created in 1909 in the first place. Although these ‘Moorish officers’ exercised the command of a platoon, the principal function was to aid the captain commanding the company by advising him on the aspects of life, customs and the necessities of the Moroccan soldiers.<sup>29</sup> According to Spanish historian Salafranca Álvarez, Spanish officers commanding Moroccan units were supposed to learn Arabic, but the complexity of the language and the existence of numerous dialects made the understanding between the commanders and their native troops difficult; help therefore was needed from these Moorish officers.<sup>30</sup> In the numerous dialects Salafranca Álvarez mentions, one must also include the non-Arabic – that is Berber (Tamazight) –

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<sup>27</sup> Archivo Histórico Municipal de Cadiz (AHMC), Varela, 132/319-320.

<sup>28</sup> Archivo General Militar de Ávila (AGMAV), A.1, L.59, Cp. 127.

<sup>29</sup> Juan Ignacio Salafranca Álvarez, ‘Los oficiales moros’, *Revista de Historia Militar* 56 (2012) 243-272, here 251.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibidem*.

ones. However, there existed since the early days of the *Regulares*, efforts to teach the Spanish language to the Moroccan troops, with course materials going as far back as 1916.<sup>31</sup>

In general, and in European armies in particular, it is accepted that non-commissioned officers form the backbone of armies as they usually rise from the ranks, with long years of experience that enable them to gain the trust of their men. They form a strong link with young officers who would arrive at their units possessing a higher formal authority, training at a military academy, but little actual experience of military life.<sup>32</sup> It is obvious that the Moorish officers (and non-commissioned officers for that matter) played a similarly important role as a link between the Moroccan soldiers and the Spanish commanding officers, especially that the overwhelming majority of these Moorish officers rose from the ranks and attained their commissions either through seniority or through combat merits.

The requirements for the obtainment of the rank of Moorish Officers 2<sup>nd</sup> Class (2<sup>nd</sup> lieutenant), as established when the *Regulares* corps was formed, were eight years of service, including three years as a sergeant, unblemished conduct and the passing of an exam.<sup>33</sup> For a Moroccan then to rise to the rank Moorish Officer 1<sup>st</sup> Class (equal to the rank of lieutenant), as per a 1919 order, he would have had to serve 10 years in the previous rank.<sup>34</sup> Combat merits, either during the colonial war or the Civil War shortened the period required for promotion for many Moroccan officers and sergeants. During the Civil War, a dozen Moroccans even graduated from military academies to become *Alféreces Provisionales*,<sup>35</sup> but still most of them had long years of military service enough to describe them as, if not *the* backbone of the Spanish Moroccan units, then a component equal in its strength to that of the Spanish commanding officers.

At the start of the Civil War there were 59 1<sup>st</sup> Class Moorish Officers and 23 2<sup>nd</sup> Class Officers in the Spanish Army (excluding the units that officially belonged to the Moroccan government but used by the Nationalists).<sup>36</sup> Their numbers would vary later as the *Tabor* numbers grew, Moroccan officers were killed or wounded, and non-commissioned officers were promoted to the rank of officers as a reward for courage, to replace the casualties, or to fill the requirements of more units, while some of the current officers were promoted to a higher rank. Yet the Moroccan officers could not generally rise beyond the ranks of Moorish Officer 1<sup>st</sup> Class or Moorish Captain (equal to a regular captain rank) and few reached this latter rank.

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<sup>31</sup> José María Gil and Carlos del Campo, *Regulares de Melilla. 100 Años de Historia* (Valladolid 2012) 45.

<sup>32</sup> The establishment of non-commissioned officers as a separate category (*suboficiales* or subofficers) in the Spanish Army came only during the 1930s. Until then, sergeants were considered a sub-category of the *tropa*. Salafraña Álvarez, 'Los oficiales moros', 247.

<sup>33</sup> Mesa, *Los moros de la guerra civil española*, 55.

<sup>34</sup> Salafraña Álvarez, 'Los oficiales moros', 248.

<sup>35</sup> Mesa, *Los moros de la guerra civil española*, 63. Provisional Second Lieutenants, overwhelmingly Spanish, were often well-educated civilian men who volunteered for the Nationalist Army and received, due to the necessities of the war, commissions after a rapid military formation of no more than several weeks, to fill command vacancies.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibidem*, 57.

The Moroccan officers were not supposed to command Spanish troops. That would disrupt the colonial hierarchy. The only exception to this rule was Mohammed Ben Mizzian. The career of Ben Mizzian in the Spanish Army started, apparently, during a visit by King Alfonso XIII to a native school in Melilla, where Mizzian, the son of a pro-Spanish Riffian leader, was a pupil. Having solved a math problem and showed some geographical knowledge of Europe that impressed the King, Alfonso asked the boy Mizzian what he wanted to become. His answer was ‘a captain’.<sup>37</sup> The King sponsored Mizzian’s admission to the Infantry Academy in Toledo, for which the law had to be changed, for the academy had never before admitted non-Christians. After graduating, he was incorporated into the colonial army in Morocco, and later fought with distinction during the Riffian rebellion in which he was wounded, and later attained the rank of captain. It was during that war time that he befriended Francisco Franco. According to a story a Melilla paper published in 1924, Mizzian saved the life of Franco by killing a Riffian rebel who was pointing his rifle at the future Spanish *Caudillo*. A Major and *Tabor* commander by the time he joined the Nationalist rebels in July 1936, received the prestigious individual *Medalla Militar* for military actions in Spain, was wounded, became commander of *Regulares* group of Ceuta, and ended the war with the rank of colonel and the command of the Spanish 1<sup>st</sup> Navarrese Division. Later he was promoted to the rank of Lieutenant General and assumed the command of the military region of Galicia (where Franco was born) and of the Canary Islands.<sup>38</sup> He was not just another ‘Moorish officer’, and his military career was more Spanish in nature than Moorish. He was the exception, although perhaps an exception that set apart right-wing Spain from other ‘liberal’ European powers like Britain and France, but an exception nevertheless. The task of commanding the Moroccan troops fell mostly in the hands of Spanish officers.

According to Mesa, not all Spanish officers were successful in leading Moroccan soldiers and even competent officers could fail. Especially important was the demonstration of great personal valour at great risk to themselves. It seems, still according to Mesa, that the strongest bonds were those formed between veterans, both Spanish officers and Moroccan soldiers, of the Moroccan wars in the 1920s, and the sacrifices and losses of Spanish officers in Morocco were important when the time came in 1936 to test the loyalty of their old native sergeants and soldiers.<sup>39</sup>

When the Civil War started in July 1936, however, and with the need to increase the numbers of both the Moroccan troops that were to fight in Spain as well as the number of the Spanish officers to command them, it was obvious that the Moroccan units could not always count on the presence of officers with experience in the language and the customs of the Moroccans or who had at least enough time to familiarise themselves with them. Nor could the new Moroccan recruits always afford the time

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<sup>37</sup> ‘El ‘hermano’ marroquí del Caudillo. El único general ‘moro’ de España’, *El Mundo* (crónica), 12 May 2002, nr. 343.

<sup>38</sup> For the military career and decorations of Mohammed Ben Mizzian see Archivo General Militar de Segovia, Caja 746.

<sup>39</sup> José Luis de Mesa, *Los moros de la Guerra Civil española*, 120-121

to familiarise themselves with their commanders or to learn Spanish for that matter, a fact that was particularly relevant for new recruits coming from the French zone of the protectorate. This meant that there was a variation in the aptitudes of the Spanish officers commanding Moroccan troops, their experience in Moroccan affairs, languages and customs, as well as the nature of the relationship between these officers and their troops.

This point was probably not lost on Colonel Juan Beigbeder, the High Commissioner for Morocco, who had suggested to Franco towards the end of 1937 to send officers with ‘special aptitude’ to the *Regulares* units. The answer was however that there were very few such officers. The possible alternative was that the chief of each native unit could give a number of lectures to the Provisional Second Lieutenants about ‘matters of the Moors and the treatment that they should give them’.<sup>40</sup> Only after the war, speaking Arabic and having experience with African troops, became a pre-condition (as par decree of General Varela, the Minister of the Army after the war) for officers wishing to be assigned to the *Regulares* units.<sup>41</sup> As a consequence, it is interesting to know how the relationship between the Spanish officers – given the lack of many of them with a ‘special aptitude’ – and their Moroccan troops were perceived by the Moroccans.

#### **Relations with officers: The Moroccan perception**

The relationship with the Spanish officers as perceived by the Moroccan soldiers differs according to the sources. There are two sets of sources to be employed here. The first source commonly used by historians to assess the perception of the Moroccans consists of interviews with Moroccan veterans of the Spanish Civil War conducted by historians decades after the end of the war. The second source consists of reports of 147 interrogations of Moroccans from the French Zone who had joined the Spanish army and fought in Spain and later deserted back to French Morocco, only to be interrogated by the French military there between June 1937 and February 1939. This chapter might be the first effort to use this contemporary source to supplement the information gathered from the latter-day interviews.<sup>42</sup> Both sources have their characteristics. The veterans of the first source are soldiers who completed their service and did not desert the army and therefore might have a different and longer experience than those who deserted. The passage of time and their continued contact with the Spanish

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<sup>40</sup> AGMAV, A.2, L.158, Cp. 25.

<sup>41</sup> ‘Orden de 21 diciembre de 1939 dando normas a que se ajustarán las peticiones de destino a La Legión y Fuerzas Regulares Indígenas’, *Boletín Oficial del Estado*, no. 257, 7201, 23 December 1939. The decree starts with referring to the ‘special psychology’ of the *Regulares* and Legionnaire units, necessitating in the candidates wishing to command them to be volunteers and to be able to adapt to the ‘characteristics of those troops’.

<sup>42</sup> The transcripts of these interrogations are deposited in box 266 of the Morocco series (3H) in the archives of the Service Historique de la Défense, in Vincennes. I analysed lists of soldiers who actually went to Spain, and later moved back to French Morocco. I therefore ignored soldiers who enlisted in the Spanish army and then deserted back to French Morocco without leaving for Spain. The number of interrogations analysed thus is 147, and they span the period between June 1937, when the first interrogations appear until February 1939. Not all the interrogations provide information about the aspects in which this study is interested, as some interrogations were very brief. Others were quite thorough in their questioning, seeking detailed information on the Spanish army and the war in Spain. Besides, five of these 147 were not deserters, but were discharged by the army due to injury, illness, unfitness for service. In one case, a soldier was arrested while trying to visit his mother with the intention of returning to the Spanish army.

might have embellished their memories or idealised them. The deserters from the second source present a contemporary, fresh account of their experience in the Spanish army, though their interrogation by French authorities might influence their testimonies. For they might have had to justify their desertion by trying to portray the circumstances of their recruitment and military life in a way that would draw the sympathy of the French interrogators, since being recruited by the Spanish Nationalist army was illegal in French Morocco. Therefore there is a risk that some might have invented or modified injustices done to them in the Francoist forces in order to avoid a harsh punishment. What also sets these deserters apart is their different geographical origin, French Morocco, which might have influenced their treatment by their Spanish superiors or the soldiers' perception of that treatment. Expounding on the reminiscences of the Moroccan soldiers will make the difference in both sets of sources clearer.

If there is any point where there exists a majority consensus about in the accounts of latter day Moroccan veterans, it is the issue of treatment of the Moroccan soldiers by their superiors during the Spanish Civil War. Commenting on their officers, in my interviews in 2011 the answers ranged from 'they were not bad with us',<sup>43</sup> to 'the officers treated us very well. There was no discrimination between us and the Spaniards',<sup>44</sup> to a more extended 'The Spanish treated us well. They gave us at the front bread and fish and everything. There was no discrimination, we were treated equally. They were only bad with the *rojós*, but with us they were very good. All the officers and captains and commanders were good with us'.<sup>45</sup> Even those who were indignant about the meagre pensions they received had to concede that 'the treatment was good, there was no racism. They loved us, we fought for them'.<sup>46</sup> In some cases, the answers equalled good treatment with how much and how good the food was the soldiers received and how the 'colonel of the regiment was a real soldier, there were always clothes, there was always food',<sup>47</sup> and how many sheep were provided for the men to feast on.<sup>48</sup> More of my (over a dozen) interviewees expressed similar positive comments on the treatment by their officers. It seems that the majority of veterans interviewed by other historians also confirm this positive image. One veteran, talking to Sebastian Balfour in 2000, described his commanding officer, Lieutenant Colonel Asensio as a saint.<sup>49</sup> Balfour concludes that the majority of the colonial troops maintained their morale and fighting quality despite the high casualties they suffered, a fact attributed in great part to the good officer-soldier relationship.<sup>50</sup> The overwhelming majority of the

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<sup>43</sup> Interview with Abdullah Abdelkader, Nador, 4 July, 2011.

<sup>44</sup> Interview with, Ahmed Mohammed Ahmed, Alcazarquivir, 21 February, 2011.

<sup>45</sup> Interview with Abdelkader ben Mohammed, Alcazarquivir, 21 February, 2011.

<sup>46</sup> Interview with Aderghal Hassan, Nador, 4 July, 2011.

<sup>47</sup> Interview with Al Dhahri Abdesselam, Ceuta, 30 June, 2011.

<sup>48</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>49</sup> Balfour, *Deadly Embrace*, 307.

<sup>50</sup> Ibidem.

interviewees of Mustapha El Merroun, in the 1990s, also concede that their treatment by their Spanish superiors was good.<sup>51</sup>

Although there is a broad consensus in the narratives of the veterans about the good treatment received by their immediate superiors during the war, there is a variation in interpreting how well-intentioned the good treatment was. In the case of one veteran, the memory of the officers was so good that the names of not few of them flowed out of his mouth with little trouble, a feat unmatched by other veterans, and he had much praise for the famous Spanish officer of Moroccan origin Mohammed ben Mizzian who was ‘a good person’.<sup>52</sup> Next to the extreme satisfaction with the way officers treated the Moroccan soldiers,<sup>53</sup> or even the comment that ‘officers were good, may God have mercy with them’,<sup>54</sup> there are others who put that good treatment in the context of negative consequences for bad treatment, such as to ‘avoid soldiers running away’,<sup>55</sup> but more importantly, as Al Filali comments, for self-preservation purposes as ‘they feared for themselves. If someone [of the officers] was rude, he would be shot from behind. In Spain they were good with us, I cannot lie. The officers were good to us’.<sup>56</sup> This observation is supported by two others who remarked that Spanish officers were ‘forced to treat us well because they feared for themselves, because he was an outsider among us’,<sup>57</sup> and ‘had they done anything disgraceful we would have given them hell’.<sup>58</sup> In at least one case, the threat was acted upon. Ahmed Al Omari, who was interviewed in the 1990s, relates one instance in which a Moroccan who went by the name Al Huzi, was struck by a sergeant, though it is not specified whether the sergeant was Spanish or Moroccan. Al Huzi ‘took the opportunity of going to combat and he killed him’, only for him to be arrested and shot.<sup>59</sup> Al Zargui, a veteran interviewed in Ceuta, gives a further twist to the self-preservation, though conceding that the treatment by the officers was good, he pointed that the captain of his company ‘was afraid of us’, because – Al Zargui thinks – the captain was, deep inside, a *rojo*. That leaning to the *rojos* applied, in his view, to ‘half of them [officers]’.<sup>60</sup> This accusation of hidden red sympathies is important for those who experienced a change in treatment after the war.

While all the veterans who expressed an opinion on their treatment by their superiors during the Spanish war overwhelmingly affirmed the good treatment, though with different interpretations, a small number of these testimonies (four to be precise) complained about the treatment after the war. Al Filali, who affirmed that ‘in Spain they were good to us, I cannot lie’ found that ‘when the war

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<sup>51</sup> Several testimonies. El Merroun Archive.

<sup>52</sup> Interview with Al Hussein ben Abdesselam, Ceuta, 24 January, 2011.

<sup>53</sup> Interview with Mohammed Abdullah Susi, Ceuta, 19 January, 2011.

<sup>54</sup> Interview with Abdesselam Mohammed Al Amrani, Ceuta, 30 June, 2011.

<sup>55</sup> Testimony of Abdul Nabi ben Al Omari, Tetuan, 11 July 1993, El Merroun archive.

<sup>56</sup> Interview with Al Filali Abdelkader, Alcazarquivir, 21 February, 2011.

<sup>57</sup> Testimony of Abdelkader Amezian, Tetuan, 3 November 1993, El Merroun Archive.

<sup>58</sup> Testimony of Masoud, Tetuan, 25 April 1994, El Merroun archive.

<sup>59</sup> Testimony of Ahmed ben Abdullah Al Omari, Tetuan, 12 April 1994, El Merroun archive.

<sup>60</sup> Interview with Mohamed ben Al Ayyashi Al Zerki, Ceuta, 30 June, 2011.

ended and we returned here, then they became ugly'.<sup>61</sup> He did not give a reason for the change in attitude but the three others did and it is remarkable how they coincide in their views. In their stories they are quick to pinpoint the reason. 'We found [after the war] that the officers and sergeants that we captured on the fronts were now ruling us'.<sup>62</sup> The veteran making this statement was referring to officers whom he believed had Republican sympathies and who were indignant at any Moroccan who had fought in Spain. One day in 1940, in Morocco, he was to receive his pay when a Spanish officer asked him whether he had participated in the war. He, cautiously, denied it. But then 'one Muslim betrayed me' and told the officer that he killed so many Spaniards until he was 'exhausted'. Having been betrayed, the officer called him later and told him menacingly that he knew about his participation in the war. The soldier answered the menacing tone by reminding the officer that 'We are in our country here' and that the officer should be the one to watch his manners. The soldier was punished by being sent with a platoon to a remote location in Morocco.<sup>63</sup>

This one is not alone in his judgement. Another veteran of the war perceived a change. After the war, as he relates, he and others were tasked with 'hard labour', building camps, bridges and digging wells. These were tasks which he interpreted as punishment for 'they wanted to take revenge on us because they were *rojo*'.<sup>64</sup> Dandi Mohammed, a soldier who served in Spain in operations against the *Maquis*, had a similar impression. Commenting on the treatment of the officers, he found that 'some of the officers were fair, others were not'. Interpreting why others were not, he believed that 'after the war, officers who were sons of the *rojos* joined the army, they went to the academy and became officers, and then some of them would remember what the [Moroccan] soldiers did to the *rojos*. So sometimes they would treat him [the Moroccan] badly. They would punish him or make him do labour. The soldier could not do anything. The officers could do what they wanted'.<sup>65</sup> These three testimonies share an interesting point. If an officer maltreated someone then the only possible explanation is that he was *rojo* in his heart all along. Either these veterans had internalised the Nationalist propaganda about the evil of the *rojos* or they wondered: who other than a *rojo* would maltreat the Moroccans who are loyal soldiers of Franco? Also interesting is the consideration of work on construction as a type of punishment. It appears that such work was not popular among more Moroccan soldiers.<sup>66</sup>

### **The Moroccan deserters' perception**

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<sup>61</sup> Interview with Al Filali Abdelkader, Alcazarquivir, 21 February 2011.

<sup>62</sup> Testimony of Mohammed ben Amar ben Al Hashmi, Tetuan, 11 November 1993, El Merroun archive.

<sup>63</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>64</sup> Testimony of Mohammed Mhauesh, Tetuan, 2 April 1995, El Merroun archive.

<sup>65</sup> Interview with Dandi Mohammed, Tetuan, 15 February, 2011.

<sup>66</sup> In one of the documents of the Delegation of Native Affairs, dated July 1941, it is mentioned that a number of soldiers of Regulares and Mehal-las took a refuge in a sanctuary called Sidi Saidi, protesting that the army would not discharge them, and that they were unsatisfied with their employment as labourers instead of soldiers, which was why they enlisted in the first place. "Delegación de Asuntos Indígenas, Información núm. 2168, Tetuán 31 Julio 1941". Archivo General de la Administración (AGA), África (Af), 81.1774.



The second set of sources, that of the interrogations of the French Moroccan deserters, provides a somewhat more mixed image of the relationship with the Spanish army and the Spanish officers. Certainly, there was no shortage of deserters who commended their officers and were clear about the good treatment they received from the army in general and their officers in particular, while expressing their satisfaction about supplies, soft discipline, hospital care etcetera.<sup>67</sup> There were some who were not satisfied with the rations and pay, but still found that the officers were well respected and observed that ‘certain among them have great moral authority over the troops’.<sup>68</sup>

There are however others who were not quite satisfied with the officers they met. One veteran, who otherwise praised the Spanish army, noted that officers who did not speak Arabic were isolated from their men.<sup>69</sup> More negative toward their commanders were some who blamed their officers for ‘not knowing well’ the troops or being ‘disinterested’.<sup>70</sup> Corporal or other punishments were also the subject of complaint of others.<sup>71</sup> Equally negative was a deserter who stated, on the subject of officers, that few of them spoke Arabic and that the career officers were killed and were replaced by younger officers ‘who maltreat the natives’. He further complained that the Spanish non-commissioned officers were brutal with the soldiers and that their native counterparts imitated them.<sup>72</sup> The difference between old and new officers was also noted by a deserter, Mohamed Ould Mhamed M’kik, who in his interview in July 1938 spoke of the mediocre morale of the Muslim troops, which he ascribed partly to the newly promoted officers who demonstrated a complete lack of understanding of the native troops. They [the officers] ‘even thrashed them [the troops]’. These officers did not concern themselves with material questions such as nourishment and clothing. M’kik contrasted these new commanders with the old ones who ‘knew the Muslims well and who were loved by the troops’, but who were either killed or had been transferred to other units. While these negative comments suggest that soldiers were at the receiving end of a bad relationship, according to one veteran it was the officers who feared their men, a fact which led to the absence of sanctions on pillaging.<sup>73</sup> These negative comments could mean that such a bad relationship with Spanish officers contributed to the decision of these soldiers to desert. There is a possibility however that these deserters made up these negative experiences to attract the sympathy of the French interrogators and therefore receive mild punishments for enlisting in the Spanish Army, although others chose to desert despite the great praise they had for their Spanish officers and without giving any detrimental comments about them.

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<sup>67</sup> See for example the interrogations of Moahmed ben Naceur; Ali ben Abid; Mohamed ben L’hassen; Abdesselem ben Lahcene; Abdesslem ben Ahmed ben Abdelkrime; Laarbi Ould M’feddel Bel Kassem; Abdesselem ben Tourhami; El Ayachi Ould Mohammed el Mesmoudi as well as others. SHD, 3 H 266.

<sup>68</sup> Interrogation of El Hadi ben Mohamed ben el bou Haninia. SHD, 3 H 266.

<sup>69</sup> Interrogation of Mohamed ould Mohamed. SHD, 3 H 266.

<sup>70</sup> Interrogations of Mimoun ben Mohamed ben Aberkane and Mohammed ould Sellem ben M’feddel. SHD, 3 H 266.

<sup>71</sup> Interrogations of Mimoun ben Haboud and Mfeddel ben Taieb bel Hadj Ali. SHD, 3 H 266.

<sup>72</sup> Interrogation of Ahmidou ben Mohamed. SHD, 3 H 266.

<sup>73</sup> Interrogation of Mohammed ben Abdesselem Lmrabet. SHD, 3 H 266.

As the preceding views by Moroccan soldiers of their Spanish officers demonstrate, there is no uniformity on how positive the relationship between the two parties was. In the first set of sources the balance obviously and overwhelmingly tilts toward a positive view by the Moroccan veterans of their Spanish officers, although the motives of the Spanish officers as seen by some Moroccan veterans were self-serving and self-preserving. In the case of the second (French) set of sources the image is roughly evenly balanced, in terms of numbers of respondents, between those with a positive view towards their chiefs and those with a negative one. This discrepancy between the two sets of sources either reflects the variation in the characters and capabilities of the Spanish officers commanding Moroccan soldiers, or exaggerations on the part of some deserters to justify their desertion to their French interrogators. It might even reflect the positive bias by some Spanish Moroccan veterans who idealised their experiences, as they grew older and were, in later decades, invited by the Spanish to attend commemorating ceremonies of the *Regulares* troops. But as the following pages will demonstrate, even Spanish military documents attest to the existence of indignation by the troops that sometimes is linked to the behaviour of their Spanish officers. If some soldiers had no other way but stoically bear the maltreatment of some Spanish officers, or even the army in general, others did not tolerate what they perceived as injustice and took action to remedy them either softly, noisily or even violently.

When dealing with examples of unruliness, rebellion and desertion, it is important to note two facts. First, while rebellious behaviour or acts by Moroccan troops caused occasional concern and sometimes alarm within the Spanish Nationalist army, they remained the acts of a minority of Moroccan soldiers and units. It would not be unreasonable to assume, however, that the measures the Spanish army took to remedy Moroccan grievances as a response to unruly behaviour contributed to the disciplined behaviour of the majority of Moroccan troops during most of the period of their stay in Spain. The second fact is that acts of indiscipline, and specially desertion, also manifested themselves within Spanish units of the Nationalist army, as well as the Republican. Numbers of Moroccan desertions have been described as minimal and irrelevant as compared to those of the Spaniards.<sup>74</sup> In general, the Nationalist army, to which the Moroccans belonged, suffered less from acts of indiscipline compared with the Republican army, and the Nationalists contained desertions and defections better than the Republicans did.<sup>75</sup>

The Moroccan soldiers could complain, protest, mutiny or take matters into their hands in another way in the face of combat exhaustion or perceived insult or injustice. The relations the Moroccan soldiers had with their (mostly Spanish) superiors played a role in the decisions many took to protest, desert, mutiny or even kill as a way of expressing their disgruntlement, though in the case

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<sup>74</sup> Pedro Corral, *Desertores. La Guerra Civil que nadie quiere contar*, 431.

<sup>75</sup> James Matthews, *Soldados a la fuerza. Reclutamiento obligatorio durante la Guerra Civil 1936-1939*, 265, 315.

of desertion, the circumstances could also be almost totally unrelated to the soldier-officer relationship.

### **Breaking contact by way of desertion**

There were many soldiers who were pleased with their war experience. According to one French Moroccan deserter, the Moroccans of the Spanish zone he met in Spain were 'happy with their fate', as they had everything they could desire: a fight, money, food, women, 'everything that a Moroccan would like'.<sup>76</sup> But many of course were less than happy after a seemingly never ending war that would have dampened the initial enthusiasm. The most common way for soldiers that were not satisfied with their situation in the army, for whatever reason, to escape their unwelcome circumstance has been to desert. In Spain, as Pedro Corral demonstrated in his study *Desertores*, more than two million people either evaded military service or deserted after serving in the frontlines.<sup>77</sup> For Moroccan soldiers fighting in Spain, this option however had its limits. Being in a foreign country, they could not desert and simply head home because the Mediterranean sea separated Morocco and Spain, not to mention the challenge of passing all military check-points on the way, which made a journey home unlikely to succeed. The option for desertion was therefore two-fold: either going over to the Republicans, or benefiting from a leave of absence, usually in the wake of an injury to go to Morocco and there to take the decision of not returning to the army at the expiration of the leave. Going over to the Republicans had its hazards, as most of the Moroccans were fearful of a horrible fate, that included torture or execution, awaiting them should they fall in the hands of the Republicans, a fear that was founded on the experience during the early months of the Civil War when a number of Moroccans were executed upon being captured by the Republicans.<sup>78</sup> Besides, it would have been impossible to return to North Morocco as it was in the Nationalist hands. The second option, benefiting from a leave of absence, was safer, although those who did risked being prosecuted. War fatigue meant, however, that some of the soldiers on leave, including those recently discharged from military hospitals decided on their own accord to extend their absence, a court martial offence which the Nationalist authorities found difficult to repress so as to avoid trouble with the tribes and not push those on leave to desert completely.<sup>79</sup> The Nationalists even set up a 'Recuperation Service', to try and entice them back to the war.<sup>80</sup>

The motives for desertion, from the point of view of Moroccan veterans, have not been discussed by aging veterans who were interviewed by historians, simply because these veterans did not desert. There is little information on the numbers and motives for desertion of Moroccans from the Spanish Zone. The French files of interrogation of Moroccan deserters however provide a variety of reasons for desertion as stated by the interrogated Moroccans. In 22 cases of the 147 reasons are neither listed (mainly because the question was not asked) nor are there easy indications that could

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<sup>76</sup> Interrogation of Ahmed ben Ali ben Abdelkrim. SHD, 3 H 266.

<sup>77</sup> Corral, *Desertores*, 20, 534.

<sup>78</sup> See Mesa, *Los moros de la Guerra Civil*, 169; and Ruano, *Islam y Guerra Civil española*, 279-280.

<sup>79</sup> María Rosa de Madariaga, *Los moros que trajo Franco*, 330

<sup>80</sup> Balfour, *Deadly Embrace*, 308.

help explain the motives to desert. In some cases one wonders why these deserters left the army in the first place. For example, Tahar d'Alilou Hammou si Ali, professed to have been satisfied with his stay in Spain and being able to provide for himself and make good savings but did not give a reason for his desertion,<sup>81</sup> which is similar to the case of El Khamar ould ben Mohamed El Bernouss who praised the pay, food and morale of the Moroccan troops stating that the Moroccans did not believe that the war would last longer than two to three months, but also not explaining why he deserted, though his interrogation report does not figure the question being put to him.<sup>82</sup> But in most cases, the reasons for desertion are quite clear, though various in nature and not always directly connected to the Spanish experience.

For a large group of those who returned to French Morocco and were interrogated, the peculiarities of their interaction with the Spanish army had hardly anything to do with their decision to desert. 54 deserters indicated homesickness and missing family members as the main or only reason for desertion.<sup>83</sup> Some of these deserters even spoke highly of the Spanish army and their Spanish superiors and the treatment they received.<sup>84</sup> For them, the stated reasons for desertion lay mainly at home and their families rather than in Spain.<sup>85</sup> As they came from French Morocco, practically a foreign land where enlistment in the Spanish army was forbidden, they could not expect to receive letters from their families, a factor which might have contributed to their increasing homesickness. This was a different situation compared with the soldiers from Spanish Morocco who could correspond, mostly with the help of scribes, with their next of kin. The loss of contact with families back home led in the case of one soldier, Mohamed ben Abdesslem ben Si Ahmed, to receive news that people in his home village thought that he was dead. Only one year later he had finally been able to attain a leave of absence for Morocco and decided to rejoin his family.<sup>86</sup>

However, a sizable part of the deserters left the Spanish army due to circumstances related to their stay in Spain. fifteen deserters explicitly indicated that combat fatigue and fear of (renewed)

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<sup>81</sup> Interrogation of Tahar d'Alilou Hammou si Ali. SHD, 3 H 266.

<sup>82</sup> Interrogation of El Khamar ould ben Mohamed El Bernouss. SHD, 3 H 266.

<sup>83</sup> In one case a soldier deserted because his parents asked him to do so, promising him that there would be no punishments by the French authorities. See Interrogation of Lachmi ben bi Rebbouh. Three extra cases simply list as reason the desire to go home to work, without explicitly mentioning family, homesickness or any other reasons. SHD, 3 H 266.

<sup>84</sup> See for example the interrogations of: Mohamed ben L'hassen who was 'well disposed towards his chiefs'; Abdesslem ben Ahmed ben Abdelkrime who was 'well treated' and had 'no grievances'; and Laarbi Ould M'feddel Bel Kassem who described the Spanish as 'full of kindness towards the Muslims', as well as others, all of whom stated that they deserted to see their families not because of any event that took place in Spain. SHD, 3 H 266.

<sup>85</sup> One possible exception out of these 54 cases concerns, Youssef ben Hamed, claimed to have been forcibly recruited, though he does not mention this as reason for his desertion. SHD, 3 H 266.

<sup>86</sup> Interrogation of Mohamed ben Abdesslem ben Si Ahmed. SHD, 3 H 266. In addition to the 54 mentioned cases there are two Moroccan deserters who did not state their motives for desertion but mentioned that while the morale of Moroccans from the Spanish Protectorate were high and their army life was good, the Moroccans of the French Protectorate could not send their earnings to their families and could not correspond with them. Perhaps that is what motivated the desertion of these two. Interrogations of Mohammed ben Sellem and Mohammed ben Al Madani.

injury or the mere desire to avoid fighting, were the leading reasons to desert. nine other deserters simply stated that they did not want to go back to the front, and since most of them had been injured it is implied that they deserted for the same reasons as the earlier mentioned fifteen.<sup>87</sup> One deserter who had left for Spain in April 1938, to get injured almost immediately, and who deserted in May 1938, made no secret of his fear of ‘the intensity of combat’ and his worry that his leg would be amputated should he receive a new injury.<sup>88</sup> Even for those who had not indicated fear of being repeatedly wounded or combat weariness as a motive for desertion (including those citing homesickness as motive), the battle injuries must have played a great role, as the majority of the deserters to the French Zone who were interrogated were convalescents of battle wounds and many were wounded more than once, and therefore the fear of injury and combat fatigue must have contributed to the desertion of far larger numbers than those who stated explicitly to have deserted to avoid combat or suffering more injuries.

Besides homesickness and war weariness, others were simply disillusioned with the army life. 25 stated clearly that dissatisfactions with life in the army or its material rewards was a central or sole reason to desert. There were eleven others who did not state explicitly their reasons for desertion but whose interrogations imply that their dissatisfaction with army life pushed them to desertion. Some were disappointed because the material gain was not up to their expectations and they failed to amass enough savings.<sup>89</sup> Others were angry because of irregular pay, or bad conditions including poor nourishment and clothing.<sup>90</sup> In some cases the deserters claimed that part of the pay of French Moroccans was withheld by the Spanish as a discouragement against desertion.<sup>91</sup> Some complained about their treatment by their superiors, a matter already mentioned above, although not all those dissatisfied with army life or pay were necessarily on bad terms with their immediate superiors. A few complained about promotions.<sup>92</sup> In a few cases deserters indicated that their recruitment in the Spanish army was not voluntary in the first place and they therefore wanted to desert since the beginning.<sup>93</sup>

A distinctive case concerns Ahmed ben Mohamed Soussi, who was described as an officer in the Regulares, and is the only Moroccan deserter featured in the French files who carried this rank. He

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<sup>87</sup> An additional case concerns Ahmed ben Abderrahman, who does not state explicitly any motive for desertion, but who was twice injured, and then refused to go back to Spain. Having been imprisoned for one month, he was sent to the Teruel front where he was later evacuated due to frostbite. It is obvious that he deserted for fear of repeated injury.

<sup>88</sup> Interrogation of Mohamed bel Hadj Mohamed. SHD, 3 H 266.

<sup>89</sup> For examples see: Interrogations of El Hadi ben Mohamed ben el bou Haninia; Ahmed ben Mohammed Er Riffi; and Ali ben Mohammed D’Abdesselem. SHD, 3 H 266.

<sup>90</sup> See interrogations of: Mohammed ben Naceur; Ahmed ben Abdesselam ben Alilou; Lhacen ben Ali and Lkhammar ben Hammou . SHD, 3 H 266.

<sup>91</sup> Interrogation of Ali ben Mohammed D’Abdesselem. SHD, 3 H 266.

<sup>92</sup> In the case of Mhamed ben Si Mohamed ben Ahmed, he complained about failing to attain promotion while Mohamed B. Omar ben Amar Taliouani was demoted from the rank of corporal and could not face returning to his unit as a lower ranking soldier. SHD, 3 H 266.

<sup>93</sup> Examples include: Mimoun ben Mohamed ben; Mohamed ben Said el Fetouaki; Mokhtar ben El Hadj Rahal; Mansour ben Ghazi; Si Ahmed ben Mohamed; as well as the earlier mentioned Youssef ben Hamed. See their interrogations. SHD, 3H 266.

was simply tired after having served the army for thirty years. After participating in combat in Spain, and desiring to retire, his request was refused and he deserted because, according to him, Franco raised the total required service period before eligibility for retirement to 36 years.<sup>94</sup> Even more noticeable is the case of Said ben Mbarek, a corporal who was arrested in Ceuta, on his way to Morocco on convalescence leave, for suspicion of ordering his men not to fire on the enemy during the last combat in which he participated. Imprisoned for two months, he escaped and reached the French zone where he was interrogated in February 1939. He did not explain whether he was guilty of the charge, but stated that his imprisonment reinforced his already existing (unexplained) intention to desert.<sup>95</sup> Desertion was a way of expressing dissatisfaction for those who had the opportunity of returning to Morocco on leave, and more so for those who could afford to desert to French Morocco, where they would be out of the reach of Spanish military justice.

### **Protest**

For the majority of the Moroccan soldiers serving in Spain with no near prospect of receiving leave for Morocco, the expression of dissatisfaction could take the form verbal protest or group demonstrations as in the case of the dissolved unit of *Tiradores del Rif*. In early February 1937, a number of members of the *Tiradores del Rif* were present, without being granted authorisation, in Salamanca, where Franco's headquarters were located, to ask an audience with the Generalissimo to level a number of complaints with regard to bad treatment, pay issues and the lack of leaves. Subsequently the Nationalist commander of the Madrid Division sent a letter to Franco, in which more details on the unit to which these protesters belonged and of its problems come to light. The *Tiradores* of the Rif was a *Harka*, an irregular unit formed by a certain major Doval. Their members were not to receive any salary from the military, but had to live off the loot of the razzias they committed during their march that took them up to Seseña (Toledo province) where they camped. As such, the lootings this unit committed were not only sanctioned (one of the rare cases where officially permissible looting is documented), but were integral to its existence. The problem was, as the commander of the Madrid Reinforced Division pointed out in his letter to General Franco in February 1937, that this source of income for these troops had ceased to exist. They were demanding now to be treated as soldiers of *Regulares* or *Mehal-las* and therefore to receive salaries, and that was, according to the Madrid Division commander the only reason for their dissatisfaction. He suggested to Franco the dissolution of the unit, and integration of any of its members who wished to do so, into the *Mehal-las* of the Rif, Tetuan and Larache, each according to his origin.<sup>96</sup> Franco agreed to the suggestion and the unit was disbanded.<sup>97</sup>

This unit was, as far as the documentary material shows, the only one to have been dissolved as a result of protest by its members, as well as being the only one that lived solely through plunder.

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<sup>94</sup> Interrogation of Ahmad ben Mohamed Soussi. SHD, 3 H 266.

<sup>95</sup> Interrogation of Said ben Mbarek. SHD, 3 H 266.

<sup>96</sup> AGMAV, A.1, L.40, Cp. 50, different documents.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibidem*.

The dissolution of the unit did not bring the matter to an end as various members were simply discharged and sent to Morocco, where they protested being discharged 'having committed no fault' and demanded a return to the frontlines. The Tetuán regional office for the Delegation of Native Affairs promised those disgruntled a speedy assignment to other units, in the belief that it would prevent these elements from spreading dissatisfaction among friends and families, and especially since their discharging documents had not labelled them with misconduct.<sup>98</sup>

A few months after the issue of the *Tiradores* of the Rif was laid to rest, a group of disgruntled Moroccan soldiers appeared, once again in Salamanca, this time belonging to the 1<sup>st</sup> *Tabor* of *Regulares* of Ceuta. 125 soldiers that were supposed to move from the Madrid front to Baena, where the *Tabor* was stationed, came unannounced to Salamanca on June 11, 1937, led by a sergeant. After receiving food and orders to continue to Baena, many of them refused to march claiming that someone had promised them that they would receive their leaves of absence in Salamanca. The military governor sent a detachment of civil and assault guards to force them to embark on a train and to leave the city towards their *Tabor*. After the train drove away, twelve of the group jumped from the train and were arrested. Interrogated by the Moroccan military police, the *mejasnia*, they declared that they all had been injured before and received no leaves and that certain amounts were due to them. Eleven were released and one, a corporal who was believed the mastermind of the protest, was detained. The captain of the military police however, sympathised with the demands and expressed his opinion to the Salamanca military governor.<sup>99</sup>

In response to the incident, the Delegation of Native Affairs tried to explain the existence of dissatisfaction regarding the lack of leaves. It noted that there was no problem in relation to the injured, and that between April and July more than 3,800 leaves were issued by military hospitals under the instructions of the General Directorate for Mobilisation, Instruction and Recuperation, but that the problem was with those who had been injured and discharged before the mentioned period, and with those who were not injured. It recommended, given the duration of the campaign, and the 'idiosyncrasy of the Muslim' to concede leaves, in certain proportion, to those who had not received it yet and particularly to those who had suffered injury before. To prevent the loss of those going to Spanish Morocco with leaves, all the information concerning the convalescents was to be provided to the Delegation to pass them on to the *interventores* of the tribes to which they belonged. The Delegation also ascribed this lack of discipline to the fact that it concerned recently recruited soldiers who were not knowledgeable of military virtues, and although it was deemed excusable, it opined that for reasons of setting an example, the masterminds of the incident should not receive leave.<sup>100</sup> While the incident might have been rather exceptional, given the amount of correspondence related to it and the concern it arose, it would have certainly contribute to greater awareness of the injustices regarding

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<sup>98</sup> '-:Nota:- sacada de la hoja secreta nr. 158, del 16-3-1937, de la Regional de Tetuán'.AGA, Af, 81.2195

<sup>99</sup> Note from the 23<sup>rd</sup> Division, 25 June 1937. AGMAV, A. 1, L. 59, Cp. 27.

<sup>100</sup> Delegation of Native Affairs/Service in Spain to Commander of the Army of the South. 14 July 1937. AGMAV, A. 1, L. 59, Cp. 27.

the lack of leaves, and greater response from the Spanish military leadership, which in this case as in others demonstrated readiness to accommodate the demands of the soldiers.

The Spanish Nationalist army was always interested in remaining up to date with the status of morale of their Moroccan troops. A document in December 1937 relates what was reported by a Moroccan lieutenant, who was sent to Saragossa to eavesdrop on troops and gain information on their comments and opinions.<sup>101</sup> The troops belonged to the *Tiradores* of Ifni, *Regulares* of Ceuta and the *Mehal-la* of Gomara. According to the report all were dissatisfied except for the soldiers of the *Mehal-la*. Those of Ifni complained about delay of eight months in payment, and recounted that during a confrontation with the adjutant of the commander of the *Tiradores* unit, a Moroccan sergeant shot the adjutant before turning the gun on himself, an episode which was followed with rapid fulfilment of the due payments. The soldiers of Ifni and of the Ceuta *Regulares* also complained about their clothing and compensations, claiming jackets were distributed to Spanish soldiers but not to them.

On the subject of officers, these soldiers noted that while some of them behaved well, many stayed hidden in the valleys while the troops fought and later these officers received rewards to the exclusion of the troops. The lieutenant-turned-spy heard expressions like:

this has become too long! At the beginning it was alright, but now many people have died! We will die here too! As it has rained in our land, it is there that we must stay. Nobody is taking care of us. They scorn us. Even Franco does not take care of us, for in Morocco they say to us that Franco loves us very much and he considers us the same as the Spaniards and that is why we came with many of us, but later this is not true anymore.

The lieutenant also heard from the troops that the:

Muslim authorities who come to the zone to visit them, come in trips paid for by the Makhzen [government] and to enjoy their time, that these [the Muslim authorities] tell them that their wives are alright and that Franco is taking care of them and that he loves them very much, and that they will convey their needs to Franco. But later, as it happens, they do not tell him anything, they mislead him, and their wives are not paid and they [the troops] are not attended to.

Later, fourteen soldiers from *Regulares* Tetuan arrived, and the lieutenant took the opportunity to speak with them and to learn that they had escaped their camp to complain to General Moscardó about a Moroccan soldier who was shot in the hand, and was subsequently charged with self-mutilation and shot, while a Moroccan *kaíd* was imprisoned for objecting to the decision. The fourteen came to

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<sup>101</sup> 'Confidencial', AGMAV, A.1, L.59, Cp. 17.



demand the release of the *kaíd* or otherwise the whole *Tabor* would come to Saragossa. Among other observations the lieutenant made was the complaint that in units with old officers and chiefs of the Moroccan forces there were no problems and the troops were well understood and attended to by their officers. But the problem was that unit commanders could not choose competent officers for these Moroccan units, but had to deal with whatever officers they were sent, and that the experience of the *Alféreces Provisionales* had produced bad results. Officers of the Moroccan troops insisted to him that new officers must follow a special course before assigning them to Moroccan units.<sup>102</sup>

In connection with the previous report, there was a proposal by captain Torres to ‘remedy’ the potentially dangerous situation. Among his suggestions was to appoint an inspector for Moroccan forces along with auxiliary personnel that should interfere immediately to resolve any incident. These auxiliary groups should contain an Arabic speaking officer that was specialised in commanding Moroccan troops, and aided by Muslim agents of investigation and surveillance drawn from soldiers of high confidence. He also suggested creating a command school for Moroccan forces.<sup>103</sup>

Personal prestige of the Moroccan soldiers appears to have played a part in the troubles some of the soldiers caused. A report in September 1938, the commander of the Group of *Regulares* of Ceuta noted that the ‘Moor’ tries from the first moment to distinguish himself within his unit so that he will be chosen by his company captain or his *Tabor* commander for promotion. Two factors are essential for one to attain ascendance: how the soldier conducts himself, and his permanence within his unit. But problems arose with wounded soldiers who, after recuperation, were sent to *Tabors* other than their original ones to cover losses according to arising military needs, which for the concerned soldiers meant loss of built up prestige in their original units. The report complains that, since those recuperating were sent to units where nobody recognised them a phenomenon came to service whereby the ‘Moor’ either deserted from his new unit to go and join his old one, or kept causing trouble so that he would be sent to his old unit.<sup>104</sup> These examples of protest demonstrations were, despite their serious potential, easily manageable and solvable affairs. Dismissing them, however, would have entailed great risks of mutiny, especially on the battlefield.

### **Violent protest and rebellion**

Cases of mutinies by Moroccan troops at the front were rare. There were, however, serious incidents that could have produced extremely negative consequences for the Nationalist war effort. In discussing the nature of the troops from Ifni and the Spanish Sahara, Fernández-Aceytuno asserted that justice is an extremely valued concept for the people of those regions. And while they in general do tend to avoid following the law, they are very demanding of justice from authorities, and if they are caught in

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<sup>102</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>103</sup> ‘Propuesta del Capitán Torres’, AGMAV, A.1, L.59, Cp. 17.

<sup>104</sup> The report goes to suggest ways to make sending recuperating soldiers to their original units possible as a standard practice. AGMAV, A.7, L.359, Cp. 36. The Spanish High Commissioner in Morocco Colonel Juan Beigbeder had already in 1937 suggested taking measures to raise the effectiveness of Moorish troops like doing as much as possible to guarantee that a soldier would always return to his battalion. AGMAV, A.2, L.152, Cp.25

violation of the laws they would patiently accept and tolerate the due punishment. But since they are very sensitive to injustice dealt to them they could retaliate very strongly. Aceytuno then proceeded to relate an incident which though he described as an unjustified example of indiscipline, he nevertheless blamed the Spanish officers for its occurrence. In September 1938 and after successful operations a *Tabor* of Ifni soldiers were brought to a train station in Saragossa where they had to wait for a special train to take them to another sector. They had not received their pay for a substantial time, their clothing was in tatters and no food was prepared for them. In this precarious situation the majority of the officers committed the 'grave error' of going to town to rest and came back in the night, some of them having had 'one glass too many'. Only one young lieutenant decided to stay with his troops and share their tiresome situation. When the time came to embark on the train, only the platoon of this young lieutenant obeyed the orders, while the rest refused to do so. One of the other officers drew his pistol to enforce the order but he was immediately shot by multiple rifles. Despite this example of the extreme 'sensibility' and 'irritability' of the native soldiers towards injustice, Aceytuno found that the soldiers from Ifni and the Sahara were very good and compliant soldiers if they had a sensible officer of moral integrity, and that they were ready to forgive in silence the unintentional human mistakes. Such an officer would never have more 'loyal and obedient' troops.<sup>105</sup> Obviously, not all officers could aspire to be of such quality and therefore there are more instances of violent protest and even rebellion.

Jorge Vigón Suerodíaz, a Nationalist officer, tells in his memoirs, published in 1970, of a mutiny at the Teruel front of an unnamed Moroccan *Tabor*, during the second half of February 1938 when the fighting to capture the city was very fierce. The soldiers overthrew their officers and would not listen to 'reason'. The circumstances of the mutiny, which he likened to mutinies of the Spanish Tercios in Flanders in the seventeenth century, are not clear in Vigón's account, except that it was the result of 'lack of knowledge of their psychology'. The situation lasted until after the recapture, by the Nationalists, of Teruel. During this time the *Tabor* kept fighting and advancing 'on its own account and risk, and not badly'. After the end of the battle the Moroccan commander Mohammed Mizzian arrived to attempt mediation. The *Tabor* insisted that 'Franco is their father but that the officers are *rojos*'. Here we see again the inclination to label bad officers 'red' and therefore enemies of the Nationalist cause. The matter was resolved in an apparently non-violent way and many would be sent home.<sup>106</sup> According to Mesa, the *Tabor* involved in this incident, was the 10th *Tabor* of the *Regulares* Alhucemas. After losing all their native and Spanish officers during an attack at the Teruel front, the troops of the *Tabor* were sent a Spanish captain who had recently joined the Nationalists after having deserted from enemy lines. The troops did not trust deserters from the enemy camp, they rejected the appointment and named a Moroccan sergeant as their commander and sent a report to Franco informing him of their lack of officers and that they would only follow the orders of the

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<sup>105</sup> Fernández-Aceytuno, *Ifni y Sáhara*, chapter VII.

<sup>106</sup> Jorge Vigón Suerodíaz, *Cuadernos de guerra y notas de paz*, 210-212.

Generalissimo. The *Tabor* persisted in rejecting officers who were sent to them to the extent that they posted machine guns to the front and back to watch against anyone approaching their lines.<sup>107</sup>

The Varela archives contain documents on an act of mutiny by a Moroccan *Tabor* on the Teruel front, roughly in the same period as the incident named by Vigón and Mesa, though the Varela documents show that it involved a different unit than the one Mesa mentions and for slightly different reasons.<sup>108</sup> On 17 February 1938 an unknown Moroccan entered the liaison office of the German Legion Condor and delivered a letter, written in Spanish and from a certain M. Busta, on the Teruel front, addressed to a certain ‘Mr. German lieutenant colonel’, informing him that the 4<sup>th</sup> *Tabor* of the *Regulares* Larache Group was ‘separated from its chiefs’ due to the prior execution of three ‘Moors’ and planned execution of two more, ‘without a single motive’. The writer of the letter explained that he had written 15 letters before to Spanish superiors without receiving a response, and that he therefore asked the German lieutenant colonel to inform General Franco or ‘our general Hitler’ of these events, as the writer was convinced that all the Spanish officers were withholding this information from Franco and from ‘our chiefs and officers from Germany’, finishing his letter with stating that the *Tabor* was doing its service on the front line as it should and under the command of a Moroccan officer who – a strange and inexplicable statement this is – has ‘German lawyers’.<sup>109</sup>

The chief of the Condor Legion liaison office did not attach much importance to the matter and therefore did not detain the unnamed Moroccan who delivered the letter, but he passed the letter to the 5<sup>th</sup> Army Corps the head of which expressed resentment at the idea of Moroccans complaining to a foreign officer about ‘the treatment they receive from us’.<sup>110</sup> Other letters, written in early March (which means that the troubles with the *Tabor* were still unresolved) by the same Busta, who called himself the officer in chief of the *Tabor*, portray a more detailed picture of the grievances about which he was complaining and the situation with the *Tabor*. The letters mentioned a number of grievances: the previous execution of three soldiers on the Asturias front, for no obvious reasons, and another one at the Guadalajara front for which the blame was laid at the doors of ‘the captain of his company’. The planned shooting of two others was also mentioned. According to Busta, one soldier entered a house in a village and brought with him a coat which he showed to the captain of his company, and he was punished for this by receiving 300 beatings, and was to be shot.<sup>111</sup>

It is implied in the letters by Busta that the soldiers threw their officers out and took charge of the *Tabor* under the leadership of the only Moroccan officer they had. The letters do mention that on 25 and 26 February the sending of provisions to the *Tabor* was stopped, and that the soldiers were told

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<sup>107</sup> Mesa, *Los moros*, 246-248. I was not successful in finding, in the Ávila military archives, the war diaries of said *Tabor*.

<sup>108</sup> One wonders whether the incidents mentioned by Vigón, Mesa and the Varela documents are not different interpretations of the same incident. If that is the case then one must accept, given the documentary evidence that it involved the Larache *Regulares*, not the Alhucemas ones.

<sup>109</sup> AHMC, Varela, 19/293-294.

<sup>110</sup> AHMC, Varela, 19/291-292.

<sup>111</sup> Letter to Franco, AHMC, Varela, 19/296.

that ‘the Moors are not needed here in Spain’. In addition, charges of robbing wages are levelled at a number of officers, and a list was provided with names of officers and civilian officials, both Spanish and Moroccan back in Morocco who, according to the complaint were stealing their wages, and some of whom were even molesting war widows. Busta, while still affirming loyalty to Franco and to Spain, demanded justice stating that ‘we came to Spain, voluntarily! To save and love our dear Spain. We did not come to Spain to receive beatings and so that these chiefs shoot us without reason’, and expecting from Franco a response ‘to know whether your Excellency want the Moors or do not want them’.<sup>112</sup> It is not clear from the Varela archives, how the matter was resolved, what happened to Busta himself or whether any of Busta’s letters made it to ‘father Franco’ himself.

### **Conclusions**

Rather than blindly obedient soldiers and mere pawns who were passive to how the army and the war affected them, many Moroccans of the Spanish army showed that when disgruntled, and with no appreciation of their grievances, they could choose to protest, rebel, or decide to leave the army altogether. The Spanish army harboured the idea that the Moroccan soldiers needed especially apt Spanish officers to lead them with an important role left to Moroccan officers as the middle link in between. It seems that in many cases, and probably the majority of the cases, the Spanish officers were successful in maintaining a positive relationship with their Moroccan subordinates. This is reflected in the memories of the aging veterans. Other officers however were not successful, and the tense relationship and lack of trust could lead to desertion or rebellion. Prior experience in Africa might partly explain the difference in performance of Spanish officers and the view of Moroccan soldiers towards them. Officers with experience in leading Moroccan troops, especially if they had participated in the war against the Rif rebellion and therefore developed a sympathy towards Moroccan troops, might display more enthusiasm to gain the trust of the Moroccan troops, compared to officers who had only served in Spain and had only just begun to take command of Moroccan soldiers. That would certainly apply to higher ranking *Africanista* officers, including Franco. New Spanish officers with no prior African past would have to take time to gain the trust of their culturally different men.

Disgruntlement of the Moroccan soldiers, however, was not only caused by the nature of their relationship with their officers. Homesickness, war weariness and irregular pay could be causes of desertion even with the presence of officers deemed to be good and respectable by their troops. For many of those who were tired of military life with no recourse to rebellion or desertion, its end in 1939 must have come as a great relief.

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<sup>112</sup> Letters to Franco, Varela and to the commander of the 4<sup>th</sup> Tabor. AHMC, Varela, 19/296-306.

## **Part II**

### **Women and Religion.**

#### **The Moroccans and Spanish Society**

## Chapter 4

### Victims, wives and concubines.

#### Relations between Moroccan troops and Spanish women <sup>1</sup>

It has generally been argued that during and after the Spanish Civil War the issue of Moroccan troops interacting with Spanish women was both a difficult and highly charged matter for the Spanish Nationalists. One scene in a Spanish film, *Libertarias* (1996), sums up the standard perception of this interaction. Towards the end of the film, a contingent of Moroccan soldiers takes a group of *milicianas* (militia women) by surprise and slaughters them with knives. At the same time, a nun, who had accompanied the militia-women, is forcefully undressed by two Moroccans while others are seen expressing sadistic enjoyment at the sight. Fortunately for the nun, a Spanish officer intervenes in time to save her from rape and possible death.<sup>2</sup> This film represents the typical view of relations between Moroccan soldiers and Spanish women during the Civil War - a relationship of sexual aggressors and victims. Given this common viewpoint, it would be difficult to imagine that there were in fact voluntary carnal encounters, love stories and marriages between the two groups. However, these existed – even to an extent that suggests that they were more than incidental.

The intent of this chapter is to furnish an overview of the interracial and intercultural relations between Moroccan soldiers who fought in Spain during the Civil War and the Spanish women of that time, and how the Spanish Nationalist authorities viewed and regulated these relations. The focus will be on the voluntary relations between these two groups. These relationships were an important indicator of how officials, particularly military authorities, in a European country regarded the interaction of what were effectively temporary Muslim immigrants with a European civilian society. In this regard, the reader will notice that the prevalent attitude in contemporary Spain that romantic relationships between Muslim men and Spanish women are doomed to failure,<sup>3</sup> was also reflected in the outlook of the Spanish military authorities who brought Moroccan soldiers to Spain during the Civil War, despite their generally sympathetic attitude towards these soldiers and their culture.

#### The Victims

As growing numbers of Moroccan soldiers were either airlifted or shipped to southern Spain, in July 1936 and afterwards, they came increasingly in contact with Spanish civilians in the areas they occupied. Soon stories of Moroccan atrocities and the mass rape of Spanish women started to spread among the pro-Republican population. These were generally reinforced by the traditional Spanish image of the ‘Moor’ as a lustful irrational being. There are a small number of testimonies of people

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<sup>1</sup> A large part of this chapter has appeared as ‘Victims, wives and concubines. The Spanish Civil War and Relations between Moroccan Troops and Spanish Women’ in: Götz Nordbruch & Umar Ryad eds., *Transnational Islam in Interwar Europe. Muslim Activists and Thinkers* (New York 2014) 211-232.

<sup>2</sup> Directed by Vicente Aranda, Spain, 1996.

<sup>3</sup> Daniela Flesler, *The Return of the Moor. Spanish Responses to Contemporary Moroccan Immigration* (West Lafayette 2008) 148-155.

who claimed to have actual first-hand information of these charges. These will be the starting point in the discussion of this first and most controversial aspect of the interaction of Moroccan men and Spanish women during the Civil War.

At some point in October 1936, at the crossroads outside Navalcarnero (to the west of Madrid), the American journalist John Whitaker wrote, in a classic and frequently cited account, how he met a Moroccan officer, Mohamed El Mizzian, who would eventually rise to the rank of general in Franco's army. El Mizzian, according to Whitaker, had brought two young girls (presumably Republican militia-women) for interrogation and then taken them to a schoolhouse where forty 'Moorish' soldiers were resting. When Whitaker asked what would happen to them, El Mizzian responded, 'Oh, they'll not live more than four hours'.<sup>4</sup> Of course the reason that this anecdote is frequently quoted is that it probably is the only one that reported a rape in progress. Moreover, it cogently highlighted the reputation of Moroccan soldiers as the Civil War's prime rapists. For propaganda purposes this reputation was also strongly promoted by General Queipo de Llano, the man who almost single-handedly took control of Seville in July 1936. During one of his infamous and terrifying evening radio speeches of that year Queipo luridly noted: 'our brave Legionnaires and *Regulares* have shown to the reds what it means to be a man. Also to the red women, who now have finally come to know real men [*Italics added*]'.<sup>5</sup> In one equally shocking comment (already referred to in chapter 1) and in the aftermath of the capture of the city of Talavera de la Reina, Queipo announced the fall, in the Nationalist hands, of 'numerous male and female prisoners. How satisfied will be the *Regulares* and how envious La Pasionaria would be [*Italics added*]'.<sup>6</sup> While Queipo frequently mixed truth and lies in his speeches, and sometimes took to the microphone while drunk, his propaganda chief, Antonio Bahamonde, who later defected to the Republicans, is along with Whitaker one of the authorities cited concerning accusations of Moroccan troops raping Spanish women. For instance, he mentioned in his memoirs, published 1938 in Barcelona, that in a number of Andalusian villages 'the Moors raped the women they found on their way and killed them later'.<sup>7</sup> Though there is certainly

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<sup>4</sup> John T. Whitaker, *We Cannot Escape History* (New York 1945) 114. 'I suppose Franco felt that women had to be given to the Moors', concludes Whitaker, since the Moors 'were unpaid'. The military historian Jesús María Ruiz Vidondo denies in his article. Whitaker's version of the events, arguing that the *Regulares* group Nr.5 (Alhucemas), of which El Mizzian was a Tabor commander, did not advance through Navalcarnero but through Boadilla. He does not provide evidence for his argument. See: Jesús María Ruiz Vidondo, 'Ben Mizzian, el General Moro de Franco', *Arbil*, nr. 119 (2009), accessed 4 September 2013, url: <http://revista-arbil.es/119ruiz.htm>. However, the records of Mizzian's military career, kept in the military archives of Segovia, credit him and his Tabor for playing a part, on 29 October 1936, in the occupation of Navalcarnero. Whitaker was therefore correct about at least the month and the location in which Mizzian was present. Archivo General Militar de Segovia, Caja 746, Exp.6/pag. 59.

<sup>5</sup> Ian Gibson, *Queipo de Llano. Sevilla, verano de 1936*, 84. See Gibson's comment on the different versions of this quote.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibidem*, 431.

<sup>7</sup> Antonio Bahamonde y Sánchez de Castro, *Un año con Queipo. Memorias de un nacionalista* (Barcelona 1938) 96.

some truth in his claims, he might have exaggerated the scale of the rapes.<sup>8</sup> The question then revolves around the scale of cases of Moroccan soldiers raping Spanish women during the Civil War.

Firstly, there is evidence that during the first weeks of the Civil War there were sexual assaults committed against suspected Republican women by Nationalist men (and one would assume that Republican males committed similar acts against Nationalist women). These would seem to have been the work mostly of Spaniards. Carlota O'Neill, the Mexican wife of a Republican pilot executed early in the war, for instance, tells of women with Republican sympathies being raped in Melilla during 1936. The perpetrators were always Spanish Falangists.<sup>9</sup> Consequently, perpetrators of such acts, if they occurred on a wide scale, were not solely Moroccans. Nor is there any evidence to suggest that Moroccans constituted the majority of the offenders. Secondly, unlike those quantitative studies of rapes committed by Allied troops, both Western and Soviet, in post-World War II Germany and Eastern Europe,<sup>10</sup> there are no comparable studies concerning the similar behaviour of Nationalist troops, including Moroccan troops, during the Spanish Civil War. While there can be little doubt that such acts did take place, it is not known whether the numbers were in the thousands, or hundreds or even less. Historians have never managed to translate these probabilities into bottom-line figures. Francisco Sánchez Ruano is unique in attempting to quantify rape cases that Moroccan troops committed, or might have committed, though in the end he does not produce solid numbers. Based on his research of mainly municipal archives, he concludes that large scale cases of rape committed by Moroccan troops were confined to the initial stage of the war in a few villages of Andalusia, Extremadura, and in the zone of Toledo (in Castilla la Mancha) as well as during the last phase of the war in Catalonia.<sup>11</sup> Thirdly, oral testimonies from Spanish citizens who witnessed the war produce contradictory images of the conduct of Moroccan troops. To take an example from Asturias, two female witnesses comment, around six decades later, on the presence of Moroccan troops. One stated

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<sup>8</sup> An example of such exaggeration is the estimation of Bahamonde of 150,000 executed in the area of command of General Queipo, which could not have happened during the period that Bahamonde worked for Queipo and in the geographical area under Queipo's command. Bahamonde claimed that Moroccan troops were brought by planes to Jerez, and were tied to the wings so as to transport the greatest possible number. He claimed to have witnessed two 'Moors' in Seville who showed the marks of ropes that were used to tie them on the wings. See: Bahamonde, *Un año con Queipo*, 26.

<sup>9</sup> Carlota O'Neill, *Trapped in Spain* (Toronto 1978) 42-43.

<sup>10</sup> For example, J. Robert Lilly estimated that American soldiers committed 17,800 rapes in England, France and Germany. Antony Beevor estimates the number of rape victims of Soviet troops in Germany to be around two million. Soviet troops even raped 'liberated' female prisoners from Polish, Ukrainian or Russian nationalities. See: Robert J. Lilly, *Taken by Force: Rape and American GIs in Europe during WWII* (New York 2007) and Antony Beevor, *Berlin: The Downfall 1945* (London 2002).

<sup>11</sup> Francisco Sánchez Ruano, *Islam y Guerra Civil española*. He studied and documented 34 cases of rape and murder in Catalonia committed by Moorish troops and believes that those practices were widespread in Catalonia, see his conclusions: Ruano, *Islam y Guerra Civil*, 381. He leaves the question undecided whether the geographical concentration of the crimes in mainly Catalonia and Andalusia has something to do with a lack of research on other regions or with different behavior by Moorish troops in different places. He takes precautions in his conclusions though. Sometimes troops of different origin operated together in the same region making identifying particular units difficult, besides the fact that after the effective ending of military operations the Moorish units were moved out, being followed by a period of post-combat repression in which the actors were Spanish. (Ibidem, 371, 374, 375, 378).



that ‘we had to be at home early, because of the Moors, who were stationed in one corner and had carte blanche for doing what they liked’. Although she does not explicitly mention what it was that they liked, and whether anyone was a victim of that carte blanche in her village, the fear from what the Moroccans could do specifically to girls if they were not home early is implicit. But then there is another witness who spoke of the Moors who were walking through the mountains with their sheep and goats and stated that ‘the truth is that with us, when we met them, they behaved well’.<sup>12</sup> Fourthly, there is evidence that except in cases where it was the deliberate policy of the regional commander (Queipo de Llano, for instance) to use sexual violence or the threat of it as a weapon, it seems that Moroccan troops generally, as the testimonies of individual Moroccan veterans assert, did not overstep discipline. When individual soldiers did, punishment would often follow quickly and harshly.

A number of historians who discussed this issue either confirm the existence of widespread sanctioned rapes or deny them by giving a number of interesting arguments. As it has already been mentioned (see chapter 2) El Merroun rejects what he considers to be fabrications about rape charges towards the Moroccans. One argument he uses is that Islamic law severely opposes as well as punishes such crimes.<sup>13</sup> That is not a strong argument as history is full of examples of soldiers violating religious commandments against rape, murder and theft. Therefore, this argument, while it might apply for some, is not a reasonable basis for the denial of the accusations. Furthermore the Moroccan soldiers themselves hardly proved to be uniformly religiously observant.<sup>14</sup> The argument that Moroccan soldiers would refrain from rape because of their religious upbringing was already used, in 1940, by the Spanish priest and Arabist Miguel Asín Palacios when he argued that the respect for Islam towards the virtue of chastity was evidenced by ‘our very own Moroccan soldiers’, who turned their eyes, with clear embarrassment, away from immodest images to the point that in some hospitals they were seen tearing the pages of the Spanish magazines that were put in their hands for entertainment. Based on that, the author wonders whether any value or fundament can be attached to the calumnious campaign that the Marxist press undertook since the start of the campaign attributing to the Moroccan soldiers the savage rape of women, which is far from the spirit and the letter of their religious law, ‘a law that is an irreconcilable enemy of adultery which Islamic law punishes with cruel penalties’.<sup>15</sup> El Merroun has other arguments however, as he also points out that the Moroccan troops had access to brothels in several corners of the peninsula. More importantly, he argues that the

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<sup>12</sup> Testimonies by, respectively, Faustina Lobo Díaz, (from the Aller region) and Elena Fernández González (from the region of Lena), in: Caunedo, Díaz and Alonso, *Asturias, 70 años, 70 voces. Testimonios y memorias de una guerra*, 216, 238.

<sup>13</sup> El Merroun, *Las tropas marroquíes en la Guerra Civil española*, 203.

<sup>14</sup> See the following chapter ‘Moros y Cristianos’.

<sup>15</sup> Miguel Asín Palacios, ‘Porqué lucharon a nuestro lado los musulmanes marroquíes’, in: Miguel Asín Palacios, ed., *Obras escogidas II y III de historia y filología árabe* (Madrid 1948) 125-151, here 145. He published this text first in 1940 in the *Boletín de la Universidad Central* in Madrid.

Nationalist authorities would severely punish those crimes, including using the death penalty.<sup>16</sup> As it will be illustrated below, his arguments have some valid basis in the historical record.

The other side of the debate is represented by scholars like de Madariaga and Balfour. As mentioned in chapter 2, Madariaga argues that atrocities, including rape, constituted standard practice of the colonial forces both in Morocco and in Spain that were encouraged by their commanders. Similarly, Balfour argues that Moroccans and Legionnaires knew no other form of war than colonial war and that was characterised by massacres and looting as well as rape. Understandably none of his Moroccan interviewees, however, confirms that.<sup>17</sup>

The arguments of both Balfour and Madariaga are reasonable and the reference to the colonial wars in Morocco is compelling. However, there are a few comments that could be made about them. First, there was a decade separating the end of the rebellion in the Rif and the start of the Civil War, making the suggestion that raping in Spain would be merely an automatic continuation of raping in Morocco not very convincing. As of 17 July 1936 (the start of the military coup), such practices had not been routine behaviour for the Moroccan troops, for at a decade. Second, as earlier mentioned, the number of veterans of the colonial war in the Moroccan units were no more than a couple of thousands. While previous veterans of the Moroccan colonial war might have re-enlisted, the great majority of the enlistees were probably youngsters who had no military experience and were generally no older than between 6-10 years when the war against Al Khattabi ended, even if they would have known the stories of the war. For them, there would have been no continuation of rape as a colonial practice, nor would it apply to the thousands of volunteers from French Morocco who had no experience in the Spanish colonial army or its brutal practices during its fight against the Riffian rebels. This does not invalidate the arguments of Madariaga or Balfour, but that they would apply to a far smaller proportion of the Moroccan army in Spain than their arguments would suggest.

Charges of rape committed by Moroccan soldiers cannot be dismissed, but the assessment of this phenomenon at times lacks a clear basis in documents and testimonies. For example, Gustau Nerín claims, in his otherwise valuable work, that ‘many of the Moroccans who were convicted during the war, were accused of sexual abuses, but the sentences were very light (months, including days of imprisonment)’. However, the archival sources, which he uses to support this claim, contradict his conclusion.<sup>18</sup> Among hundreds of offences, ranging from drunkenness to murder, seven cases are related to rape (*violación*). In three of these, the offenders received life sentences, while the military courts handed out two other Moroccans thirty years of imprisonment each. There is also one case of sexual assault (*abusos deshonestos*) for which a sentence of fourteen years, four months and one day

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<sup>16</sup> El Merroun, *Las tropas marroquíes*, 203.

<sup>17</sup> He refers to one Spanish Nationalist officer who confirmed to Balfour the regularity of rape by Moorish troops. Balfour also refers to Nationalist military instructions to keep soldiers ‘in hand’, which he interprets as an affirmation of his point. *Ibidem*, 293.

<sup>18</sup> Gustau Nerín, *La guerra que vino de África*, 287. The source which he gives in his *La guerra* is Archivo General de la Administración (hence AGA), M-1686.

was given. The lightest sentence, mentioned in this source, for an offender convicted of rape was six years, one month and sixteen days. These judgments hardly validate Nerín's claim of 'light' sentences.<sup>19</sup>

Western historians have usually neglected the Moroccan side of the rape issue which has been elicited in the recent past through interviews of aging veterans. Despite the necessary caution that one should take in considering these interviews, they cannot in fact be ignored given the pejorative historical legacy and reputation that have been associated with the actions of Moroccan troops during the Spanish Civil War. This legacy and reputation continues to this day to be linked in Spanish public discourse to the 'Moor'.

In these interviews the majority of Moroccan veterans indicated that they had not witnessed, participated in or had any knowledge of cases of Moroccan troops raping Spanish women. All agreed that their superiors forbade them, on the pain of death, from attacking civilians or hurting women.<sup>20</sup> At the same time, some admitted that looting was permissible upon first entering an enemy village or town. One of the veterans noted that 'there never was aggression against civilians. It was the finest army. It was forbidden to touch women or any house. The major, San Martín, told the *Tabor*: "no touching of women, no touching of anything"<sup>21</sup>

Still there were a few Moroccan veterans who did confirm that some soldiers were involved in cases of rape; one veteran even confirmed more than one instance. He noted that when the army entered a city the soldiers were free to loot as they liked, but that civilians were, according to him, off-limits. Failing to respect that order entailed a *consejo de guerra* (court martial). He witnessed the trials of two cases of rape that Moroccan soldiers had committed, one case occurred in Seville, where the perpetrator received the death sentence. The other took place in Catalonia, when three soldiers raped two girls of one family. Two soldiers were subsequently executed after interrogation while the third fled to the '*rojos*'.<sup>22</sup> This last incident is suspiciously similar to one recounted by another veteran, in whose version three Moroccans raped girls from one family and killed the parents. Two of the perpetrators were caught and executed, while the third managed to flee and eventually to find his way back to Morocco.<sup>23</sup> Both accounts could be of the same incident. But in the second version, General Muñoz Grandes plays a part as he spoke to one Moroccan *kaíd* (native officer) asking him: 'We were at war in Morocco. Did we do such things?' The *kaíd* answered in the negative where upon the general

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<sup>19</sup> Whether the convicts served their full sentences is another matter, which the source does not clarify.

<sup>20</sup> Among testimonies that claimed the strict prohibition on rape, usually to be punished by death, are those of: Mohamed Imhaouesh, Mohamed ben Amar ben Al Hashmi, Ahmad ben Abdullah Al Omari, Al Massari, Al Bouyekra, as well as other testimonies in the personal archive of El Merroun, and those of most of the veterans interviewed for this study.

<sup>21</sup> Interview with Ahmed Mohamed Ahmed, Alqazarquivir, 21 February 2011.

<sup>22</sup> Testimony of Mohammed al Ayyashi Al Bakouri who served in the headquarters of his unit working on legal and native affairs. 7 April 1994, El Merroun archive.

<sup>23</sup> Testimony of Al Buyekra, 21 April, Fnideq, El Merroun archive.

asked ‘then why did these [soldiers] kill [those] people?’<sup>24</sup> The native officers of the unit then put their signatures on the execution order.

Another veteran relayed how on one occasion a girl was raped. After dismissing the first two groups of soldiers that were brought to her, she identified the supposed perpetrator in the third group, and thereupon he was executed by his own unit ‘so that others would not be able to do it. Therefore, when we entered an inhabited place we could not do anything’. The chief of his unit had told its members that Spain was not like Morocco. In Morocco ‘the women do as you want from them’, but in Spain if a woman ‘wants to, then it does not matter to anyone. But if she does not want to, then there is nothing [that can happen] by force’.<sup>25</sup> In fact the Moroccan veterans who expressed their views on this issue always approved of the shooting of a rapist, whether they witnessed an actual rape or not. But punishment was not always taken for granted, as rape charges were sometimes disputed by fellow soldiers. One death sentence for two Moroccans accused of rape and killing, for instance, prompted a *Tabor* of the *Mehal-la* – that thought the soldiers were innocent - to refuse to follow orders and to start marching towards Salamanca with the intention of protesting to Franco that they were ‘dying in times of war and in times of peace’.<sup>26</sup>

The testimonies of the Moroccan veterans concerning the issue of rape leave one with the impression that Moroccan troops were strongly discouraged by their Spanish officers from committing rape, at least after late 1936. Further, if they did in fact commit the act and were caught they generally suffered harsh penalties ranging from extended incarceration to execution. Moreover, there are two contemporary accounts by Moroccan soldiers from the Spanish army who deserted to French Morocco that confirm the views given, more than half a century after the war, in the previous testimonies. Among the 147 Moroccans from French Morocco who had served in the Spanish army and returned to the French zone, only two spoke of rape cases. Although they did not specifically state that they witnessed the rapes themselves, they stated that in both cases the perpetrators (one perpetrator in one case and four in the other) were shot.<sup>27</sup> Not one of the 147 spoke of any license to commit rape, or of any rapes that went unpunished. Although most of these 147 soldiers did not participate in the first brutal weeks and months of the war, and although only two deserters spoke of cases of rape, these two still could be considered as strengthening the version of the events given by the veterans’ testimonies mentioned earlier.

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<sup>24</sup> Ibidem. However, the reference with regard to the Rif war, though it might be the experience of Muñoz Grandes himself, does not apply to the Rif war in general. During that war, Spanish and Spanish-led forces used sexual aggression against women in rebel territories. According to some accounts, Franco and Varela (the only officer to receive the most distinguished San Fernando laureate twice) were brought women as war prizes by their troops but that both men magnanimously refused the gift. Nerín, *La guerra que vino de África*, 285-286.

<sup>25</sup> Interview with Masoud Ballah, Brussels, 5 November 2011.

<sup>26</sup> Testimony of Abdelkader Al Shaoui, 3 December 1992, El Merroun archive. This witness did not experience the incident himself, but heard it from soldiers of the *Mehal-la* involved, while he was receiving treatment in the hospital.

<sup>27</sup> Interrogation of Mohamed B. Omar ben Amar Taliouani, and of Mohamed B. Omar ben Amar Taliouani, SHD, 3 H 266.

Rather than dismissing on the one hand the Moroccan deserters' and veterans' version of the rape subject as self serving or apologetic, or on the other hand the accounts of rape by Moroccan troops of Spanish women as trivial, both versions can be reconciled by considerations of the timeframe of the enlistment of the Moroccan interviewees. Most of the Moroccan veterans interviewed by historians, decades after the war, as well as the deserters interviewed by French authorities in French Morocco, were deployed in Spain after the first weeks and months of the Civil War when most of the sexual aggression by the Army of Africa (as well as others) took place in an environment of sweeping and often uncontrolled violence and terror, before the relative stabilisation of frontlines. Therefore the accounts of the Moroccan veterans and their own version of the rape subject for the periods in which the majority of them served, can be considered reliable.

To conclude this issue we must consider an important point and that is the scarce documentary evidence on the part of the Nationalists about sexual aggression committed by their Moroccan troops, which is remarkable given that these troops were accused of committing these crimes on a grand scale. It is even more remarkable when one compares it to the acts of rape committed by the Moroccan (and other North African and 'coloured') of the French Expeditionary Corps that fought in Italy in 1943 and 1944, acts which were committed on a larger scale in May 1944 and immortalised in the 1960 movie *Two Women* (with Sophia Loren). Those acts of sexual aggression are somehow better documented than the rapes attributed to the Moroccans of the Spanish Civil War. The French military archives contain reports on more rape incidents and attributed to the Moroccans of the French army during the first half of 1944 in Italy than the Spanish archives have on rapes attributed to Moroccan soldiers during the whole 1936-1939 period,<sup>28</sup> although these French documents do not give a specific number for Italian victims or rape and at first sight do not seem to speak of hundreds let alone thousands of rapes that were reported in Italy.<sup>29</sup> Then remains the question of whether French commanders encouraged Moroccan troops and other colonial soldiers to commit atrocities in the Italian countryside. According to Italian sources, General Alphonse Juin promised, in a declaration written in Arabic, the colonial troops of the French Expeditionary Corps that they would have 'women, houses, wine' and everything they would desire. They could take, burn and destroy everything they wanted during fifty hours, should they penetrate the enemy line without leaving an enemy soul alive.<sup>30</sup> Of course, the French commanders of that campaign have not admitted this allegation. However, the rapes in Italy

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<sup>28</sup> See for example, SHD, Cartons 10 P 11 and 10 P 68.

<sup>29</sup> Tomasso Baris, 'Le Corps Expéditionnaire Français en Italie. Violences de "Libérateurs" durant l'été 1944', *Vingtième Siècle. Revue d'Histoire*, nr. 93 (2007) 47-61. According to the feminist communist organisation L'Unione Donne Italiane 12,000 women were victims of sexual violence in the towns and villages that witnessed the passage of the French Expeditionary Corps. Ibidem ,54. The Italian senate determined in 1996 that 2000 women were raped by the Moroccan soldiers in the spring of 1944. See Norme in favore delle vittime di violenze carnali in tiempo di guerra, the website of the Italian senate:

<http://www.senato.it/japp/bgt/showdoc/frame.jsp?tipodoc=Ddlpres&leg=13&id=1012> (accessed on 11 July 2013).

<sup>30</sup> Baris, 'Le Corps Expéditionnaire Français en Italie', 51.

led, on the part of the French, to hesitation on whether to use the Moroccan troops and specifically the irregular *Goums* for the liberation of France.<sup>31</sup>

On the point of scarce documentary evidence on rapes by Moroccan soldiers in Spain compared to the French case in Italy, we can discern important differences. Firstly, in Italy there were other international military forces in operation, especially the American forces that reported to the French command many of the offences committed by Moroccan troops against Italian civilians including rape. Secondly, by the time the Moroccans were fighting in Italy the Italian authorities had become partners with the Allies against the Germans, and so Italian police and military were able to be present in territories where French forces were also present and thus able to record and report excesses committed by the French colonial soldiers in general and the Moroccans in particular. Thirdly, since the Italians were not enemy and certainly not the civilians, and given the previous two considerations, the French would not or could not go to great lengths in hiding the crimes, although if thousands of Italian women were indeed raped then the French military must have committed great neglect in recording this. In Nationalist Spain, on the other hand, there were no significant international parties present, during the first weeks of the war, to witness and report any large scale rape incidents that might hurt the reputation of the Nationalist army nor any independent and neutral police force that might seek to defend the interest of Republican female victims of rape. But an alternative explanation for the scarcity of documentary evidence on rapes committed by the Moroccans of the Spanish Nationalist army (an explanation which is certainly unpalatable to those asserting that rape by Moroccan troops took place on a grand scale) is that these sexual crimes were far less frequently committed than usually is thought and, as the veterans maintain, that the harsh punishments were enough deterrence to keep those deeds in the category of the exception rather than the rule. One might also argue that that the fear of the Moroccans, strategically utilised by the Spanish Nationalists, caused an overreaction and led to the aggravation of the reputation of the Moroccan soldiers, and reinforced the image of the lustful and violent Moor that had been around for hundreds of years.

The Allied campaign Italy was not the first episode to generate a negative attitude towards French colonial troops or blemish their record by accusations of sexual aggression. That fate befell the colonial troops of the French Army during the occupation of the Rhineland in 1920s. Between 25,000 and 40,000 soldiers originated from Senegal, Algeria, Morocco and other French colonies in Africa. Discriminated against and targeted as a racially primitive and alien threat in the ‘heart of Europe’, they were represented in the German media as being governed by dangerous, uncontrollable sexual instincts and desires, and depicted as an evil presence. Campaigners mobilising against the colonial soldiers denounced them as a ‘Black Shame’, and were concerned that the use of ‘primitive’ black troops to watch a ‘white nation’ would seriously undermine and threaten the ideology of white domination. That ‘savages’ could act like masters in Europe and that ‘coloured tribes’ were ‘allowed

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<sup>31</sup> Edward L. Bimberg, *Mountain Warriors: Moroccan Goums in World War II* (Mechanicsburg 2008) 85.

to tyrannise a white people' seemed outrageous to many Europeans in the early 1920s. The allegations united several liberal and left-wing organisations, trades unionists, German and international women's organisations, members of parliament from different European countries and the United States, with Christian groups and the extreme right-wing in Germany.<sup>32</sup> In Great Britain, the press either falsely represented or greatly exaggerated the behaviour of French African troops in the Rhineland, which in turn further stimulated racial animosity towards black people and mixed relationships in Britain.<sup>33</sup>

### **The Wives**

For all the horror of individual and gang rape, relations between Moroccan soldiers and Spanish women during and after the Spanish Civil War were in fact much more nuanced and complex. Despite their propaganda-inspired reputation as lustful aggressors, a number of Moroccan soldiers had romantic relationships with Spanish women. In fact, there were a sufficient number of these relationships to alarm the Nationalist military and to motivate it to take measures to impede them.

The following anecdote, by a veteran of *Regulares* Ceuta, El Hussein ben Abdesselam, is illustrative of the general attitude of Spanish society and the military towards mixed Moroccan-Spanish relationships. One day, during the later stages of the war, El Hussein's *Tabor* arrived at the Extremaduran village of Puebla de la Calzada, where some of the soldiers were quartered on the opposite side of a workshop where several girls worked sewing clothes. The owner, a wealthy Spanish woman, used to invite a number of Moroccan soldiers to come and sit with them. As the gatherings became more frequent the Spanish owner fell in love with a corporal, a fellow Regular of El Hussein, who was from Larache and was called Abdesselam, and who apparently was well versed in Spanish. The romance ended in agreement between the two to marry. Upon hearing of the marital intentions of this Spanish woman, the people of the village were filled with dissatisfaction and a number complained to the commanding officer of the *Tabor*, demanding an end to the relationship. The commander promised to stop the intended marriage. He summoned the Moroccan corporal and assigned him fixed office duty, effectively preventing him from leaving his quarters until the unit left the village. El Hussein was one of the soldiers who informed the Spanish lady about these actions.

After realising what happened she took her car and drove south, crossing into Morocco and heading towards Tetuan where she had an audience with the Khalifa, Mulay El Hassan ben El Mehdi, to seek his intercession. Commenting that he had no problem with a Spanish woman marrying a Moroccan subject, the Khalifa reassured her that he would intercede with Franco in the matter. Whatever the Khalifa might have written or said, it seems that it had the intended effect. Sometime later the *Tabor* commander summoned the people who complained to him about the Spanish-Moroccan marriage, and told them that he had received instructions from Franco not to hinder the

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<sup>32</sup> Iris Wigger, "Black Shame" – The Campaign against "Racial Degeneration" and Female Degradation in Interwar Europe', *Race & Class* 51 (2010) 33-46, here 35.

<sup>33</sup> David Killingray, 'British Racial Attitudes towards Black People during the Two World Wars, 1914-1945', in: Eric Storm and Ali Al Tuma, eds., *Colonial Soldiers in Europe, 1914-1945. "Aliens in Uniform" in Wartime Societies*, 97-118, here 107.

marriage of the corporal and the Spanish lady. This did not mean the end of the story as the unit was moved out to be stationed, in the following months in a number of different places, with the Spanish fiancée of Abdesselam following the unit and renting a place in each locality that the unit came to settle in. But after several months the marriage documents were ready and the corporal was discharged from the army and remained in Spain with his Spanish wife.<sup>34</sup>

This happy ending to the story of the Moroccan corporal and his wealthy Spanish wife was not representative of the majority of the cases of romantic relationships between Moroccan soldiers and Spanish women. The difficulties that these couples faced were significant. As one veteran pointed out: 'It was not easy to marry a Spanish woman. Not like today. They [the military superiors] would forbid it'.<sup>35</sup> Indeed, this was the policy that the Spanish military, and the Protectorate authorities through their *interventores*, sought to implement. Franco's positive attitude in the aforementioned anecdote was the exception to the rule.

It is important to note that in the majority of documented cases of mixed marriages, intended marriages or other romantic relationships, the soldiers in question can be divided into two groups. The first consisted of wounded men who obviously had enough free time to stroll outside the hospitals and make contact with women of the cities where the military hospitals were located. 'The nurses loved the Moroccans', asserts one veteran, 'the correspondence between the soldier and the nurse continued even after he returned to the front'.<sup>36</sup> A letter, intercepted by the military censorship, in April 1938, speaks of a romance that developed during a period of recovery from injuries. In the letter sent by a Spanish woman, a resident of La Coruña, to her lover and 'only protection in this world', a certain Dris, in Morocco, she reminds him how she took care of him during fourteen months in La Coruña as he was injured. The letter speaks of her as an orphan and apparently no other relatives. She also asks him that when he reaches Morocco he should do whatever the military government of Spain entrusted him to do and that is to ask the High Commissioner in Morocco a permit so that she could pass to Morocco. She also informs him that she received in her town a travel permit that would allow her to travel.<sup>37</sup> Whether the letter arrived at its destination and whether Dris managed, or even desired, to arrange for the permit is not known.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Interview with El Hussein ben Abdesselam, Ceuta, 24 January 2011. Years after the events he met in Ceuta the mixed couple which had produced two children. The part of the story where the Spanish woman travels to Morocco to meet the Khalifa was of course not witnessed by Al Hussein himself but learned after she returned from her trip.

<sup>35</sup> Interview with Abdelkader Ahmed, Alcazarquivir, 21 February 2011.

<sup>36</sup> Testimony of Ahmed ben Abdullah Al Omari, 12 April, Tetuan, El Merroun archive.

<sup>37</sup> Copy of a letter from María del Carmen Guerra. AGA, Af, 81.1752. The document ends with 'Algeciras, 30 April 1938.- II triumphal year', which suggests either that she had left La Coruña and was waiting the imminent arrival of the permission to go to Morocco, even though it is clear that Dris had just left for Morocco, or that the letter was intercepted and copied in Algeciras on the mentioned date, which explains the 'triumphal year' expression, more familiar to Nationalist official documents of that era.

<sup>38</sup> See also the copy of a civil matrimony contract sealed at Lavadores (written Labadores in the document), in the Galician Vigo municipality, on 7 June 1938, between a corporal of the Mehal-la, who was an inmate of the Bella Vista (Vella Vista in the document) Hospital in Vigo. AGA, Af, 81.1752.



The other group of soldiers involved in romantic relationships with Spanish women, a smaller group, consisted of those who were assigned duties that left them behind the front-lines, like the Moroccan military police, the *Mejasnia*, or those performing guard duties for high Spanish figures, such as General Franco. These circumstances facilitated the relationships that started to worry the Spanish military authorities.

In May 1937 the Delegation of Native Affairs of the High Commissariat reported the case of a young Spanish girl from Saragossa, where a Muslim hospital existed, who tried to accompany an injured Moroccan back to Morocco with the intention of contracting a civil marriage. The report expressed relief that the lack of necessary documentation kept the girl from crossing the border at Castillejos into the Protectorate.<sup>39</sup> However, it also expressed concerns that such instances might take place in the future and that such unions not only produced insurmountable problems but impeded the protecting mission, though it does not state how. The report asked for adequate measures to impede such journeys, preferably cutting them short in the places of origin, usually cities where Muslim hospitals existed.<sup>40</sup> But such relationships continued to take place, and apparently not all military commanders were aware of their duty to stop intended marriages between Moroccan soldiers and Spanish women. In October 1937, a letter to the Delegation of Native Affairs asked its opinion on authorisation for matrimony between a soldier of *Regulares* Alhucemas and a Spanish woman, pointing out that the commander of the *Regulares* Alhucemas Group did not object to the matrimony but did not find himself in a position to authorise it as, in his opinion, the native authorities were the ones who should do so.<sup>41</sup> In response the Delegation of Native Affairs advised, unsurprisingly, against such marriages, as the Spanish women were ignorant of the Muslim customs and lifestyles. It also objected on the grounds that such marriages demanded the matrimony to be Islamic, and that the meagre salary of a soldier would not economically be proper for a Spanish woman, which would be even worse if the couple were to live in a village rather than a city.<sup>42</sup>

Another case of an intended Moroccan-Spanish marriage that illustrates one of the justifications the Nationalist authorities used to oppose this type of relationships was that of the military policeman, or *mejasni*, also a member of Franco's Moroccan Guard, Ben Brahim Susi. In March 1938 the Delegation of Native Affairs was informed that Susi had divorced his Moroccan wife and intended to marry a Spanish woman from Salamanca. The *interventor* in North Spain (the Spanish military controller of native affairs), who was charged with investigating the matter, noted that the Spanish woman had a limp and judging from 'her physical look', concluded that the Moroccan *mejasni* intended to benefit materially from marrying this much older woman. The *interventor* visited

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<sup>39</sup> Castillejos is modern day Fnideq, the Moroccan locality closest to the border of Ceuta.

<sup>40</sup> AGA, Af, 81.1122 Leg. 3763/3. 'Orden sobre prohibición de casamientos ilegales de soldados musulmanes con españolas'.

<sup>41</sup> From the Chief of Staff of the Morocco Military Forces, Ceuta, to the Commissioner for Native Affairs, Tetuan. 11 October 1937. AGA, Af, 81.1752.

<sup>42</sup> Commissioner for Native Affairs, Tetuan, to the Chief of Staff of the Morocco Army Forces, Ceuta. 21 October 1937.

the Spanish lady and ascertaining that she was not pregnant, tried to convince her of her wrong choice. His argument was interesting. The Spanish officer told her that ‘the Moors in a European environment are only useful for military service’. He also argued that Moors are ‘such friends of fantasy’ that he must have created grand stories about his personal attributes and great possessions.<sup>43</sup>

The ‘problem’ of inter-religious marriages emerged with such frequency that it eventually became a matter for ministerial consideration. In July 1938 the Nationalist minister of National Defence issued an order prohibiting ‘illegal marriages’ between ‘Muslim soldiers’ and Spanish women. The order came as a result of a lengthy complaint concerning these marriages, which the Legal Department of the Ministry of Defence had previously formulated. The specific incident that prompted this complaint and the subsequent order was a marriage in Melilla between a Moroccan corporal of the *Regulares* and a Spanish woman who had come from the Peninsula. What was even more egregious and reflected a ‘lack in morality’ was that her father even gave ‘authorisation’ to the marriage. The Legal Department outlined in its report the possible consequences of such marriages. One negative effect mentioned, citing the opinions of military authorities in the Protectorate’s eastern region, was that these unions would enrage native women. As the report noted, the differences in tradition would ‘degenerate into quarrels that would cause continuous bitterness between women of both religions’.<sup>44</sup> In addition, the report expressed a concern for the well-being of ‘our [female] compatriots’ who would gain neither spiritual nor material advantage from these marriages. The Ministry’s Legal Department urged civilian authorities in the Peninsula to do their utmost to legally hinder inter-religious relationships, and noted that the Church’s cooperation should not be a problem, as it can within its functions work to encumber such marriages. The report also lamented the fact that the Civil Code on marriage contained no prohibition regarding differences of faith. On the other hand, it noted that the Defence Minister could use the current law to insist on prior authorisation for any soldier wishing to contract marriage, and thus could legally require civilian authorities in Spain and Spanish Morocco to refuse to register such marriages without this authorisation. Finally, the report recommended that all sectors and commanders of Moroccan units be informed of this policy; but that it be done as discreetly as possible, given the ‘delicate’ nature of the matter. Further, the units should be ordered to keep authorisations to a minimum.

The Defence Minister’s instructions did ultimately achieve the desired result. It prohibited the Muslim religious personnel attached to military units from actually sealing the marital contract, which was easy to do since many of them held the rank of officer. An example of such personnel attempting to seal undesired marital contract comes from March 1938 when the director of the Muslim hospital in Saragossa informed the *interventor* of Moroccan affairs in northern Spain that he learned about an intended marriage between a Spanish woman and one of the Moroccan patients who had asked the

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<sup>43</sup> AGA, Af, 81.1113, Leg. 3746/3, report nr. 1650, on 1 April 1938. The report concluded that it was futile to convince the Spanish woman to desist from her intention.

<sup>44</sup> AGA, Af, 81.1122, Leg. 3763/5. ‘Informe de la sección de Justicia del Ministerio de Defensa Nacional, sobre matrimonios de soldados musulmanes con españolas’.

hospital's imam and the *catib* (scribe) to arrange the marital union. The director managed in time, though this took place before the ministerial July instructions, to instruct his two subordinates to stop the arrangements. Additionally, the *interventor* ordered the hospital's religious staff to refrain from effectuating any further marriages without the authorisation of his office and without first providing the *interventor* with information on the 'Moor' and the 'Christian' woman and the circumstances of their relationship.<sup>45</sup>

In light of the efforts of the Spanish military authorities to forestall marriages between Spanish women and Moroccan soldiers based on religious and cultural differences as much as possible, one might imagine that conversion to Christianity would have raised fewer objections to such unions. In 1938, there was just such an instance. The military Muslim hospital of Medina del Campo reported that a member of the *Mejasnia* intended to marry a Spanish woman and would convert to Christianity to do so. This, however, presented the Spanish military with a more explosive issue since the intended conversion might give the appearance that the hospital administrators were condoning proselytising activities that were strictly forbidden in Muslim hospitals. The hospital's director was eager to communicate that no such forbidden conversions were taking place.<sup>46</sup> This sensitive issue was very important to Franco and his followers who presented themselves as 'men of God', whether Christians or Muslims, fighting the 'godless reds'. As Carmen Franco, the daughter of the Generalissimo, stated, her father 'had much respect for Islam'. For instance, he never advocated that the members of his Moorish Guard, who had married Spanish women, convert to Christianity. He thought that the Moroccans should not change religions because they were 'very impervious and it was a complication to mix both religions'.<sup>47</sup> While it probably can be concluded that Franco was not a supporter of these types of marriages, at least in the case of the Moorish Guard, he did not actively oppose them.

In the 1940s when a sizable number of Moroccan soldiers were still stationed in Spain, the issue of Moroccan-Spanish marriages continued to concern the Franco government. As in the past, the same uncomfortable questions of religious and cultural differences dominated these alliances. As one veteran remembered during this period:

The captain would be informed about the marriage. They would call the woman and ask her if she agrees to marry with him. She says yes, he says yes. Then they [the military superiors] would say: "he is a Moro and you are Spanish, how will you marry? If you agree to marry him according to his religion, then fine. If no, then you stay with your religion and he the same, but without marriage". But when the children are born, that is a problem. When the child is born, they come and say: "what name will you give it". Many times, they went to the priest, and the priest talks with the soldier: "the children must have the same religion, they cannot be parted,

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<sup>45</sup> See AGA, Af, 81.1113, Leg. 3746/3, cables nr. 471 and 1673.

<sup>46</sup> See AGA, Af, 81.1113, Leg. 3746/3, cable nr 2556.

<sup>47</sup> Jesus Palacios & Stanley G. Payne, *Franco, mi padre. Testimonio de Carmen Franco, la hija del Caudillo* (Madrid 2008) 8.

you have the Moorish religion, the Muslim one, and she has the Spanish religion. It must be given a careful thought". One of them must fall in the trap, the man or the woman. If the man loves her and wants to marry her then he must become a Spanish subject. They go to the priest and he baptises him. And if not, they remain like this [in non-marital relationship].<sup>48</sup>

As such, the end of the Civil War in April 1939 did not put an end to the troubling issue of Moroccan-Spanish marriages. Though large numbers of Moroccan troops returned to Morocco, others remained for garrison duty and to mop up the remnants of Republican resistance. This meant that the continued presence of some Moroccan troops in populated location in the Spanish Peninsula, led to continued romantic attachments leading to marriages, despite the restrictions imposed by the Spanish state,<sup>49</sup> which grew stronger in 1941 when it forbade municipal judges from authorising civil marriages, except for those who were not Catholic and those who could prove that they were not baptised.

A July 1939 report highlighted yet another aspect of this issue: the question of the nationality of the Spanish female who contracted marriage with a Moroccan. The report noted an increase in the frequency with which Spanish women were entering into civil marriages with Moroccans either in front of Spanish municipal judges or justices of peace in Spanish Morocco.<sup>50</sup> A problem arising from these unions was the question of the woman's nationality. According to Article 22 of the Spanish Civil Code at the time, a Spanish woman who married a foreigner lost her Spanish nationality and automatically assumed the nationality of her husband.<sup>51</sup> At the same time, Moroccan law did not grant Moroccan nationality to a foreigner marrying a Moroccan subject. The report also indicated that the local Moroccan authorities were too inflexible in providing these Spanish women, who decided to move with their husbands to Morocco, with the necessary Moroccan documentation. On the other hand, some Spanish women found it difficult to obtain the necessary Spanish documentation to travel with their Moroccan husbands in the first place, since they were now considered non-citizens by the Spanish authorities. As noted in both the documents of the Protectorate authorities and the Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, there were also concerns for the political and legal well-being of these Spanish women. They were losing the protection of Spanish laws, and while these were not the most liberal during this era the Spanish most certainly considered them more 'progressive' than those that existed in Morocco. This was yet another reason for the Spanish Nationalist authorities to feel uncomfortable with Moroccan soldiers having lasting relationships with Spanish women. In legal

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<sup>48</sup> Interview with Dandi Mohammed, Tetuan, 15 February 2011. Notice that becoming a Spanish subject, in the eye of this veteran, amounts to or equals converting to Christianity.

<sup>49</sup> See letter from the Commissioner for Native Affairs to the Chief of the *Regulares* Group in Tetuan. 15 November 1940. The Commissioner reiterates, in answering an earlier inquiry by the *Regulares*, the usual objections on matrimonies between Moroccan soldiers and Spanish women: the difficulties for Spanish women being assimilated into Moroccan customs, economic hardship, the reintegration of Moroccan soldiers into their old ways of life, except a few cases and the damage to Spain's prestige as protecting nation.

<sup>50</sup> See AGA, Af, 81.11023, Exp.108.

<sup>51</sup> A foreign woman who married a Spanish man automatically obtained, according to the Spanish Civil Code, the Spanish nationality.

terms, this concern was solved in March 1941 by prohibiting Catholics from contracting civil matrimonies.

There was one way of shielding Spanish women from the perceived disadvantages of moving with their Moroccan husbands to Morocco. The Delegation of Native Affairs in Tetuan noted in 1942 that Moroccans who contracted legal marriages with Spanish women and had children with them should be exempt from the efforts by the General Directory for Morocco and Colonies to deport Moroccans who were deemed undesirable or illegal to avoid 'the arrival to Morocco of these women and children where they would lead a life incompatible with the one led in the protecting nation'.<sup>52</sup> The problem of course was that most of the mixed couples moved to Morocco and the concern of the Delegation of Native Affairs in this regard was, in terms of the scale of the problem, of secondary importance.

During the Civil War the Nationalist policy with regard to romantic relationships was still taking its nascent steps. Such policy was not yet well defined. It was not until the mid 1940s that the Spanish Protectorate authorities, especially the Delegation of Native Affairs, developed a 'doctrine' with regard to impeding relations between Moroccan men (who now included, in addition to soldiers and ex-soldiers, also many students) and Spanish women.<sup>53</sup> The Delegation deemed such relationships damaging for the prestige of the protecting power, and resolved to cooperate with the Spanish 'national board for the protection of women' to avoid their continuation. The Delegation found that Spanish women who consorted with Moroccan men did so out of 'pretentiousness, ignorance, vice or greediness' and considered the cultivated and suave 'Moor' the most dangerous type. But by this time the Delegation had a well-established practice in place, starting with intercepting letters between Spanish women and Moroccan men, gathering information to establish the nature of the relationship (is it mere friendly or romantic?) and taking steps to prevent the Spanish woman in question from moving to Morocco and the Moroccan man from coming to Spain,<sup>54</sup> as well as informing Spanish family members so that they would take action.<sup>55</sup> The mere interception of letters that never reached their destination was probably enough in some cases to end the relationships as it gave the impression to lovers that their partners neglected or had abandoned them.

One wonders whether Moroccans were also encouraged to display their disapproval of such marriages. In 1941, in Tetuan, on the occasion of the Day of the Hispano-Arabic Book, a literary contest was celebrated in which two short stories won the first prizes, one in the Spanish language category and the other in the Arabic language category. The Arabic story, called *Taha*, tells of two brothers, Taha and Ali, from a poor family who end up in Spain after the outbreak of the war. Ali

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<sup>52</sup> 'Nota para despacho', 16 May 1942. AGA, Af, 81.1174. Others who could be exempt were well-established and 'serious' tradesmen of good conduct.

<sup>53</sup> Fernando Rodríguez Mediano, 'Delegación de Asuntos Indígenas, S2N2. Gestión racial en el Protectorado español en Marruecos', *Awrāq: Estudios Sobre el Mundo Árabe e Islámico Contemporáneo*, nr. 20 (1999) 173-205, here 181.

<sup>54</sup> Rodríguez Mediano, 'Delegación de Asuntos Indígenas', 188.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibidem*, 173, 174.

volunteers for the army, and his father praises him for choosing to fight for the Nationalists, whose victory will make Morocco great. Ali ends the war winning ‘the trust of his chiefs and their admiration with the courage that he demonstrated in the battlefields’. But the more studious Taha wins a scholarship to study medicine in Spain. Taha’s father has only one warning for his son. ‘I only warn you of one thing, and that is: the woman. You will find there beautiful girls, and the new life will seduce you in many forms so do not be seduced’. But apparently it is not enough to warn his son once, so the father charges again. ‘Know, o Taha, that between you and the future that you are awaiting there is only one ghost, if you overcome it you will overcome the rest. It is love! It is love!! It is love!!!’. It is a love that, the father continues, ‘would draw you backwards’. By heeding the warning Taha would be ‘worth of the aid that the Spanish government has given to you’. After graduation the son ‘could do what you like’, but we must presume that after graduation Taha did go back to Morocco. What is certain is that Taha heeded his father’s advice, otherwise he would not have ‘made medical discoveries that turned the known medical rules upside down’.<sup>56</sup> One wonders whether the story won the first prize because of the family’s pro-Spanish attitude, Ali’s demonstration of courage as a warrior, or the father’s repetitive warning to Taha not to mix with Spanish women.

The Spanish military and the Protectorate’s Spanish authorities generally tried to prevent Moroccan soldiers from marrying Spanish women. In their ‘protective mission’, the Spanish proclaimed their desire to prevent their Moroccan subjects from suffering a religious lapse, to preserve the harmony of family and village life in the Protectorate and to placate the sensitivities of the native women.<sup>57</sup> But the Nationalist policy towards interreligious marriages also stemmed from the decided viewpoint that romantic and marital relationships between peoples of two different cultures and faiths were incompatible and thus ultimately doomed to failure. The Spanish military officers and officials who considered themselves to have the closest cultural and personal ties to Morocco and its people, given their years of military service in the Protectorate, and who had no issue with the Moroccan military presence in Spain, were the ones who probably had the greatest concerns about their Moroccan brothers-in-arms establishing personal liaisons with Spanish women.

Despite the policy of obstructing interreligious marriages between Moroccan soldiers and Spanish women, the Spanish Army never actually resorted to penalise, during the Civil War in any case, those soldiers who had relationships with Spanish women, nor did it resort to physically preventing Spanish women (by imprisonment for example) from consorting with Moroccan soldiers. And the law did not, until the end of the Civil War, prohibit such marriages. In practice, interreligious marriages and romantic relationships continued to take place during and immediately after the war.

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<sup>56</sup> Ahmed el Hassan Escuri, ‘Taha’, in: Ahmed el Hassan Escuri and Enrique de Roda Guarrido, *Cuentos marroquíes* (Larache 1941).

<sup>57</sup> In the case of Moroccan soldiers who divorced their wives in Morocco to marry Spanish women, the *Regulares* groups paid the divorced women their due *sadak* (dowry, in this case the portion to be paid after separation) and deducted the amount from the soldier’s pay. See for example AGA, Af, 81.1113, Leg. 3746/3 ‘El cabo de Regulares de Larache Mohammed Ben Yilud número 3004 intenta casarse con una española’.

From the group of French Moroccan deserters who commented on the issue, four maintained that marriages or romantic liaisons took place between Moroccan soldiers and Spanish women, two among these four placing these relations in the context of good contacts with the civilian population, while the two others affirmed that relations with civilians were forbidden.<sup>58</sup> One of them, even though acknowledging this prohibition, still managed to have a mistress in Granada named Juana who - the deserter found it interesting to mention - had a liquor license.<sup>59</sup> The existence of such romantic relations or marriages, occasionally taking place with the permission of the unit commander, gave some Moroccans the obviously mistaken impression that the Spanish Army not only tolerated but looked positively upon mixed marriages.<sup>60</sup> Yet, the majority of Moroccan veterans conceded that such unions were either difficult or totally forbidden.

There are no definite estimates as to how many Moroccan soldiers serving in Spain married Spanish women or had a romantic relationship with the possible intention of marriage. But fragmentary reports and a number of examples of oral anecdotal evidence give insight into the contexts of these marriages. Towards the end of 1939 reports by a number of regional military controllers' offices in Spanish Morocco were sent listing the names of Moroccan men (both military and civilian) and Spanish women who were married to each other. According to these reports there were: sixteen cases in Tetuan, one case in each of the places Rincón de Medik, Beni Ider, Anyera and Xauen, five cases in the region of Villa Sanjurjo, and seven cases in Nador.<sup>61</sup> In addition, there is another report listing the names of 68 different 'Muslims who live maritally or have relations with Spanish women', as well as the names of Spanish women who either were residing in Morocco or were living in Spain and corresponding with their Moroccan lovers. Most of the listed men were Moroccan Muslims, save one case concerning an Indian resident of Tetuan, who was corresponding with a Spanish woman from Seville, and a Moroccan Jewish resident of Tetuan who received letters from two Spanish women, bringing the total to 99 cases of 'Muslims' who were married to or had a romantic relationship with a Spanish woman, of which 97 are related to Muslim Moroccans.<sup>62</sup>

In one case, it is mentioned that the affair is *liquidado* (terminated), and therefore one must presume that the rest of the affairs or marriages were ongoing. Although many of the men in question were soldiers or non-commissioned officers (and even one captain), there were merchants who obviously met their Spanish women while selling their wares to Moroccan troops. In one case the

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<sup>58</sup> Interrogations of Mohamed ben Abdesslem ben si Ahmed; Mansour ben Ghazi; Seddik ben Amar ben Ahmed; and Mohammed ben Mohammed ben Belkassen. SHD, 3 H 266.

<sup>59</sup> Interrogation of Mohammed ben Mohammed ben Belkassen. See previous note.

<sup>60</sup> Interviews with Abdessalam Mohammed Al Amrani and Mohammed ben Ayyashi El Zerki, Ceuta, 30 June 2011.

<sup>61</sup> AGA, Af, 81.1752, reports, all in 1939, on: 27 September (on Tetuan, Rincón de Medik, Beni Ider and Anyera), 4 November (on Xauen), 24 November (on Villa Sanjurjo) and 16 December (on Nador).

<sup>62</sup> 'Relacion nominal de los musulmanes que vivem [sic] maritalmente o tienen relaciones con mujeres españolas'. AGA, Af, 81.1752. One of the 68 names in this report is already mentioned in a report on 4 November about cases of mixed marriages in Xauen (see previous note), which means that this report listed 67 new cases to be added to those listed in the reports referred to in the previous note.

commitment to the woman went as far as conversion, as demonstrated by the case of Mohamed Sahafa Mohand Bejneni, a sergeant of the *Mehal-la* of the Rif, who was baptised in Spain, taking the name of Juan.<sup>63</sup> It is not clear how many of the Spanish women who were residing with their Moroccan men in Morocco were already living in Morocco before the Civil War, but there are four instances listed of mixed marriages that took place before the war going back to 1924, and February 1936 (both cases related to Tetuan), 1935 (Rincón de Medik) and 1932 (Anyera), and we have to presume that the rest of the cases, or the overwhelming majority of them, took place after the outbreak of the Civil War. This must not be seen as an exhaustive list, as we must assume that there were relationships with Moroccan soldiers or merchants who died during the war and therefore would not figure in these reports, and that a number of Moroccans stayed in Spain with their Spanish women. About this last group we can at least learn from a report by an *interventor* in February 1941, that the matrimonies existing in Spain at the time were numbered at only five, one of which had produced offspring.<sup>64</sup> Furthermore, we have to take into account the relationships that were terminated long before the authorities had any knowledge of them.

The passage of time since the end of the Spanish Civil War did not diminish the reservations in the policy towards marriages between Spanish women and Moroccan men. By 1952, there were almost no Moroccan units operating in Spain as the anti-Franco guerrilla movement was completely destroyed, but there still existed the Moorish Guard of the Generalissimo. Some of its members, even though a small number, married or at least planned to marry, Spanish women. One case, occurring in 1952, concerns an officer, Sidi Mohamed ben Yilali who applied for authorisation to marry a Spanish woman. As he was to marry a Catholic woman, and even though he had received the necessary dispensation from the Church, his superiors sought the advice of the chaplain of Franco's headquarters and the chaplain advised that the opinion of the church was that such mixed marriages are rarely authorised, and if so only after the assurance that the husband would not try to convert his wife, would permit her to practice her faith and would educate his children according to the Catholic religion. In the specific case of this officer who has to constantly live with Moroccan units, the chaplain found that in the few similar cases which he came to know, the results were not satisfactory, as these units were composed of soldiers of the Islamic faith who were extraordinarily intransigent and fanatic, which would make coexistence difficult for a Moroccan whom they think has abandoned his religion and accepted the catholic one. Following this advice, the chief of the *Casa Militar* (General Franco's headquarters) ordered the captain commanding the Moroccan officer's company to try 'with the utmost possible tact' to convince him of abandoning his plans, and should he persist, to apply for a transfer outside the Moroccan unit. In the end the Moroccan officer received the military authorisation

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<sup>63</sup> AGA, Af, 81.1752, report on mixed marriages in Villa Sanjurjo on 24 November 1939.

<sup>64</sup> Report on 25 February 1941 by E. Moreno Gordillo. AGA, Af, 81.1125.



necessary.<sup>65</sup> This case is interesting, as the main obstacle presented, is not the guarantees that the Church demanded from a non-Catholic would-be husband, but the hostile position of other Muslims vis-à-vis a Muslim who would marry a Christian woman, a position that could be so troubling that it would necessitate the transfer of an officer outside his unit, which shows that reservations about mixed marriages continued long after the civil war and came from both sides, Spanish and Moroccan.

As far as evidence from the Moroccan perspective about Moroccan-Spanish marriages is concerned, all of the Moroccan veterans who personally knew other Moroccan soldiers who had married Spanish women and brought them back home, confirmed that these women had left Morocco in the wake of Moroccan independence, either with their husbands or alone (often after the demise of the husband) and moved to the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla or returned to their original towns. For those Moroccans who married Spanish women and lived in Ceuta and Melilla or in the Spanish Peninsula they remained in place, acquiring the Spanish nationality.<sup>66</sup> In hindsight this would seem to have vindicated official Spanish scepticism that Spanish women could make a life in a country so alien to their culture and religion.

Before closing the discussion on marriages, one should wonder whether the general Spanish attitude towards mixed marriages and relations was mainly due to the Islamic faith of the Moroccans, separate in itself, or due to the mixture of Moroccan/Muslim of the inhabitants of the Spanish Protectorate. In other words, would a non-Moroccan Muslim have received a better reception to his intentions? There is one such example (and probably not many others exist) in the case of Amet Handi Hassen Bey. Hassen Bey was a Turkish soldier who was captured by the French in the Balkans during the First World War and was transported to a prisoner camp in French Morocco from which, after a few failed attempts, he escaped to Spanish Morocco and then to Malaga where he enlisted in the Spanish Foreign Legion in 1923 and participated in the war against the Moroccan rebels of Mohammed Ben Abdel Krim. In 1932 he was a sergeant when a companion of his returned from a family visit in Madrid carrying a picture of a niece of him. Hassen Bey took the picture in his hand and told his companion 'tell your niece she already has a fiancé, a sergeant of the Legion'. Later his companion received a family visit in Morocco that included the said niece and Hassen Bey was set to marry her, and after a visit by him to her grandmother in Madrid the two were officially engaged, with the acceptance of all family members. It was however a very long engagement of five years, due to the political events of the Asturias rebellion in 1934, as well as due to the delay in his application for

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<sup>65</sup> Correspondence on 15 October 'Sobre autorización para contraer matrimonio con una española, el Oficial Moro, de 2ª de la Cuarta Unidad del Regimiento', and 14 November 1952 'Regimiento de la Guardia de S.E. El Jefe del Estado y Genrealísimo. 4a Unidad de Fusileros Marroquíes', Archivo General Militar de Guadalajara (AGMG), Caja 3, Cp. 24. Other correspondence about the officer in question shows that there were rumours in 1945 that he was already married in Spain. That and his supposed inattention to his Moroccan wife in Ifni led this one to demand a divorce.

<sup>66</sup> Interviews with: Mohammed Abdullah Susi and Al Hussein ben Abdessalam in Ceuta, respectively 19 and 24 January 2011; Dandi Mohammed in Tetuan, 15 February 2011; Abdelkader Ahmed and Ahmed Mohamed Ahmed, Alcazarquivir, 21 February 2011; Kendoussi ben Boumidien, Nador, 4 July 2011. The AGMG contains files on the Moorish Guard soldiers who married Spanish women and remained in Spain,

naturalisation, and the start of the Civil War in 1936 where he served in the general quarters of the famous Colonel Yagüe. One difficulty to surmount was the religious one, and the couple applied to the Pope for a dispensation for mixed marriage which they received. That indicates that the family of the girl would not have been content with only a civil matrimony, and that Hassen Bey did not convert to Catholicism to marry. Not only does Hassen Bey not mention any objections on the part of the family, but he does not mention any objections from the army either. The couple married in Trujillo (Cáceres province) in 1937, the groom's best man being the administrator of a Spanish nobleman. His position close to Yagüe and the rank of the best man were apparently prestigious enough for the local paper to publish a piece on the wedding.<sup>67</sup>

The story of Hassan Bey has a number of interesting elements. The romance was not the fruit of the vicissitudes of the Civil War, although the marriage took place during its course. The woman in question did not marry under circumstance of objection by the military or social circles surrounding the couple, and in no way could the Delegation of Native Affairs interfere, since Hassan Bey was no 'native', or better said, a Moroccan. The issue of difference in faith proved to be no problem even though both spouses kept their religion, but Hassen Bey apparently did not contest that the offspring would be raised as Catholics, as he mentions that his first born was baptised,<sup>68</sup> indicating that he might not have been a conservative Muslim, and that this factor might have helped him to be accepted by his Spanish in-laws. For all intents and purposes Hassen Bey was embraced as a member of the family and society, as a Spaniard. His association with a Spanish woman was no problem. His story however, stands alone, and with no similar ones with which to compare, it would be difficult to see a pattern in attitudes and policies that one could recognise and apply generally to the Moroccans.<sup>69</sup>

This chapter has so far focused on the mixed relationships between Muslim men and Spanish women in Spain. Relationships between Muslim women and Spanish men during the Civil War in Spain must have existed, but if they did then they would have been very scarce, to the point that they do not figure in the military archives of the Civil War period. Mateo Dieste notices something similar in Spanish Morocco. He states that Spanish colonial literature reflected the fascination of Spanish men with the mystery and inaccessibility of Muslim and Jewish women in Spanish Morocco. Nevertheless, in reality the dominant type of mixed relationship was that of Spanish women and Muslim men, even though this kind of relationships is absent from colonial literature, because it contradicted the masculine and colonial model of domination.<sup>70</sup>

### **The Concubines**

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<sup>67</sup> Amet Handi Hassen Bey, *Memorias de Amet Handi Hassen Bey* (Valencia 1993) 121, 123-124.

<sup>68</sup> Ibidem, 125. Hassen Bey does not himself appear to be the religiously conservative type as he celebrated his first born by buying half a dozen bottles of champagne.

<sup>69</sup> The couple lived happily ever after, living out their old days together (as of 1993 the year of the publication of the memoirs) in Valencia after 56 years of marriage. Ibidem, 125-126.

<sup>70</sup> Josep Lluís Mateo Dieste, "Rarezas": Conversiones religiosas en el Marruecos colonial (1930-1956)', *Hispania* 73 (2013) 223-252, here 232.

Now that it is clear how the Spanish Nationalists viewed mixed marriages, the final issue is how they approached and dealt with another kind of relation between Moroccan soldiers and Spanish women. The Spanish Civil War witnessed a significant growth in the number of women turning to prostitution. Many of these were the wives and daughters of Republicans who had either died, were imprisoned or fled Nationalist repression, and many of which had probably few means to sustain themselves. As a consequence, the Nationalist camp experienced a relaxation of sexual morality that saw an increase in regulated or tolerated prostitution.<sup>71</sup> Even the Spanish religious hierarchy, which supported the Nationalists, does not seem to have protested – in the name of Catholic morals - against the tolerance of prostitution.<sup>72</sup>

The tendency, by the Spanish military authorities, to limit relationships between Moroccan soldiers and Spanish women also echoed in its policy toward prostitution. The term ‘policy’ however, in this case, must be used with extreme caution. For in contrast to the instructions with regard to Moroccan-Spanish marriages, no documentary material has come to light so far that explicitly prohibited Moroccan soldiers from using the services of Spanish prostitutes. Still there are some indications that seem to confirm the aforementioned tendency. Moreover, as a rule, Moroccan troops were generally serviced by Moroccan prostitutes.

In the early days of the war, the presence of Moroccan troops in southern Spain contributed to an increase in prostitution. In Seville, for instance, prostitutes frequented the gardens of the María Luisa Park where the *Regulares* camped.<sup>73</sup> This did not apparently please the Spanish authorities. One Moroccan, interviewed by Mateo Dieste, remembered with a laugh, that when he arrived in Seville ‘the Spaniards say to the women, the Moors has a dick like a donkey. The Spaniards [say] to the women. [The Moor] Probably has the prick like a donkey’. Only when the ‘gypsy women’ arrived ‘then the [Spanish] women came to where we were’.<sup>74</sup> To control these sexual relations the Spanish Nationalist military expended some effort to facilitate prostitution for their Moroccan troops by establishing special brothels for them.<sup>75</sup> These brothels were generally staffed with women from Morocco; military authorities took care to facilitate the movement of Moroccan prostitutes to the Spanish peninsula. There was, for example, a request sent by the commander of the Army of the North to Franco in April 1938, asking for permission to establish a ‘Concubines Centre’ in the

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<sup>71</sup> Jean-Louis Guereña, *La prostitución en la España contemporánea* (Madrid 2003) 412. This culminated, in 1941, in the official repealing of the 1935 prohibition on prostitution. In 1956 prostitution was made once again illegal. *Ibidem*, 415, 436.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibidem*, 410.

<sup>73</sup> Bahamonde, *Un año con Queipo*, 28.

<sup>74</sup> Josep Lluís Mateo Dieste, ‘De los “Remendados” al Hâjj Franco. Los españoles en el imaginario colonial marroquí’, *Illes i Imperis*, nr. 7 (2004) 63-92, here 83. Notice the distinction the veteran makes between ‘gypsy’ and ‘Spanish’ women.

<sup>75</sup> For references to various women from Morocco working or running brothels in Spain, see for example AGA, Af, 81.1150.

neighbourhood of the city of Fraga to service the needs of eleven Moroccan units belonging to the Moroccan Army Corps. Franco agreed to the proposal.<sup>76</sup>

There were earlier efforts to accommodate this need. In December 1936, General Orgaz, the Spanish High Commissioner in Morocco at the time, planned to organise an effort to move dozens of ‘Chejas’ and musicians whom he intended to use to build a Moorish quarter in Spain that would serve to entertain the troops.<sup>77</sup> One such entertainment expedition, from Xauen, comprised three musicians, 36 women and two café sellers.<sup>78</sup> In a December 1937 report, a Republican spy also noted the transport of ‘Arab’ women to Spain. He stated that after trouble arose among the Moroccan soldiers who had been isolated in ‘special camps’, the military administration felt compelled to bring these women and settle them in farmhouses near these camps. The reason for this ‘isolation’ of the soldiers, this Republican report claimed, was that the *Regulares* continued raping even after conquered territory was organised.<sup>79</sup> Some of these prostitutes arrived either in pairs or individually, in some cases transporting with them significant amounts of narcotics (kif) and tobacco.<sup>80</sup>

Although prostitutes were deemed to provide a valuable service for the Moroccan troops, some of them had a negative effect on military discipline or morale. In February 1939, the commander of the 17<sup>th</sup> Division asked a colonel from the Delegation of Native Affairs to solve the issue of a soldier of *Regulares* Tetuan, who had complained that during a 48-hour leave, he had paid a Moroccan prostitute 140 pesetas in advance for a planned two-day liaison. The prostitute, however, left without coming back and the duped soldier complained to the disciplinary service of the Moroccan military police, the *Mejasnia*. The men of that service told him that they could not do anything for him because the prostitute was the lover of the head of said service. The Native Affairs colonel reprimanded the involved *Mejasnia* personnel to order the delivery of the swindled sum and, should that not happen, to arrest the prostitute so that she would receive the ‘proper punishment’. A stern warning was issued to the members of the *Mejasnia* for neglecting their duty and severe punishment was promised should such a case repeat itself.<sup>81</sup> In a different case, an apparent addiction to prostitutes pushed one soldier to desert. This soldier, who had come from French Morocco, told his interrogators that he ‘saw that he did not gain as much money as he hoped’, and the money that he did gain he spent on ‘women of bad ways’, though not specifying whether these women were Spanish or Moroccan, detailing that in

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<sup>76</sup> Archivo General Militar de Ávila, A.1, L.50, Cp. 45.

<sup>77</sup> AGA, Af, 81.1150, Exp.5429. ‘Cheja’, the feminine form for the Arabic word ‘sheikh’ (which means elder) refers in this context to women professionalising in singing and dancing and who, says Madariaga in her study, doubled as prostitutes. See: Madariaga, *Los moros que trajo Franco*, 286.

<sup>78</sup> Regional controller in Gomara to the Commissioner of Native Affairs in Tetuan. AGA, Af, 81.1150.

<sup>79</sup> Report by the Servicio de Información Exterior, December 1937, in: International Institute for Social History, Archivo FAI, CP, 33A/5.

<sup>80</sup> For example a Moroccan woman, returning to Spain with her ‘maid’, was applying to carry with her to Spain 10 kilograms of kif and 300 packets of cigars; see: Regional Controller of Jebala to Commissioner for Native Affairs, 1 June 1937, nr. 30, AGA, Af, 81.1150, Carpeta 6. Another woman, travelling with a maid and a third woman, described explicitly as prostitute, applied for permission to carry 50 kilograms of kif and 1000 packets of cigars, along with 10 kilograms of tea. Regional Controller Regional Controller of Jebala to Commissioner for Native Affairs, 1 June 1937, nr. 29, AGA, Af, 81.1150, Carpeta 6.

<sup>81</sup> AGA, Af, 81.1117, L. 2948/2.

Saragossa such a woman cost him 10 *duros* in addition to 1 *duro* for tea, and 1 *duro* (one *duro* is five pesetas) for the phonograph.<sup>82</sup> Therefore he preferred to return to his village.<sup>83</sup>

In Morocco itself, sending Moroccan prostitutes to Spain had provoked early in the war the outrage of the wives of the Moroccan soldiers fighting in Spain. According to the memoirs (published in 1997) of Rosalinda Powell Fox, the British mistress of Colonel Juan Beigbeder (High Commissioner of Morocco from 1937-1939), a group of Moroccan wives stormed the Larache train station where a train of female 'camp followers' stood ready to follow the troops. The wives attacked the prostitutes in a battle where 'hair was pulled out by the roots', 'earrings wrenched from a delicate ear' and 'dresses were torn and bosoms exposed', managing to prevent the departure of the prostitutes that day. Only under the cover of the early hours of the next morning did the train with 'its fallen human cargo' leave the city.<sup>84</sup>

There is no hard evidence to indicate the total number of Moroccan women who travelled to Spain to provide sexual services to the members of the Moroccan units or how long they remained. Only shreds of information are available. For example, in September 1938, 21 women were on route to a brothel in the village of Valmanya (in Lérida, and not far from the already mentioned Fraga), where a little less than 50 women were already stationed. However, in a report from the Commander of the Aragon Army Corps, these women were no longer needed since there were no more Moroccan units in the sector.<sup>85</sup> This again demonstrated that Moroccan women had the task of servicing exclusively Moroccan troops.

Why did the Spanish military take the trouble of importing prostitutes from Morocco for its Moroccan soldiers? Certainly there should have been, in a time of war and devastation, no shortage of available prostitutes in Spain itself, or even women who could not be deemed professional prostitutes but who temporarily traded sexual favours for food or other goods that were in shortage. For example, upon the entry of Nationalist troops in Barcelona, recalls one veteran, women in the city called on the Moroccan soldiers to sleep with them 'for there was hunger'.<sup>86</sup> One answer to the question may be that Moroccan prostitutes doubled as dancers and singers and thus created an overall entertainment environment that was more familiar to and in accordance with 'Moroccan culture'. It is not clear from the source material, documentary or oral, whether the Moroccan soldiers preferred Moroccan 'concubines' over local Spanish women. However, the obvious objective was also to discourage Moroccan soldiers from having sex with Spanish women. In some cases, the Moroccan troops were forbidden from going into the cities during their leisure time. In 1993, one veteran specifically noted

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<sup>82</sup> I presume that the tea and phonograph were, in this case, necessary elements of the encounter with the women of 'bad ways'.

<sup>83</sup> Interrogation of Ahmed ben Mohammed Er Riffi, deserted: August 1938. SHD, 3 H 266.

<sup>84</sup> Rosalinda Powell Fox, *The Grass and the Asphalt*, 81-82.

<sup>85</sup> Letter to Lieutenant Colonel Antonio García García, 12 September 1938, AGA, Af, 81.1125, Leg. 3370, Cp 2 'Varios'.

<sup>86</sup> Testimony of Hamido Al Ma'dani, 30 September 1996, El Merroun archive.

this prohibition but then indicated that he and his comrades would ‘go secretly to the places of vice’ during the night only to return to their positions in the morning.<sup>87</sup>

The Nationalist military policy concerning the use of prostitutes was to separate, as best as possible, Spanish and Moroccan troops. This separation was based on a practical rationale: some Spanish prostitutes simply did not want the Moroccans. One such veteran prostitute recalled in the 1970s that ‘nobody wanted the Moors, because they came accustomed to the *carte blanche* that they gave them and they wanted to do whatever they desired. In one village in Asturias they left the majority of the women there pregnant’.<sup>88</sup> But the separation in the prostitution sphere must have also been due to the instances of friction and incidents that might have arisen in the brothels between Moroccan and Spanish soldiers,<sup>89</sup> especially if some Spanish soldiers would have objected to a Moroccan having sexual contact with a Spanish woman even if it was consensual. It would also reduce tensions with other European soldiers such as the substantial number of Italians in Nationalist Spain. In Seville, for instance, during the early phases of war the ‘Moors’ were forbidden from visiting night clubs so as to avoid contact with the Italians who called them ‘Abyssinians’ and had frequent and violent clashes with them.<sup>90</sup> Since efforts by the Spanish military authorities existed to prevent marital relations between Moroccans soldiers and Spanish women, it is safe to assume that the Spanish military sought to apply this policy to prostitution as well, the difference being that the Moroccan troops were offered an alternative in the form of imported Moroccan prostitutes.<sup>91</sup>

### **A European issue**

Spain was not the only colonial power to have struggled with the issue of mixed sexual relationships between its colonial soldiers and European women, whether those sexual relationships developed into marriages or took place within the realm of prostitution. Pre- and post Spanish Civil War conflicts in Europe brought to notice these issues. Concerns about imperial prestige always played a role in the mind of the military authorities that controlled the colonial troops. This is clear, for example, with regard to the British Indian Army during the First World War. As David Omissi puts it, frequent

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<sup>87</sup> Testimony of Mohammed ben Amar ben Al Hashmi, Tetuan, 18 November 1993, El Merroun archive.

<sup>88</sup> J.R. Saiz Viadero, *Conversaciones con la Mary Loly: 40 años de prostitución en España* (Barcelona 1976). 18. By ‘they gave them’ she obviously meant that Nationalist authorities gave the Moroccans the ‘*carte blanche*’.

<sup>89</sup> For examples of quarrels at prostitution houses between Moroccan and Spanish soldiers see: AGA, Af, 81.1125, Leg. 3770, ‘escándalos–reyertas’. In one such incident, a Moroccan military policeman was beaten up by a Requeté and a Legionnaire. The madam of the house claimed that he had mistreated one of the prostitutes while he accused the two Spanish men of attacking him without any reason. While being interrogated he threatened to take revenge on the madam for testifying against him. See SHD, 3 H 266, for the interrogation of the deserter Mohammed ben Tahar ben Hacni, a sergeant in the Spanish Foreign Legion, who fled from a prison in Ceuta, where he was incarcerated for killing, in July 1938 in Saragossa, a Spanish sergeant of the Legion who courted Mohammed’s ‘mistress’. No details on the ‘mistress’ are provided, whether she was Spanish or Moroccan, but she was probably a prostitute.

<sup>90</sup> Bahamonde, *Un año con Queipo*, 43. The Italians, who acted like they were in a ‘conquered country’ used to have ‘many incidents with the Moors, some grave’ and even deadly ones. *Ibidem*, 147.

<sup>91</sup> A number of veterans refer to comrades who used the services of Spanish prostitutes or had otherwise extra-marital sexual relationships with Spanish women, though denying that they themselves ever indulged in such contacts. It is worth mentioning that, with one exception, these interviews were not conducted in the presence of family members, so that at least was not a factor in the interviewees’ denials.

dislocations of military life might easily disrupt the sexual mores of the Indian soldiers, while encounters between white women and Indian troops could be charged with the heightened curiosity of racial and cultural difference. Soon after arriving in Europe Indian soldiers began obtaining access in Marseille to women of the neighbourhood and illicit sex took place. Wounded men recovering in the hospitals of Brighton or Bournemouth walked out with white women. Authorities regarded these encounters as prejudicial to good discipline and did their best to keep Indian troops under strict surveillance. Sex with English women was considered detrimental to the prestige and spirit of European rule.<sup>92</sup> But it is also remarkable that some Indian troops also thought these liaisons to be distasteful, especially if there was a concern that an Indian soldier willing to marry a European woman might convert to Christianity.<sup>93</sup>

The discomfort towards mixed sexual relationships also included the French authorities during the First World War, especially the censors who were preoccupied with the effect upon the prestige of France, French females, white women in the colonies, and the European prestige that justified and supported European rule in the colonies.<sup>94</sup> Colonial soldiers discovered that they could in the metropole approach white women and have relationships of some equality with them.<sup>95</sup> Despite efforts to discourage relations between French women and colonial soldiers, French officials nevertheless felt that these efforts could not stop these liaisons. There were some officials who took a liberal view towards these relations especially if they were ‘consecrated by a birth’ of a child, to whom the state should feel an obligation, and who thought that the French goal of assimilation and civilisation of colonial subjects could be reached by permitting a large number of colonial soldiers to have a more prolonged stay in France. Yet, the overall official attitude was negative,<sup>96</sup> for it violated the necessary racial distance between the colonial subjects and the French nation to which they in theory belonged, but a distance that was necessary to maintain colonialism, empire and French power.<sup>97</sup> Ironically, the French officials found that their control of the colonial order in the metropole was more equivocal because of social and administrative disorder that the war brought about, and because they called colonial soldiers to defend a motherland with which these colonial subjects supposedly had strong bonds, certainly a situation that is not so dissimilar to that of Spain during the Civil War.

When the Second World War broke out, similar concerns came back to life in Europe. To take for example the use by the British Empire of black soldiers of the South African High Commission Territories in Europe. British colonial authorities viewed with concern the move of these troops into Sicily and Italy. Contact with Europeans might show these in a bad light and corrode the racial ‘balance’ of Southern Africa. Sexual opportunities and the sight of impoverished Europeans

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<sup>92</sup> Omissi, *The Sepoy and the Raj. The Indian Army 1860-1940*, 65.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibidem*, 66.

<sup>94</sup> Fogarty, *Race and War in France. Colonial Subjects in the French Army, 1914-1918*, 222.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibidem*, 225.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibidem*, 223-224.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibidem*, 229.

threatened white prestige, and had implications for the return of Africans to their colonies. A British colonial adviser wrote: 'The temptations to which these men are subjected in Sicily and Italy are serious. ... The people are large producers of potent wine ... [and] women of Sicily and Italy display a deplorable lack of any sense of moral decency'. This touched deep-seated fears for white prestige, particularly on the subject of sex.<sup>98</sup> Another adviser deplored the more relaxed racial attitudes, which he considered common among southern Europeans, and because of the 'extreme poverty and want of the local population', in which circumstances the colonial soldier is 'necessarily in a far superior position ... and is able to offer many things which they are in dire need of'.<sup>99</sup>

The French, during the Second World War, were not less concerned than the British, nor less than they themselves were during the First World War, even when it came to the women of their bitter enemy Germany. Some French officials felt, with regard to their own Moroccan troops, that having defeated the Germans and been welcomed by the German women, these Moroccans had lost their deference towards the Europeans.<sup>100</sup> In June 1945, a few weeks after German surrender, the French commander of the 4<sup>th</sup> Group of Moroccan *Tabors* sent a letter to the commander of Moroccan *Goums*, requesting that certain measures should be taken to maintain the morale of *Goumiers* that would make them capable of completing their current mission of occupation, and that would eliminate causes of disorder and indiscipline that could take place. Among those measures he requested increasing the staff of groups of prostitutes to the Moroccan units, to the amount of fifteen women per *Tabor*, as the numbers had been currently insufficient. The rationale was that 'one cannot ask from the *Goumiers*, in their majority originating from the Berber tribes of easy morality to live in complete self-control for long months'. The officer concluded that to fill the ranks of the prostitutes groups was the best means to mitigate rape or attempts of rape that could take place in Germany. But for reasons of European prestige, and in consequence French prestige, he judged that it would be inappropriate to recruit European women for this task, and that 'native' women should be sent over.<sup>101</sup>

### Conclusion

The Spanish Nationalist military felt uncomfortable with the issue of Moroccan soldiers interacting with Spanish women. The Nationalists faced a fundamental dilemma. They had brought Muslim Moroccans to Christian Spain and expended considerable effort to justify their presence as true allies in the crusade against the godless 'reds'. At the same time, the Nationalists portrayed themselves as fighting for traditional Catholic Spain: the same Spain that had put to an end to the Moorish political presence at the end of the fifteenth century and its demographic presence in the early seventeenth

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<sup>98</sup> Ashley Jackson, 'African Soldiers and Imperial Authorities: Tensions and Unrest during the Service of High Commission Territories Soldiers in the British Army, 1941-46', *Journal of Southern African Studies* 25 (1999) 645-665, here 654.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibidem*, 655.

<sup>100</sup> Robin Bidwell, *Morocco under colonial rule. French administration of tribal areas 1912-1956* (London 1973) 300.

<sup>101</sup> Lt. Colonel Parlange, commander of the 4<sup>th</sup> GTM (*Groupe de Tabors Marocains*) to the commander of Moroccan *Goums*, 1 June 1945. SHD, 3H 2425 -D6.



century. These were also the same individuals who did everything they could to impede interactions and marriages between Moroccan soldiers and Spanish women.

In her work on the cultural Spanish responses to modern Moroccan immigration in Spain, Daniela Flesler discusses today's public opinion about romantic relationships between Muslim men in general and Moroccan men in particular and Spanish women. She notes that contemporary Spanish literary works as well as feature movies that have dealt frankly with this issue, and have generally criticised racist attitudes towards such relationships, have nevertheless tended in the end to judge these intercultural and interreligious romantic bonds as almost always doomed to failure.<sup>102</sup> In this regard, and if one can cautiously speak of continuities in attitudes, it probably should be noted that Spanish society, civilian and military alike, whether Francoist or democratic, sympathetic or not to the 'Moor', whether in the 1930s, 1940s or in the twenty-first century, has displayed a relative consistency in its attitude towards romance between the Muslim Moroccan male and the Spanish woman.

Given that the sexual relation between a Moroccan soldier and a Spanish woman was to be avoided whether it was the fruit of a romantic relationship or a business transaction, and that the greatest possible distance between the Moroccan man and the Spanish woman was sought, one wonders then (to come full circle) how it is possible for Spanish commanders to allow their Moroccan troops, even for a brief period at the beginning of the war, to engage in acts of raping Spanish women (a more damaging act to the Spanish prestige than a consensual sexual relationship) when the Spanish military command did not want the Moroccans to romance, marry or solicit one? The answer, as suggested by some historians and already mentioned above, might be found in the degree that Republicans in general, and Spanish women in this case, were stripped from their Spanish-ness, as they belonged to a political side that was against the 'true' Spain. Therefore, while romantic relationships and marriages were considered meetings between the Moroccan and the Spanish that ought to be controlled, condoned sexual assaults (not necessarily condoned on a large scale) were encounters between a Moroccan and a non-Spanish alien element that could be allowed to take place (as a punishment for the enemy) without much interference from the powers that be.

There is an anecdote that illustrates how deeply entrenched the willingness was to keep the Moroccan and the Spanish separated sexually, except that this one involves a Spanish man and a Moroccan woman. One of General Mohammed ben Mizzian's daughters married a Spanish officer without the consent of her father. After their marriage the couple travelled to Morocco, invited by Mizzian, who had become chief of independent Morocco's army, on the pretext of reconciliation. At the airport, the police detained the daughter and deported her husband.<sup>103</sup> Despite later attempts by the

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<sup>102</sup> See footnote 3.

<sup>103</sup> Carlos Fernandez, *Tensiones militares durante el Franquismo* (Barcelona 1985) 157-159, cited in Nerín, *La guerra que vino de África*, 177. According to this source the daughter converted to Catholicism to marry her Spanish fiancé. See also 'Fotocopia de una carta de d. Guilleromo de Olózaga, yerno del General Mizzian, al Ministro de Asuntos Exteriores', *Fundación Francisco Franco*, 22380. In the letter, dated 14 November 1959, the husband of Mizzian's daughter, explains that he requested that Spanish embassy in Rabat to grant his wife

Spanish husband to reunite with his wife and complaints to Franco, the new state of affairs prevailed. Attempts at freezing the pension of Mizzian from the Spanish army were rejected by Franco himself who probably understood Mizzian's decision and, given the policy of his regime, approved of it. The principle of rejecting Spanish-Moroccan mixed marriages (though this time it was between a Spanish man and a Moroccan woman) scored yet another victory.

The interracial and interreligious relations between Moroccan soldiers and Spanish women are a good example of the ambivalence with which the Spanish Nationalists looked upon their Protectorate in Morocco and its inhabitants. As much as the Nationalists deemed the Moroccan soldiers an essential part of the Spanish Nationalist Army and their 'crusade', their policy was to ensure that these 'Moors' retained their Muslim identity and space and were kept, as much as possible, separate from the Spanish population, particularly its female inhabitants, but more importantly not to allow disruption of the Spanish imperial hierarchy and prestige by letting the Moroccans step outside their defined boundaries as people under Spanish protection. Interracial marriages were deemed destructive to these aims. However, the importance of the Moroccan soldiers for the war effort necessitated that this aim – separating Spanish women from Moroccan soldiers - was to be achieved with 'tact', and the reality of their omnipresence in Spain made a totally successful effort to achieve this impossible.

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political asylum, but that the department of Moroccan Affairs at the Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs responded by requesting the husband to inform his wife not to take refuge at the embassy in Rabat because of the grave consequences that such act might entail.

## Chapter 5

### Moros y Cristianos.

#### Religious aspects of the participation of Moroccan soldiers in the war <sup>1</sup>

*'...with the spirit of God's vengeance at the point of their bayonets, they pursue, destroy and kill without giving time to the fugitives to protect and save themselves. Covered now with blood, the column advances...'*

- Alberto Risco- <sup>2</sup>

The Spanish Civil War was not at first supposed to be a holy war in the religious sense. Nor were the majority of the Spanish Nationalist officers who rebelled against the Spanish Republic in July 1936 particularly religious, despite their political conservatism. In fact, it was in the Spanish Protectorate of Morocco where the military coup first received its holy war denomination, and it was the Moroccan Khalifa, the nominal representative of the Moroccan Sultan and the highest Moroccan authority in the Spanish zone, who first did so.<sup>3</sup> This chapter will discuss the religious aspects of the Moroccan participation in the Spanish Civil War.<sup>4</sup> The idea of a religious alliance between the Moroccan Muslims and the Spanish Christians against a supposedly atheist enemy will be examined from the point of view of the Spanish Nationalist propaganda, but also from the point of view of the Moroccan soldiers. The chapter will also demonstrate that the Spanish Nationalists portrayed the Moroccans in their Moroccan Protectorate as devout Muslims. This portrayal influenced the propaganda the Nationalist used to win the loyalty of the people in Spanish Morocco. With regard to the Moroccan soldiers, many aspects of their daily life had to defer to the notion of the religious Moroccan and the Spanish Nationalist military endeavoured to create a separate Muslim religious sphere for the Moroccan soldiers. The chapter will show that the Nationalist authorities did not only want to respect the Islamic religion of their troops but also expected the Moroccan soldiers to adhere to the idealised

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<sup>1</sup> The phrase 'Moros y Cristianos' translates as Moors and Christians. It refers to the battles between the medieval Moors and Christians in Spain during the age of the Reconquest, and to the festivals in Spain that have been commemorating and re-enacting these battles for centuries.

<sup>2</sup> Describing the entrance of African units in Toledo. Alberto Risco, *La epopeya del Alcazar de Toledo* (Burgos 1937) 216.

<sup>3</sup> Stanley G. Payne, *The Franco Regime 1936-1975* (Madison 1987) 197n1. Initially, as Payne states, religious concerns did not play an overt role in the rebellion of July 1936, but it was its counterrevolutionary character that made Catholics natural allies from the start. Ibidem. This was not the first instance in which authorities in Morocco appealed against 'atheism' in a war in Spain. Though in no way relevant, it is still interesting to know that French atrocities against religion during the Napoleonic invasion of Spain brought condemnation from the Sultan of Morocco who pleaded with the Spanish to do everything to destroy the 'atheist' French hordes. John Lawrence Tone, *The Fatal Knot. The Guerrilla War in Navarre and the Defeat of Napoleon in Spain* (Chapel Hill 1994) 217n7.

<sup>4</sup> A large part of this chapter has appeared under the title 'Moros y Cristianos. Religious Aspects of the Participation of Moroccan soldiers in the Spanish Civil War', in: Bekin Agai, Umar Ryad and Mehdi Sajid, eds., *Muslims in Interwar Europe. A Transcultural Historical Perspective* (Leiden 2015) 151-177.

image of devout Muslims even when some of these soldiers did not desire to comply with that idealised image.

Soon, after the outbreak of the Civil War, strange scenes started to emerge during the war: the archbishop of Toledo, Isidro Gomá y Tomás, returning to his archiepiscopal see escorted by Moroccan Muslim troops or a priest accompanying Moroccans into battle. Cheering crowds pinned scapularies on the chests of the Moroccans. Andalusian girls handed out images of the Sacred Heart of Christ or *détentes* (stops) to the Moroccans and Legionaries who arrived in Cádiz or Jerez. José María Pemán, a Spanish conservative writer told Franco in Seville how these *détentes* ‘carry embroidered around the heart a short prayer saying “Stop, bullet, for the Heart of Jesus is with me!” They have been a great success with the Moors, who call them “bullet stoppers”’. There were many similar scenes.<sup>5</sup> In Ceuta, the Nationalists authorised the building of a new mosque in which stones from the battlefields of the Alcazar of Toledo, Oviedo and Teruel were integrated as an ‘official recognition’ of the existence of Islam in Spain and as a ‘proof’ of the significance these ‘martyr cities’ had for the Muslims.<sup>6</sup>

In fact, the Spanish Republicans inadvertently helped the Nationalists’ propaganda in portraying this war to the Moroccans as a struggle in which the Republic targeted Islam and Moroccans in particular. Early in the war, Republican planes struck the native medina of Tetuan, hitting a mosque in the process, and later dropped bombs near a ship that was to take pilgrims on their trip to Mecca, while the Republican navy shelled a number of coastal towns in Spanish Morocco.<sup>7</sup> In August 1936, the Spanish paper *Diario Marroquí* highlighted an air raid that supposedly targeted the Mezquita of Córdoba, ‘the historical monument of Arab civilisation’.<sup>8</sup>

The Nationalists portrayed the struggle against the Republic to the Muslims of Spanish Morocco as a conflict in which religion played a prominent role because the Nationalists saw the Moroccans as primarily driven by religion and religious biases. The Moroccans were first and foremost Muslims. That they were perceived as extremely religious was obvious to both those who held either a negative hostile view or a benign and paternalistic one of Islam and Moroccans. A comment by an officer in the Spanish Foreign Legion reminds us of the inseparable link that the

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<sup>5</sup> Hugh Thomas, *The Spanish Civil War*, 400; Claud Cockburn, *Cockburn in Spain. Despatches from the Spanish Civil War* (London 1986) 161; Frasier, *Blood of Spain. An Oral History of the Spanish Civil War*, 155; Hilari Ragner, *Gunpowder and Incense. The Catholic Church and the Spanish Civil War* (London 2001) 48.

<sup>6</sup> Tomas García Figueras, *Marruecos. La acción de España en el Norte de África* (Madrid 1944) 292.

<sup>7</sup> Balfour, *Deadly Embrace. Morocco and the Road to the Spanish Civil War*, 273, 281; Shannon E. Fleming, ‘Spanish Morocco and the Alzamiento Nacional, 1936-1939’, 36, 37. The target of the bombing in Tetuan was perhaps the building of the High Commissariat which lies not far from the *medina* (the native old quarter). The Republican air and naval bombardments caused relatively (by later standards of the same war) few casualties in Spanish Morocco and the Spanish African territories. Naval bombing on Ceuta in July 1936 and April 1937 caused 9 military and 2 civilian fatalities. Larache suffered one military fatality after two naval bombardments in August 1936 (as well as the partial destruction of both the Muslim and Catholic cemeteries) and no fatalities due to aerial raids in July. Arzila (today Asilah) suffered three civilian deaths (including one child) during one naval attack in August 1936. The air raid on Tetuan on 18 July caused the largest number of fatalities: one military and fourteen civilian (4 men, 7 women and 3 children). Archivo General Militar de Ávila (AGMAV), Caja 2239, Cp. 6

<sup>8</sup> ‘Los Aviones Rojos Bombardean la Mezquita de Córdoba’, *Diario Marroquí*, 19 August 1936. The famous mosque that was turned into a cathedral after the Reconquista, however, was not hit.

Spanish perceived between being Muslim and Moroccan. Seeing for the first time the *Tiradores de Ifni* soldiers, who were darker in skin than the Moroccan soldiers he had met so far, he called those of Ifni ‘more religious and rough, in one word: more Moorish’.<sup>9</sup> One Spanish soldier who fought for the Nationalists remarked retrospectively on the ‘Moors’ he met in Melilla in 1936 that they were ‘in this aspect [being religious] superior to us who never remembered to visit a church’.<sup>10</sup> The religiosity of the Moroccan soldiers was admired by a Spanish army chaplain who remarked how ‘in Spanish land some renegades who abused the faith and the churches and assassinated the priests. On the contrary, some simple Muslims idolised God and entrusted themselves to him. It was not difficult to guess that these men, who wore *chillabas* and rural garments were simple folk and of grand religiosity’.<sup>11</sup> The Nationalists also forbade foreign journalists - and we must presume Spanish ones too - to describe the Moroccans in any way except as devoted God-fearing soldiers.<sup>12</sup>

García Figueras, one of the most prominent administrators of the Spanish Protectorate in Morocco, considered the greatest achievements of the Nationalist administration in Morocco those that took into account the spiritual and religious nature of the Moroccan populace. This understanding obviously applied not only to Moroccans but to Muslims in general. In 1939 Franco sent a letter to the Association of Muslim Youth in Cairo, answering a memorandum that the Islamic Conference in Cairo sent to him. In his letter, Franco commended the ‘Muslim people’ for succeeding in preserving their ‘spiritual treasures’ in a materialistic age, and pointed to the blood bonds that were formed with the Moroccan people in defence of the ‘faith and spiritualism’.<sup>13</sup> Regardless of propaganda, Franco seemed genuinely to believe that the idea of a deeply religious Muslim was not a palatable one. In a less public remark he declared that ‘the Arab without a turban is a future Marxist’.<sup>14</sup>

This Spanish policy regarding Islam was much older than the Spanish Civil War. From the 1920’s onwards, the policy guidelines for colonial officers from the Delegation of Native Affairs insisted on the need of a respect for Islam, provided that this respect did not contradict the principal objective of political domination. Among the arguments used to justify this ‘respect’, Spanish Africanism appealed to Spain’s Islamic past. As stated in the manuals written for colonial officers, the official strategy was that of a formal respect of Islam, combined with the aim of controlling the chiefs of the brotherhoods in order to avoid potential dangers.<sup>15</sup> Once local resistance was defeated in 1927, the Delegation of Native Affairs promoted the reconstruction of religious buildings and support of

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<sup>9</sup> Francisco Cavero y Cavero, *Con la Segunda Bandera en el frente de Aragón. Memorias de un alférez provisional*, 36

<sup>10</sup> Jose Llordes Badía, *Al Dejar el fusil. Memorias de un soldado raso en la Guerra de España*, 60.

<sup>11</sup> Juan Urrea Lusarreta, *En las Trincheras del Frente de Madrid*, 108-109.

<sup>12</sup> Judith Keen, *Fighting for Franco. International Volunteers in Nationalist Spain During the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939* (London 2001) 69.

<sup>13</sup> The text was published in the Moroccan *Al Hurriya*, 16 February 1939.

<sup>14</sup> Abel Albet-Mas, ‘Three Gods, Two Shores, One Space: Religious Justifications for Tolerance and Confrontation Between Spain and Colonial Morocco During the Franco Era’, *Geopolitics* 11 (2006) 593.

<sup>15</sup> Josep Lluís Mateo Dieste, ‘The Franco Pilgrims: The View of *Al-Hajj* by a Spanish Colonial Officer (1949)’. Paper presented at the *Europe and Hajj in the Age of Empires. Muslim Pilgrimage Prior to the Influx of Muslim Migration in the West* conference at the Museum Volkenkunde in Leiden, 14 May 2013.

certain rituals which reinforced the submission of the local political and religious authorities or which legitimised the power of the new colonial government.<sup>16</sup> In accordance with this propaganda policy, the Spanish administration restored religious buildings, promoted rituals and maintained the formal independence of the *habus* (religious endowment) properties. The Spanish policy of toleration towards Islam went so far as to annoy the Spanish bishop in Tangier who in 1921 criticised the participation of Spanish soldiers in Muslim festivities ‘as if they were Muslims, or as if it did not matter that they acted like Muslims, when they were Christians’. He also criticised constructing shrines for Muslim holy men and ‘not one shrine for the Christians’.<sup>17</sup>

Some of the Nationalist veterans of the Protectorate perceived that the religiousness of the Moroccans was neither blind nor absolute. Ruiz Albéniz, also known as El Tebib Arrumi or The Christian Doctor, an important journalist and radio speaker for the Nationalists during the Civil War, observed in the early years of the Protectorate that the Moroccan religiousness was practical in nature and that religious observance was ultimately subordinated to profit.<sup>18</sup> Once secure in his faith the Rifi, guided by his innate desire for profit would associate himself with the actions of the Protectorate.<sup>19</sup> But that security in faith for the Moroccan must first be guaranteed by the Spanish.. The Spanish considered it essential to attach the greatest importance to the religious factor when communicating with the Moroccans of their protectorate or when buying their support. One remarkable example on the Republican side proves the point. Early in the war the communist paper, *Mundo Obrero*, published what seemed to be a note by a young Moroccan prisoner of war denouncing Franco. The paper published a Spanish translation of the letter as well as a picture of the original. While the Spanish version denounced Franco as a ‘traitor’, it is visible in the Arabic text that the word ‘infidel’ is added to ‘traitor’, but which the paper omitted from the translation.<sup>20</sup> Perhaps the Republican paper’s lack of accuracy in translation stemmed from the unwillingness to portray the conflict in religious terms. Its Republican readers would not in any case identify with an orthodox Islamic perspective. But this example shows that even when the Moroccan soldier wanted, or in this case (it is not easy to ascertain) probably felt forced to attack the Francoists he could only do so in terms of who was a believer and who was an infidel. It comes then as no surprise that early in the war Franco paid a lot of attention to sponsoring the pilgrimage of Moroccans to Mecca.

### **El Hajj Franco**

In early 1937 Franco scored one of his most impressive propaganda achievements in relation to the Muslims of the Spanish Protectorate and his army: the Franco-sponsored pilgrimage to Mecca. In December 1936 the High Commissariat had requested Franco to assign a ship for the Spanish

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<sup>16</sup> Mateo Dieste, ‘The Franco Pilgrims’.

<sup>17</sup> Josep Lluís Mateo Dieste, ‘Una hermandad en tensión. Ideología colonial, barreras e intersecciones hispano-marroquíes en el Protectorado’, *AWRAQ* nrs. 5-6 (2012) 79-96, here 91-92.

<sup>18</sup> Filipe Ribeiro de Meneses, ‘Popularizing Africanism: The Career of Víctor Ruiz Albéniz, *El Tebib Arrumi*’, *Journal of Iberian and Latin American Studies* 11( 2005) 39-63, here 40.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibidem*, 42.

<sup>20</sup> María Rosa Madariaga, *Los moros que trajo Franco*, 323-324.

Moroccan pilgrims to Mecca, and Franco agreed on the same day and ordered the navy to take the necessary preparations.<sup>21</sup> At the time the High Commissioner in Morocco was General Orgaz, but it seems that the one behind the idea was the Arabist Colonel Juan Luis Beigbeder, secretary general of the Commissariat at the time and later High Commissioner himself.<sup>22</sup> The Nationalist navy prepared a ship that was to depart from Ceuta at the end of January 1937, and which was arranged so as to become a 'floating mosque'. Nationalist aviation and navy protected the pilgrimage part of the way until the Italians took over.<sup>23</sup> Nationalist Spain appointed a consular agent for Jeddah and Mecca. The choice for this position fell on a Muslim officer of the *Regulares* (though of Spanish nationality).<sup>24</sup> Franco also prepared an audience for the pilgrims in Seville upon their return in March. This gesture was not an easy matter, considering that much of the Spanish Navy had fallen into Republican hands at the start of the Civil War, and Franco could barely dispense with any ships. In the words of Rosalinda Fox, it was 'like asking Whitehall [British War Ministry] in the middle of a war to release half of the Royal Navy'.<sup>25</sup>

The first pilgrimage that left from Ceuta in 1937, carried with it 298 pilgrims who were joined by others in Melilla and Libya which was then under Italian occupation. The next year the expedition took 451 pilgrims from Ceuta and Melilla plus 337 from Libya, and the 1939 took a total of 800 pilgrims to Mecca.<sup>26</sup> The Francoist pilgrimage not only helped spread and reinforce Franco's message that he was a friend of Islam. The Franco-sponsored pilgrimage shined in comparison with the transport the French provided for their Algerian pilgrims, strengthening the credentials of Franco even more.<sup>27</sup> But the Spanish sponsorship and control of the pilgrimage was also meant to shield the Spanish Moroccans from any undesirable outside political influence, particularly French propaganda, as until the first Francoist pilgrimage, French shipping companies monopolised the transport of pilgrims to Mecca.<sup>28</sup> As a result of Franco's sponsored pilgrimage to Mecca, the Khalifa in Tetuan described Franco as the 'protector of Islam'.<sup>29</sup> In addition to the political benefits in Spanish Morocco

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<sup>21</sup> Archivo General Militar de Ávila (AGMAV), A.1, L.59, Cp. 87. Cables: Generalissimo to Orgaz on 12 December, 1936, and Generalissimo to naval general staff on 12 December 1936.

<sup>22</sup> This is the case according to his British mistress Rosalinda Powell Fox in her memoirs: *The Grass and the Asphalt*, 130.

<sup>23</sup> See the account by Abdel Krim Kerrisch, a Dutch protégé who accompanied the Spanish-Moroccan pilgrims to Arabia in the Dutch national archives: Nationaal Archief, Gezantschap Marokko, access nr. 2.05.119, inventory nr. 36. Missive nr.: 821/103. According to this witness, the Spanish warships escorted the pilgrims until Tripoli. According to a Spanish document, the plan was to provide protection, which would be 'indispensable until' the Oran meridian, from which point the Italians could take over. AGAMV, A.1, L.59, Cp. 87. Note by Generalissimo HQ on 25 January, 1937.

<sup>24</sup> AGAMV, A.1, L.59, Cp. 87. Note by Generalissimo HQ on 25 January, 1937.

<sup>25</sup> Powell Fox, *The Grass and the Asphalt*, 130.

<sup>26</sup> Josep Lluís Mateo Dieste, 'The Franco Pilgrims'. During the Second World War, and specifically between 1940 and 1943 the pilgrimage was not organised. After it was postponed, following preparations to carry out the regular expedition, the Delegation of Native Affairs spread information – misinformation according to Mateo Dieste – that attributed the suspension of travel to France and the United Kingdom. Ibidem.

<sup>27</sup> See the account by Abdel Krim Kerrisch in the Dutch national archives.

<sup>28</sup> Mateo Dieste, 'The Franco pilgrims'.

<sup>29</sup> AGAMV, A.1, L.59, Cp. 87. Cable by the office of the High Commissariat.

itself, the pilgrimages must have left an impression on the soldiers fighting in Spain too.<sup>30</sup> Some soldiers were selected to be awarded grants (tickets and travel expenses) for the trip to Mecca. The pilgrimage was presented as a reward for the Moroccans for helping Spain, and therefore lists of ‘loyal Moroccans without resources or with merits of war’ were presented by each *intervención* or Group of *Regulares*. Also selected were religious figures and tribal figures who were invited for being a ‘*moro amigo*’ (friendly Moor) and as a reward for efforts to recruit Moroccan soldiers for the war effort.<sup>31</sup> It is probably due to this pilgrimage and others that followed during the course of the war that Franco became known as El Hajj Franco (the pilgrim Franco), a title the northern Moroccans and his ex-soldiers used to refer to him, some doing so even to this day,<sup>32</sup> because ‘he had the character of Muslims’.<sup>33</sup>

### A religious alliance?

In the struggle to save Catholic, spiritualist, and traditionalist Spain, the Moor who was the old enemy of these three had become the ally of the regenerated traditional country. In an interview that appeared in a French publication, Franco declared that ‘we, all of us who fight, Christians or Muslims, are soldiers of God and we do not fight against other men, but against atheism and materialism’.<sup>34</sup> This alliance with the Muslim Moroccans was certainly not a self-evident development but proved to be an uncomfortable one that required justification for at least a part of the masses to which the Nationalists appealed. One Nationalist Catholic writer commented, perhaps uneasily: ‘It does not matter that next to Christians, the turbans of Mohamed are seen. The sword is of rich Toledan steel, even if the hilt had an Arab enamel, and the Moors and Christians were united in some of the endeavors of the medieval Christian kingdoms’.<sup>35</sup> One Nationalist newspaper, *ABC Sevilla*, while commending the Moors of whom ‘no one put a step backwards’ went further by calling Morocco the ‘Covadonga of the current reconquista’ in a reference to the place that symbolised the birth of the first successful Christian resistance to the medieval Muslims and the start of the Reconquista.<sup>36</sup> In one anecdote, the Spanish priest and Arabist Miguel Asín Palacios related how in one hospital a print of the Virgin was going to be removed so as not to hurt the feelings of the Moroccan wounded, when one of these protested

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<sup>30</sup> The soldiers in Spain who would not be able to go to Mecca could, for a different, though less unique spiritual ritual, continue in Spain the *ziyaras* (saint veneration rituals). As one Moroccan deserter told his French interrogators in French Morocco, Moroccan *Mokaddemin* (masters) of the *zawiyas* (Sufi lodges) would often come to Spain to perform these rituals. See the interrogation of Mansour ben Ghazi. SHD, 3 H 266.

<sup>31</sup> Mateo Dieste, ‘The Franco pilgrims’.

<sup>32</sup> Mohamed Choukri mentions in his internationally acclaimed autobiographical novel *Al khubz al hafi* (known in English as: For Bread Alone), the disabled of the Civil War in Tetuan, some of whom ‘were proud of it for it allowed them to have adventure and to have memories of the battles they fought whether victorious or defeated. The Caudillo was called El Hajj Franco among them’. Mohammed Choukri, *Al khubz al hafi* (Casablanca 2010) 28. I even heard this ‘Hajj Franco’ reference once in Tetuan in early 2011.

<sup>33</sup> Interview with Abdessalam Mohammed Al Amrani, Ceuta, 30 June 2011.

<sup>34</sup> Nerín, *La guerra que vino de África*, 177-178.

<sup>35</sup> From an article: ‘El Cerro de los Angeles y el General Varela’, *La Correspondencia de San Fernando*, 9 November 1936. The copy of the article, cited here, is in AHMC, Varela, 15/22.

<sup>36</sup> ‘Marruecos: Covadonga de la actual reconquista’, *ABC Sevilla*, 17 July 1938, 24. Ironically the ‘Moors’ contributed to the occupation, in October 1937 of that place.



against the removal by stating that ‘the Virgin is good for everyone’.<sup>37</sup> The priest used this to demonstrate how much these Moroccans had in common with the supposedly true Spaniards.<sup>38</sup> García Figueras saw no problems in coexistence between Islam and Christianity as the political issues of the Reconquista no longer were applicable and both religions were engaged in a fight against the godless nations and creating bonds between people who believe in the one and only God.<sup>39</sup>

The propagation of religion as the bond that united the Spaniards and Moroccans comes also as part of the wider Nationalist camp. Catholicism, like nationalism, was a powerful instrument for the unification of the disconnected rebellious factions that lacked a common goal other than overthrowing the Popular Front government. The Francoists mixed national struggle with religious struggle because Catholicism was a privileged and central element in traditional Spain, and it seems that Francoist recruits were exposed to the religious awakening of Nationalist Spain.<sup>40</sup>

In 1940 Miguel Asín Palacios published a paper called ‘Why did the Muslim Moroccans fight on our side?’ In one of the most eloquent Nationalist rationalisations of the Moroccan participation he answers: ‘Below the rugged crust of these simple and brave Moroccan soldiers, beats a heart that is identical to the Spanish, which renders reverence to some other-worldly ideals, not very dissimilar to ours, and which feels the religious emotions which we feel, because it follows many of the Christian dogmas which we follow and which atheist Marxism repudiates and persecutes’.<sup>41</sup> To illustrate that this was not an opinion based on wishful thinking, he refers to a supposed Moroccan soldier who, using a hand-grenade, intimidated a ‘Marxist’ soldier by crying in Spanish ‘*Tú no estar de Mahoma! Tú no estar de derechas!*’ (You are not of [the followers of] Mohammed! You are not one of the Right!).<sup>42</sup>

One wonders whether the position that Palacios took was representative of the Spanish Catholic clergy, even in a mere propagandistic sense. Let us consider two views, those of a priest and a bishop, both captured by the Republicans. Their situation as prisoners of war might not make their statements ideally reliable, but it is interesting since it gave the Republicans the chance to ask, face to face, the representatives of the Church about why it stood in the same camp as the Moors. In January 1938, the priest García Blasco was captured by the Republicans during the battle of Teruel. During his interrogation he was asked whether he ever thought of protesting against the use of Moroccan troops by the Nationalist command. The priest answered: ‘Not in public. But of course during private

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<sup>37</sup> Miguel Asín Palacios, ‘Porqué lucharon a nuestro lado los musulmanes marroquíes’, 136.

<sup>38</sup> Seidman argues that the Francoist regime was partly successful in creating a kind of monotheistic unity (that purposely excluded the Jews) against the ‘atheist’ enemy. In Zaragoza not only Spanish and Italian soldiers but also German Protestant and Islamic Moroccan troops visited and venerated the Virgin of Pilar. Seidman, *The Victorious Counterrevolution*, 39-40.

<sup>39</sup> Figueras, *Marruecos: La acción de España en el Norte de África*, 340.

<sup>40</sup> Matthews, *Soldados a a la fuerza. Reclutamiento obligatorio durante la Guerra Civil (1936-1939)* 139-140, 144.

<sup>41</sup> Asín Palacios, ‘Porque lucharon a nuestro lado los soldados marroquíes’, 148-149.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibidem*, 145. By ‘Right’ he meant of course the Nationalist camp that was usually referred to ‘people of the Right’ as opposed to the Republican Left.

conversations I commented upon it, that the old history would feel disturbed when the greatness which we acquired by fighting Islam would look like a lie now that we are fighting alongside those who used to be our enemies'.<sup>43</sup> Speaking as a prisoner the priest might naturally have given his interrogator the answer he desired, although his other answers with regard to morale in the Nationalist rearguard - which he described as high - was not what a Republican would necessarily wish to hear.

But ingratiating oneself to an enemy interrogator does not seem to be the case with the bishop Polanco who also fell prisoner in Teruel. When questioned in January 1938 about the presence of the Moroccan troops in Spain, he answered that he saw nothing wrong in Franco using them, for Franco saw them as 'soldiers in the service of Spain'. When the interrogator pressed that it was strange that the Church, after long years of fighting the Muslims, was now coexisting with them, and asked whether that could be considered an acceptable Christian approach, the bishop answered in the affirmative. In his opinion history witnessed many occasions of alliances between people from different religions to fight an enemy, alliances that were based on a 'perspective that had nothing to do with religion'.<sup>44</sup> Perhaps, with his grand depiction of Muslim-Christian brotherhood, Asín Palacios was a minority voice among the Spanish clergy after all, even in the pure propagandistic sense. Probably his sympathies with the Moors derived more from his background as an Arabist rather than as a priest.

Not all the Spanish combatants on the Nationalist side seem to be impressed by the religious brotherhood propaganda either. One officer of the *Regulares*, an *alferez provisional*, writes in his diary entry for 17 and 18 September 1937 that this unit arrived in Sigüenza and was taken to the cathedral, which was in a deteriorated state and where the soldiers spent their night, while their commander slept in an adjoining house. The next day the lieutenant met a number of indignant comrades. Asking them what happened they answered him 'the Moors did one of their deeds this night. It seems that they found the chapel open and they took the mats, the carpets and the garments the priests use to officiate'. But the lieutenant did not blame his soldiers. For he writes that when his unit arrived at night everyone thought that the town was abandoned and 'my Moors' thought that this was the front, even to the extent that 'when witnessing the ruins and the ominous silence that surrounded us they loaded their guns'. And they thought furthermore, the lieutenant continues, that the cathedral was abandoned. But then, in his defence of his 'Moors' he counters 'In addition, why did they order to billet the *Tabor* there, knowing that the Moors do not understand our religion? Because of all of this, my opinion is that it is the fault of those who brought us there'.<sup>45</sup> After all the propaganda efforts of the Nationalists to cast the Moroccans as religious allies, this officer (and certainly many like him) who is supportive of his Moroccan soldiers to the point of defending stealing from the cathedral, is not affected by that

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<sup>43</sup> Interrogation of the priest García Blasco, dated 13 January, 1938. Archivo General de la Guerra Civil (AGGC), 58/8.1

<sup>44</sup> Interrogation of the bishop Polanco, dated 28 January 1938. AGGC, 58/8.1. During the collapse of the Republican army in Catalonia in early 1939 both the priest and the bishop were shot.

<sup>45</sup> Pablo Montagudo Jaén, 1936, *Regulares. Diario en el campo de batalla*, 173-174.

propaganda and does not consider the Moroccan soldiers as people who understood the religion they were supposed to defend.

In any case, the Moor, the fanatic foe of the recent Rif wars, was rehabilitated in Nationalist Spain by the Nationalist state, its leading military figures and its propaganda machinery, which included press, cinema and poetry.<sup>46</sup> This rehabilitation was perhaps not difficult to accomplish. In the end it required simply an adjustment to the presentation of basically the same image of the Moor. As the irrational Moor became simple, childlike and innocent, so the fanatic became pious, in fact spiritualist.

The view of the Moroccan soldiers as religiously devout and controlled by his religious prejudices, which was in turn derived from the same view the Spanish had of the Moroccan society that they ruled, motivated the explanations the Nationalists gave to the outside world with regard to the motivations of the Moroccan soldiers for fighting in Spain as well as the policies the Nationalists conducted with regard to the interaction of the Moroccan soldiers with their Spanish environment, especially when involving direct religious aspects. The actions of the 'Moorish' troops, their lifestyle, the incentives etc, were supposed to be shaped by or directed towards their Muslim-ness. On this point, facts were sometimes mixed with wishful thinking, and it is here that we explore the border between the two, starting with the supposed religious motivations of the Moroccans for fighting against the Republic.

### **Jihad**

While the Spanish Nationalists adequately promoted the idea of a religious alliance to defend the faith against godless Communism, the Moroccan side did not fail to support this rhetoric. The native urban political elite helped the religious interpretation for the enlistment of the Moroccans to fight in Spain as well. In 1937 *Al Hurriya*, the daily of the Spanish Morocco-based Nationalist Reforming Party, explained in an article called 'The Nationalist Movement and Communism' its position towards Communism. 'The Moroccan nationalism is totally contradictory in its principles and directions to the corrupting Communism. Even more, it [Moroccan nationalism] considers anyone who belongs to Communism to be alien from Islam and the Moroccan nationality.'<sup>47</sup> Then on the day following the official end of the Civil War in April 1939, the paper expounded on the circumstances and motives of the Moroccan soldiers who went to Spain. The newspaper rejected any notion that economic motives were primarily behind the enlistment of the locals. Instead it listed other reasons, among which was the fear for their 'religious sentiments'. 'For Communism has run rampant and dominated these lands [Spain], for the Muslims are, by the nature of their situation, staunch enemies of the idea of equality in wealth'.<sup>48</sup> Either this merely and blindly followed the Spanish Nationalist line or the paper could not

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<sup>46</sup> On the aspects of this rehabilitation see: Madariaga, *Los moros que trajo Franco*, 345-364.

<sup>47</sup> 'Al Haraka Al Wataniyya wal Shiu'iyya', *Al Hurriya*, 4 November 1937

<sup>48</sup> *Al Hurriya*, 2 April, 1939. It also claimed that the Islamic world 'supported us in our position, despite some mad campaigns directed against us from some Muslim countries. Those campaigns were the result of hire and bribery by France or Communism itself'.

accept the stigmatisation that came with the notion of the mercenary, or both.<sup>49</sup> In fact, and at the start of the Civil War in July 1936, the future leader of the not yet established Nationalist Reforming Party, Abdeljalek Torres clashed with High Commissioner Orgaz against the recruitment for the *Mehal-la* units and their imminent participation in the war on religious grounds. Torres pointed out to Orgaz that the *Regulares* were units which were part of the Spanish Army. The *Mehal-las*, however, were Moroccan Muslim units which served under the Moroccan flag, and hence were religiously prohibited from participating in war among Christians serving a cause and under a flag which was not Moroccan or Islamic, a participation which would make the Moroccan government a warring party and violate the neutrality which Torres and his comrades sought.<sup>50</sup> Given the circumstances, the ruthlessness with which the Nationalists in general dealt with their opponents and the importance that the Spanish Protectorate and its Moorish troops had for Franco, Torres was lucky to escape with merely being angrily dismissed by Orgaz, who countered that he had the support of the Khalifa, the Grand Vizier, the ministers, the tribal chiefs, the chiefs of the religious brotherhoods and the Cheriffians (descendants of the Prophet).<sup>51</sup> Torres later made a complete turnabout and threw his weight behind the Nationalists, with his *Al Hurriya* paper providing the already mentioned religious justification for the Moroccans' support for the war. In his new position he had the support of prince Shakib Arslan, a leading Pan-Islamic exile from Lebanon, who was based in Geneva and who functioned since the early 1930s as a mentor for the Moroccan nationalists of both the French and Spanish protectorates.<sup>52</sup> In November 1936 Arslan wrote to Torres:

I am satisfied about your policy towards Spain (..) a different attitude would have hurt you much...it is more likely that the government of Madrid will not be victorious (..) the Muslims would not like a victory for Madrid (..) nobody ignores that this communist government is in favour of disorder...if the Republic wins, its disastrous ideas will run the risk of spreading in

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<sup>49</sup> I am inclined to believe the second interpretation because *Al Hurriya*, both during and after the war was not devoid of articles criticising aspects of the Spanish Nationalist administration, nor of warning towards Spain should it fail in the fulfilment of its promises towards the Moroccans after the war. The newspaper and rival of the other Moroccan nationalist party, Moroccan Unity also claimed that the Moroccans did not fight for money for 'feelings cannot be bought or sold, but because of the honest belief that the victory of Spain will immediately bring victory for the cause of the Moroccan people'. But it did not explicitly put Islam as a factor in siding with the Nationalists. See: 'La guerra ha terminado. Marruecos confía en la palabra del Caudillo de España', *Unidad Marroquí*, 30 March, 1939.

<sup>50</sup> Ibn Azzuz Hakim, *La actitud de los moros ante el Alzamiento*, 157.

<sup>51</sup> As explained by other witnesses in the publication of Ibn Azzuz Hakim, *La actitud*, the Islamic identity of many was the reason they escaped fates similar to Spanish counterparts. For instance, several Moroccan notables, like Torres himself, were members of the Masonic order, but not a single Moroccan was shot or even jailed for that reason.

<sup>52</sup> On his relation with the Moroccan nationalist movement see: Umar Ryad, 'New Episodes in Moroccan Nationalism in the inter-war period: The Influence of Shakib Arslan in the Light of Unpublished Materials', *Journal of North African Studies* 16 (2011) 117-142; and David Stenner, 'Networking for Independence: The Moroccan Nationalist Movement's Global Campaign against French Colonialism', *Journal of North African Studies* 17 (2012) 573-594.

the northern zone. The only thing that we could have expected from it is the independence which it [the Republic] never considered.<sup>53</sup>

The pro-Franco political forces, be they Spanish or Moroccan, might have used the religious element in their propaganda to justify the participation of Moroccans in the war, but it was apparently an impression that even some on the Republican side believed.<sup>54</sup> The same narrative was adopted by some foreign pro-Nationalists observers of the war. A prominent one among them is the American Russell Palmer who spent the period between 1936 and 1938 filming the war in Spain and then presented his documentary that was called *Defenders of the Faith*,<sup>55</sup> in which he adopts the Nationalist narrative of the war as an effort to save Spain from the chaos and destruction for which the Republicans were responsible. Among the faith defenders he shows are the Moroccan soldiers. Palmer, who was also the film narrator, describes the ‘Moors’ as ‘famous for their hatred of communism’ and that they consider the reds ‘infidels’ because they burnt churches.

The Nationalists went to great lengths to portray the enlistment of their Moroccan troops as ideologically motivated, but that is an interpretation that has proven difficult to defend by historians. María Rosa de Madariaga and Sebastian Balfour, convinced as they are that the volunteers who filled the ranks of the Moorish units in the Spanish peninsula joined for purely economic reasons, reject the idea that there are any higher ideological causes behind the participation of the Moorish troops in the Civil War. For them the issue is simple and they probably represent the opinion of the majority of those studying the Spanish Civil War.

The issue is less simple for two Moroccan historians who seem convinced that the religious appeal of the cause, propagated by Franco’s agents, was an important factor in the decision made by Moorish recruits to enlist in the Spanish Nationalist army. According to El Merroun, Franco’s rhetoric about Communism and its destruction of Christian and Muslim religions left an impression on the Moroccan troops. He cites a Moroccan soldier ‘In Spain ar-rojo [the red one, the communist] comes, burns shrines, kills saints. Moor comes to help Franco fix Spain’.<sup>56</sup> Thus, the religious aspect was an important one in pulling the Moroccans towards the Nationalist Spaniards.<sup>57</sup>

Ibn Azzuz Hakim (perceived in Morocco as one of the most prominent historians working on the history of the Moroccan nationalist movement and northern Morocco) attacks the historians who did not trouble themselves with the real reasons for the Moroccan participation in the war which,

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<sup>53</sup>Abdelmajid Ben Jelloun, ‘La participacion de los mercenarios marroquies en la Guerra Civil española 1936-1939’, 531.

<sup>54</sup> One Canadian volunteer of the International Brigades, Jules Paivio, remembered decades later the ‘Moors’ who believed ‘it’s an honour to die for Allah, so they keep coming at you. They won’t stop’. From the TV documentary series *Battlefield Mysteries*, episode *The Lost Graves of the International Brigades*, produced by Breakthrough Entertainment, Canada, 2008.

<sup>55</sup> *Defenders of the Faith*. Directed by Russell Palmer, 1938. The credits at the beginning describe the film as ‘The first picture of actual warfare ever to be made in natural colour’.

<sup>56</sup> Mustapha El Merroun, *Las tropas marroquíes en la Guerra Civil española*, 40.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibidem*, 224.

according to him, were that ‘the agents of Franco wanted to give the Muslims the opportunity for Jihad alongside the People of the Book, the believers in one God, against the Infidels’ and that the Moroccans ‘entered the war alongside the Catholics of Franco for religious solidarity’.<sup>58</sup> He continues: ‘some chiefs of Muslim brotherhoods, paid by the Francoists, were spreading in low voice the news that general Franco had converted to Islam’ and was waging a campaign against ‘those without god’. In fact, Hakim regards the view that the ‘Moors’ died or became handicapped for a cause not theirs, only attracted by money and as simple mercenaries, as unfair.<sup>59</sup> It appears that both historians base these opinions mainly on the discourse of both the Spanish Nationalists and the Moroccan nationalist and collaborating elite. But they are deeply motivated by the morally negative presentation of the Moroccan soldiers as pure mercenaries attracted solely by money and the prospect of looting.

Ironically, the voice of those around which the debate of religious motives revolves, is the voice least heard. The historians of latter day rarely if ever based their statements on the views of the soldiers whose motives they interpreted, or even took the trouble of citing them to support the pro or contra arguments of this religious aspect of conflict. Today, there are only a few indications and examples that can help modern historians understand the position that the Moroccan soldier held with regard towards the religious nature of his struggle in Spain, and the image that arises from these examples is still a mixed one.

In March 1938 a group of spokesmen for the 6<sup>th</sup> *Tabor* of the *Regulares* Ceuta and for the wounded soldiers in the Granada military hospital sent a letter to the *interventor* in Seville complaining against one of the Muslim clerics serving in Spain. After the death of a number of soldiers during the ‘jihad’, this cleric refused to wash the bodies of the ‘mujahedeen’, to lead the prayers for their souls or even to attend the funerals. Compounding this insult, he stated that ‘everyone who died in the lands of Spain was an absolute infidel’.<sup>60</sup> The complaint denounced this man calling him ‘red’. This document draws attention for its use of the terms ‘jihad’ and ‘mujahedeen’ to describe the war in Spain and its Moroccan participants, but also for its labelling as *rojo* those who disputed the religious legitimacy of fighting in Spain.

The ‘jihad’ term also appears in the calls for recruitment that circulated in Spanish Morocco. One important source is the personal archive of Mustapha El Merroun, in which dozens of interviews with Moroccan veterans are preserved. One of these Moroccans described the recruitment by stating

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<sup>58</sup> Ibn Azzuz Hakim, *La actitud de los moros*, 45. José Luis de Mesa is one historian who does not explicitly endorse a view on the issue of possible ideological motivations for Moroccan troops fighting for Franco, but his presentation of a choice of historical opinions and citations tends to make clear that he stands on the side of views like that of Ibn Azzuz Hakim. Mesa quotes a Moroccan, who was apparently a childhood friend of his saying that ‘it was natural. Mohammed and Christ proclaimed and represented God who was rejected by the Reds. That is why we could stand with the Christians against them’. Mesa, *Los moros de la Guerra Civil española*, 124.

<sup>59</sup> Ibn Azzuz Hakim, *La actitud de los moros*, 45.

<sup>60</sup> Archivo General de la Administración (AGA), Af, 81.1179, Leg. 3962, Letter from notables of the 6<sup>th</sup> *Tabor* of *Regulares* Ceuta to Sanchez Pol (in Arabic). There is a Spanish translation accompanying the letter that replaced ‘jihad’ with ‘operations’ and ‘mujahedeen’ with ‘soldiers’.

that the tribal chiefs shouted ‘O, servants of God! Those who wish to perform the Jihad, the Jihad has now returned’.<sup>61</sup> In the battlefield itself, the attacking waves of the Moroccans started with cries exalting God or the prophet Mohammed. Ruiz Albéniz, the Nationalist propagandist, cites one such cry ‘Jandulilah! La [Ilaha] Illa Allah, Sidi Mohamed Rasul Allah...’ (Mobilise for Allah, there is no god but Allah).<sup>62</sup> According to Sanchez Ruano,<sup>63</sup> the Moroccans entered the battle crying ‘Allah Akabar’. A more typical charging battle cry commenced with praising the prophet ‘O lovers of the prophet, pray on him’, and ending with ‘heaven is for the patient, and hell is for the infidels’.<sup>64</sup> Do such religiously inspired battle cries necessarily mean that the soldiers, or the majority of them, believed at the time they were fighting for a religiously sanctioned cause? Or do they merely reflect their cultural background and as such it would not only be normal to utter cries and perform pre-battle rituals by way of self-encouragement and perhaps protection?<sup>65</sup> Or was that simply a confirmation of the point of view that asserts that everyone is religious in the trenches? There is no easy answer but such examples make it difficult to dismiss out of hand the notion that the religious factor played a role in how the Moroccan volunteers viewed or justified their part in the war.

Whether the Moroccan soldiers actually went to war motivated by the moral message of a holy war or not, it seems in any case that many, if not the majority, deemed their Republican opponents on the wrong side as far as godly matters were concerned. This is shown in the way veterans, interviewed by El Merroun, describe the Republican *rojos*. According to one Moroccan, ‘the *rojos* killed the monks and destroyed the churches so they believed only in the hammer and sickle’.<sup>66</sup> A similar definition of a *rojo* was ‘the enemy of Spain or the criminal who abandoned his religion’.<sup>67</sup> One veteran remembered that ‘our *jefes* [chiefs] told us that the *rojos* have come from Russia and from France to occupy Spain’, and that the Moroccans were in Spain defending their own country ‘for if the *rojos* would win, northern Morocco would be occupied by the *rojos*’.<sup>68</sup> The first impression the ‘reds’ left upon the memory of another soldier was equally typical: ‘When we went [to Spain] we found that the *rojos* were burning churches’.<sup>69</sup> Consequently it would normally follow that if a Moroccan

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<sup>61</sup> Also clerics would call on the people: ‘O servants [of God]! The bread will come from them [the Spanish], the munitions from them and the weapons from them’. Testimony of Mohammed ben Amar ben Al Hashmi, Tetuan, 24 June 1994, El Merroun archive.

<sup>62</sup> Víctor Ruiz Albéniz, *Las crónicas de El Tebib Arrumi*, Vol.II, *Campañas del Jarama y el Tajuña*, 35. Of course the author might have misheard the cry, which is perhaps why he missed the ‘Ilaha’ which means ‘god’.

<sup>63</sup> Francisco Sánchez Ruano, *Islam y Guerra Civil española*, 233.

<sup>64</sup> Interview with Abdessalam Mohammed Al Amrani, Ceuta, 30 June 2011. This veteran still believed in 2011 that they emerged victorious because God stood on their side.

<sup>65</sup> According to a Moroccan deserter, the Moroccans on the eve of a battle would perform a *ziyara* ritual. See the interrogation of Seddik ben Amar ben Ahmed. SHD, 3 H 266.

<sup>66</sup> Testimony of Abdelkader Amezian, Tetuan, 9 November 1993, El Merroun archive. ‘The Spanish took us to the Churches and we found them ruined and the idols destroyed. So they told us “are these people going to be successful?”’, he continues.

<sup>67</sup> Testimony of Al Bouyekra, 21 April, Fnideq, El Merroun archive.

<sup>68</sup> Testimony of Abdelkader Al Shaoui, Tetuan, 3 December 1992, El Merroun archive.

<sup>69</sup> Testimony of Al Ayyashi, Tetuan, 11 November 1993, El Merroun archive.

defected to the reds 'he would die as an infidel'.<sup>70</sup> One veteran told Sánchez Ruano that the Moroccan soldiers would not desert to the Republicans, for they thought that 'if they died, they would go to heaven for performing the Jihad'.<sup>71</sup>

Given these late testimonies it seems that the Nationalist propaganda about a holy war succeeded in so much as convincing Franco's Muslim soldiers that they were at least not fighting for the wrong camp. David Montgomery Hart, who did an ethnographic and historical research on the Beni Uriagel in the Rif, commented on the religious character of the call to arms and the Riffians' response to it by stating that 'at any rate as far as they were concerned it seems that the moral issues of the war were clear enough: they were helping those Spaniards, whom they knew and liked, as against others whose lack of religious belief was both incomprehensible and insulting'.<sup>72</sup>

Hart arrived at this conclusion in the 1970s, although he does not make clear whether this was based on his interviews with those Riffians who returned from Spain or whether this was based on Spanish or other literature. Discussing the tribe of Ulad Settut, David Seddon, who also conducted research in the Nador province, concludes that there was a rapid development of 'a considerable hostility against those who came to be known locally as "reds"'.<sup>73</sup>

When turning however to the accounts by Moroccan deserters who originated from the French zone, there is an absence of religious rhetoric in fighting the Republicans. Religion does feature in a few testimonies in terms of the praise for how the Nationalists respected the Muslim religion and Muslim religious festivities,<sup>74</sup> or the visits of religious figures to the fronts. There is one testimony that mentioned the existence of activities of religious brotherhoods in propagating the Francoist cause but without going into further detail.<sup>75</sup> However, none of the interrogated deserters originating in the French zone mention, in their interviews with the French officers, traces of coming in contact with the religion versus atheism or Christian-Islamic alliance propaganda, or traces of the description of the Republicans as anti-religion fanatics. This element is completely absent in these interrogations. How should this fact be interpreted? Does it signify that the narrative of the religious war was adopted by the veterans only after the war as they were trying to make sense of their participation or to idealise it? Or that somehow those of Spanish Morocco were more susceptible or more frequently subjected to the religious propaganda than soldiers from French Morocco? The absence can also simply be ascribed to an absence in questioning on the part of the French officers. Indeed never once did the French officers put this question to the deserters.

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<sup>70</sup> Testimony of Masoud, Tetuan, 25 April 1994. El Merroun archive.

<sup>71</sup> Ruano, *Islam y Guerra Civil española*, 233.

<sup>72</sup> David Montgomery Hart, *The Aith Waryaghar of the Moroccan Rif*, 416. He further adds 'Many Rifians feel a respect for Franco himself which, it might be added, persists to this day'. Ibidem.

<sup>73</sup> David Seddon, *Moroccan Peasants. A Century of Change in the Eastern Rif, 1870-1970* (Folkestone 1981) 157.

<sup>74</sup> Interrogations of Mohamed ould Mohamed, deserted: September 1938; and Abdesselem ben Tourhami, deserted: Augustus 1938. SHD, 3 H 266.

<sup>75</sup> Interrogation of Mohamed ben L'hassen, deserted: April 1938. SHD, 3 H 266.



It was only a decade before since French Morocco found itself the subject of the Jihad of Mohammed ben Abdel Krim's Riffian rebels, whose attack on the French Protectorate pushed the French to collaborate with the Spaniards in destroying the movement. A decade before that, France had found itself the target of a guerrilla movement in Morocco that was financed and partly managed by German agents who encouraged Moroccan tribesmen, mainly in the Rif, to wage Jihad against the French, as the Ottoman Empire had taken the side of Germany during the First World War. Germany at the time thought it could mobilise the religious feelings of a large Muslim nation to destabilise the colonial empires of its enemies, even though the German endeavour produced little results, though it did provoke great concern among the French in Morocco.<sup>76</sup> In light of the experiences of the two decades prior to the Spanish Civil War, one would have expected the French interrogators to show more interest in talk of holy war on their northern frontier which was controlled by a not so friendly Spanish regime that was allied to Germany.

### **Letters and Graves**

Since the Nationalists perceived and presented the Moroccan soldiers fighting in Spain and the Moroccan population of the Protectorate in general as first and foremost religious people, it was natural that the Nationalists took great care not to offend the religious feelings of their Muslim soldiers. This happened sometimes at the request of the Moroccan soldiers themselves, others at the request of higher Moroccan authorities and at times even when this care was not requested. Such attention in policy manifested itself in many aspects of the daily lives of the Moroccan soldiers, for example when making use of Muslim religious festivities to release Moorish detainees (troops incarcerated for different offences) as a sign of respect for the religious feelings of the Moorish troops,<sup>77</sup> and therefore asserting the pro-Islamic stance of the Francoist government. Other aspects such as correspondence paper; graveyards; dietary habits and preoccupations; conversions; and especially life in hospitals display the great lengths the Nationalists went to create the religious space in which the Nationalists wanted their Muslim soldiers to stay and which they assumed their soldiers wanted.

The provision of an Islamic diet is one of the first issues that comes to mind when considering religious necessities of the Moroccan Muslim troops, and the Spanish army seems to have been relatively successful in this regard. As Seidman puts it, the quartermaster was especially proud that meals of *Regulares* contained a considerable quantity of meat, which North Africans were allowed to butcher themselves according to Muslim rite. Authorities permitted Moroccan butchers to supervise operations in their canning and meatpacking factories.<sup>78</sup>

One less evident aspect of the military policy of respecting the religion of their Muslim troops or, alternatively, the policy of maintaining a safe distance between the religious sphere of the

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<sup>76</sup> On the German Jihad in Morocco see Ali Al Tuma, 'Si Herman en Abdel Malek. De Duitse jihad in Marokko tijdens de Eerste Wereldoorlog', *ZemZem* 1 (2015) 27-34.

<sup>77</sup> See for example: AGMAV, C.2374, L.145, Cp. 63.

<sup>78</sup> Seidman, *Republic of Egos. A Social History of the Spanish Civil War*, 104.

Moroccans and that of the Spaniards was manifested in the issue of letters the soldiers sent to their families. These letters were naturally subjected to censorship. In February 1938 the political section of the High Commissariat in Tetuan wrote to the chief of staff of the Morocco Forces expressing concern that many Muslim soldiers were sending letters to their families on a type of stationery with Christian religious symbols printed on it.<sup>79</sup> To correct this, considerable effort and time was invested in the arduous task of copying the letters on a different type of paper. There were already requests to closely monitor the type of paper used by the Muslim soldiers, going back as far as October 1937.<sup>80</sup> The February 1938 complaint suggested measures such as to force vendors accompanying the units to carry a different kind of paper. More importantly, and to understand what annoyed the author of the angry complaint, and it was one of many similar complaints, was the argument that the use of the aforementioned kind of paper would help circulate rumours of the existence of Christian missionary activities among the Muslim troops.<sup>81</sup> This was a concern that the Nationalist military authorities reiterated several times in relation to other aspects of the daily life of the Muslim soldiers.

Burial places formed another aspect of the religious policy that must have been of greater emotional importance for the Moroccan soldiers than the letters. It can be said with certainty that no Moroccan soldier (or at least almost none) who died during the Civil War in Spain had his corpse taken to Morocco for burial. They were all buried in Spain, which applies to almost all of the foreign nationalities that participated in the war in great numbers.<sup>82</sup> In many cases, particularly during the heat of battle, it was not possible to bury the dead Moroccan soldiers in proper cemeteries, and these fatalities were buried where they died, collectively sometimes. In some cases, the dead were buried mixed with the Christians, especially in the beginning.<sup>83</sup> Whether by their own initiative or in response to demands of Moroccan soldiers, the Spanish started to separate the burial places. According to a veteran 'during one of the battles, the dead were mixed, so they [the Spanish] looked for the Muslim corpses to bury them. So they took the trousers off the dead to see who was circumcised'.<sup>84</sup>

Burial in a proper cemetery proved sometimes possible, but Spanish Catholics were not keen on having Muslims buried in Catholic cemeteries so the Muslim corpses were put to rest in civil cemeteries, along with the 'red' the Moroccans had come to fight.<sup>85</sup> The Nationalist army tried, early in the war, to provide for separate cemeteries that were to be designated as Muslim. In October 1936, the chief of staff General Varela instructed the military commander of the northern town of Vargas (near Santander) to send all Moorish soldiers, killed in fighting or dead as a result of sickness, to

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<sup>79</sup>AGA, Af, 81.1122, Cp. 4.

<sup>80</sup>AGA, Af, 81.1150, Missive: Exp./5429.

<sup>81</sup>AGA, Af, 81.1122, Cp. 4.

<sup>82</sup> For example, 4175 Italian dead were buried in Spain, with scores of others buried elsewhere or lost at sea. Brian R. Sullivan, 'Fascist Italy's Military Involvement in the Spanish Civil War', *The Journal of Military History* 59 (1995) 697-727, here 713.

<sup>83</sup> Testimonies of veterans of the Spanish Civil War: Hamido Al Ma'dani., Mohammed Mhauesh and Karimo ben Abdelkader. El Merroun archive.

<sup>84</sup> Testimony of Mohammed ben Amar Al Hashmi, Tetuan, date unclear, El Merroun archive.

<sup>85</sup> Seidman, *The Victorious Counterrevolution*, 179.

Talavera de la Reina to be buried in the ‘Moorish cemetery’ there.<sup>86</sup> The Talavera de la Reina cemetery was established by taking the part of the municipal cemetery that was usually reserved for non-believers and suicides. A room was constructed there for washing the bodies. In 1939, a tile was dedicated to the buried soldiers that was adorned with the ‘Solomon seal’ (a six point star), and that read ‘From the Group of Regulares Tetuan nr. 1 to its Muslim comrades, fallen for Spain’.<sup>87</sup>

There were also those who died later in the hospitals as a result of their wounds. As these Moroccan soldiers were usually treated in so called ‘Muslim’ hospitals, the Nationalist military authorities required them to take careful measures when burying the Muslim dead troops, so even if they were to be buried in a Catholic cemetery the Muslim deceased should have their own separate section within the cemetery and, if possible, with a separate entrance point.<sup>88</sup>

One of the earliest descriptions of the rituals for the preparation of the burial of dead soldiers came from the memoirs of Mekki Redondo who was curious as to how his father died in Spain in 1936. He was gravely wounded in September at Talavera de la Reina near Madrid and died shortly after admission to the hospital near that city.<sup>89</sup> The *faqih* had inculcated the *shahada* (the statement that there is no god but Allah and that Mohammed is his messenger) and prepared his body for burial.<sup>90</sup> The *faqih* was the only religious official in the campaign hospital that Colonel Yagüe established at Talavera de la Reina. He recalled being woken by a nurse to tell him:

that one of the four heavily injured soldiers was dying. I went instantly to him and found him dying while at the same time trying, in vain, to pronounce the *shahada* [the statement that there is but one God and that Mohammed is his Messenger], and therefore I had to inculcate this until his soul was given to the creator. I later called the doctor, Lieutenant Castro, who certified his death. His corpse was then brought to the hall of ablutions where, at sunrise, I washed him and put him in a shroud. After saying prayers for his soul, we buried him in a cemetery that I myself habilitated, a cemetery where, the previous day, we had buried 104 Muslims who had perished on the same day. I still have the register where I wrote down the names of the dead Muslim soldiers I helped wash, laid shrouds for and buried during the three months I stayed in Talavera, and which reached 597.<sup>91</sup>

It is not clear whether the idea for separate Muslim cemeteries, in hospital grounds, first came from the Spanish Nationalist army or from Moroccan officials. But sometimes the Moroccans appeared to take the initiative. In March 1937 a Moroccan minister of the Spanish zone of Morocco, visiting Spain,

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<sup>86</sup> AHMC, Varela, 14/389.

<sup>87</sup> Anonymous, ‘El cementerio musulmán de Talavera de la Reina’, *Estela*, nr. 1 (1997) 9-10, here 9.

<sup>88</sup> Bureau of Control for Moroccan Affairs in Spain, January 1938. AGA, Af, 81.1122, L.2958, Cp.3.

<sup>89</sup> Ibn Azzuz Hakim, *La actitud de los moros*, 85.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibidem*, 88. The number of burials he cites does not correspond with a more recent estimation of 300 burials at that cemetery. ‘El Cementerio musulmán de Talavera de la Reina’, *Estela*, 9.

suggested that Muslim hospitals dedicate a place for burying the Muslim dead,<sup>92</sup> a suggestion that was welcomed by the Nationalist authorities and was included in subsequent instructions for military hospitals. But as we have seen, there was already a Moorish cemetery in Talavera in 1936. In some cases the establishment of a Muslim cemetery was done without Moroccan supervision, such as the one in Seville, which had a Muslim cemetery built in September 1936, while in another case, that of Barcia (Valdés region of Asturias), the Muslim cemetery was built by civilians from the Valdés region, but the process was completely directed and controlled by Moroccan religious officials.<sup>93</sup>

The efforts to provide separate burial spaces for the Moroccan soldiers continued after the war. In 1940 the Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs requested that efforts be undertaken to determine the burial places of many Moroccan soldiers with the goal of separating the Muslim dead from the Christians. A Moroccan official was to participate in efforts as head of a special section created for this goal at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.<sup>94</sup> A number of provincial governors and heads of municipalities provided information that made it possible to identify a number of places and in some cases the number and identities of Moroccans buried there. For example: in Toledo 614 dead Moroccans were located plus an undetermined number in Seseña and Puente del Arzobispo (both in Toledo province). In the Barcelona province 31 Moroccans were located plus two questionable cases. In the province of Guadalajara the burial places of 42 Moroccans were located in different municipalities. The causes of death were in some cases identified. Some had died from sickness and there was one case of suicide in the municipality of Fuentelsaz. In the case of three soldiers buried in the municipality of Molina de Aragón, they were court-martialed and received capital punishment for unknown reasons. 24 were buried in the capital city of the Ávila province, in the municipal cemetery, with the specific numbers of the graves provided. In the case of Tarragona province only the names of the municipalities where Moroccans were buried were provided without an estimation of numbers. Many Moroccans in these different reports were buried in the municipal cemeteries; in some cases, it is explicitly mentioned that they were buried in the civil part of the cemetery. In one case, Torremocha de Jadraque (Guadalajara province) was a Moroccan buried in a 'Catholic' cemetery. From the reports we can also identify special cemeteries for Muslims established in the cities: Puerto de Santa María (Cádiz province), Jerez de la Frontera (Cádiz province), Seville, Granada,<sup>95</sup> Córdoba, Penarroya-Pueblonuevo (Córdoba province), Saragossa, Salamanca, Cáceres, Plasencia, Antequera (Málaga

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<sup>92</sup> AGMAV, C.2396 A.2, L.190, Cp 14. Letter in Arabic.

<sup>93</sup> Álvarez Martínez, Expósito Mangas and González Álvarez, 'El cementerio moro de Barcia: Breve acercamiento a su estudio', 136-137, 137n30. According to the authors between 400-500 bodies were buried here. Ibidem, 142.

<sup>94</sup> AGA, Af, 81.1114. Leg, 3747/2, 'Cementerios'.

<sup>95</sup> In the city of Granada a small piece of land was chosen to bury the Moroccan soldiers close to the Catholic cemetery (itself uphill from the Alhambra), on a spot higher than the Christian burial ground, with a steep path leading upwards to it. Currently, three rows of around 26 each constitute the graves of Moroccan soldiers. They are all unidentified. After later Moroccan migrations to Granada, the burial place for the Moroccan soldiers (to which the author was granted access outside regular visiting days) was rehabilitated as the Muslim cemetery of Granada. Newer burials take place around the three central rows. See Appendix 5

province), Ronda (Málaga province), as well as other localities where Muslims were buried but where the reports were not certain whether there were separate burial grounds for Moroccan Muslim soldiers.<sup>96</sup>

### **Conversions**

If writing letters on stationery with Christian symbols caused enormous irritation with the bureaus of native affairs and the Spanish military, then converting the Moroccan soldiers raised great alarm. Such proselytising activities apparently happened only in hospitals, as these were the places where priests, or others with a strong religious fervour, likely had enough time to engage in the process. But the military authorities were never happy with Spanish religious personnel roaming inside hospitals where wounded Moroccan soldiers were treated. It was probably in November 1936 when a report by the Army Inspector brought to Franco's attention for the first time the disturbing effects of the efforts of the '*señoritas*' and priests to convert the injured Moroccans to Catholicism.<sup>97</sup> Immediately, Franco instructed military hospitals to 'respect the religious creeds of the natives'.<sup>98</sup>

It appears, however, that the missionary zeal still persisted in some places. The Inspector of Moroccan Affairs suggested in November 1938 more active observation of non-hospitalised persons entering hospitals, and issuing serious instructions to religious authorities on this topic.<sup>99</sup> Copies of a telegram by Franco forbidding converting Moroccans were supposedly hung in some hospitals 'in big letters'.<sup>100</sup> The Generalissimo himself personally gave demonstrations of his will to dissipate any doubts as to the sanctity of the Islamic space of his Muslim soldiers. One day he arrived at a hospital for a quick inspection. Entering a ward where Moorish wounded soldiers were being treated, he took a look around noticing a couple of crosses hanging on the walls of the ward. He obviously did not like that and ordered them to be removed immediately.<sup>101</sup> Nevertheless and despite all the stern warnings and precautions, there were individual cases of Moorish soldiers who converted to the Catholic faith. In 1938 for example the Bureau of Control for Moroccan Affairs in Spain reports about such a case, a Moorish soldier named Bin Kiran. A difficult aspect of this case was the fact that the conversion happened under the auspices of General Moscardó, the famous protagonist of the siege of the Alcázar of Toledo. Still, the report goes on to instruct directors of military hospitals to warn charity sisters as well as nurses of the damage their proselytising activities would cause to the National Movement. The damages would include reversing years of work done in the Protectorate, and besides all this, the Bureau of Control for Moroccan Affairs believed the conversions were 'almost always fake'.<sup>102</sup> It is difficult to ascertain the real motives of those converted since there are no testimonies of Moroccan veterans who had converted. The concerns for these religious transformations were still an issue even

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<sup>96</sup> For more details, see the different reports in the 'Cementerios' file in AGA, Af, 81.1114. Leg, 3747/2.

<sup>97</sup> AGMAV, A.1, L.59, Cp. 86. Report on November 19, 1936.

<sup>98</sup> AGMAV, A.1, L.59, Cp. 86. Cable by the army of the north on November 27, 1936.

<sup>99</sup> AGA, Af, 81.1113, Cp 3.

<sup>100</sup> AGA, Af, 81.1150.

<sup>101</sup> Antonio Corral Castanedo, *Esta es la casa donde vivo y muero*, 236.

<sup>102</sup> AGA, Af, 81.1113, Cp 3: letter, 20 May, 1938.

after the war when a couple of conversions were recorded, like one in Córdoba. In March 1941 the Bureau of Control for Moroccan Affairs commented on the case of Mohammed El Uariachi who after the war was expelled from Spain only to return and manage to stay by being baptised and marrying a Spanish woman. The bureau commented that the majority of such cases revolve around ‘opportunistic people’. It is safe to say, however, given the relatively few cases mentioned,<sup>103</sup> that those conversions were certainly not significant enough to have an impact in Spanish Morocco or in the army fighting in Spain.

### **Hospitals**

As the conversion issue makes clear, hospitals were the places where the Muslims and Christians interacted the most. In hospitals Moroccan soldiers fell in love with Spanish women, priests tried to win new souls for Christianity, complaints on religious matters were made and compromises reached. A military hospital was almost the only place that offered the Moroccan soldiers a better chance to get to know Spanish society well, or at least its Nationalist version.

While the stay in hospitals was comfortable for the majority of the Moroccans, many might have missed the opportunity of resting in those hospitals and even having their lives saved. It appears that in some cases the evacuation of Moroccan injured was not as effective as it should have been and that many of those responsible laxed in their tasks. One Spanish officer angrily wrote in December 1936 how: ‘on the road I come across various stretchers with corpses of *Regulares* of Tetuan and I curse the stretcher-bearers who abandoned them. I send a go between so that people of my tabor would come to collect them’.<sup>104</sup> An incident recounted by a German observer is quite illustrative. He tells how one day he entered a house which was used as a station where wounded soldiers, who were carried to it by stretcher-bearers, would be further evacuated by a motorised vehicle. He comments:

Immediately, two Moroccans were carried in. Jebalans whom nobody could understand. One had a chest wound, the other had his shin shattered. They sat there speechless. The young emergency doctor wanted to sit with his aides at the table. I watched the misery of the Moroccans and asked the doctor, why the wounded were not being immediately transported further. When he says, these are lightly wounded, I attack him sharply and tell him that I would report his roughness to General Yagüe. Yagüe would have the doctor shot, because this

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<sup>103</sup> AGA, Af, 81.1113, letter, 27 March, 1941. José Luis de Mesa mentions a few Moroccans who underwent name changes, indicating that they probably converted. Among those were Mohamed Ben Mizziam, a corporal in the Spanish Legion, of whom it was said, according to de Mesa, that he was a cousin of his more famous namesake Colonel Mizzian (note the difference between the M and N in spelling both surnames. Mizziam must be a mistake made during registration in the official documents). De Mesa thinks that this corporal is the same person as Manuel Ben Mizziam, who figures in the military records as a sergeant in 1949. Another name he found is Antonio Said el Sadi, and José Antonio ben Yilali Ben Baka-li. Interestingly there is a Turkish member of the Spanish Foreign Legion at the time of the Civil War who was called Otoman Slah Ed Dim Ben Said and whom the records show in 1945 as having substituted Otoman for Juan. José Luis de Mesa, *Los otros internacionales. Voluntarios extranjeros desconocidos en el bando nacional durante la Guerra Civil (1936-1939)* (Madrid 1998) 246, 249, 250.

<sup>104</sup> Montagudo Jaén, 1936, *Regulares. Diario en el campo de batalla*, 60.

efficient general would commit his life for his Moroccans. No minute more lasted before the wounded were taken away. The eyes of the Moroccans glistened with gratitude when I spoke to them.<sup>105</sup>

This story illustrates two points: the first is that the fate of Moroccans was apparently not taken seriously by some Spaniards, and that they displayed total apathy towards them. The second point, is that it appears that *Africanista* commanders were well-known to have a great attachment to the value of Moroccan troops to such an extent that would make these medical personnel fearful for their lives.

Once the Moroccans reached the hospitals, the care they received greatly improved. If the testimonies of the surviving Moroccan veterans are any indication, then a significant segment of the Moroccan combatants in Spain spent some amount of time in the Spanish military hospitals. Barely any one of those witnesses who was not wounded in battle and stayed in the military hospitals of Spain. But soon, the Moroccan wounded were hospitalised in a separate space. This usually meant separate wards in the same hospitals where Spaniards were treated. The Nationalists, however, also began to establish separate Muslim hospitals, which spread all around Nationalist Spain, given the presence of the Moroccan units in all areas of operation.<sup>106</sup> The Muslim hospital in Saragossa grew later in the war to be the most prominent one. In such hospitals in the Peninsula, care was taken to provide a Muslim diet for the wounded,<sup>107</sup> and to distribute the tables for prayers times.<sup>108</sup> For the entertainment of the inmates there were Moorish cafés. Even story-tellers were sent to the hospitals to ‘mitigate the torment of these wounds’.<sup>109</sup> It appears that sometimes, even in the field of surgery, the Spanish doctors had to accommodate religious sensitivities of some of the soldiers. In Salamanca, a young Moroccan patient being prepared for surgery in March 1938 asked not to be given the ‘water that makes you stupid’ (ether, which is alcohol-based), and, in deference to his wishes and his religious sensibilities, the doctor induced the patient with Evipan before then giving ether to maintain anaesthesia.<sup>110</sup> At other times, it seems that Spanish doctors wrongly attributed to religious motives or afterlife considerations, fears that were understandably normal. An example of such attributions we find in the diary of Sir Robert Reynolds Mackintosh, a New Zealand-born surgeon who volunteered in 1937 to help in Nationalist Spain. Describing a visit to the Muslim hospital in Saragossa, he recorded that:

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<sup>105</sup> Albert Bartels, unpublished memoirs, 178.

<sup>106</sup> In the spring of 1937 hospitals of significant size for the Moroccans were located in Saragossa, Burgos, Valladolid, Cáceres, Coruña, Almedralejo, Zafra, Córdoba, Seville, Jerez de la Frontera, Cádiz, Huelva, Medina del Campo, Plasencia, Villablanca, Ronda and Puerto de Santa María, among others. Beds per hospital at the time varied between 225 to 400 with the possibility for 200 extra beds in Saragossa and 300 in Medina del Campo. See AGMAV, A.2, L.190, Cp 12/6 and AGAMV, A.2, L.190, Cp 14/1.

<sup>107</sup> AGA, Af, 81.1122, ‘Racionado para moros hospitalizados’. 31 December, 1937.

<sup>108</sup> See examples in: AGA, Af, M.1685, L.2963.

<sup>109</sup> AGA, Af, 81.1180, Proponiendo el envío a España de narradores de cuentos para que recorran los Hospitales para marroquíes allí instalados. 28 December, 1937.

<sup>110</sup> Jonathan Browne, ‘History of Anaesthesia: Anaesthetics and the Spanish Civil War. The Start of Specialisation’, *European Journal of Anaesthesiology* 31(2014) 65-67, here 67.

the men [the Moroccan inmates] appeared to be very contented. One of the doctors told me that they had great difficulty in persuading the Moors to submit to any amputation. It appears that their religion tells them that paradise is full of *houris* [female companions in paradise], whose sole mission is to smile on the fortunate men who reach paradise, but unfortunately these *houris* will have nothing at all to do with a man who has not a complete body, and I am told by the doctor that dozens of Moors have preferred to die without having their leg amputated, when by having it taken off, they could have saved their lives.<sup>111</sup>

This is another example of how the Spanish attributed the behaviour, motives and fears of the Moroccan soldiers to their religious background, when fear of amputation, due to its permanent nature and the impediment it could cause for having a normal functioning life, would be a normal fear expected from anyone in a similar situation, even if there were any truth to the *houris* story.

As the presence of Muslim hospitals in Spain had no precedent in recent Spanish history, and certainly not on such a large scale, some problems and complaints arose at the beginning due to the lack of an established Islamic diet, organised religious personnel, rules of communication and so on. In November 1936 the army inspector Cabanellas complained to Franco about what he saw in some ‘Muslim’ hospitals that he visited. In addition to his disapproval of proselytising attempts in the hospital he remarked that some patients were deceived into believing that the meat they were served was slaughtered according to Muslim rites, only to discover later that this was not the case, leading some to refrain from eating for days.<sup>112</sup> Such complaints led to individual efforts to correct the situation and, in 1937, to organised efforts that were initiated by both the Moroccan authorities as well as the Spanish Nationalists to adapt the hospitals to a Muslim environment so as to make the stay for the wounded a pleasing one. This adaptation effectively meant the creation of a separate Moorish space.

In March 1937 the Moroccan vizier Ben Ali visited Spanish hospitals, whereupon he wrote a letter suggesting the establishment of separate Muslim hospitals in the rear-lines. He suggested that the wounded be quartered separately according to their military affiliations: the *Regulares* and the *Mehallas*. The vizier also suggested a Moorish staff consisting firstly of a *faqih* (cleric) who would be charged with the duties of Imam, butcher, notary and undertaker; secondly, a *raqqas* whose duties were to carry the letters and money to the families in Morocco; and thirdly, an interpreter. Among other suggestions, like the establishment of ablution and prayer halls and a burial place, Ben Ali suggested the establishment, in each town with a Muslim hospital, of an ‘Arab café’ for the Muslim

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<sup>111</sup> The Sir Robert Reynolds Macintosh Archive held by the Wellcome Library. PP/RRM/D1/76. The excerpt and the reference were kindly provided by Jonathan Sebastian Browne.

<sup>112</sup> Cabanellas to Franco, 19 November, 1936, AGAMV, A.1, L.59, Cp 86.



wounded. In that case, he continued, the Muslim wounded would be prohibited from entering ‘foreign cafés so that they would not have forbidden drinks. For that, a special vigilance must be appointed’.<sup>113</sup>

In the requests of the Moroccan minister we see the attempt to exercise some control on the lives of the Moroccan subjects in Spain through limiting the Moroccan soldiers’ contact with the surrounding Spanish ambience and preventing its perceived corrupting influence like alcohol. In February 1937 the High Commissariat had already preceded the Moroccan minister by issuing instructions on the organisation of Moroccan hospitals in Spain. The proposed religious staff was larger than that suggested by the minister. It would consist of an Imam, chief of the religious staff, who also functioned as a notary, a *mudarris* (teacher) to answer religious questions, a *catib* (writer) to write letters to the soldier’s families and a *munadif el mauta* (cleaner of the dead) who was responsible for the burial preparations. These were assisted by two cooks who were also butchers, as well as four assistant cooks, plus two couriers to carry the needs of the injured as well as inheritance material of the deceased, in addition to an interpreter. As for general hospitals with ‘Moroccan departments’ the staff would vary according to the number of wounded present.<sup>114</sup>

The General Staff in Salamanca was in agreement with much of the minister’s request and especially with regard to the prohibition of visiting European cafés. It cited as an extra reason the fear of espionage and the necessity of avoiding incidents which had been ‘unfortunately frequent’ in towns where many Moroccans were present.<sup>115</sup> Franco had also already referred in February 1937 to ‘Moorish cafés’ which would provide the wounded soldiers with a place that had a ‘familiar’ environment.<sup>116</sup> It seems that the prohibition of selling alcohol to Muslims was not an equal success everywhere. In March 1938, a report on drunken Moroccan inmates lamented the absence in the southern town of Jerez de la Frontera of a prohibition on selling alcohol that reigned in other places.<sup>117</sup> In March 1938, Salamanca suffered from the same problem, and the local authorities apparently did not prevent selling alcohol to the Moroccan inmates of the military hospital there, necessitating the intervention of Moroccan military police to stop the ‘scandals of the Moors’.<sup>118</sup> But hospitals were not allowed to actually forbid Moroccan inmates who were in a state to walk to take strolls outside the hospital. In March 1937, a report brought to the attention complaints of Moroccan soldiers in a Salamanca hospital that they were not allowed outside nor were visitors for them allowed inside, which in turn led to instructions by the commander of the Army of the North to this hospital not to forbid the inmates from taking walks outside the premises.<sup>119</sup> Much later, in December 1938, the Army of the South tried one more measure to reduce the strolls of the Moroccan soldiers outside the hospital

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<sup>113</sup> AGMAV, C.2396 A.2, L.190, Cp 14. Letter in Arabic.

<sup>114</sup> AGMAV, C.2396 A.2, L.190, Cp 14. ‘Instrucciones para la organización de los hospitales instalados en la península, destinados a marroquíes’. 28 February, 1937.

<sup>115</sup> AGMAV, C.2396 A.2, L.190, Cp 14. Report by the General Staff, 19 March, 1937.

<sup>116</sup> AGAMV, A.1, L.35, Cp. 20.

<sup>117</sup> AGA, Af, 81.1179, Varios hospitales.

<sup>118</sup> AGA, Af, 81.1180, Intervención del Norte to Sanchez Pol, 10 March, 1938.

<sup>119</sup> AGMAV, A.1, L.50, Cp. 17. Instructions on 20 March, 1937; report by the HQ of the Generalissimo on 12 March, 1937.

by exempting the products of the Moroccan *cafeteros* (café owners) from custom duties if they were to be sold inside the hospitals, and therefore to make it cheaper for the inmates to order their consumptions inside.<sup>120</sup>

As one could infer from the previous paragraph, the presence of Muslim hospitals must not have been met with enthusiasm by the local population everywhere. One of the places where the presence of a Muslim hospital troubled the local population was Sánlucar de Barrameda (Cádiz), or at least that is the impression that a Spanish citizen from that town, Dominguez Lobato, gives in his memoirs.<sup>121</sup> Lobato does not hide his disdain for the Moroccans, who were for him a ‘decrepit race, full of misery’. According to him the aversion of the local population to the presence of the Moroccan wounded had its roots in the colonial wars in Morocco, the horrors of which some of the locals had witnessed, as well as the ‘thunderous entry’ of the *Regulares* to the town in July 1936,<sup>122</sup> which apparently had a strong pro-Republican base. These negative preconceptions were only strengthened when the Moroccan inmates, or those who were fit enough to wander about the town, displayed behaviour that did not endear themselves to the populace, nor it seemed that these Moroccans cared about ingratiating themselves with the people. In Lobato’s version this negative behaviour took the forms of stealing from the local shops,<sup>123</sup> loudly expressing their disapproval about the presence of young Spaniards who otherwise should be fighting on the front crying ‘This cannot be, this cannot be... We fight for Spain. The young without fighting for Spain, impossible. Every one fight for Spain! And if not, leave Spain alone...’,<sup>124</sup> aggressive attempts to win the attention of local girls who disdained them,<sup>125</sup> as well as the insistence by the relatively healthy inmates to be treated, i.e. pampered, the same way as the badly wounded.<sup>126</sup> The degree to which the presence of Muslim hospitals troubled the Spanish population in general is difficult to determine, and is dependent on anecdotal evidence. As we saw in the previous chapter, rather than disdain, there was a fair number of women, in other cities, who fell in love with the Moroccan wounded, ended up marrying them, or even took the trouble to travel to Morocco to join them.

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<sup>120</sup> AGA, Af, M1683, L.2958, Cp.3: Commander of the Army of the South, December 1938.

<sup>121</sup> Dominguez Lobato, *Cien capítulos de retaguardia*.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibidem*, 297-298.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibidem*, 300.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibidem*, 308-309.

<sup>125</sup> ‘The Moors are much infatuated, and more than infatuated, impudent’, thought Lobato of the Moroccan wounded. According to his memoirs the ‘women disdain them. The Moors do not say, like the Italians: Oh! Bella Signorina! They attack, shouting as in the war. They understand love in another way’. He continues by stating that the attentions to the ‘fairer sex’ caused tension in the town and frequent quarrels. One specific case he mentions involved a furious gypsy girl, the presence of Civil Guards who diplomatically defused the tension, a Moroccan who protested that his only fault was ‘for saying to her beautiful...only for saying to her beautiful’. *Ibidem*, 299, 329.

<sup>126</sup> ‘The Moors we talk about, these wounded or these sick who are here – have a special psychology. What anyone does, the other comrades of the expedition must systematically repeat’, says Lobato. And then he gives an example of a group of wounded who arrived at the train station, one of them wounded in the leg and could not walk. Being carried on a stretcher into the car that was to bring him to the hospital, everyone else demanded being carried on a stretcher, a demand that was fulfilled in the face of ‘fear that a mutiny would be provoked’. *Ibidem*, 307.

Despite the care the Nationalists took to respect the religious sensitivities of their Moroccan soldiers, complaints in this regard still arose. Sometimes the reason for these grievances was the behaviour of the Moroccan religious personnel themselves. From drinking excessively to continuously shaving their own beards, or failure to lead the prayers were reasons given in a number of complaints about these *foqaha* (plural for *faqih*).<sup>127</sup> Similar complaints about drinking were occasionally also filed against members of the native military police who were detached to military hospitals.<sup>128</sup> These complaints seemed, however, not as grave as failing to perform duties towards the dead, or even flatly refusing to do so on the ground that the dead did not deserve them.

When religious-based complaints arose in hospitals the Nationalist authorities spent serious efforts to investigate and verify them. One hospital that received frequent complaints was in Villafranca de los Barros (Badajoz province). The complaints against the director of the hospital revolved around the presence of religious (Christian) images, the lack of a separate kitchen for the Muslims and the lack of a separate space within the same kitchen (that the same utensils were used for Spanish Christians as well as for the Moroccan Muslims for halal and non-halal meat), the refusal of the director to provide transport for the burial of the dead, the existence of a 'bar' inside the hospital, etc.<sup>129</sup> Upon investigation the complaints were found exaggerated: the religious images were all covered, except one in a hall that was forbidden for the inmates to enter; the Europeans cooked and used their utensil in separate space in the kitchen and plans were made for an independent kitchen; the burial transport problem was a one-time incident due to maintenance problems and in fact not all the Muslim religious personnel agreed with the content of the complaints. The investigation recognised, however, that the director of the hospital was not quite amiable.<sup>130</sup> This shows, if anything, the extent to which the Nationalist military authorities were prepared to accommodate the sentiments of the Moroccan soldiers, and the privileged position these soldiers (and the Muslim clerics) had in imposing their own lifestyle and wishes in hospitals in a country in which they were foreigners. It is remarkable that the archival material neglects to reflect complaints on the Spanish side about these Moroccans who acted with a sense of entitlement rather than of gratefulness.

Some additional examples of the Nationalist efforts to provide a religiously agreeable stay for the Moroccan inmates include a mosque that was established on the grounds of the Military Hospital of Bella Vista in Vigo and another at the Hospital of La Barzola in Seville. At the inauguration of the latter, thousands of pesetas were directly distributed to the Moroccan patients. In the former establishment during Ramadan, Vigo sent its municipal band to entertain patients, who were offered

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<sup>127</sup> AGA, Af, 81.1122, letter of complaint nr. 3159, 9 January, 1939.

<sup>128</sup> For Complaints about gambling and failing to observe Ramadan against one such *mejasni*, see AGA, Af, 81.1187, letter to the inspector of the Moroccan *Mejasnia*, 1 December, 1937. In this case however, fellow policemen were the ones who complained about his failure to fast.

<sup>129</sup> AGA, Af, 81.1179, Leg, 3963. Zaragoza, letters on 9 January, 1939; 31 December, 1938; 15 December, 1938.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibidem*.

treats during the festivities. The walls of the Granada hospital, one of the largest, were covered with lofty Koranic maxims in Arabic.<sup>131</sup>

Regardless of the occasional complaints and the initial problems earlier mentioned, the memories the hospitals left on the surviving veterans are mostly positive and remembered with nostalgia. 'The food was good, the beds were changed daily. The daughters of generals and officers, and the sons of merchants and doctors did that. They were polite', remembers one who worked there.<sup>132</sup> 'The hospital of Seville was very nice. A delegation of Moroccan *kaïds* and *bashas* [tribal leaders and city high officials] visited us. So we were given plenty of clothing and food'.<sup>133</sup> The old nurses were remembered affectionately. 'The nun there [in the Salamanca hospital] was very nice to me and used to call me son'.<sup>134</sup> Messoud Ballah, recalled that when he was wounded, and as he was dressed in the uniform of the Spanish Foreign Legion, he was taken for 'a Christian', and was at first taken to a ward for Europeans. Later he was put in a Muslim ward.<sup>135</sup> But he praised the treatment of the injured. Another veteran praised the treatment and the food in the hospitals though admitted that 'the Moroccans displayed some bad behaviour like throwing the plates'.<sup>136</sup> On this kind of behaviour another veteran remembers that: 'one Moroccan ordered food and he did not like it so he threw the plate at the nurse. So when chaos arose and the Colonel came and asked, he told the nurses you know that the Moroccans are not civilised people and that they do not understand, that they do not know, that they cannot be patient and they are troublesome. She who can be patient with them can stay and she who cannot must go to another Christian hospital to work'.<sup>137</sup> This account not only shows that in some hospitals not everyone was completely well disposed towards the Moroccan patients,<sup>138</sup> (though in this case the inmates share the blame) but it also makes clear the degree to which those working in hospitals were prepared to go in satisfying and showing patience toward the Moroccan inmates.

The majority of the memories of the stay in the military hospitals are positive. It is possible that the passage of decades has filtered out any memories of discomfort or the occasional irritation, but the positive view of the treatment in hospitals is also visible in the contemporary testimonies of the interrogated French Moroccan deserters who fought in Spain, even among those indignant on other aspects of army life. One of them, while on one hand negative about the irregular pay, lack of normal

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<sup>131</sup> Seidman, *The Victorious Counterrevolution*, 46-47. See also, Jorge Lamas, 'Hospital Moro de Bella Vista', *La Voz de Galicia*, 22 April 2006. Accessed on 12 June 2014:

<http://www.lavozdeg Galicia.es/hemeroteca/2006/04/22/4709790.shtml>

<sup>132</sup> Testimony of Abdelsalam ben Hussein Rian.. He was a *catib* (writer/notary) in one such hospital. Tetuan, 24 July 2000, El Merroun archive.

<sup>133</sup> Testimony of Abdul Nabi ben Omari, Tetuan, 11 July 1993, El Merroun archive. He adds: 'Those Bashas and dignitaries walked among our beds and told us to be men and patient and to fight'.

<sup>134</sup> Interview with Al Hussein ben Abdessalam. Ceuta, 24 January 2011.

<sup>135</sup> Interview with Masoud Ballah, Brussels, 5 November 2011. Stitou Bouinou on the other hand observed that the hospital were he was treated was mixed, with Moroccans lying next to wounded Spanish. As a rule that was not the case as archival material demonstrates. So the case of Bouinou was either exceptional, temporary, or his memory failed him. Interview with Stitou Bouinou, Zumi, 21 May 2012.

<sup>136</sup> Testimony of Mohammed Al Ayyashi Al Bakouri, Tetuan, 7 April 1994, El Merroun archive.

<sup>137</sup> Testimony of Al Bouyekra, Fnideq 21 april 1996. El Merroun archive.

<sup>138</sup> One Nationalist psychiatrist equated Moors with 'the mentally weak'. Seidman, *Republic of Egos*, 104.

shelter, and the ‘stinginess in giving leaves’, he was quite positive on the other hand about how ‘perfectly organised’ the hospitals were where the inmates were treated according to their religion and received food prepared by their fellow believers.<sup>139</sup> The positive recollections of the Moroccan inmates of Spanish hospitals might also simply reflect a contrast with the medical facilities and treatment available for them in the Moroccan Protectorate itself, whether French or Spanish, which must have been of lower standard with the ones found in the Spanish Peninsula.

The positive memories coupled with the documentary evidence of the hospital policies of the Nationalists lead to the conclusion that the military succeeded to some degree in establishing a *little Morocco* for its wounded Moroccan men, though it did not always manage to keep them within its confines. In any case the Nationalists tried to present the image of Muslim-friendly hospitals. They succeeded in gaining the satisfaction of Moroccan notables visiting the hospitalised in Spain.<sup>140</sup>

The Nationalists also tried to sell the image of Muslim-friendly hospitals to the media. In Russell Palmer’s colour film on the war in Spain, footage is shown of Moroccan wounded and recuperating soldiers posing outside a Muslim hospital, along with smiling and friendly looking nurses as well as what seems to be Muslim religious officials and Moroccan officers. The mood seems relaxed, with two Moroccans playing music and dancing. The commentary reminds the viewer that these are special hospitals for the Moroccans where the tenet of their religion could be observed in matters of diet. It then goes further to state that the simple tastes and happy disposition of these men makes life in these hospitals interesting.

A place less pleasant to stay for Moroccan soldiers and the civilians who provided services for them were Spanish prisons. But even there the Spanish authorities deemed it appropriate to separate the Muslim inmates from the Spanish ones. In August 1938, the Delegation of Native Affairs requested the *interventor* of the Bureau of Moroccan Affairs in North Spain to carry out the necessary efforts to locate certain Moroccan prison inmates, as it was not favourable that they ‘would suffer their sentences in coexistence with the Spanish penal population’. The inmates were supposed after being located to be sent to the Uad-Lau prison in Morocco.<sup>141</sup> However even after the end of the Civil War there were still Moroccans held in Spanish prisons as it is obvious from a missive sent on 22 January 1941 by a representative of the Delegation of Native Affairs to the director of the Comendadoras prison in Madrid, requesting that the Muslim prisoners should receive food that they could prepare in accordance with their religion, and to try to let the Muslim prisoners sleep in cells or sections that were separated from the Spanish.<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> Interrogation of Abdeselem ben Tourhami. SHD, 3 H 266.

<sup>140</sup> Note (on 23 September 1937) of gratitude by the Interventor to Sevilla to directors and staff of a number of Andalusian Muslim Hospitals, on the occasion of the visit of Muslim notables from Ifni and Cabo Juby. AGA, Af, 81.1186 (Visitas – Incidentes).

<sup>141</sup> AGA, Af, 81.1125, Leg. 3769, Cp 1.

<sup>142</sup> AGA, Af, 81.1125, Leg. 3770, Cp 2. According to one file there were 166 ‘Muslim inmates’ both military and civilian in Spanish prisons in 1941. Ibidem, It is unclear when the last of them were repatriated to Morocco to

### **'The sinners'**

For all the attention the Nationalists gave to the religious sentiments of the Moroccan soldiers, and for all the efforts to portray them as God-fearing pious soldiers, many of these young men do not seem to have been particularly pious Muslims. There is no way to quantify those who fulfilled the profile of an observant Muslim as opposed to those who did not or those who were only partially observant. These last would have probably formed the majority. As we have seen, some hospitals struggled with the issue of Moroccan convalescents who caused 'scandals' connected to drinking alcohol. In Sanlúcar de Barrameda, Dominguez Lobato sarcastically relates in his memoirs how one of the Moroccan inmates of the hospital 'says that he does not drink, that "the Koran prohibits wine". Well, every evening before dinner, he drinks a whole cup of Moscatel [Spanish Muscat wine]', adding how 'a serious thing' it is to watch a 'drunken Moor'.<sup>143</sup> Also sarcastically he pointed to how the 'true Koranic practitioners seemed absolutely unaware of the Ninth Commandment', lusting after girls in the town and how the Moroccan convalescents' 'favourite pastimes' was frequenting a little street where four or five houses were 'generously open' and where 'the *moritos* [little Moors] found the best welcome', referring obviously to houses of prostitution.<sup>144</sup> As shown in the previous chapter the Moroccan soldiers developed sexual relations with Spanish prostitutes upon their arrival in Spain. But that sometimes led to brawls with Spanish soldiers, and furthermore, they were not always welcomed by the prostitutes. That was perhaps one reason why the Spanish military arranged, early in the war, for Moroccan prostitutes, as well as dancers and singers who doubled as prostitutes to be shipped to Spain and quartered near Moroccan units where they exclusively serviced the needs of these units. But it also happened that, during hard times and due to lack of food, Spanish women exchanged sexual favours for food with Moroccan soldiers.

The evidence seems to demonstrate that among the Moroccan soldiers who fought in Spain, those who observed prayers, teetotalism and fasting were in the minority. 'Most of them were not religious' remembers one veteran.<sup>145</sup> In the entire company of another Moroccan veteran only one member performed the prayers, though they all fasted in Ramadan.<sup>146</sup> Alcohol was often consumed,<sup>147</sup> although according to one testimony, Muslim officers would be punished by imprisonment if they drank alcohol.<sup>148</sup> Earlier it was referred to some towns' institution of prohibition to sell alcohol to Moroccans while in other towns that same measure did not exist. One veteran remembered that in one unnamed town the '*camarero* [waiter] was punished because he let the Moroccans drink', and that the bar owner excused himself by stating that he was confused because the bar was full of Tercio and

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complete their sentences, although the archival material reveals regular transfer of prisoners to Morocco throughout the Spanish Civil War and the years after that.

<sup>143</sup> Dominguez Lobato, *Cien capítulos de retaguardia*, 320.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibidem*, 299, 301.

<sup>145</sup> Interview with Abdullah Abdekade, Nador, 4 July 2011.

<sup>146</sup> Interview with Kendoussi ben Boumidien, Nador, 4 July 2011.

<sup>147</sup> Interview with Mohammed Abdullah Susi, Ceuta, 19 January 2011. See also Balfour, *Deadly Embrace*, 283.

<sup>148</sup> Testimony of Mohammed Al Ayyashi Al Bakouri, Tetuan, 7 April 1994, El Merroun archive.

Requeté soldiers and that the one who paid the bill was not even a Moroccan. The owner was warned not to give alcohol to the *askaris*.<sup>149</sup> But other sources for alcohol were the Moroccan mobile merchants who followed the troops and installed their shopping posts whether on streets or at the top of mountains, selling tobacco but also alcohol.<sup>150</sup> It is not clear whether in general, the Spanish army was more lenient towards its Moroccan soldiers who consumed alcohol in Spain or did not adhere to Islamic practices in general, compared to Moroccan authorities, or whether those serving in the Spanish *Regulares* were differently treated than those serving in the *Mehal-las* which officially represented the Moroccan state.<sup>151</sup>

If many Moroccan soldiers proved not to be very practicing Muslims when it came to performing prayers, drinking alcohol, or visiting prostitutes then they at least showed somewhat more observance towards the fasting month of Ramadan. Fernando Fernández de Córdoba, a famous radio announcer for the Nationalists during the war, related how one evening in 1936 near Valdemoro (south of Madrid) the ‘Moors’ suddenly started to fire continuously in the air creating a tense situation that confused Spanish troops nearby until the head of the Moorish unit resolved it by explaining that Ramadan had begun. These ‘infantile and simple men’, believed, according to Córdoba, that “the first one to fulfil the ritual of firing his rifle will gain a place next to Allah”.<sup>152</sup> Whether the majority of the soldiers fasted during actual combat operations is a question in need of clarification, and it would be hardly surprising if the clerics attached to the Moroccan units gave the soldiers permission to break their fast. One veteran however remembers, while speaking about the respect towards Muslim holy occasions that ‘the commander would stop the *Tabor* and would say tomorrow is Ramadan, who is going to fast and who is going to break the fast? The one who wants to fast goes to the right. Then one who wants to break the fast goes to the left’.<sup>153</sup> This division might imply that those who would choose to observe the fast might expect different, probably lighter, military tasks, at least when the front was calm.

De Mesa mentions that the combats during the Battle of the Ebro in 1938 in which the 1<sup>st</sup> Navarrese division under the command of Mohammed Mizzian participated, coincided with Ramadan, and that despite the fighting the commander refrained, along with Spanish and Moroccan members of his staff, from having any food until nightfall, maintaining themselves solely with tea,<sup>154</sup> which is not

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<sup>149</sup> Testimony of Karimo ben Abdelkader, Tetuan, 25 September 1996.

<sup>150</sup> Cognac appears in three sources as the alcohol that was sold by these Moroccan ambulant merchants. See: Francisco Cavero y Cavero, *Con la Segunda Bandera en el frente de Aragón. Memorias de un alférez provisional*, 34; Pablo Montagudo Jaén, 1936, *Regulares. Diario en el campo de batalla*, 119, and Francisco Pérez, *Diario de operaciones. (Desde el 10 de Marzo de 1938 al 1º de Abril de 1939)*. Unpublished and finished in Boltaña, 3 December 1941. Source: <http://www.cesobrarbe.com/documentos/diario.pdf>, 13.

<sup>151</sup> One interviewee of El Merroun, a reservist of the *Mehal-la* during the Spanish Civil War, who did not fight in Spain, stated that ‘in the *Mehal-la* if they catch you outside the law of Islam [i.e. conducting un-Islamic practices] they [the military authorities] would imprison you. Testimony of Bagdad Al Asri, Tetuan, 29 March 1994, El Merroun archive.

<sup>152</sup> Fernando Fernández de Córdoba, *Memorias de un soldado locutor* (Madrid 1939) 109-110.

<sup>153</sup> Testimony of Al Bouyekra, Fnideq, 21 April 1996, El Merroun archive.

<sup>154</sup> De Mesa, *Los moros de la Guerra Civil española*, 111.

strictly in compliance with the fasting that mandates abstaining from food and liquids. As for the rank and file it seems that in times and places when and where the troops were recuperating or resting most of the troops either observed the fasting or at least refrained from breaking it out of fear of the judgment of other soldiers.<sup>155</sup> It seems that there was a greater tendency to reprimand those who did not fast, compared to those who did not perform prayers.<sup>156</sup>

Even in hospitals the wounded seem to have observed Ramadan. Eshyllt Priscilla Scott-Ellis, a British woman who volunteered her services as a nurse in southern Spain, commented negatively on the fasting of the Moroccan wounded. She stated in her diary of November 1937 while working in an unidentified hospital, that she was ‘beginning to loathe the Moors. They are so tiresome ... it makes me mad to have a lot of filthy, smelly Moors ordering me about ... the trouble is that they are doing their periodic fasting and eat nothing till dinner, so are all very irritable’.<sup>157</sup> It seems then that the majority of the Moroccan soldiers who were fighting in Spain, rather than being the devout Muslims the Nationalists portrayed them to be, were in fact often prone to ‘sinning’, while selectively observing their religion at other times.

### **Islam and European armies**

The position of Islam in European armies was treated with perhaps no less care than it was in the Spanish Army, even by countries not traditionally associated with colonial armies that contained large numbers of Muslim soldiers. The Germans during the First World War employed religion as a tool of propaganda to incite Muslim soldiers in the British and French armies to desert. In prisoner of war camps, they spent much effort and money to show the Muslim prisoners how much Germany sympathised with Islam, building mosques in the camps and attending to their religious needs.<sup>158</sup> German fascination with the idea of attracting Muslims as potentially powerful allies resurged during the Second World War. Himmler was personally fascinated by the Islamic faith, which he believed fostered fearless soldiers, and marvelled at the idea of a Bosnian military division composed of Muslims. The SS sought through the creation of such a division to rally all of Islam’s disciples to their side.<sup>159</sup>

But the careful attention to the religious feelings of colonial, and especially Muslim, soldiers is also seen in the British and French armies. For the British the crucial lesson of the Indian Mutiny (1857), triggered by a perceived offence against the religious feelings of both Hindu and Muslim soldiers, was that military discipline could be preserved only if the authorities understood the religious needs of the men. Many experienced officers believed that the first qualification of a leader of native

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<sup>155</sup> Testimony of Al Siddiq Al Kumeili, Tetuan, 24 Septembet 1996, El Merroun archive.

<sup>156</sup> See: AGA, Af, 81.1187, letter to the inspector of the Moroccan *Mejasnia*, 1 December, 1937.

<sup>157</sup> Eshyllt Priscilla Scott-Ellis, *The Chances of Death. A Diary of the Spanish Civil War*, ed., Raymond Carr (Norwich 1995) 11.

<sup>158</sup> Andrew T. Jarboe, ‘The Long Road Home. Britain, Germany and the Repatriation of Indian Prisoners of War after the First World War’, in: Eric Storm and Ali Al Tuma, eds., *Colonial Soldiers in Europe, 1914-1945. “Aliens in Uniform” in Wartime Societies* (New York 2016) 140-157, here 145

<sup>159</sup> George Lepre, *Himmler’s Bosnian Division. The Waffen-SS Handschar Division 1943-1945* (Atglen, PA 1997) 17.



troops is that he should be intimately acquainted with and known to his men.<sup>160</sup> British authorities did much to include customary practices in the routine of military life. Religious teachers, blessed the weapons and colours of the regiment. Religious ceremonies were closely integrated with the regimental calendar. During the First World War a fund was set up in Britain to provide articles of religious importance.<sup>161</sup>

So did the French who were very particular about not offending the religious feelings of their Muslim soldiers, especially the North African ones. The French army policy also focused on North African soldiers as Muslims because of a long tradition in France, predating the colonial experience in the region but also shaped and intensified by it, of viewing the ‘Arab Islam’ of North Africans as inherently fanatical, politicised and impervious to outside influences, particularly the progressive and modernising influences of French colonialism. This in turn shaped and reinforced a tendency to view the Muslim identity of North Africans as the primary, often the only important consideration when formulating colonial and military policies towards them. They were above all, in some ways ‘only’, Muslim.<sup>162</sup> Officials made special efforts to accommodate Muslim religious beliefs within the French Army. Authorities felt especially vulnerable to criticism on these issues, because it was crucial both to maintaining morale and to combating German and Ottoman propaganda. In fact, efforts in the army to accommodate Islam were particularly focused on three key areas: burial rites, the observance of holy days and the provision of clerics, imams, to minister to soldiers’ religious needs while serving in France.<sup>163</sup> The army also made attempts to facilitate the observance of Muslim holy days. From the opening months of the conflict, the Ministry of War instructed local commanders to give Muslim soldiers some respite from their daily duties on religious holidays and to allow them to pray in common and to celebrate according to their customs, and observe the fast of Ramadan, even given that some French officials noted the lax religious attitude of many Muslim soldiers outside the Muslim holy month, and the inconvenience for commanders to change work and meal schedules for an entire month.<sup>164</sup> Probably not much changed during the Second World War, at least with regard to the sensitive issue of the precise observance of Muslim burials customs,<sup>165</sup> and respect towards Islamic observation of the holy month of Ramadan.<sup>166</sup>

While these different European attitudes share much with, and in many cases are a mirror image of the Spanish Nationalist religious policy towards colonial soldiers, that does not mean that the Spanish experience does not have its own unique elements. In comparison to the British, French and

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<sup>160</sup> Omissi, *The Sepoy and the Raj. The Indian Army 1860-1940*, 99.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibidem*, 100-101.

<sup>162</sup> Richard S. Fogarty, ‘Islam in the French Army during the Great War Between Accommodation and Suspicion’, in: Eric Storm and Ali Al Tuma, eds., *Colonial Soldiers in Europe, 1914-1945. “Aliens in Uniform” in Wartime Societies* (New York 2016) 23-40, here 25.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibidem*, 25, 26.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibidem*, 27.

<sup>165</sup> See for example ‘note de service-objet: sépulture des militaires inhumés en Corse’, 14 March 1944. SHD, 3 H 2551.

<sup>166</sup> Interview with Idriss Bouchayeb ben Kaddour, Sidi Kassem, 24 May 2012.

German nations, Spain was the country that had most based the establishment of its nationhood on the struggle against Islam, and yet was the nation which had most shared cultural and historical bonds with Islam and Muslim Morocco. Spain's call to Jihad against infidels might have been similar to Germany in the First World War. But Germany was dependent on the Ottoman Sultan as the official bearer of the Jihad banner, while Franco managed to present Nationalist Spain in its own right as the bearer of a holy war banner that included Islam. For the Spaniards who looked to their struggle against the *rojos* through a religious prism, the Moroccan Muslims might have been more natural allies than the North Africans were to the French or the Indian to the British. The practical benefits of respecting the religious feelings of colonial Muslim soldiers were evident for the different European powers and a strong motivator to show such consideration and tolerance. But the Spaniards could claim, or even convince themselves, that they did so out of genuine historical and religious bonds and goals, which one could regard as distinct from the French with acted upon their propagating of universal, egalitarian values, or from the British with their fears of a repeat of the 1857 Indian Mutiny.

#### **Conclusion: To be or not to be a Muslim**

Religion was important in the way the Spanish Nationalists viewed, presented and treated their Moroccan troops. In a *Cruzada* against those accused of anti-religion, religiousness was the *raison-d'être* for the presence of these troops in Spain. Faith, i.e. belief in an old organised religion, and respect for old traditions, was the only binding element that could be argued. The Moroccans therefore, in their participation to create a traditional Spain, had to be religious or at least be presented that way. But it was not only a matter of temporary practicality. The image of the religious Moroccan simply fit the standard stereotype the Spanish had of the Moor and that fluctuated between presenting him as a 'fanatic' at times or as 'deeply religious', two terms referring to two sides of the same coin.

Perhaps one of the most prominent propaganda expressions that praised the religious Moroccan was the film, *La canción de Aixa* (the song of Aixa), a Spanish-German co-production, which was released in Spain just after the end of the Civil War.<sup>167</sup> It tells the story of two cousins, Hamed and Abslam, who come from rival families and who vow to end their rivalry, but who both fall in love with the mixed race singer Aixa, which rekindles their rivalry. From their first encounter in the film the contrast between the two cousins could not be greater. Hamed is a westernised man, wears a tuxedo, drives a car and drinks alcohol. The other cousin, Abslam is traditional and conservative, wearing a white turban and a *Regulares* uniform, the latter not being a small detail, as the Nationalist army's policy was to keep the Moroccans (or to encourage them to remain) in their religious place. When they meet by chance at a hotel in Tetuan, Abslam notices Hamed drinking alcohol and when asked about it, Hamed answers 'it is necessary here. One must be modern and forget the prejudices', an answer which Abslam indignantly retorts with: 'And you call prejudices our faith and the laws of our forefathers?' As the film progresses, we learn more about the two. Hamed is disrespectful of his

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<sup>167</sup> Directed by Florián Rey. Produced in UFA studios in Berlin, 1939

father, listens to music from 'Paris', is apparently interested in western books and befriends people who smoke and drink, while Abslam is respectful towards his father and the patriarchal order. The film clearly steers the viewer towards sympathy with Abslam and his values rather than the westernised Hamed who clearly is depicted as morally inferior to Abslam. In the end Aixa decides to give her love to the more religious of the cousins, and 'getting the girl' is usually a strong criterion by which film characters are categorised as deserving the viewers' sympathy. But the film also steers the viewer towards the idea that traditional ways are more befitting of Morocco than western values or even western technology (as in the scene where the car of Aixa and her uncle breaks down and has to be towed by horses).

American writer Susan Martin-Márquez also analysed the film and sees in it a symbolic representation of the contrast between the Spanish and the French colonial practices in Morocco: Hamed who listens to Parisian music and therefore is aligned with the French style of colonisation and is eager to reject his own traditions in favour of European culture and technology, while Abslam served in the Spanish army, an institution that has clearly allowed him to maintain his own cultural inheritance.<sup>168</sup> In addition to this contrast, Martin-Márquez sees the film as expressive of Nationalist Spain's new identity, for Morocco in the film not only signifies Morocco but also Spain, a nation set to embark upon a period of autocracy, characterised on the cultural front by the Nationalist regime's rejection of a modernity now deemed foreign and its exaltation of timeworn national traditions.<sup>169</sup> American writer Daniela Flesler seizes upon this understanding to assert that 'in this way, *La canción de Aixa* erases Moroccan/Spanish differences, emphasising their commonality'.<sup>170</sup> Flesler has a good argument here, but at the same time the 'commonality' between Spain and Morocco that the Spanish Nationalist regime was selling its audience was presented as an implied and *common* understanding between the Moroccans and the Spaniards. The understanding is that Morocco should remain Moroccan, Muslim and therefore *different*. It must have been a relief to watch the film for those wary about the cultural hazards of the presence of Moroccan troops in Spain.

The Spanish Nationalist military and state sought to maintain a separate religious space for its Muslim soldiers. The Muslim hospitals and cemeteries, the Muslim diet, the prohibition of Christian proselytising among Muslim troops, etc., were all part of this separate religious space. In some cases it was the Moroccans who sought it, either soldiers or visiting native officials. This was, therefore, a policy that had the approval of both the Spanish and the Moroccan sides and that was initiated from both sides.

The motives for such a policy suggest a question: did the Spanish Nationalist military conduct the policy of creating a separate religious sphere for Muslims out of a genuine respect for the faith of its Muslim soldiers? Or was it because the Muslim North Africans were seen as impervious to

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<sup>168</sup> Susan Martin-Márquez, *Disorientations. Spanish Colonialism in Africa and the Performance of Identity* (New Haven 2008) 240.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibidem*, 241.

<sup>170</sup> Flesler, *The Return of the Moor*, 148.

Christianity? Or because of political calculations regarding the stability of the Protectorate, or a mix of all or some of the above factors?

Whether the respect for the faith itself was genuine or not, a concern for the religious feelings of the Moroccan troops is sensed in the many documents and reports that touch on the matter and therefore must be considered real. These documents do not show any cynicism on the part of the Spanish military with regard to the religious feelings of the Moroccan soldiers. Treating their Moroccan soldiers well, also in matters of faith, ensured that the Spanish officers could obtain the best performance from their soldiers. But it was also of political importance, ensuring stability and continuing support in Spanish Morocco by presenting Franco as a protector of the Muslim faith.

Franco was not the only 'protector' of Islam and Muslims of the time. Mussolini had also decided to declare his friendship to Arabs and Muslims, obviously to rival British and French influence in the Mediterranean, and while visiting Libya in the spring of 1937 (the same period when Franco sent his pilgrims to Mecca in cooperation with Italy), he was handed, during a grand ceremony, 'this well tempered Islamic blade', by a Berber colonel who had served in Italy's forces, reminding him that the Muslims of the Mediterranean 'see in you the great Man of State who guides, with a firm hand, our destiny'. The Duce, riding a horse, lifted the Sword of Islam to the cheers of the public. What the Sword of Islam meant was not quite obvious, but it was a great spectacle which secured the necessary headlines.<sup>171</sup>

The policy of religious tolerance was continued in Morocco after the war. As Albet-Mas puts it, the political and religious tolerance displayed by Spanish administrators in Morocco during Franco's dictatorship was in sharp contrast to contemporaneous behaviour and policy in metropolitan Spain until the late 1950s. In Albet-Mas' opinion the tolerance was real but reflected a perception of necessity rather than choice.<sup>172</sup> It might be a necessity rather than choice with regard to the Protectorate itself, but when it came to the soldiers, the Nationalists, in their general policy (which was not uniformly translated into practice) went a long way to make sure that the Moroccans did not have the choice of being anything other than pious Muslims.

It seems however, that the religious policy was not only a matter of protecting the spiritual space of the Moroccans or pleasing the Moroccan authorities. The rejection of the idea that conversion to Christianity could ever be genuine, and the presentation of the Moroccans to both the Spanish people and to the world as deeply religious and spiritual, and the establishment of a traditional Spain reminiscent of the medieval one meant that the Moroccan soldiers in Spain *had to be* Muslim and *had to be* religious whether they liked it or not.

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<sup>171</sup> Sebastian O'Kelly, *Amedeo. The True Story of an Italian's War in Abyssinia* (London 2002) 79-84. The comparisons with Franco has its limits of course, as Franco was more personally involved with Morocco than Mussolini with Libya where Mussolini never lived, though both men led a brutal campaign to curb a local insurgency in Morocco and Libya. In both cases the role of protector of Muslims was somewhat dubious. In the case of Franco it was rather Muslim soldiers who protected him and his regime. As for Mussolini, even his Sword of Islam was fake: it was made in Florence.

<sup>172</sup>Albet-Mas, 'Three Gods, Two Shores, One Space', 598.

It is appropriate to close this chapter with a curious story that illustrates the complexities of the religious aspect in the partly Islamicised Spanish military. In the 1950s Mohammed Ben Mizzian, the only Muslim to attain the rank of general in the Spanish army, was appointed Captain General of Galicia, who in his new position had the duty of conducting the yearly traditional honours, in the name of the head of state, towards the apostle Saint James of Compostela, known as Santiago Matamoros (Santiago the killer of the Moors). It is said that to avoid an embarrassing situation, flowers or a blanket were used to cover the parts which showed the holy apostle crushing the Moors, so as not to offend the general.<sup>173</sup> There is a similar story, recounted by Federico García Sanchiz in 1941, whereby the crushing of the Moors is covered with branches as a courtesy to the *Regulares* who were garrisoning Compostela. One of the *Regulares*, according to Sanchiz, protested: ‘No, do not cover.... That Moor is a red Moor.....’.<sup>174</sup> Such were the ironies of the holy war.<sup>175</sup>

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<sup>173</sup> Madariaga, *Los moros que trajo Franco*, 276.

<sup>174</sup> Federico García Sanchiz, ‘Soliloquio’, *Ejército*, nr. 14 (1941) 54-65, here 63.

<sup>175</sup> Nerín gives two examples of tensions between Catholicism and Islam in Morocco. The first one is Nador, where in 1921 Riffian rebels attacked the church there and destroyed its images. The second is the Barcelona quarter of Gracia where ‘it is told’ that in 1939 the Moroccan forces were billeted in the cavalry barracks in Lepanto street. The barracks was dominated by a statue of Saint James decapitating a Muslim. ‘It appears’, Nerín continues, ‘that the statue suffered the same fate as the saints of Nador’. Nerín, *La guerra que vino de África*, 178. No reference is given for this story, but while it is possible that Moroccans were offended by the statue, it is highly unlikely that they would have destroyed it, especially since they were quartered there. It would have been more likely that they would have destroyed it while in transit so that it would have been more difficult to identify the perpetrators. More plausible is that it suffered damage during combat, or at the hands of the Republicans, in which case it would not have been the first time.

### **Part III**

## **The Moroccan as Enemy, the Moroccan as ‘Brother’**

## Chapter 6

### The Republic and the Moroccans

In a letter, during a famous correspondence between the two Spanish writers Miguel Unamuno and Angel Ganivet that lasted between 1886-1898, Unamuno told Ganivet:

I do not wish to know anything about the Arabs. I feel a deep antipathy towards them. I hardly believe in that what they call Arabic civilisation, and I consider their passing through Spain the greatest calamity that we have suffered.<sup>1</sup>

Ganivet responded by saying that he was born in a place (Granada) that before it was Spanish, was 'Moorish, Roman and Phoenician', and that the greatest influence on Spain after Christianity, the influence that 'gave us our Quixotean spirit, was the Arabic one'. These words, as Madariaga argues, represented and continue to represent the two tendencies that divided and still divide Spanish opinion towards the Arabs, a division between 'Morophobia' and, if not 'Morophilia', a certain recognition of the legacy of the Arab culture and its importance within the Spanish one. Ironically the profoundly anti-Arab Unamuno would later, in his writings, oppose the Spanish military adventure in Morocco, while the self-professed heir to the Islamic-Arabic culture was an early proponent of the idea of an imperialist project in Morocco on the basis of the common racial traits of both the Spanish people and the Muslims of that country.<sup>2</sup> In this part of the study, this current chapter and the following one will examine the attitudes towards the Moroccans that ranged from the hostile, on the part of the Republicans, to the mixed attitude of acceptance and distance on the part of the Nationalists.

In 1937 in France the Spanish journalist Manuel Chaves Nogales published a collection of nine short stories called *A sangre y fuego*. Horrified by the cruelty of both parties to the war he exiled himself to France where he wrote about the ugly aspects of the conflict. Though classified as stories, each of his accounts have been 'extracted faithfully from a strictly true fact, every one of its heroes has a real existence and authentic personality that has been discreetly veiled only due to the proximity of the events'.<sup>3</sup> One of these stories, in fact two stories in one, deals with the fate of two captured Moroccan soldiers. The first one, being injured, was taken to a village called Monreal, where he was medically treated. The revolutionary committee discussed his fate, with anarchists favoring his release if he was to reject his past and commit himself to become a worthy citizen of a free Iberia. The communists suggested he should serve against the 'rebels' though under a watchful eye, while the Republican delegates demanded he be sent to Madrid. But the 'people' demanded his death, and so it happened. After his successful treatment at the hospital militiamen put him against the wall and shot

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<sup>1</sup> María Rosa de Madariaga, 'Arabes y Españoles: Complicidades y Recelos Mutuos', *Revista Internacional de Sociología* 46 (1988) 509-520, here 509.

<sup>2</sup> Madariaga, 'Arabes y Españoles', 509-511.

<sup>3</sup> Manuel Chaves Nogales, *A sangre y fuego. Héroes, bestias y mártires de España* (Madrid 2001).

him. The second was captured along with other Moroccans during the assault on the University City in Madrid. The Republicans paraded them in the main avenue of Gran Vía to a public that seemed less hostile, some of whom even believed the Moroccan had rebelled against Franco. But by nightfall the prisoners were taken to a quiet spot on the outskirts of the Spanish capital where they were shot dead.<sup>4</sup>

Aside from the assurances of the author there is good reason to believe that his stories were merely dramatised versions of the truth. Archival material presents a similar case. In October 1936 the general staff of the Nationalist columns of the southern sector reported that ‘in Madrid a captured legionnaire has been paraded, maltreated and later shot, also a number of *Regulares* [were paraded] were photographed and later shot’.<sup>5</sup> Manuel Tagüeña, one of the notable Republican commanders in the war, writes about how at the end of August 1936 in Peguerinos, his forces managed to repel a Nationalist attack and a number of prisoners, including ‘Moors’, fell into his troops’ hands. The orders, according to him, were to shoot all prisoners, an order dutifully carried out. A lucky Moroccan was the last prisoner to fall into their hands, by which time the soldiers ‘were tired of spilling blood’. The Moroccan turned out to be a veteran of the Verdun battle during the First World War, and was sent to Madrid where ‘he might save his life there’.<sup>6</sup>

The early period of the war witnessed the execution of Moroccan troops with such frequency that even though there was no Republican governmental or military policy to sanction the killings, the chances of a Moroccan soldier surviving capture were low, a pattern that might have decreased with the progression of war but was still visible from time to time. Ruano cites the American journalist Knoblauch, who reported that captured Moroccans were burnt alive by the Republicans in the neighborhood of the Escorial.<sup>7</sup> The Republican well-known communist commander Valentín González, better known as El Campesino, is reported to have had many of the captured Moroccan prisoners executed.<sup>8</sup>

Some on the Republican side, generally outsiders, admitted the existence of the problem of executing the Moroccan prisoners and tried to remedy it. In October 1936, the French communist leader, André Marty, reported to the Comintern that:

our [communist] party took the right position vis-à-vis the Moroccans. All the [Spanish] papers were constantly cursing the Moroccans. We made the first attempt to win over the Moroccan people. With this goal in mind, we put on the radio an Arab public speaker. It is possible that the Moroccans did not understand him since he spoke in the literary language,

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<sup>4</sup> Chaves Nogales, *A sangre y fuego*, 165-186.

<sup>5</sup> AHMC, Varela, 68/419.

<sup>6</sup> Manuel Tagüeña Lacorte, *Testimonio de dos guerras* (Barcelona 2005) 130.

<sup>7</sup> Sanchez Ruano, *Islam y Guerra Civil española*, 279-280.

<sup>8</sup> Thomas, *The Spanish Civil War*, 696. A whole Tabor (battalion) is supposed to have been captured and slaughtered. I doubt this particular incident or at least its magnitude, since no single Tabor was ever annihilated or disbanded as a result of heavy casualties. But it illustrates at least what the Republican media thought should happen to Moroccan prisoners.



which is different from the common Arabian language. But the first step was taken, and it had significant consequences. The anarchist organ began to write “about our brothers, the Moroccan soldiers”. And we made it so that captured Moroccan soldiers could freely walk the streets of Madrid without risking their lives.<sup>9</sup>

Another foreigner who tried to solve this problem was Najati Sidqi, a Palestinian communist whom the Comintern sent to Spain in October 1936 to encourage Moroccan soldiers to switch to the Republican side by writing pamphlets, in Moroccan Arabic, and even using the megaphone on the frontlines.<sup>10</sup> While in Spain he assumed the alias of Mustafa bin Kala.<sup>11</sup> Though he started optimistically, the mission soon left him frustrated. The Spanish ‘comrades’ were always suspicious of any Moroccan, and while Sidqi struggled to convince Moroccan soldiers to surrender, he complained more than once about the execution of Moroccan prisoners of war at the hands of the Republicans who ‘rarely showed mercy’ when they captured Moroccans. According to him the Spanish communist leaders showed indifference towards the executions and towards ‘the Moroccan cause’ in general. Sidqi ‘started to feel, deep in my heart, that my mission was failing’.<sup>12</sup> He left Spain at the end of 1936 for Algeria to seek a more effective method of inciting the Moroccans to rebel against Franco by establishing a radio station. The ‘Algerian project’, however, never materialised and Sidqi never returned to Spain.<sup>13</sup>

The reasons for the frequency with which captured Moroccans were executed are diverse. Some Spanish soldiers complained to Sidqi about their distrust of Moroccan soldiers who on more than one occasion, the Spanish soldiers claimed, would feign surrender by raising their fists and shouting in broken Spanish ‘yo estar rojo’ (I being red), only to follow by throwing hand grenades.<sup>14</sup> The hostile attitude was undoubtedly linked to propaganda about the ‘Moroccan savage’ that leading Republican figures spread and the atrocities they attributed to the Moroccan soldiers. But it was also the result of years of demonising the Moroccan as a result of the Rif wars of the 1920s and a simple Spanish historical bias against them. The philosopher and writer Juan Goytisolo concludes that ‘our Left, apart from some exceptions, has chosen the myth, the fantasy, the cliché’ in dealing with the Moroccan aspect of the war. He states that the Spanish secularist bias against the Moroccan, deeply

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<sup>9</sup> Ronald Radosh, Mary R. Habeck, and Gregory Sevostianov eds., *Spain Betrayed. The Soviet Union in the Spanish Civil War* (New Haven 2001) 49.

<sup>10</sup> Najati Sidqi, *Mudhakkarat Najati Sidqi* (The Memoirs of Najati Sidqi) (Beirut 2001) 122, 137. The Spanish Arabist Nieves Paradela was the first Western researcher to uncover Sidqi’s participation in the Spanish conflict having studied, in the 1980s, the then unpublished manuscript of the memoirs. See her ‘Acción política y estancia española de Najati Sidqi’, *Temas Árabes*, nr. 2 (1982) 121-142.

<sup>11</sup> The Soviet correspondent for *Pravda* Mikhail Koltsov noticed this Mustafa whom he described as trying to induce Moroccan soldiers to desert as well as trying to organise Moroccan units to fight for the Republic. He was presented as being of North African origin rather than a Palestinian. Koltsov, *Diario de la guerra de España*, 106.

<sup>12</sup> Sidqi, *Mudhakkarat*, 147, 152, 153.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibidem*, 148-151.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem*, *Mudhakkarat*, 139.

ingrained in the traditional collective discourse has ‘overcome the socio-economic analysis of our Marxists’, and he describes the Republican attack on the ‘Moroccan’ as ‘xenophobic, openly racist’.<sup>15</sup> Madariaga agrees and notices that the old prejudices were so deeply rooted, not only in the popular classes but among many at the top of the Republican camp, that the Republicans had no well-defined ideas about how to orient their propaganda towards the Moroccans.<sup>16</sup> The Spanish Popular Front, in spite of ‘many efforts to see them with different eyes and use a language more in accordance with leftist ideology’ continued to consider the Moroccans as ‘cruel’ and ‘savages’.<sup>17</sup> Certainly, an important factor was the leftist rebellion in Asturias in 1934, the legacy of which was that the left as a whole held the Foreign Legion and the Moroccan *Regulares* principally responsible for crushing the Asturian revolution, as well for the immediate repression, summary executions and looting that followed.<sup>18</sup>

The Republicans’ hostile attitude was translated into a general refusal to give quarter or accept surrender by Moroccan troops.<sup>19</sup> The Moroccan soldiers were aware of the grim fate that they faced, should the Republicans capture them. Jorge Vigón Suerodíaz, a Nationalist officer at the time of the war, wrote that in January 1938, during the battle of Teruel, he witnessed a large formation of Republican prisoners marching past who were guarded by *Regulares* soldiers. One of the prisoners was in extremely bad condition and Vigón accompanies this ‘poor young man’ to the nearest first aid post. But one Moroccan sergeant reacted with surprise to the officer’s ‘poor young man’ comment and responded: ‘Poor no, my commander, poor is the Moor whom they take and kill, poor is the Moor whose feet the red burns. The red is not poor, the red is bad’.<sup>20</sup> One Moroccan veteran witnessed the body of a fellow soldier, cut-up and hung: ‘we said to each other: look what the reds do to the Muslims! And if we got one of them the same would happen, like the other’.<sup>21</sup> Another affirmed that ‘the reds, if they captured one [Moroccan] they would kill him and that is just that’.<sup>22</sup> Or, as already mentioned, the execution could be postponed as ‘at first they would parade them in the streets and then kill them’.<sup>23</sup> A few Moroccans who deserted back to French Morocco told their interrogators similar tales. Layachi o si Mohamed ould si Ali who ‘constantly referred to the Republicans as ‘Russians’, stated that the Moroccan noticed that the ““Russians” would cut the throats of and shoot the prisoners they take whereas General Franco is merciful towards those his troops capture’, an interesting account

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<sup>15</sup> Juan Goytisolo, *Crónicas sarracinas* (Barcelona 1981) 37-39.

<sup>16</sup> Madariaga, *Los moros que trajo Franco*, 400.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibidem*, 403.

<sup>18</sup> José E. Álvarez, ‘The Spanish Foreign Legion During the Asturian Uprising of October 1934’, 223-224.

<sup>19</sup> Mesa, *Los moros de la Guerra Civil*, 169.

<sup>20</sup> Jorge Vigón Suerodíaz, *Cuadernos de guerra y notas de paz*, 200. To this Vigón responded ‘*But the Moor is good – I tell him – and will take this soldier to the first aid post* [Italics in the original]. The sergeant manages to shut up the guards, whose gibberish must be worrying these men’.

<sup>21</sup> In the documentary *El laberinto marroquí* by Julio Sánchez Veiga, Icarus Films, New York 2009.

<sup>22</sup> Testimony of Al Siddiq Al Kumaili, Tetuan, 24 September, 1996, El Merroun archive.

<sup>23</sup> Testimony of Mohammed Al Ayyashi Al Bakouri, Tetuan, 4 July 1994, El Merroun archive.

since this deserter does not seem sympathetic to the army or the war effort.<sup>24</sup> Another deserter, Mfeddel ben Taieb bel Hadj Ali who spoke about low morale in the army noted that despite the weak spirit among the troops, deserting to the enemy was not an option because ‘their fate would be worse’.<sup>25</sup> This made the Moroccan soldiers generally more tenacious in fighting, and in large part accounts for the low numbers of soldiers willing to surrender to the enemy,<sup>26</sup> or accept the fate of a prisoner of war. Even among the few who deserted some were not to spend the entire war in the Republican camp and deserted back to the Nationalists.<sup>27</sup>

It is not known how many Moroccan prisoners of war were captured by the Republicans or how many Moroccan troops deserted to the enemy. There is a document by the General Staff of the Republican Army listing 61 Moroccan prisoners of war and deserters who came under Republican control between mid 1937 to mid 1938. One third of these came from French Morocco; the majority were under 25 years with one 14 year old (with several unlisted ages); 25 are listed as having been taken prisoner while the rest (minus three cases that are not described) are categorised as either escapees (*evadidos*) or those who presented themselves voluntarily (*voluntarios*), among whom were three who were members of the respectively socialist and anarchist trade unions: UGT and CNT.<sup>28</sup>

The fate of some of the prisoners who escaped execution demonstrates still how discriminating the Republicans were in dealing with the Moroccan soldiers. Madariaga mentions a trial, conducted by the Popular Tribunal on 26 October 1936 against four Nationalist soldiers, three Moroccans and one Spanish. Two of the Moroccans and the Spaniard belonged to a *Tabor* of *Regulares* of Melilla, the third Moroccan belonging to *Regulares* of Larache. The charge was ‘aiding the fascist rebellion against the government of the Republic’ and confronting the militias in the Toledo front. Shockingly, the three Moroccans were found guilty and sentenced to life imprisonment, while the Spanish soldier was acquitted as the tribunal found that he had given ‘unwitting support to fascism’.<sup>29</sup>

There is scattered evidence on individual Moroccans who became prisoners of war and survived to tell the tale. One of the few pieces of evidence concerns Mohamed ben Amar Illase, who claimed in 1941 that he went to Spain in 1937 along with the *Regulares* of Tetuan. While on the Toledo front, he asked permission to bathe and was taken prisoner by the Republicans who took him to a prison in Madrid, and later to one in Valencia and later still to Barcelona by boat. In Catalonia while working close to the French frontier he fled to France where he was detained for three months before being released. According to him, he demanded repatriation to Spain which he only managed to do in February 1941 when he was detained by the *Guardia Civil*.<sup>30</sup> This piece of document does not provide however, information on whether there were other Moroccan prisoners, and if there were,

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<sup>24</sup> Interrogation of Layachi o si Mohamed oudsi Ali. SHD, 3 H 266

<sup>25</sup> Mfeddel ben Taieb bel Hadj Ali. SHD, 3 H 266.

<sup>26</sup> Corral, *Desertores*, 446.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibidem*, 444.

<sup>28</sup> AGGC, EM (2), 59/ 8.7.

<sup>29</sup> Madariaga, *Los moros que trajo Franco*, 403-405.

<sup>30</sup> Declaration by Mohamed ben Amar Illase. AGA, Af, 81.1117.

whether they were treated differently or segregated, or whether Moroccans suffered any racially motivated maltreatment. Further, explanation is needed for the long period spent in France before the ex-prisoner managed to return to Spain.

### **The Moroccans meet the ‘rojos’**

How did the Moroccans, whom the Republicans were either trying to vanquish or induce them to surrender, view the Republicans and how did they react to them and to their attempts at enticing them to go over to the other side? Already an impression has been given of the certainty of the Moroccan soldiers about the bad fate of those who would become prisoners under Republican control. The general image that emerges from many testimonies of veterans is that of a violent and ruthless enemy, and not only towards the Moroccans themselves. One veteran remembered upon entering a city that ‘we met Spanish women, clothed in black and weeping on their men and *novios* and sons for they did not want to march with the *rojos*’.<sup>31</sup> As it has already been mentioned for many of the Moroccan veterans, the Republican soldiers were opponents who would give them no quarter. Not only death would follow falling into the hands of the enemy but mutilation as well. Two others spoke of dead Moroccans being ‘crucified’,<sup>32</sup> their eyes gouged out, or the genitals cut off and put in their mouths.<sup>33</sup>

There are very few admissions, by Moroccan interviewees, of killing Republican prisoners, and whenever they did admit such actions they would frame it as a reaction to supposed Republican atrocities committed against Moroccan soldiers. The veteran who spoke about Moroccans being crucified explained how in return ‘we burned them!’<sup>34</sup> Rather than literally setting enemy soldiers on fire he meant killing a great number of them, although there was a system to this. ‘We would kill a part of them and another part would be spared’. The part that was killed, according to this veteran were the ‘genuine reds’ not the ones ‘taken by force’. How they would distinguish between the ‘genuine’ and ‘forced’ ‘reds’ he partially explains by describing how he received the surrender of a Republican soldier. Speaking with a slight admiration for the stubbornness of the ‘reds’, he tells of how he demanded of a Republican prisoner to shout:

Viva España! But the prisoner ‘would say “no”. I give him hell. He says “Viva España”. I tell him “Viva Franco!”. He would say “No. Franco no. I will not say viva. [Even if you] kill me I would not say Viva Franco”. We would get hold of him and would shoot him in the head and kill him and [still] he would not say “Viva Franco”’.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Testimony of Abdelkader Al Shaoui, Tetuan, 3 December 1992, El Merroun archive.

<sup>32</sup> Interview with Mohammed ben Al Ayyashi Al Zerki, Ceuta, 30 June 2011

<sup>33</sup> Interviews with Abdesselam Mohammed Al Amrani, Ceuta, 30 June 2011.

<sup>34</sup> Interview with Mohammed ben Al Ayyashi Al Zerki, Ceuta, 30 June 2011.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibidem*.

As for those spared, some of them ended up in Morocco where they worked, long after the end of the war, on constructing roads and fortifications, ‘while we were guarding them’.<sup>36</sup> If admissions to killing Republican prisoners were rare, it is even rarer and rather exceptional to find an admission in oral testimonies that un-armed and even civilian people were shot. Already a mention has been made (chapter 2) of an anecdote in which a Spanish commander told Moroccans ‘wherever you find reds kill them’, and ordering the execution of two unarmed prisoners’.<sup>37</sup> Others put the blame on the Spaniards. One remembered that ‘the commander would order whether they would kill them [prisoners]. They would bring them to the trenches and execute them, but the Spaniards would do the execution. We on the contrary had sympathy with them because they were like us, forced to do this war’.<sup>38</sup>

### **Speaking to the Republicans**

When the Moroccans and Republicans were not trying to kill each other, there was communication between the two sides as the fronts sometimes stabilised and opposing lines drew close to each other. Communication ranged from continuing the fight verbally, trying to entice the Moroccans to desert to the Republicans or even, though rarely, have a friendly trade. In 1937 the Nationalist *ABC Sevilla* ran a story about one such communication though it was probably embellished to show the high morale of the Nationalist Moroccan forces. As the writer was ridiculing a planned Republican offensive he wrote:

I cannot fail to mention a dialogue, last night, in a certain parapet, where one *jamete* was interrogated thus by the unknown and hidden Marxist:

-Why won't you come over, Moors? We have everything and we will give you much money. But if you won't come over soon you can be certain of death, because we are preparing a terrible offensive along the whole front, and we will slaughter you all.

-Are you not deceiving the Moor? Finally, an offensive of the reds? Moor is very happy! Because the captain forbids looting [the corpses] if there is no offensive by the reds and I was wishing you will do an offensive because then [we] will be authorised by captain to loot’.<sup>39</sup>

Aside from the somewhat belittling ‘*jamete*’ term by the writer to describe the Moroccan soldier, in the story the Republican enemy speaks to the Moroccan as a soldier who is mainly motivated by economical gain which is something the Moroccan soldier, according to the writer, confirms.

More importantly are the surviving Moroccan veterans’ memories of some of the Republicans’ attempts to induce them to surrender. ‘In the trenches we would hear the Moroccan *darija* [Moroccan colloquial Arabic], they would bring them [Moroccans in the Republican camp] and they would talk using the megaphone. We did not know whether they captured them or whether they were on their

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<sup>36</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>37</sup> Testimony of Al Bouyekra, Fnideq, 21 April, El Merroun archive.

<sup>38</sup> Testimony of Mohammed ben Amar ben Al Hashmi, Tetuan, unclear date, El Merroun archive.

<sup>39</sup> ‘ABC en el frente de Madrid’, *ABC Sevilla*, 18 June 1937, 8.

side. They would say “we are in good health, we are well treated, we captured Tetuan, we captured Larache. They only lied, it was but propaganda’.<sup>40</sup> One anecdote that would bring to mind the story of Najati Sidqi describes how ‘the reds put a megaphone on an olive tree and someone called in classical Arabic “You Rifian heroes, you freemen of Jebala. We appreciate your jihadi capabilities which are not appreciated by Franco who does not give you good food or money. Come to us and we will give you money and women and good food”’.<sup>41</sup> One wonders whether the classical Arabic was spoken by a Spanish, a non-Maghrebi Arab or even Sidqi himself, as neither the date nor the approximate period for this incident is given, nor Sidqi himself mentions promises of women to the Moroccan soldiers. According to yet another account, a voice of a Moroccan called Milud from Melilla was heard in Asturias who used to talk to Moroccans, calling them to desert to the Republicans for ‘we have drinks and food and women. Here, we are filled’. Those whom he called upon to desert would respond by insulting him and the Republicans with ‘you son of Jews’ and ‘you sons of dogs’.<sup>42</sup> Others responded to the invitation to surrender in return for money and women with the more obscene remarks of ‘hijo de Pasionaria, hijo [de] puta’.<sup>43</sup> Trading insults became a habit for many. ‘They used to talk to us in Spanish, and we would respond in what Spanish we had. They would insult us and tell us what are you Muslims doing in our country Spain?’<sup>44</sup> Interestingly one of the veterans told the Republicans that ‘you came to our lands to fight us, so this is us coming to your lands to fight you’.<sup>45</sup> It is a remarkable comment from someone, who was an ex-member of the Abdelkrim Al Khattabi’s resistance movement and who later fought on the side of the very army that crushed the Abdelkrim rebellion of the 1920s in Morocco to which he was referring. It would have certainly been unwise to utter that statement where it could have been noticed by the Spanish superiors or reported to them.

It is clear that since the Republicans who spoke to the Moroccans were convinced that the Moroccan volunteers in Franco’s army came to Spain solely due to economic motives and to enjoy the loot, including women, it was more than natural that money and women were the main incentives used to try to attract Moroccans to desert. It would appear that archival evidence, at least on one occasion, might corroborate the oral testimonies with regard to using women as incentives for Moroccan soldiers to desert. In February 1938, the second *Tabor* of the *Regulares* Alhucemas, in the sector of Porcal (south of Madrid) sent an extract of a speech by the ‘reds’ directed towards the ‘natives’ in which it was claimed that many ‘Moors’ were captured in Saragossa and were currently in Madrid and Barcelona, inviting the Moroccan soldiers to come over to their side as they will benefit from 10 pesetas (a higher pay than in the Nationalist army) and would have a ‘happy life’, reminding them that

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<sup>40</sup> Testimony of Al Bouyekra, Fnideq, 21 April 1996, El Merroun archive.

<sup>41</sup> Testimony of an unnamed member of the Association of Ancient Combatants and Victims of War, Tetuan, 2 December 1993, El Merroun archive.

<sup>42</sup> Testimony of Ahmad ben Abdullah Al Omari, Tetuan, 12 April 1994, El Merroun archive.

<sup>43</sup> ‘Son of Pasionaria, son of whore’. Testimony of Mohamed ben Amar ben Al Hashmi, Tetuan, 24 June 1994, El Merroun archive.

<sup>44</sup> Interview with Abdelkader ben Mohammed, Alcazarquivir, 21 February 2011.

<sup>45</sup> Testimony of Mhauesh, Tetuan, 23 March 1995, El Merroun archive.

they, far from resting, ‘live continuously in the trench where, unlike them [a clear reference to the Republican soldiers], they do not have women and other diversions’.<sup>46</sup> The speech points to the possibility of receiving those mentioned diversions should any Moroccan soldier join the Republicans. One piece of Republican propaganda planned to be aimed at the Moroccans, though it is not clear if this actually happened, that refrained from offering economic incentives and referred to the supposedly inferior position of the Moroccans and to the religious paradox of fighting for the Catholics:

The Moors that are wounded are killed in hospitals so that they would not be fed. The Italians receive better pay and live better than you do. You will forever be the cannon fodder that Franco and the Italians need. You fight for the Spanish officers who invaded Morocco and treat you and look at you as slaves. So you fight so that the enemies of your country will win. You fight for the domination of the believers of a faith – the Catholic – that is not yours, a faith that always fought against yours until you were expelled from Spain and enslaved in Morocco. The war that you wage is not sacred nor is it for the independence of your country but to enrich Franco and to bleed Morocco dry by the Germans and Italians.<sup>47</sup>

For all the invitations to join the Republic, the Republican propaganda towards the Moroccans displayed on rare occasions other sentiments, as happened to a Moroccan unit that witnessed, while exiting a town in Extremadura, Republican planes dropping leaflets in which the Moroccans could read ‘If you win we will rule, and if we win we will rule. We the Spanish are brothers. Out with the garbage’.<sup>48</sup>

But the ‘Moors’ who fought against the Republic were not the only ones to suffer from a hostile attitude displayed by the Republic, for the same Republic displayed a similar attitude towards the North Africans who, in far lesser numbers, fought for the Republican cause. This attitude towards pro-Republican ‘Moors’ serves to strengthen the opinion that the Republic’s attitude towards the pro-Nationalist Moroccans was partially motivated by tradition anti-Moorish attitudes.

### **The Republican ‘Moors’**

Mohamed ben Larbi Cherif was perhaps the first Moroccan Muslim volunteer for the Republican case. All that we currently know about him is what the *Diario Marroquí* mentioned on 1 August 1936: that he was ‘a Moorish instructor of red militias’, who had gone to Ceuta to provide military training to red militia in the Union district of the city and who was detained on 31 July.<sup>49</sup> Other than that, it is not known whether he was instructed to train the ‘red militia’ or if it was of his own accord, and whether

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<sup>46</sup> AGMAV, C.2494, Cp. 12/34

<sup>47</sup> AGGC, EM (2), 60. T 26.

<sup>48</sup> Testimony of Bachir, Tetuan, 26 September, 1996, El Merroun archive.

<sup>49</sup> ‘Ha sido detenido un instructor moro de milicias rojas’, *Diario Marroquí*, 1 August 1936.

he was a native of Ceuta or not, or whether he was at the time, or had been before, a member of the Spanish military.

But early in the war there were other Moroccan ‘volunteer’ cases which are better documented and sometimes tragic in nature. In his memoirs of the war, the *Pravda* correspondent Mikhail Koltsov talks about the so-called *Batallón de Milicias Marroquíes*, a unit that is supposed to have been formed by the communist 5<sup>th</sup> Regiment and which supposedly contained anti-fascist Moroccan elements. Gárate Córdoba suspects though that the Moroccans, recruited to fight for the Republicans, were not formed into independent units but distributed among other existing units of the 5<sup>th</sup> Regiment, and later among units of the International Brigades, and that the Militia Battalion might not have existed.<sup>50</sup> But according to Ben Salem, the aforementioned battalion did exist but it met with a tragic ending. It was formed by around 300 Moroccan prisoners, deserters and volunteers along with other Moroccan and Muslim residents and workers in Madrid who were rounded up from the streets and pressed into military service. They were then sent to the front lines in the *Ciudad Universitaria* which was witnessing heavy fighting since the last months of 1936 when the Nationalist forces closed in on the capital. Most of these Moroccans perished during the fighting. The Republicans then shot the handful of survivors for ‘leaving their positions’, although Ben Salem does not provide a source for this information.<sup>51</sup> He does quote however the *Journal de l’Afrique Francaise* which reported a similar story on December 1936 that Moroccan factory workers in Spain were forcibly recruited at the start of the war by the Republican side and formed into a battalion which was later sent to the Guadarrama front to the north of Madrid. The battalion was decimated in the fighting there, leaving angry survivors who mutinied and were therefore shot by the Republicans.<sup>52</sup>

The suspicious attitude that the Republican left had towards the Moroccans was extended even to the admittedly small number of Arabs and other Muslims, some of them communists from various countries who volunteered to fight for the Republicans as part of the International Brigades. Little is known about those Brigadists, and there are hardly any testimonies from the part of these Arab or Muslim Brigadists. Abdul Latif Ben Salem estimated the ‘Arabs’ fighting in the International Brigades at 800.<sup>53</sup> There are other lower estimations. Soviet records used by Salvador Bofarull identify 110 ‘French’ volunteers with Arab names, 38 of whom are listed as coming from Algeria, the origin of the rest is unknown. The records identified also one Lebanese, one Syrian, three Egyptians and two Iraqi (one Jewish, one Arab), one Moroccan, and three Palestinian volunteers.<sup>54</sup> According to Castells there were 716 Arab volunteers, the greater part of whom came from Algeria (493), while Morocco

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<sup>50</sup> Gárate Córdoba, ‘Las tropas de África en la Guerra Civil española’, 64.

<sup>51</sup> Abdelatif Ben Salem, ‘La participación de los voluntarios árabes en las Brigadas Internacionales. Una Memoria Rescatada’, in: J.A Gonzalez Alcantud ed., *Marroquíes en la Gerra Civil española. Campos equivococ* (Granada 2003) 111-131, here 117.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibidem*. See also a short presentation of the subject by Pedro Corral in his *Desertores*, 447-449.

<sup>53</sup> Ben Salem, ‘La participación de los voluntarios árabes’, 120.

<sup>54</sup> 123 other ‘Palestinians’ were Jewish volunteers. Salvador Bofarull, ‘Brigadistas árabes en la Guerra de España. Combatientes por la República’, *Nación Árabe*, nr. 52 (2004) 126-132.



provided 201, and the rest came from Tangier, Syria, and Saudi Arabia (4).<sup>55</sup> It seems in any case that the greatest share of volunteers came from French possessions in North Africa, mainly Algeria.

One of the North African volunteers was Mohamed Belaidi, a machine-gunner in a *Potez 540* French-made airplane, and who was killed in 1936 after being hit by a German *Heinkel* fighter. He inspires the character Saïdi in the novel *L'Espoir*, published in 1937 by the French writer and anti-Fascist activist André Malraux.<sup>56</sup> In the novel, Saïdi explains why he came to Spain, stating that ‘when I learned that the Moors fought for Franco, I told my socialist section: “we have to do something. If not, what would the comrade workers say about the Arabs?”’<sup>57</sup> The historiography of the Moroccans in the Spanish Civil War registers one interview with a Moroccan veteran of the International Brigades. That interview was conducted by Ruano who met said veteran in Tangier. Al Hachmi, who at the age of 18 volunteered in Tangier, then an international city, to fight in Spain. He explained his motives by stating ‘I was with the workers and the poor. Besides, I did not like fascism then, nor now’. He volunteered with two Moroccan friends, left for Marseille and then for Spain. According to him his two friends were similarly motivated and he did not know of Arabs in the International Brigades who joined as mercenaries. He fought in different places, including Madrid, Teruel and the north. In 1938 he left for France and took part in the anti-German actions of the French resistance, for which he was given a pension by the French government.<sup>58</sup>

The ‘Arab’ volunteers were not organised in independent battalions or companies based on ethnicity or place of origin as was usually the case with the English, French, German, Italian or American volunteers. It is not known whether this was deliberate or not, and if it was, whether the Spanish Republicans were behind it. As a French pro-Republican participant in the war, Paul Nothomb comments on the Spanish Republican attitude towards the pro-Republican Muslim volunteers: ‘We knew that the many Arabs in the International Brigades were treated by the Republican officers with a condescension that was clearly tinged with contempt’.<sup>59</sup>

This situation was not helped when the voice of North African members of the International Brigades was, albeit rarely, heard in public. Skoutelsky, in his *Novedad en el frente*,<sup>60</sup> provides excerpts of radio speeches by two North African volunteers of the International Brigades, one Moroccan from Rabat, a veteran of the Great War who came to Spain from France, and the other an

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<sup>55</sup> Andreu Castells, *Las Brigadas Internacionales en la Guerra de España* (Barcelona 1973), quoted in Bofarull, ‘Brigadistas árabes en la Guerra de España’, 132. According to Castells estimates, 87 of the 716 were killed and 66 were either missing or captured. There is little information about many of the volunteers Castells lists. For example, none of the names of the Saudis mentioned is known, only that the four survived and returned home after 1938.

<sup>56</sup> André Malraux, *L'Espoir* (Paris 1937). The novel was adapted into a Spanish speaking movie of the same title that was filmed in Spain during the war but only released in France in 1945.

<sup>57</sup> Malraux, *L'Espoir*, 303.

<sup>58</sup> Ruano, *Islam y Guerra Civil*, 289-290.

<sup>59</sup> Paul Nothomb, *Malraux en Espagne* (Paris 1999) 132. He criticises Dolores Ibárruri for her comments, which were ‘savage and full of sensuality’ with regard to the Moroccans. Nothomb describes this kind of rhetoric as more appropriate of the ‘Inquisition of the age of Isabelle’.

<sup>60</sup> Rémi Skoutelsky, *Novedad en el frente. Las Brigadas Internacionales en la Guerra Civil* (Madrid 2006).

Algerian former sergeant of the French army and later member of the Spanish Communist Party who rose to become a company commander. In their speeches they explain their motives for fighting in Spain and interestingly link the Iberian struggle to the struggle against the injustices of the colonising power, with the Moroccan volunteer asserting that ‘we want to save Morocco from colonial exploitation and then we will have to help ourselves win independence’, having confidence that ‘our Spanish comrades’ were fighting for the freedom of all people, and especially ‘for the liberation of Spanish Morocco’.<sup>61</sup> The Algerian, in his radio speech, complained about the moral oppression his country was suffering at the hands of the ‘colonist’ and asked his French comrades to be interested in his country, but he did not go as far as demanding independence for either Algeria or Morocco.<sup>62</sup> These two volunteers were perhaps too hopeful. In this regard it is worth noting the comment by the Palestinian Sidqi, that after moving to Paris from Algeria, where he incurred wrath from both Spanish and French communists because of his opposition to their ‘colonialist leanings’.<sup>63</sup> Whatever the case may be, it is possible to indicate that the absence of independent ‘Arab’ units was a reflection of the suspicious attitude that the Spanish Republicans held towards the loyalty of any North African volunteers, although there is no hard evidence to prove that this was a deliberate policy.

The North African pro-Republican fighters figure sparsely in Nationalist documents. In November 1936, a French deserter from the newly arrived International Brigades appeared in Casa de Campo and told his Nationalist interrogators that his unit contained a number of Algerian Arabs who desired to desert to the Nationalist ranks but were afraid of retaliating measures.<sup>64</sup> In December of the same year, two Spanish deserters from an engineer unit also appeared in Casa de Campo to announce that the unit was under the command of ‘the Moroccan lieutenant’, whose name was not mentioned. They did mention however that he ‘has much enthusiasm for the red cause’ and does a great job of encouraging his soldiers.<sup>65</sup>

Equally interesting is the account by a Moroccan volunteer in the Republican army who was taken prisoner by the Nationalists. Hamido ben Mohamed Hach, from Tangier, had been living in Spain since 1935 when he moved to live with his sister in Madrid who was married to a Spanish citizen. The ‘National Movement surprised him in Madrid’ and he was evacuated to Valencia and later to Barcelona. In Mataró he enlisted ‘as volunteer’ in 1937 in the Second Battalion of the division that was commanded by Lister, and took part in the Ebro operations, where he was captured by Italian

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<sup>61</sup> Skoutelsky, *Novedad en el Frente*, 207.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>63</sup> Sidqi, *Mudhakkarat*, 153. A humorous anecdote Sidqi mentions is that after leaving for Damascus, the Syrian Communist Party published in May 1937 the first issue of its official paper *Saut Al Sha'b* (The Voice of the People) which published an article on the Spanish Civil War containing an image of a giant Moroccan soldier embracing a slim Spanish one as a symbol of brotherhood between the Moroccan and Spanish peoples. After sending the first issue to the French Communist Party, the French counterparts were furious and answered the Secretary General of the Syrian party that the image did not represent the truth of the war as the Spanish soldier should have been depicted as a giant and the Moroccan one as slim. *Ibidem*, 161.

<sup>64</sup> AHMC, Varela, 91/446.

<sup>65</sup> AHMC, Varela, 92/51, 52.

forces (it is unknown exactly when). He was moved to a number of locations before ending up in a concentration camp for foreigners in San Pedro de Cardeña (Burgos) where he was put to work in the 75<sup>th</sup> Disciplinary Battalion in Belchite.<sup>66</sup> Though interesting, this account does not give us insight into the motives that led this ex-Republican Moroccan soldier to enlist as a ‘volunteer’, if he had any political leanings of any kind, or if he simply found himself in the wrong place in the wrong time, or why did he not volunteer when he was in Madrid. It does not provide information on whether other Moroccans or North Africans were present in the same unit, or whether this soldier’s Moroccan origin played a part in his relations with his comrades in arms. Aside from these persons who fought for the Republic, the Nationalist documents also tell us of a Muslim called ‘Hanak’ who was a speaker for Radio Barcelona.<sup>67</sup>

With the terms ‘Moor’ or ‘Moroccan’, the discussion revolves obviously about people who are Muslim. Indeed, many sources from that era make the distinction between ‘Moor’ and ‘Israelite’ while referring to citizens from the same country. But it is noteworthy to mention, in passing, the fact that a very small number of Jewish Moroccans of another religious persuasion, namely Jewish, were also present in war-torn Spain on the side of the Republic. So far, accounts by Moroccan veterans and those found in archival material have not provided information on the presence of any Jewish Moroccans on the Nationalist side.<sup>68</sup> Moroccan volunteers for the Republican cause were not, however, enough to solve the Moroccan problem that ached the Republic. To shake the power base of the Nationalists, Spanish Morocco had to be destabilised.

### **To re-conquer Morocco**

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<sup>66</sup> Report on Hamido ben Mohamed Hach. AGA, Af, 81.1117

<sup>67</sup> Captain Leopold de Coig Odonell to Commissioner for Native Affairs in Tetuan, on 31 March 1939. AGA, 81.1117, L.3754, Cp.. 2. The picture that figured two other ‘Muslims’ was sent to Tetuan. It is not clear how Tetuan would have provided any help in detaining the said radio speaker.

<sup>68</sup> The Service Historique de la Défense contains interrogation reports of Jewish volunteers returning from Spain to French Morocco. The goal of examining these documents was to ascertain whether information from these Moroccan Jewish volunteers could provide new insights on the Republican attitude to the Moroccan presence among its army’s ranks. The archives provide information on the following Jewish Moroccans: Melul Joseph, a lorry driver who was imprisoned in Spain before being recruited as a mechanic in the 14<sup>th</sup> international brigade. In 1938 after being discharged for medical reasons, he told his French interrogators in Morocco, that 18 other Jewish Moroccans served in his company. SHD, 3 H 266, report on the interrogation of Melul Joseph. Another Moroccan Jew, Messaoud Ben David Barchilon from Casablanca where he frequented Spanish political circles, volunteered to fight for the Republican and left for Spain in November 1936. He was injured by an air raid while still in training in Alicante which left him incapable of combat service and therefore served in auxiliary service, and was joined in January 1937 by his brother Elias who worked as a military electrician. SHD, 3 H 266, report on the interrogation of Messaoud and Elias Ben David Barchilon. Isaac Cohen from Larache was imprisoned for six months by the Spanish Nationalists as a ‘suspect’, though the document does not mention the nature of the suspicion. After being released he moved to the French zone and then to Barcelona where he worked among civilian organisations until he was repatriated in February 1938, after which he offered his services to the French as an informant on the Spanish zone of Morocco. SHD, 3 H 266, report on the interrogation of Isaac Cohen. Unfortunately, these interrogations do not provide any information on the treatment of the Moroccan Jewish volunteers by the Republican authorities, or any disagreeable incidents relating to either their Moroccan or Jewish extraction, although the lack of specific complaints in the interrogation reports might indicate that they were treated well.

After returning from Spain where he fought as a member of the Trotskyist POUM militia, George Orwell noted in frustration that:

What clinches everything is the case of Morocco. Why was there no rising in Morocco? Franco was trying to set up an infamous dictatorship and the Moors actually preferred him to the Popular Front Government! The palpable truth is that no attempt was made to foment a rising in Morocco, because to do so would have meant putting a revolutionary construction on the war. The first necessity, to convince the Moors of the Government's good faith, would have been to proclaim Morocco liberated. And we can imagine how pleased the French would have been by that! The best strategic opportunity of the war was flung away in the vain hope of placating the French and British capitalism'.<sup>69</sup>

Was Orwell's suggestion practical or even possible? In 1992, Madariaga rejected this possibility. She argued against critics of the Republic who blamed it for not promising autonomy or even independence to Moroccan nationalists in order to weaken Franco's position in Morocco, to which she countered that the Republic was in no position to give such concessions, and that the Moroccan nationalist movement was too urban and weak to do anything to undermine the Francoists.<sup>70</sup> A proclamation by the Republic or even a promise for future independence for Morocco might have caused many troubles for the Nationalists in Morocco, though perhaps not in a decisive way. One Moroccan nationalist figure, M. Bennuna, told Ruano that although there were not many militant Moroccan nationalists in the principal cities, they did have members in the mountains who would have conducted military action against Franco, though this would have had more success hindering the recruitment of soldiers for Franco, rather than attacking the Francoist army, mostly composed of Moroccans.<sup>71</sup>

The fact is that the Republic was ready to give up the Protectorate to France, give concessions to Britain in Morocco,<sup>72</sup> or alternatively offer Germany a deal that would give Berlin French-African territories which would be compensated by giving Spanish Morocco to France in exchange for Germany stopping its aid to Franco.<sup>73</sup> These initiatives failed, especially as Britain did not wish a greater French influence in that part of Morocco facing Gibraltar.<sup>74</sup> The Republic seemed ready to negotiate the fate of its protectorate with anyone except the Moroccans themselves. Orwell was partly correct about the French factor in the Republican attitude towards fomenting a rebellion in Morocco.

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<sup>69</sup> George Orwell, *Homage to Catalonia* (London 2000) 219.

<sup>70</sup> María Rosa de Madariaga, 'The Intervention of Moroccan Troops in the Spanish Civil War: a Reconsideration', *European History Quarterly* 22 (1992) 67-97.

<sup>71</sup> Ruano, *Islam y Guerra civil*, 215.

<sup>72</sup> Thomas, *The Spanish Civil War*, 562.

<sup>73</sup> Mesa, *Los moros*, 167.

<sup>74</sup> Madariaga, 'The Intervention of Moroccan Troops in the Spanish Civil War', 92.

The foreign communists also complained about it. André Marty reported that ‘we must give freedom to some Moroccans. Until now we have done nothing in that direction. The Republican Prime Minister Largo Caballero refused to discuss this question, pleading that he did not want to spoil relations with the French government’.<sup>75</sup> The fear of the French that a rebellion by natives in Spanish Morocco could foment nationalist unrest in the French protectorate was the most important factor to be taken into account in Republican plans to hit the Spanish Nationalist base in North Africa. But according to Republican sources,<sup>76</sup> it seems that regarding early Republican plans in Morocco the French government stated that France approved of the Republican intentions with the only condition that under no circumstances ‘would we try to exalt the nationalist sentiments of the natives’.<sup>77</sup> The Republicans believed in May 1938 when planning another attempt in Morocco ‘that at the moment France would permit all action produced in our Protectorate by the legal government of the Republic and would even help maintain it if that would not result in damage to the calmness in its zone’.<sup>78</sup> This of course meant greatly restricting the Republicans in what they could do to foment an action hostile to Franco in Morocco. This is not to say that the French government was the culpable party, as other factors, including the prevalent Spanish distrust of Moroccans, played a part.

The Republic did not successfully manage opportunities that presented themselves to stir trouble for the Spanish Nationalists in Spanish Morocco, and rebuffed an initial proposal by Moroccan nationalists in French Morocco to help the Republic fight Franco. In the autumn of 1936 a delegation of the Moroccan Action Committee (CAM) that was based in the French Zone of Morocco travelled to Barcelona to make the Republican government an offer regarding the Spanish Zone. The CAM in French Morocco took a different direction than the Moroccan Nationalist movement in the Spanish Zone and sided, morally at least, with the Spanish Republicans.

In August of 1936 French socialists visited the C.A.M. and convinced them to try to incite a rebellion in the Francoist rearguard. In September 1936 a C.A.M. delegation travelled to Spain to offer help in organising a rebellion in northern Morocco, in return for promises of independence or some sort of autonomy. The delegation members were detained more than once in Republican Spain and subjected to several interrogations, having narrowly missed ‘certain death’ at the hands of Spanish anarchists. After reaching a preliminary accord with the Spanish Central Committee of the Anti-Fascist Militia they were informed that the accord was invalid. The socialist Prime Minister Largo Caballero expressed his suspicion and lack of trust of the delegation that he refused to meet, as well as pointing to the troubles that an insurgency could cause for the French, which he still hoped would openly support the Republican war effort, if it manages to inspire the nationalists in the French zone to do the same. As a compromise the delegation was offered money instead of concessions in return for

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<sup>75</sup> Radosh, Habeck and Sevostianov, *Spain Betrayed*, 54.

<sup>76</sup> ‘Informe acerca de las posibilidades de desarrollo de una acción subversiva en Marruecos y Sahara Español’. International Institute for Social History, Archivo FAI 61, Es 12.

<sup>77</sup> ‘Informe’, 11.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibidem*.

causing trouble in the Spanish Zone. Refusing and returning angrily, the CAM leaders were later either exiled or jailed by the French authorities, still under the Popular Front government. In the wake of this failed mission, some of these leaders tended to support the pro-Franco attitude taken by Moroccan nationalists from the Spanish Zone, especially after hearing reports of the Spanish Nationalists' intention to grant some form of autonomy to their Moroccan region.<sup>79</sup>

In light of this outright refusal to even hold talks with potentially anti-Franco Moroccan politicians, even if they were from the French zone, it is surprising that in 1937 the Republican government of Largo Caballero undertook a mission conducted by the socialist Undersecretary for War Carlos Baraibar to distribute money to Moroccan notables with the aim of launching a rebellion in the Spanish Zone of Morocco, a mission which ended in a fiasco.<sup>80</sup> The project came to a halt after the fall of Largo Caballero in May 1937 in what was called the May Crisis, and it formed a point of contention between Largo Caballero and his cabinet.<sup>81</sup> It was initially kept secret from other members of the government. Research into the Baraibar mission by Luna Alonso, examining the documents of the Republican Ministry of Foreign Affairs, noticed anomalies in the project that led him to doubt the credibility of the plan, among them: the delegation authorised the mission while being aware of the French reservations towards any tribal rebellions that could destabilise the French Zone; the impossibility to use the French Zone as a base to launch their operation; their exclusive reliance on one Moroccan notable, Dris el Riffi whom every report and opinion agreed about being dishonest and lacking any credibility among Moroccans, French or Spaniards. Republican Prime Minister Largo Caballero refused the more cautious communist plan for agitation and sabotage which gained the support of the Spanish consular agents in Morocco, in favour of the dramatic rebellion plan. Luna Alonso concludes that the project never intended to be serious and was a card that Largo Caballero intended to play in his struggle with the communists. His goal was to remain at the head of the government by using the prospect of the imminent outbreak of a rebellion in Morocco that would turn the tables on the Spanish Nationalists and secure the victory for the Republic. Luna Alonso concludes that the whole undertaking constituted a 'comedy'.<sup>82</sup> The 'comedy' that saw the Undersecretary for War Baraibar conducting many meetings with Moroccans and going native by sitting on the ground and 'eating with his fingers' was not without its price, as five agents who entered Spanish Morocco to

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<sup>79</sup> El Merroun, *Las tropas marroquíes en la Guerra Civil*, 22-25. According to Madariaga the delegation demanded autonomy and not independence, realising the danger of France filling the vacuum if independence was granted. Madariaga, *Los moros que trajo Franco*, 417- 419.

Hugh Thomas refers to this attempt but he places as its protagonist 'Abdel Kjalak Torres', the leader of the National Reformist Party (PRN) in the Spanish Zone, see Thomas, *The Spanish Civil War*, 561-562. But this is not correct. Torres was a prominent Moroccan figure who could not slip out of the Spanish Zone into Republican Spain and come back again undetected by the Spanish Nationalists. Torres did initially oppose the recruitment of Moroccan soldiers calling for Moroccan neutrality but later displayed himself as a fervent supporter of Franco until the end of the war.

<sup>80</sup> Thomas, *The Spanish Civil War*, 562.

<sup>81</sup> For more on the misión see Maria Madariaga, *Los moros que trajo Franco*, 425- 433, El Merroun, *Las tropas marroquíes en la Guerra Civil*, 25-27 and Miguel Antonio Luna Alonso, 'La misión de Carlos Baraibar en Marruecos durante la Guerra Civil', *Espacio, Tiempo y Forma*. Serie V, H Contemporánea 15 (2002) 391-406.

<sup>82</sup> Luna Alonso, 'La misión de Carlos Baraibar', 404.

establish contacts with tribal chiefs were captured and immediately shot, which showed that the Nationalists were well informed about the efforts.<sup>83</sup> After that, few interesting developments occurred on the issue of organising rebellions in Morocco for many months, though the Nationalists claimed in December 1937 that there was a Republican attempt to assassinate the Khalifa.<sup>84</sup>

Quite often, Republican efforts in Morocco were thwarted or betrayed by Moroccans. We already mentioned the case of Dris el Riffi who was determined by the Republicans as being useless and corrupt. To add insult to injury, the Spanish Nationalist authorities were aware from time to time of the Republican efforts to stir unrest among the tribes in their zone by pouring in money. It seems that they were not alarmed, since it involved, as the Nationalist documents state, people who were cheating the Republicans out of their money in return for promises they never intended to keep.<sup>85</sup> More seriously was an attempt in April 1937 when a Moroccan betrayed a plot to bomb parts of Spanish Morocco. This is according to a report by the Dutch legation in Tangier which informed the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in The Hague in April 1937 that a number of non-commissioned officers, working at the aerodrome of Aoumara close to the border with French Morocco, between Larache and Alcazarquivir, had planned to bomb Larache and Tetuan with the intention of creating panic. This would have led 'to trouble and will give the authorities of French Morocco the wished for opportunity to restore order by the force of arms'. The report discloses that it was a Moroccan loyal to the government of General Franco who 'betrayed this conspiracy to the government, so that the plotters were arrested in time'. The result was 14 executions in Tetuan.<sup>86</sup> The most painful hit was yet to come in September 1938.

An anarchist plan was proposed in May 1938 in Barcelona to organise yet another rebellion in Morocco. This project was partly based on what it claimed were secret contacts in October 1937 with Abdel Khalek Torres of the 'Partido Nacionalista Marroquí', asking him whether he would be open to collaborating with the Republic. Still according to the anarchist plan, he answered that his party could not collaborate with the Republic as long as it was in agreement with France. In reply, a letter was sent to him that noted the possibility of not making an agreement with France and invited him to negotiate directly through two delegates with the Republican government. This way Torres' desire to collaborate with the government of the Republic was affirmed,<sup>87</sup> though the plan itself noted that the collaboration of France had to be obtained.

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<sup>83</sup> 'Informe', 12.

<sup>84</sup> According to Nationalist press in Spanish Morocco 'red elements' in French Morocco made, an attempt on the life of the Khalifa by sending, through the English mail, a package containing explosive material. 'Miraculously' nothing happened in the Khalifian palace, and the prince and his family members and aides were saved. See: 'Se ha intentado atentar contra la preciosa vida de nuestro jalifa', *Heraldo de Marruecos*, 30 December 1937. Whether there are traces that prove this claim within Republican documentation, is something yet to be unearthed.

<sup>85</sup> AGMAV, A.3, L.227, Cp.3.

<sup>86</sup> NL-HaNA, Gezantschap Marokko, access nr. 2.05.119, inventory nr.. 36. Missive nr.: 890/119.

<sup>87</sup> 'Informe', 16.

More importantly, from the religious and racial point of views were the following points: the project stressed that any political-social action in Morocco must be religious and nationalist in nature; it suggested procuring support from both Muslim and Jewish elements (through Zionist circles in London and Paris) but pointed to the necessity of keeping the Jewish support secret from the Muslim would-be allies that would reject any cooperation with the Jewish ‘elements’; and the plan hoped to make use of what it perceived as anti-European attitudes among some Moroccans. Discussing the organisation of rebellions in Ifni and the Sahara, the plan proposed attracting chiefs of the Requibat tribes, among which were the Ulad Musa who were ‘always ready to fight against the Christian’,<sup>88</sup> and noted that among another tribe, the Ait Ussa, ‘we would always find people ready to jump upon the Christians’ given their ‘xenophobic and marauding instincts’.<sup>89</sup> In any case, the plan was not, at least not in its ambitious nature, put into practice. How much of it could be related to the September 1938 attempt based at the international zone of Tangier to incite rebellion in Spanish Morocco is unknown.

By 1938 the Republican leadership should have known that it could not rely on strong support in Morocco. There is a Republican intelligence report from 1938 listing about 83 key Moroccan notables and important figures in the Spanish Zone, their positions, and updates. Among them are five to six whom the report describes as either friends of the Republic, having Republican sympathies, or easily attracted to the Republican cause; two others are described as being opposed to the recruitment in their regions; two more as being enemies of the Spanish Nationalists and two others who were being distrusted and observed by the Nationalist authorities in Northern Morocco.<sup>90</sup> The rest were portrayed as loyal to the Nationalists, including Torres, who figured as a potential ally in the anarchist plan. In total between six and nine Moroccans could be theoretically attracted to the cause of the Republic, according to this report, which was not promising considering that having sympathies is not the same as being prepared to act.

The last Republican attempt against the security of the Nationalist zone in Spanish Morocco occurred on the night of 11 September 1938 in Tangier, during the height of the Czechoslovakian crisis which could have precipitated a European war with a possible invasion by France of Spanish Morocco, and which ended with an agreement in Munich which permitted the annexation by Germany of parts of Czechoslovakia and opened the door to the occupation of the rest of that country later on. The Dutch acting consul in Tangier sent an alarming report describing the attempt. ‘A conspiracy was discovered which could have had enormous consequences’.<sup>91</sup> It turned out that ‘50 Arabs and red Spaniards’ were surprised and detained after one of the conspirators reported them. The arrests by the

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<sup>88</sup> Ibidem, 24.

<sup>89</sup> Ibidem, 25.

<sup>90</sup> AGGC, EM (2), 56.

<sup>91</sup> NL-HaNA, Gezantschap Marokko, access nr. 2.05.119, inventory nr. 36. Missive nr.: 1501/166. The report concludes by mentioning that Beigbeder wrote a letter of protest to the Committee of Control that governed Tangier. Also consult the report by the Tangerine gendarmerie. See: Administrator to consul General of Portugal (19 September 1938) in: NL-HaNA, Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken: Nederlandse Vertegenwoordiger in het Comité de Controle Assemblée Legislative en in de Commission du Port, Tanger (Marokko), 1924-1956, access nr. 2.05.120, inventory 269, document nr: N677/29



Tangerine gendarmes took place while the conspirators 'were in taxis and trucks and tried to enter the Spanish Zone along a side-road'. They turned out to be armed 'with automatic revolvers and provided with the needed ammunition'. After further investigation 'arms caches were discovered in the surroundings of Tangier'. The arrests were 'still in full swing'. The report further stated that the goal of this conspiracy 'that had branches in the whole of the Tangerine and the Spanish Zone was to incite a rebellion in the last [i.e. Spanish] zone'.<sup>92</sup> The goal was to create enough chaos for the French to intervene while counting on a failure to end the Czechoslovakian crisis peacefully.

There are a number of interesting facts regarding this last chance to cause the Nationalists to lose Spanish Morocco. Firstly, the Spanish Consul General in Tangier was relieved of his duties by the government of Negrín, the new socialist Prime Minister on the very same day the attempt failed and sent to Argentina. Secondly, once again a Republican conspiracy was betrayed by a Moroccan. Lastly, apparently some Republican agents on the ground were kept in the dark with regard to the attempt. The anarchist documents provide a comic portrayal of this affair. While the anarchist leadership in Barcelona was aware of the plot and indignant at its failure, its agents in Tangier remained convinced in their reports that the whole business was the work of Moroccan agents provocateurs working for the Spanish Nationalists,<sup>93</sup> and no one bothered to correct the impressions.

### **Conclusions**

The relationship of the Republic with the Moroccans was generally a troubled one, mixed with missed opportunities and mutual mistrust. Most of the Moroccan soldiers distrusted the Republicans and were not ready to desert to their ranks, while the Republican soldiers distrusted Moroccans in general and displayed little sympathy or mercy towards those who surrendered. Republican attitudes reflected traditional Spanish negative views of the Moroccans which were strengthened by the memory of colonial wars and the recent memory of the Asturias 1934 uprising as well as the crimes attributed to the Moroccans during the early stages of the war. Since the Republicans did not control Spanish Morocco, nor any Moroccan units, they were probably less motivated to encourage a less negative attitude towards Moroccans in general. Some foreign allies of the Republic were more sympathetic to the Moroccans and even considered it practical to display a positive attitude towards the Moroccans as individuals and also towards the cause of autonomy or independence of Morocco. The Republican leadership rejected and distrusted any political agreement with Moroccan nationalist leaders. Even the traditionally anti-imperialist communists (both Spanish and French) were not in favor of raising the issue of the independence of Morocco.

The other side of the story is that the Republic met obstacles on more than a few occasions in its attempts to cooperate with Moroccans in order to stir troubles in Spanish Morocco. These obstacles were partly the result of amateurish planning and lack of serious effort. But they were also partly the

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<sup>92</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>93</sup> See for example the report by the Sección Nacional de Coordinación-Servicio de Información Exterior, dated 3 October 1938. IISH, Archivo FAI, Cp, ES 35.

result of actions by a number of Moroccans who proved themselves to be either corrupt or deliberately deceitful, and which led not only to squandering of money, but loss of life and political embarrassment and therefore, it is safe to assume, strengthened the suspicious attitude the Republicans already had towards the Moroccans.

## Chapter 7

### To be Spanish, to be Moroccan

*'Every Spaniard, deep down or otherwise, has a Moorish spark in his character'* –A British diplomat in Spain - 1937.<sup>1</sup>

*'I am Spanish. My grandfather came here in 1926 after fighting for the French. My father fought for Franco, I was born and raised here'* - A Muslim resident of Melilla - <sup>2</sup>

Since sexual and religious relationships have been discussed, this chapter sheds light on further aspects of cultural relationships by revisiting the position Spaniards held between accepting the 'Moor' and excluding him from Spanish community, and examining Spanish rhetoric, policy, and the realities of mutual relationships. Equally important is the view the Moroccans adopted in relation to the brotherhood message the Spanish projected, the position they took in relation to the social and cultural border between them and the Spaniards, and their willingness to cross it. How did the Moroccans envisage the Spanish-Moroccan brotherhood? How did they perceive the mixing of the two cultural spheres? Spain's policy of maintaining a separating zone between Moroccans and Spaniards was not a one-sided affair. If the Spanish wanted to keep the two separate, so did the majority of Moroccans.

#### **The rhetoric**

In 1937, a Nationalist observer of the war in Spain wrote:

This valiant Moor, simple, loyal, has helped us in an extraordinary way in this terrible war that we are sustaining for the moral and material salvation of our fatherland. This Moor is the same one who yesterday fought against us when he thought and believed that we had desires of annexation and conquest. It is the same one who understood much later our civilising mission, the same one who came to know our Generalissimo and was captivated by him as by the prototype of manhood, intelligence and authority in their highest standards.<sup>3</sup>

As the text implies, the positive image of Moroccan soldiers in Spanish Nationalist propaganda as loyal in a common struggle contrasted with the extremely negative view most of the Spaniards, including much of the military, had of Moroccans during the two preceding decades. Centuries of

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<sup>1</sup> Pears to Chilton. Kenneth Bourne, D. Cameron Watt and Michael Partridge, eds., *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, Part II, series G, Africa, vol. 25 (Bethesda 1996) Doc. 110.

<sup>2</sup> Daniel Koski-Karell, *'This Project We Call Spain': Nationality, Autochthony, and Politics in Spain's North African Exclaves* (Dissertation, University of Washington 2014) 9.

<sup>3</sup> Francisco de Armas, *Estampas de la guerra*, 127.

reinforcing the image of the Moor as a traditional enemy were strengthened by the military engagements of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in Morocco. This was particularly the case during the colonial war against the Rif rebels of Mohammed ben Abdul Krim Al Khattabi, when Spain suffered one of the most humiliating colonial defeats in the battle of Annual. Racist attitudes towards Moroccans were prevalent among vengeful Spanish officials, soldiers, politicians, and the press, describing Moroccans as uncivilised, xenophobic, fanatical, brutal, degenerate, and deceitful. Some called for the complete extermination of Moroccans. At the same time, others were attracted to Moroccan culture; they recognised a shared history between Morocco and Spain, and even saw Moroccans as younger brothers. In fact, many Spaniards displayed contradictory responses towards Morocco and its people. The brutal colonial war, which ended ultimately with Spanish victory, had its effect on the development of the image of Moroccans.<sup>4</sup>

The fellow imperialists of Ganivet had their way in Morocco and established their protectorate in the early twentieth century. In 1936, they employed the legacy of the Arab culture and the shared history between Moroccans and Spanish to bring Moroccan troops to Spain. Queipo de Llano was one of the first to make a reference to medieval history when he remarked on 26 July 1936, during one of his radio chats that, ‘it is curious that to Córdoba have arrived those brave *Regulares* to defend that beautiful monument La Mezquita, that was erected by their ancestors [*Italics added*]’.<sup>5</sup>

For those who believed that there was a historical paradox in bringing Moroccans, there was no shortage of expert historical argument that there was no such paradox. On 4 April 1937, ‘patriotic’ celebrations were held in Seville which were attended by General Queipo de Llano. Performances of patriotic hymns and cinematic screenings on Marxist destructiveness were followed by a speech by José María Pemán, a famous right wing intellectual and writer. Among a number of issues, he referred to the collaboration of Muslims with the ‘endeavor of Spain’ which he found in ‘congruence with History’. He added that ‘it [History] surprises only those who are ignorant, for those who are familiar with the past know that El Cid had more Moors in his army than Spaniards’.<sup>6</sup>

Not only the shared history was used during the Civil War to explain as propaganda the military participation of Moroccan troops, but also the continued presence of units in Spain, especially the famous Moorish Guard of the Generalissimo, though the historical justifications of this might raise some questions. In 1952, Juan Priego López published a book on the Moorish guards of different Spanish sovereigns. Referring to the Moorish guards, he notes the following:

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<sup>4</sup> Balfour, *Deadly Embrace*, 193-200.

<sup>5</sup> Ian Gibson, *Queipo de Llano. Sevilla, verano de 1936*, 205

<sup>6</sup> ‘Un acto patriótico en el Teatro de San Fernando’, *ABC Sevilla*, 4 April 1937.

our old sovereigns had in their service, especially during the age of the Reconquest, we find ourselves in a very distinct case, for the soldiers who constituted them [the guards] were not completely strangers to our race, but on the contrary they originated from a people that is very similar to ours and connected traditionally to our political vicissitudes. In reality, the existence of such Moorish escorts or guards has obeyed well the brotherhood that was established, since remote ages, by the geography and history between two peoples which reside on one side and the other of the Strait of Gibraltar.<sup>7</sup>

After mentioning how the Iberians and the Berbers were similar racially as well as spiritually, he compares the Spanish struggle against Arab domination with the Berber struggle against the same domination. Therefore, the heroic deeds of Pelayo, the first leader of the Spanish resistance against the Moors, had their parallels in the Berber tribes of Miknasa, Barguata, and Matgara.<sup>8</sup> This is somewhat remarkable, because other propagandists for the Spanish-Morocco brotherhood, make a point of this brotherhood being built on the shared Arab-Islamic history that followed the Arab conquest of the Iberian peninsula, not the resistance against it. And the Spaniards hardly made a distinction in their policies or discourses between the Berber and the Arab. The Moroccans were usually lumped together as Moors. In general, Spanish officers refused to promote an Arab/Berber division in the manner of the French.<sup>9</sup> In any case, Priego continues by mentioning how the medieval King Enrique IV liked to share the customs of his Moorish guard, and that many Castilian noblemen ‘showed their preference and sympathy for the Muslim customs’.<sup>10</sup>

Was Priego López perhaps justifying the all-too familiar scene of many Spanish officers and generals, most notably Varela moving about wearing the Moroccan *chillaba*? After that historical precedent it was normal that during the pacification campaigns of the early twentieth century ‘the military comradeship, that existed in other periods between Spaniards and Berbers, was re-established between the soldiers of the native forces and the Spanish officers and non-commissioned officers who commanded them’.<sup>11</sup> Priego then comes to the natural conclusion that follows all of the above, and states that Franco ‘conscious of this’ history did not doubt in using the Moroccan forces:

because - as we demonstrated and repeated many times- the Moors cannot be considered strangers to our race’. And to show his confidence in the Moorish soldiers, General Franco

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<sup>7</sup> Juan Priego López, *Escoltas y guardias moras de los jefes de estado españoles* (Madrid 1952) 3-4.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibidem*, 9, 11.

<sup>9</sup> Geoffrey Jensen, ‘Military Memories, History, and the Myth of Hispano-Arabic Identity in the Spanish Civil War’, in: Aurora G. Morcillo, ed., *Memory and Cultural History of the Spanish Civil War. Realms of Oblivion*. (Leiden 2014) 495-532, here 498.

<sup>10</sup> Priego López, *Escoltas y guardias moras*, 25.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibidem.*, 33.

decided to entrust them with guarding his person the moment he was invested with the functions of chief of state.<sup>12</sup> And ‘with that an old tradition is renewed and a symbolic and brilliant expression of racial and historical brotherhood is given between Spaniards and Moroccans.’<sup>13</sup>

The rhetoric that justified the presence of Moroccan soldiers in Spain, in terms of Hispano-Arabic identity or Muslim-Spanish brotherhood, was not completely born on the spur of the moment. According to Geoffrey Jensen, the contrasting notion of Moroccans as ‘brothers’ was not ‘conjured up out of nothing’. Instead, it always had a place in traditionalist rhetoric, albeit at times alongside contradictory, negative portrayals of Moroccans.<sup>14</sup> Modern Spain’s officers displayed ambivalent attitudes towards Moroccans since the Spanish-Moroccan war (1859-1860), also called the War of Africa. Like civilian writers and artists, some mid-nineteenth Spanish army officers portrayed Moroccans in unabashedly negative terms, while others wrote surprisingly favourably of their north African ‘brothers’.<sup>15</sup> During the War of Africa, Spanish soldiers met families with peninsular, i.e. Spanish, surnames which generated both curiosity and sympathy among some Spaniards.<sup>16</sup>

Proponents of Andalusian regionalism in Spain, like Blas Infante and Rodolfo Gil Benumeya also played a role in glorifying the Muslim past, and stressing the links between the people of Andalusia and Morocco. Blas Infante used his understanding of Andalusian culture to justify Spanish colonialism in Morocco. Even though he was executed by the Nationalists at the start of the war, his discourse was appropriated by Francoist intellectuals to justify Spanish colonialism in Morocco.<sup>17</sup> For Gil Benumeya, who converted to Islam, the builders of the Alhambra were the ‘ancestors of the current Spaniards and the current Moroccans, not the ancestors of Muslims who live today in the Orient’.<sup>18</sup> For him, Spain and Morocco were two halves of the same piece of fruit,<sup>19</sup> and therefore, Spanish intervention in Morocco was a moral obligation.

According to some, including the Spanish imperialists themselves, Spanish imperialism in Morocco distinguished itself from its French and British counterparts by the lack of a fully

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<sup>12</sup> Ibidem, 33-34.

<sup>13</sup> Ibidem, 34. For a study on the medieval Morisco guard see: Ana Echevarría Arsuaga, ‘La Guardia Morisca: Un cuerpo desconocido del ejército medieval español’, *Revista de Historia Militar*, nr. 90 (2001) 55-78.

<sup>14</sup> Geoffrey Jensen, ‘The Peculiarities of Spanish Morocco: Imperial Ideology and Economic Development’, *Mediterranean Historical Review* 20 (2005) 81-102, here 90.

<sup>15</sup> Jensen, ‘Military Memories, History, and the Myth’, 497.

<sup>16</sup> Mateo Dieste, ‘Una hermandad en tensión’, 82.

<sup>17</sup> Eric Calderwood, ‘“In Andalucía, there are no Foreigners”: Andalucismo from Transperipheral Critique to Colonial Apology’, *Journal of Spanish Cultural Studies* 15 (2014) 399-417, here 408-409.

<sup>18</sup> Mateo Dieste, ‘Una hermandad en tensión’, 80.

<sup>19</sup> Ibidem.

oppositional Moroccan ‘other’, as Jensen explains.<sup>20</sup> Rom Landau, Arab specialist and traveller, also noted the contrasts between French and Spanish Morocco: ‘the Moors have at least had the satisfaction of not being regarded as members of an inferior species. The attitude of racial superiority maintained by all too many Frenchmen in their Zone was rare in Spanish Morocco. In fact, many Spanish residents pride themselves on their distant Moorish ancestry’.<sup>21</sup> It might be true, as Jensen asserts, that only in Spain right-wing ideologues thought that colonisers and colonised had many things in common,<sup>22</sup> and that Spanish colonialism in Morocco tried to see itself as different from other European powers. Since it had no evangelising mission in Morocco, and in the face of the lack of a fully developed racial ‘other’, the perceptions of a shared history, culture, and even a shared racial identity, as well as the echoes of medieval *convivencia* (medieval Muslim-Christian coexistence) provided means to moralise the colonial endeavour. It was presented as Spain bringing civilisation and repaying the Moors for the gift of civilisation that they brought to medieval Spain.<sup>23</sup> Therefore, and since the concept of the Hispano-Arab identity loomed large in the worldviews of some officers – both liberal and conservative – Francoist ideologues did not have to invent it.<sup>24</sup> The Francoist regime went to such lengths that a book published by the Franco dictatorship’s office of popular education described medieval Spain as nothing more than the ‘real Spain wearing a turban’, and ‘the builders of the Alhambra were the grandfathers of today’s Spaniards and Moroccans’.<sup>25</sup>

The adjustment of Spanish (military) views towards Moroccan soldiers, from negative to more positive, was therefore not entirely surprising. Jensen, in his study on the Spanish colonial administrator and writer García Figueras, provides an example of this by comparing two novels Figueras wrote about Morocco. The first novel, *Del Marruecos Feudal*, was published in 1930 and the other, *Ramadan de Páz*, was published after the Civil War. In both novels, as Jensen illustrates, the primary role of Islam as motivating the Moroccan characters is emphasised. Both novels contain elements of a shared identity between Moroccans and Spaniards. But while in the first novel the emphasis is more on negative Orientalist stereotyping, including the attribution of the characters’ fatalism to Islam, in the second, the stress is on the compatibility of both faiths, Islam and Christianity. Emphasis is also placed on the strong religious values of the Moroccans, and therefore a more positive attitude towards them.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Jensen, ‘The Peculiarities of Spanish Morocco’, 92

<sup>21</sup> Landau, *Moroccan Drama, 1900-1955* (London 1956) 168.

<sup>22</sup> Jensen, ‘The Peculiarities of Spanish Morocco’, 97.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibidem*, 89.

<sup>24</sup> Jensen, ‘Military Memories, History, and the Myth’, 497.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibidem*, 520.

<sup>26</sup> Geoffrey Jensen, ‘Muslim Soldiers in a Spanish Crusade: Tomás García Figueras, Mulai Ahmed er Raisuni, and the Ideological Context of Spain’s Moroccan Soldiers’, in: Eric Storm and Ali Al Tuma, eds., *Colonial Soldiers in Europe, 1914-1945. “Aliens in Uniform” in Wartime Societies* (New York 2016) 182-206, here 193-200.

The development of more positive views towards Moroccans during the 1920s and 1930s was facilitated by the military experience of Spanish officers in Morocco and the identification many of them felt with the country. Franco is famously quoted stating that ‘without Africa I can scarcely explain myself to myself’.<sup>27</sup> It was perhaps facilitated by the years of peace that followed the colonial war, but certainly by the bonds that were formed between the Spanish officers and the native troops in the years after the Anual disaster in 1921, and by the existence of enlightened officers (before and after the colonial war) who rejected the overt racism of many of their colleagues and tried to develop a more positive, though paternalistic approach towards the Moroccans.<sup>28</sup> Paternalistic, because after all, the Moroccan-Spanish brotherhood was unequal. The Moroccan was seen as the little brother in need of guidance from his older Spanish brother who looks upon ‘the Moor, not as an inferior being, but as a friend, or rather as younger brother that has to be tutored until he reaches his maturity’, as one of the manuals for the *interventores*, written in 1935, stated.<sup>29</sup> It is the same way the Moroccan soldiers in Spain were described as infantile. In that, the Nationalists did not differ much when they equated the Moroccan soldiers fighting in Spain with children. As one propagandist put it, ‘like the little child when he finds himself in some danger or notices that he is being offended, he runs anxiously or threatens with telling his loving father, such are the little Moors with their father and our father Franco’.<sup>30</sup>

Despite this official rhetoric of which many Spanish civilians and military could have been genuinely convinced, it was certainly not universally accepted in Spain. In his introduction to his Arabic translation of Joseph McCabe’s work, *The Moorish Civilization in Spain*, Mohammed Taqiyyuddin Al Hilali, a Moroccan Islamic scholar, writes:

during the last World War, I was in the city of Granada in the Andalusian lands of Spain for four months. The Moroccan students visited me daily at the hotel where I was staying, and they complained about what they heard from their professors who cursed the Moors, which is how Moroccans in European languages are called. And they claimed that every evil that exists in the Spanish lands and every custom is the legacy that was left by the Moroccans during their rule of those lands.<sup>31</sup>

Therefore, Al Hilali used McCabe’s book on Moorish Spain to disprove the arguments of those teachers. It is noteworthy that in an age when the Francoist regime was propagating the Hispano-Arab identity, such negative stereotypes of the Moors were being spread in a Spanish university. Perhaps it simply meant a return to the old customs of disparaging the Moors, and these professors

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<sup>27</sup> Balfour, *Deadly Embrace*, 202.

<sup>28</sup> On these enlightened officers see *Ibidem*, 161,162,176, 178, 201.

<sup>29</sup> Mateo Dieste, ‘Una hermandad en tensión’, 81.

<sup>30</sup> Nerín, *La guerra que vino de África*, 174.

<sup>31</sup> Joseph McCabe, *Madaniyyat al Muslimin fi Isbanya* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Rabat 1985) 3.



belonged to the Morophobic section of Spanish society, a section that existed both among the supporters of the Nationalists, as well as the Republicans. Al Hilali himself praises a few Spanish scholars who took it upon themselves to defend the Islamic civilisation of Spain, and who ‘do not care about the wrath of the Falange or the indignation of those enthusiastic extreme nationalists’,<sup>32</sup> showing that not all of Francoist Spain embraced its Morophilic message.

This Spanish rhetoric of the Spanish-Moroccan brotherhood and its partial acceptance, justified by history, of the Moroccans within the Spanish Nationalist geographical and ideological realm, not only explained the normalcy of having Moroccan soldiers in Spain, but it implied also that the shared history also mattered to Moroccan soldiers themselves. In the March 1941 issue of the Spanish *Ejército* magazine, Federico García Sanchiz of the Spanish Royal Academy wrote how one day during ‘the war with the reds’ in Toledo, a lone Moor, ‘one of the innumerable *Regulares* of the Uprising’ was standing on the bridge of San Martín. The writer was remembering how the rape by Don Rodrigo [the last of the Visigoth rulers of Spain] of La Cava [daughter of a legendary ruler of Ceuta called Don Julián] caused the treason of Don Julián that brought the Arab invasion of Spain. He wondered whether the Moor was ‘dreaming, after centuries have passed, of that one [century] when his ancestors burst into the Peninsula, dominating it in the same way that Don Rodrigo lost it, for it looked more like rape rather than conquest the fulminating Hagari conquest?’<sup>33</sup> By Hagari, he refers to Arabs as the sons of Ismael whose mother, the wife of Abraham was Hagar. But did the shared medieval history and perceptions of Moroccan-Spanish brotherhood actually matter to the Moroccans?

During the Spanish Civil War Moroccan nationalists adopted the Spanish Nationalist war propaganda that glorified the Moroccan-Spanish religious brotherhood that was cemented by the fight against communism. Moroccan nationalist figures either reflected or parroted the slogans of the Spanish Nationalists, and the references to the shared medieval past. In September 1936, Torres, who in July, had opposed the sending of the *Mehal-las* to Spain, travelled to Seville to be hosted by General Queipo de Llano. Torres spoke on Queipo’s radio of the glorious Muslim past of Seville, and the tight bonds of friendship and fraternity between Morocco and Spain. It was for this reason that Moroccans and North Africans should help the Spaniards with whom they shared the same blood.<sup>34</sup> However, prior to the Spanish Civil War, the Moroccan elite had a slightly different view of the Andalusian past. Moroccan travellers to Spain in the nineteenth century did not describe it as an exotic place, but as a familiar one, due to its Muslim past. But the glorious history of Al Andalus was contrasted with the later (and contemporary) decadent Spain.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> McCabe, *Madaniyyat al Muslimin*, 9.

<sup>33</sup> Federico García Sanchiz ‘Soliloquio’, *Ejercito*, nr. 14 (1941) 55.

<sup>34</sup> Madariaga, *Marruecos. Ese gran desconocido*, 293.

<sup>35</sup> Mateo Dieste, ‘De los “Remendados” al Hâjj Franco. Los españoles en el imaginario colonial marroquí’, 76.

But what of the soldiers themselves? That medieval past, so dear to Spaniards who promoted the Moroccan colonial adventure, and who justified the presence of Moroccan troops, and so dear to the Moroccan nationalists who came from Andalusian families, was for the Moroccan soldiers who fought in Spain inexistent. The answer to the question of Federico García Sanchiz, whether the Moroccan soldier who stood on the Toledan bridge of San Martín was thinking about the ancestors who irrupted in the peninsula centuries past, would be no. The Moroccan most certainly did not think about that. In none of the interviews with Moroccan veterans, whether conducted by historians decades after the war, or by French interrogators or Spanish propagandists during the war, did the subject of the shared medieval past appear. The accounts of the Moroccan participants of the war do not mention them at all.<sup>36</sup> No references to the Alhambra of Granada, La Mezquita of Córdoba, or the memories of the ancestors in Spain are made. Even for those who were convinced of the religious aspect of fighting against an infidel, the bonds of history do not appear to have meant anything. History was more important to Spanish *Africanistas* and Spanish Nationalists than to the Moroccan soldiers they commanded. That history, in the end, also mattered for the Nationalists less in practice than in theory.

#### **The brotherhood beyond the rhetoric**

While Moroccans were welcomed in Spanish arms in theory, in practice they were ejected from Spain. Not long after the collapse of the Republic, Moroccan troops were repatriated to Morocco, and every undocumented Moroccan civilian in Spain who provided services to the military units, or who practiced commerce was sent to Morocco. For the first time, Spain was dealing with illegal Moroccan migration, with the Moroccan *Mejasnia* playing a leading role in capturing their compatriots.<sup>37</sup> The removal of Moroccans from Spain was not without notable exceptions. The Moorish Guard of General Franco stayed of course. A small number of units remained in Spain or were later brought back from Morocco to help hunt down anti-Francoist guerrillas. As we referred to earlier (see chapter four), some Moroccan men married Spanish women and were allowed to stay if they had children. Importantly, while Moroccan troops were physically removed, there was little attempt to remove their memory or image. Moroccan troops figured prominently in victory parades in Spain, both in 1939 and in later years. There was no ‘whitewashing’ at the end of the conflict similar to what the French did with black African troops in 1944: the French, under Allied pressure, replaced them with ‘white’ troops that could take public credit for victory in the last stages of the war,<sup>38</sup> and ensured that the liberation of Paris must be seen as a ‘whites only’ victory.<sup>39</sup> Military publications after the war continued to praise the role of Moroccan soldiers long

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<sup>36</sup> As far as the transcripts of El Merroun and the published works of the rest of cited authors show.

<sup>37</sup> Nerín, *La guerra que vino de África*, 253.

<sup>38</sup> Nancy Ellen Lawler, *Soldiers of Misfortune. Ivoirien Tirailleurs of World War II*, 180-182.

<sup>39</sup> Mike Thomson, ‘Paris Liberation Made “Whites Only”’, *BBC Radio 4*, 6 April 2009.

after it was necessary in terms of war propaganda.<sup>40</sup> Indeed, Franco himself, in the script he wrote for the motion picture *Raza* (which screened in 1941) stated, ‘how good and loyal they are!’<sup>41</sup>

Despite the Moroccans’ loyalty to Franco and the Nationalists, in the preceding chapters it has been demonstrated how the Spanish Nationalist army endeavored to prevent cultural, religious, and romantic mixing between Moroccan soldiers and the Spanish population. This was also simply a continuation of the policy in Spanish Morocco itself. One good example that occurred during the Civil War, is the housing project for Moroccans and Spaniards in Tetuan and Larache. The project consisted of building cheap housing for Spanish and Moroccan labourers. The interesting part of the project was as follows:

no different quarter has been chosen, because Spanish and Muslims must coexist, nor the ones and the others [i.e. houses] were indiscriminately mixed, because every civilisation and every custom has its own shyness. In these neighbourly constructions, the logical coexistence was sought without the disorderly and - for ones and others - disturbing mixture.<sup>42</sup>

It is a perfect summary of the policy of racial and religious segregation while maintaining a superficial impression of brotherhood; an ambivalent policy towards Moroccans that was followed both in Spain and Morocco.<sup>43</sup> This ambivalence is also seen in the issue of naturalisation. As many Moroccans fought for Spain as ‘brothers’ of the Spaniards, some could lay claim to Spanish-ness. The Arabist priest Miguel Asín Palacios, was very enthusiastic in considering that the Moroccan soldiers had conquered, with their blood sacrifice, the right to citizenship. He called onto the Spanish state not to hesitate in recognising them as Spaniards, and by that ‘elevating them from their current status of protected to that of citizens of the same patria, one and indivisible, with the same political rights as the other Spanish regions’.<sup>44</sup>

Indeed, several Moroccan soldiers gained Spanish citizenship after the war. Several notices conferring Spanish nationality to Moroccans, published in the state’s official bulletin, make a special mention of the receiver being a veteran of the *Guerra de Liberación* (Liberation

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<sup>40</sup> See for example, García Perez, *Mehal-la Jalifiana de Gomara num. 4* (Ceuta 1941) and his *Historial de Regulares de Alhucemas Numero 5* (Cordoba 1944); also the work referred to above by Priego Lopez on the Moorish Guard.

<sup>41</sup> Francisco Franco y Bahamonde, *Raza. Anecdótico para el guión de una película* (Madrid 1942). Franco employed the alias Jaime de Andrade. The film was directed by José Luis Sáenz de Heredia, and produced by El Consejo de la Hispanidad. The film narrates the story of three brothers and a sister and their struggles during the Spanish Civil War which claims the lives of two of the brothers.

<sup>42</sup> ‘La barriada de casas baratas del Generalísimo Franco. Ayuda, premio y reforma social’, *Heraldo de Marruecos*, 12 November 1937, 2-3.

<sup>43</sup> It was also for political reasons that such a separation was sought, namely to prevent the spread of socialist or syndicalist ideas among the native population. Mateo Dieste, ‘Una hermandad en tensión’, 89.

<sup>44</sup> Miguel Asín Palacios, ‘Por qué lucharon a nuestro lado los soldados marroquíes’, 150.

War) or the Moroccan campaigns, or both; thus indicating that they had become Spaniards by virtue of their military service.<sup>45</sup> For all the policy of separation and segregation, Francoist Spain was ready to welcome Moroccans into the Spanish patria. It is not known how many soldiers were granted Spanish citizenship, or the ratio of application to acceptance. One document of the Delegation of Native Affairs provides numbers of Muslims who obtained Spanish nationality as of May 1955. In Tetuan the number was 539, in Villa Nador 79, and in Larache, Alcazarquivir, and Arcila, at least 75.<sup>46</sup> But the document does not state how many were (ex-) soldiers, or dependents of soldiers, though we may assume that the majority received it due to proven loyalty to Spain through military service (and of course being a family member of such soldiers). Military service would not have been the only criterion for eligibility. Nor was military service in the Spanish Civil War enough to be eligible for naturalisation. Good conduct and the absence of disturbing antecedents were necessary pre-conditions to be naturalised.<sup>47</sup> In the end, the provision of Spanish nationality was exceptional,<sup>48</sup> although that was due as much to the reluctance of the Spanish state to grant it in large numbers, as to the lack of willingness among many Moroccans to make use of the opportunity.

It does seem that the Spaniards placed Muslim citizens on a higher level than the rest of the Moroccans, though perhaps not much higher. One Spanish officer told Sanchez Ruano that there were two classes of Moors: 'the shoeblack from Ceuta, influenced by Spaniards, who was loyal, and the Riffians who were more difficult'.<sup>49</sup> Beigbeder, the High Commissioner in Morocco during almost the entire Civil War, wrote that the distinction must be made clear 'in the eyes of everyone' between the Spanish Muslims, born in Ceuta and Melilla (places of Spanish sovereignty), and the Moroccan 'protected' Muslims.<sup>50</sup> Though this might have been motivated by some need to stress the sovereignty of Spain on Ceuta and Melilla, it can be argued that it might have also been motivated by the need to stress the prestige that comes with being associated with Spain.

Did the participation of Moroccan troops in the Spanish Civil War truly 'elevate' the position of Moroccans of Spanish Morocco in the eyes of their Spanish protectors to a position of equality? On a grand, abstract level, it certainly did, as many of the texts of Nationalist writers, some of which have already been cited, attest. Several Nationalist soldiers, commanders, or other witnesses of the war expressed profound gratitude to the Moroccans for their decisive role in the

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<sup>45</sup> See for examples decrees to naturalise Moroccan soldiers in the *Boletín Oficial del Estado*, nrs. 183, 276 (year 1942) and 327 (year 1950), and files on Moorish Guard members who were naturalised, AGMG, Caja 151.

<sup>46</sup> AGA, 81.11023, Exp. 103. 'Concesión de nacionalidad española a indígenas de nuestra zona, año 1955'.

<sup>47</sup> See for example the file on the application for Spanish nationality of Enfeddal Ben Ahmed el Gomari. AGA, 81.11023, 'Gabinete Diplomático num. 771', dated 5 April 1952.

<sup>48</sup> Josep Lluís Mateo Dieste, "'Rarezas": Conversiones religiosas en el Marruecos colonial (1930-1956)', *Hispania* 73 (2013) 229.

<sup>49</sup> Ruano, *Islam y Guerra Civil española*, 167.

<sup>50</sup> AHMC, Varela, 97/34.

war. But on an individual human level, Moroccans, even those who fought for Spain, were still 'little Moors'. The following piece, published in 1947, intended as humour by its writer, describes the view Spaniards in Spanish Morocco still had of their 'protected':

Buxta ben Abselam, an old soldier of the Regulares and today a quick-witted merchant of Melilla, pays a visit to Seville with the goal of greeting some friends, and at the same time attempting to sell some Moorish artisan products. In one of the most central streets of the beautiful town, one lady calls to him:

-Listen morito ...,<sup>51</sup> paisa ...,<sup>52</sup> Mohamed.

Buxta continues on his way as if he did not hear, and the lady, yet again, calls him raising her voice even higher.

Moroo...! paisa...! Mohamed...!

At this, our friend Buxta turns around and with a foul humour exclaims:

-Listen, mojera,<sup>53</sup> you, why calling for me moro, saying Mohame and saying paisa? You not knowing how I calling?

- I do not know, morito, answers the good lady. How do you want me to call you, Alfredo?

-No! Nothing of Friedo nor any such stury. Yo knowing that Moor already fighti in Spain with Franco, you knowing that Moor already talking, rayding, already dooing counting like aromi.<sup>54</sup> True? Then musting calling DON PAISA.<sup>55</sup>

A deliberate attempt was made to convey, in English, the broken Spanish with which Buxta was speaking. The piece makes fun of the elevated status Buxta, the Moroccan, thinks he has gained by fighting for Franco. The text recognises that Moroccans did achieve a rise in standing, which they were aware of, at the same time however, it stops short of recognising equal status with the Spaniards by highlighting the very broken Spanish that Buxta speaks, and ridicules how he calls himself 'Mr Fellow'. By not speaking fluent Spanish, the position of Moroccans as standing at a lower level compared to Spaniards is stressed. It was expected of Moroccans to learn Spanish, if they desired equality, rather than the Spaniards to learn Arabic. Many writings on the Spanish Civil War by Nationalists (and occasionally Republicans), whether memoirs or propaganda, when quoting Moroccans, almost always do so in broken Spanish. It often appears that part of the goal of the quotation is to have fun at the expense of the Moroccan who uttered the words, although

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<sup>51</sup> Little Moor.

<sup>52</sup> Short for 'paisano', which means: fellow, compatriot, or someone who lives in the countryside.

<sup>53</sup> A faulty pronunciation of 'mujer' (woman), a pronunciation that I came across more than once during interviews with Moroccan veterans.

<sup>54</sup> Arrumi, literary 'The Roman', by which it is meant: Christian, or European.

<sup>55</sup> Mr. *Paisa*. See: Mohandusi Rahamante, 'Humorismo – dos anécdotas musulmanas', *Segangan*, November 1947, 12.

occasionally a Moroccan could be explicitly praised for speaking correct Spanish. Although the *Africanistas* liked to think that they were versed in Moroccan culture, the majority of the chiefs of the Moroccan units, including Franco, did not speak Arabic or Berber,<sup>56</sup> or just a few isolated words and expressions, hence the need for Moroccan officers. The small number of Spanish officers who spoke Arabic was not enough for the growing number of soldiers who fought in Spain. Similarly, in the Protectorate, the Spanish civilian population, by and large communicated with the native population in Spanish. The Moroccans had to learn Spanish, for most Spaniards had no desire or inclination to learn Arabic or Riffian.<sup>57</sup> While the necessity to speak Spanish, signified a hierarchical relationship whereby the Moroccan stood on a separate (though ostensibly, and according to Francoist propaganda, equal) level as the Spaniard, the reality often did not correspond to policy.

### **The Practice**

As previous chapters have shown, despite steps taken by the Spanish Nationalist army and government to separate Moroccans from the Spanish population in the Peninsula during the war, in reality maintaining such separation was not always possible. Romantic relationships and marriages between Moroccan soldiers and Spanish women existed. Despite efforts to prevent the conversion of Muslims to Christianity there exist cases where such conversions took place, even if the goal was usually a contract marriage. The same was true for Spanish-Moroccan relationships in Spanish Morocco. The crossing of cultural and religious frontiers also manifested itself from both sides: Moroccans converted to Christianity, Spaniards converted to Islam,<sup>58</sup> Spanish men married Moroccan women, though that happened less often than Moroccan men marrying Spanish women. Even Jewish-Muslim and Jewish-Christian liaisons existed. There were different kinds of relationships between people belonging to different faiths that ranged from friendship to romantic bonds, to matrimonies, and even relations in the realm of prostitution. What distinguished this crossing of the cultural line of division, was that they took place mainly between the lower social classes.<sup>59</sup> On some level, a form of Spanish-Moroccan equality and, perhaps inadvertently, brotherhood was achieved because many of the Spaniards living in Morocco were poor migrants. Their economic situation did not differ much from Moroccans, thus the issue of haves and have-nots which was significant between the French colonisers and the native population in the southern zone never arose. There were many references to Spaniards in Morocco as poor people, which undoubtedly led, in the perception of the Moroccans of the Spanish Protectorate, to the feeling that Spanish colonial rule was less severe than the French one. It also led to the inferiorisation of the

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<sup>56</sup> Gustau Nerín, *La guerra que vino de Africa*, 61.

<sup>57</sup> David Montogemy Hart, *The Aith Waryaghar of the Moroccan Rif. An Ethnography and History* (Tucson 1976) 417.

<sup>58</sup> Mateo Dieste, “‘Rarezas’: conversiones religiosas”, 233. There were even cases of western foreigners who came to Spanish Morocco to embrace Islam. *Ibidem*, 232, 248,

<sup>59</sup> Mateo Dieste, ‘Una hermandad en tensión’, 88.

image of the dominant Spanish coloniser.<sup>60</sup> The accessibility of Spaniards and the poor economic conditions of many, meant that many Spaniards were employed by Moroccans, often performing what was considered by the Protectorate authorities as menial jobs. The Spanish authorities considered this damaging to Spanish prestige and tried to prevent it.<sup>61</sup> The Spanish authorities tried to prevent the inversion of the status of the Spanish as protector and Moroccan as protected. The matter extended even to some Spanish soldiers, who were keen to supplement their income and were contracted by Riffian farmers in the Oriental Rif to work on the harvest.<sup>62</sup>

An old Moroccan civilian, interviewed in 2011, sums up the attitudes of many Moroccans toward the Spaniards who lived in northern Morocco. This Moroccan, remembering sympathetically, found on the governmental level that ‘the Spaniards, contrary to the French, did not intervene in our affairs. If you go to the Spanish captain or colonel for a complaint they would tell you to go to the *kaïd* or the qadi [Muslim judge]...’. On the human level, he noted that ‘the Spaniards were simple people ... sometimes they would ask you if you could treat them to lunch’.<sup>63</sup> That was in the end the fruit of the composition of the Spanish rhetoric on brotherhood, Spanish policy of segregation, and therefore intervening as little as possible in the religious traditions and affairs of the Moroccans, and the accessibility of the majority of the Spaniards as a result of economic realities. That composition also had its effects on some Moroccan nationalists. As the son of the Abdeslam Bennuna, the founder of the Moroccan nationalist movement told Dieste:

Between the Moroccan and the Spaniards a very especial relationship was established, [a relationship] of *tú a tú* [rather than the more formal *usted*]. The Spaniards, from those with responsibilities, both politicians and military, to the merchants, or the labourers who also existed, coexisted with the Moroccans. They did not treat the Moor as inferior, and respected the religious and nationalist sentiments.<sup>64</sup>

### **To be or not to be Spanish**

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<sup>60</sup> Mateo Dieste, ‘De los “Remendados” ’ al Hâjj Franco’, 72.

<sup>61</sup> Mateo Dieste, ‘Una hermandad en tensión’, 85.

<sup>62</sup> Mateo Dieste, ‘De los “Remendados”’, 72.

<sup>63</sup> Interview with Abderrahman bu Zeryouh, Tangier. 5 January 2011. Two uncles of him fought in Spain, one of whom was killed there in 1939. Asked why did he think his uncles and other volunteers fought in Spain? He responded: ‘many went because they were enthusiastic about hearing about money and the ability to fight. They were people who did not refrain from a fight’.

<sup>64</sup> Mateo Dieste, ‘Una hermandad en tensión’, 84. The respect for nationalist sentiments, which was translated in allowing the Moroccan nationalists, during the Civil War, to legally establish political parties, was of course a matter of expediency that was motivated by the fear of troubles in Morocco and the possible prospect of losing the war, as both García Figueras and Beigbeder admitted. Madariaga, *Marruecos. Ese gran desoconocido*, 292, 294. It is also motivated by the will to use Moroccan nationalism as a tool to force the French to recognise the Francoist regime, as Beigbeder admitted to a British diplomat. Bourne, Watt and Partridge, *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, Doc. 178.

If the rhetoric of the brotherhood and the poor economic and social standing of many Spaniards in the Protectorate contributed to an inferiorisation of the Spanish colonial dominator, so must the conflict in Spain have done for the Moroccan soldiers. Queipo de Llano even pointed that out in one of his radio chats. Commenting on supposed Republican excesses in Baena, he addressed the Republicans: ‘What these Moors did, when they saw your deeds in Baena, was to wonder with surprise: These people who do this, are they the ones who want to civilise Morocco? They are quite right’.<sup>65</sup> But it was not only the supposed crimes of the Republicans that would have made the Moroccans wonder on what basis the Spaniards could claim superiority over the Moroccans. Spain was for many Moroccans called ‘the country of hunger’,<sup>66</sup> where they witnessed people starving and begging for food, and in some cases Moroccans providing food for them.<sup>67</sup> It was a country where Moroccans defeated time and again an enemy that was Spanish, even if this enemy was portrayed as red, godless or even un-Spanish. It was a country where they could take the possessions of Spaniards, the lives of Spaniards, and sometimes the women of Spaniards, whether by force or through courting. It was a land where they inspired fear in Spaniards, and where they played a military role that exceeded in its importance their numbers, a fact which they knew very well. Buxta, the *Regulares* soldier who was ridiculed above, had every right to call himself ‘Don Paisa’.

But does a perception of equality, or even superiority (after all the Moroccan soldiers who originated in the Protectorate, were the ‘protectors’ of their Spanish protectors) towards the Spaniards mean an acceptance by the Moroccans, and especially the Moroccan soldiers of the so-called brotherhood? Answering this question is complicated because of the complexity of Moroccans who interacted with the Spanish.

The Moroccan soldiers who arrived in Spain came, as it were, in different shapes and colours. Some of them had been embroiled in a hostile relationship with Spain, due to the Rif war, and were not particularly fond of Spain.<sup>68</sup> A German veteran of the First World War, who had fought in Morocco against the French along with a force of Moroccan guerrillas, met old comrades in Spain. One of them expressed his attitude towards the Spaniards: ‘Trust the Devil and do not trust them [Spaniards]’.<sup>69</sup> Many younger recruits who were too young to be involved in the colonial wars apparently were more receptive to Spanish propaganda,<sup>70</sup> and more open to new cultural experiences than the older generation who were more conservative.<sup>71</sup> Others who came

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<sup>65</sup> Ian Gibson, *Queipo de Llano. Sevilla, verano de 1936*, 381.

<sup>66</sup> Mateo Dieste, ‘De los “Remendados”’, 73.

<sup>67</sup> Interview with Al Hussein ben Abdesselam, Ceuta, 30 January 2011; Mustapha El Merroun, ‘Surat Isbaniya fi mandhur al mujannadin al maghariba khilal al Harb al Ahliyya al Isbaniyya. 1936-1939’, *Al Ittihad Al Ishtiraki*, 31 July 2005, 10. Ruano, *Islam y Guerra Civil española*, 367.

<sup>68</sup> Ruano, *Islam y Guerra Civil española*, 127.

<sup>69</sup> Albert Bartels, unpublished memoirs, 146.

<sup>70</sup> Ruano, *Islam y Guerra Civil española*, 127.

<sup>71</sup> Albert Bartels, unpublished memoirs, 126.



from the French zone and who had no previous contact with the Spaniards and subsequently deserted, had probably a stay and experience that was too short to identify with Spain or the Franco regime. In any case it is impossible to question them on their views regarding this issue. Others had always been in the service of Spain.

As discussed in chapter 3, the majority of the Moroccans from the Spanish Protectorate, or those from the French Protectorate who remained in the Spanish Zone after the war, admitted the good treatment they received by their officers in Spain during the war, and mostly did not experience racial discrimination; at least that is the view of those serving in Moroccan-majority units. The experience was probably different for those serving in the Spanish Legion or the Moroccan branch of the Falange units. Some Moroccan veterans remained ideologically committed to the worldview of the Francoist regime and the values of order and discipline that Franco's regime represented for them. One of them, who thought of Franco as the manliest of Spanish men, even deplored the failure of the right-wing coup of Colonel Tejero in 1981 against the democratic rule in Spain.<sup>72</sup> Another believed that the problem of Basque separatism could simply be solved in one week by sending a force of Riffian soldiers.<sup>73</sup> In many cases, the soldiers, after Moroccan independence chose to continue serving in the Spanish armed forces until the 1960s,<sup>74</sup> when they retired. Even those soldiers who served in the *Regulares* in the 1940s and 1950s, and only served in the Protectorate praised the Spaniards, both the military and civilians, and their correct treatment of them and the Moroccan population. Veterans in Asilah commented that there was only one period of tension, during the prelude to Morocco's independence, when the Spanish superiors restricted for a short period the amount of ammunition allocated to Moroccan soldiers to five rounds each.<sup>75</sup> Rarely did a Moroccan soldier in the Spanish army join anti-Spanish movements. However, there were few soldiers who showed the ultimate sign of inclusion in the Spanish brotherhood, by accepting the Spanish nationality.

The case of the highest ranking Moroccan soldier is illustrative. Mohamed Ben Mizzian gave an interview to a Spanish journalist, Juan Guixé, who published it in his 1922 book *El Rif en sombras. Lo que yo he visto en Melilla*. In it, Guixé describes the 25 year-old Mizzian as a young man who speaks Spanish with a Castilian accent, and who thinks in Spanish, but is troubled by his past. Mizzian told him how his family wanted him to learn the Koran, and he could have become a religious man rather than a lieutenant in the Spanish army. He continues:

I believe, with time, the Moors will adapt to European civilisation, if not the current ones, then their sons and their grandsons. The same will happen to the generations that are born

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<sup>72</sup> Interview with Mohammed Bilal Achmal, Tetuan, 7 January 2011.

<sup>73</sup> Mateo Dieste, 'De los "Remendados"', 84.

<sup>74</sup> Several interviews.

<sup>75</sup> Interviews with ex-members (but not war veterans) of the *Regulares* in Asilah, 20 February 2011.

under Spanish action: they will be free from their fanaticism and will look with horror to the black spots of their past. The Riffian people are ignorant, and from that ignorance comes their evil. They are so ignorant, to a degree that you cannot imagine. That ignorance incapacitates them, so that they do not understand the progress that civilisation signifies. They live like barbarians and thence comes that violent, shocking and astonishing contrast between the life of the Riffian and that of the European.<sup>76</sup>

True to his word, in the following years and decades he would fight fiercely to establish the Spanish order in Morocco. And so he did to establish the order of General Franco in Spain, claiming that the war in Spain was necessary to defend Western civilisation from being destroyed.<sup>77</sup> As an officer in the Spanish army, he also possessed the Spanish nationality; he held both military and administrative positions (Commander of the Military Region of the Canary Islands and of Galicia) that only Spaniards could hold. For many goals and purposes he was embraced as a Spaniard. Although he embraced Spain, this had its limits, as after all, he was still of Moroccan descent, and there was no shortage of reminders. In 1952, Mizzian was sent with a Spanish delegation on an official visit to a number of Arabic countries. The Spanish *ABC* paper pointed to its readers that Mizzian, a *General de División* at the time, was ‘of pure Moroccan stock’ who had served Spain well. The paper also pointed out that his comrades in arms included the generals Franco, Varela, and Gracia Valiño who had the utmost estimation and the closest friendship for ‘their Moroccan comrade’. The paper mentioned that Mizzian, in addition to Arabic and Chelja (Riffian Berber), spoke ‘correct Spanish’.<sup>78</sup> The Moroccan part of the General would simply not disappear in the eyes of the Spaniards. Nor could it for Mizzian himself, who, upon the independence of Morocco, resigned from the Spanish army, relinquished his Spanish nationality, and became Morocco’s first Minister of Defence. It was in this capacity that he imprisoned his daughter, who was married to a Spanish Christian, confirming that Moroccan and Spanish blood and religion should not mix.

Moroccan authorities of the Spanish Protectorate, even though subjecting themselves to the political control of the Spanish authorities were as keen as the Spanish to prevent the crossing of the frontier that separated Moroccans from the Spanish in their daily lives, especially when it came to Moroccan women. Muslim Moroccan women could be severely punished for marrying or having relationships with non-Muslim men. Even during the 1940s, the Basha (native governor) of Tetuan persecuted Moroccan women for attending cinemas or theatres, or for even passing through

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<sup>76</sup> Lucas Molina Franco, ‘Mohamed Ben Mizzian Bel Kasem: El general moro de Franco’, in: Lucas Molina Franco, *Treinta y seis relatos de la Guerra del 36* ( Valladolid 2006 ) 305-310, here 306 - 307.

<sup>77</sup> Nerín, *La Guerra que Vino de África*, 208.

<sup>78</sup> ‘El Ministro de Asuntos Exteriores Empezará el 4 de Abril su Viaje a los Países Árabes’, *ABC*, 23 March 1952, 36.

Spanish urban spaces for fear of becoming more like European women.<sup>79</sup> Sometimes, official positions in the Moroccan government of the Protectorate were filled by Moroccan nationalists. Moroccan nationalists who were ready to accommodate the Nationalist propaganda on religion and shared history, were only ready to go to this extent and not further. What the Moroccan nationalists did not concede, was the concern for the distinctiveness of the Moroccan identity, and the avoidance of its absorption by the Spanish one. The National Reform Party (PNR) of Abdel Khalek Torres gave an example of this 1937 when its paper *Al Hurriya* published the so-called ‘demands of the Moroccan people’. Concerning ‘the Moroccan nationality and civic status’ the paper put the following demands:

- Moroccan subjects must not be allowed to disavow the Moroccan nationality by obtaining the Spanish nationality in Morocco.
- Those who are born abroad to a Moroccan father are to be considered Moroccan.
- The Moroccan nationality must be kept for those who are born in the Spanish colonies to a Moroccan father, whether the father was born there or not.<sup>80</sup>

It would not be difficult to imagine that such demands were partially, if not mainly, written with Moroccan soldiers of the Spanish army in mind. The problem of losing the Moroccan identity to Spain by way of naturalisation was not a concern exclusive to Spanish Morocco. It had its precedents as far back as the nineteenth century with the protection status that some Moroccan subjects were granted by multiple European powers who wielded influence in Morocco, and it became a problem in the wider Maghreb before the 1930s. As Shadid and Koningsveld explain, the European concept of nationality was alien to classical Islamic legal tradition. Since the second half of the nineteenth century it penetrated gradually into the Muslim world. This penetration can be seen initially as a mere process of translating the existing social and political realities into a new legal terminology. However, a new dimension was added in Tunisia and Algeria, when the French authorities introduced Laws of Naturalisation in 1923 and 1927. These laws offered French nationality and the full rights of French citizenship to Tunisians and Algerian Muslims who accepted French civil law instead of Islamic law. This measure was met with fierce resistance from many Muslim scholars, who in Tunis issued a fatwa which qualified the person who adopted French citizenship under the said law as an apostate. Their view was supported by similar fatwas issued by scholars of the famous Islamic centre in Cairo Al-Azhar, and other scholars in Egypt. The French stipulated the adoption of French citizenship as a condition to acquire a position of

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<sup>79</sup> Mateo Dieste, ‘“Rarezas”: Conversiones’, 248.

<sup>80</sup> ‘The Demands of the Moroccan People,[part] -6-’ *Al Hurriya*, 23 June 1938.

importance in the colonial society; this was part of France's assimilation policy.<sup>81</sup> As a consequence of the fatwa, however, only a limited number of Muslims adopted French citizenship.

Spaniards in the Moroccan protectorate, and certainly under Franco, were far from attempting any assimilation policy; or at least, as a country that was supposed to adopt a Catholic identity, they did not try to include Moroccans within this identity, whether during or after the war. That did not, however, prevent many Moroccans, especially soldiers, from equating the adoption of Spanish nationality with apostasy; even though some served with the Spanish army until the end of the protectorate and beyond, and even though an organised movement of religious scholars in Spanish Morocco against accepting the Spanish nationality was lacking. A former member of the Moorish guard who considered that 'Franco had blind trust in us', explained how:

I was present at the ceremony of the signature of the [Moroccan 1956] independence document. After independence we received a telegram saying: anyone who wants to join Morocco can do that. Those who want to settle their accounts can do that, and those who want to be baptised and take the Spanish nationality can stay with us. One morning our colonel came and started praising us that we were brave men and trustworthy. Then his wife Carmen came weeping and wishing we stayed with her. But indeed I joined Morocco'.<sup>82</sup>

Note the use of the word 'baptise' when speaking of being a naturalised Spanish citizen. It is a term that arises in other testimonies of Moroccan veterans, long after the end of the war. Mateo Dieste also noted the use, in the Oriental Rif, of the term '*abutisar*', an adaptation of the '*bautizar*' to refer to gaining Spanish nationality. Interestingly, he cites a Franciscan father who stated that during the Moroccan independence process (1950s), some Moroccans in Tangier stood in a queue at the gate of the Spanish church as they had heard that Spanish nationality would be given to those who converted to Christianity.<sup>83</sup> The same was noted by those who chose to remain under Spanish authority and accept Spanish nationality.<sup>84</sup> As it happened, the majority of Moroccans chose to remain Moroccan, and rejected Spanish nationality, though not only due to religious reasons.

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<sup>81</sup> Wasif Shadid and Sjoerd van Koningsveld, 'Loyalty to a non-Muslim Government. An analysis of Islamic Normative Discussions and of the Views of Some Contemporary Islamicists', in: W.A.R. Shadid and P.S. van Koningsveld, eds., *Political Participation and Identities of Muslims in non-Muslim States* (Kampen 1996) 84-114, here 93.

<sup>82</sup> Testimony of an unnamed 'tall man', El Merroun archive, Tetuan, 17 December 1995. Indeed, the documents of the Guadalajara military archives show that the Moorish Guard members were offered the choice of the Spanish Nationality, but very few of them took that choice, and the overwhelming majority chose to go 'home'.

<sup>83</sup> Mateo Dieste, "'Rarezas": Conversiones', 249.

<sup>84</sup> Interview with Mohammed Abdullah Susi, Ceuta, 19 January 2011.

In the wake of the Moroccan independence, Moroccan nationalists in the former French zone started to mount military action against the Spanish territories in Ifni. In December 1957, news arrived in Spain that Spanish defenders had abandoned frontier outposts in the face of invading Moroccan irregulars. Reports were printed in the Spanish press about Moroccan savagery against Spanish civilians including the rape and disembowelment of a pregnant Spanish woman. These disclosures set off a storm of anti-Moroccan feeling in Spain. In Madrid, crowds booed Franco's Moroccan guard in the streets and greeted their newsreel appearances with noisy catcalls.<sup>85</sup> In the face of this, and the disappearance of the African empire that Franco helped to construct in northern Morocco, Franco had to disband his guards corps. Some of its members accepted the offer of Spanish citizenship and continued service in the Spanish armed forces. However, the majority opted to return to Morocco and receive financial compensation.<sup>86</sup> With that, the vestiges of the Spanish-Moroccan military brotherhood that started with a colonial project and was strengthened through a civil war were coming to an end.

### **Conclusion**

The relationship between the Spanish Nationalists and Moroccan soldiers during the Spanish Civil War reflected in a great measure the relationship that had already existed in the Moroccan Protectorate before the war and continued to do after the war. There are three levels in which this relationship developed: the level of grand rhetoric, the level of government policy, and daily reality that was partly shaped by governmental policies and partly formed by resistance to those policies. The grand rhetoric, whether during the establishment of the Spanish Protectorate in Morocco or during the use of Moroccan troops during the Spanish Civil War, stressed bonds of blood, faith and shared history to present the presence of the Spaniards in Morocco and of the Moroccan troops in Spain as naturally and ethically acceptable. Spaniards and Moroccans, according to this grand rhetoric, were no strangers in each other's countries. This rhetoric was partially influenced by the views and experiences of the Spanish officers who served in Morocco and who established good rapport with their native troops and a paternalistic view towards the Moroccans in general.

On the level of governmental policy in the Protectorate and in Nationalist Spain, the brotherhood between the Spanish and the Moroccan communities was approached in a more cautious way, with a mixture of inclusion and exclusion. Most of the Moroccans in Spain, soldiers and civilians alike, were removed from Spain at the end of the war, though many were presented with the opportunity to naturalise and become Spanish. New housing projects in Spanish Morocco did not separate Spaniards and Moroccans by assigning new houses to different quarters, but a separation of sorts was maintained. The governmental policies, of both the Spanish and the

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<sup>85</sup> 'Morocco: Moors Unmoored', *Time*, 23 December 1957, 22.

<sup>86</sup> See examples in AGMG, Caja 79/400 and Caja 151.

Moroccan governments, tried to control the sexual boundary between the two communities, especially preventing their own women from marrying or having any other type of sexual liaisons with men from the other community.

It is with the policing of the sexual mores that it becomes obvious that realities often defied governmental policies. Inter-communal sexual relations existed both in Spain and in Morocco despite the efforts of the Nationalists or the Moroccan authorities. Such relationships were deemed threatening of the Spanish authority if the male partner was Muslim. Other types of relationships were deemed injurious to Spanish prestige, like Spaniards being employed by Moroccans to do menial jobs. The result of this interaction between policy and daily reality was that policies could not be implemented to their full extent, but they still managed to prevent day-to-day inter-communal relationships from pushing the boundaries further. In the end the Spanish imperial 'racial' hierarchy did not suffer much from the mixing of cultures and races that the Spaniards feared, because the majority of Moroccans themselves, whether on a governmental or individual level, were usually not keen to cross the religious or national divide that separated them from the Spaniards.

In a recent interview, José Antonio González Alcantud, a historian, anthropologist, and researcher on Spanish-Moroccan stereotypes, commented that Andalusians like to see a Moorish part in themselves; but they also belong to the European culture, and therefore 'we can say that we are "cousins but not brothers"'.<sup>87</sup> Perhaps that is the view Spanish imperialists, and Nationalists who justified the use of Moroccan troops in Spain in particular, had when they struggled to reach a balance between including and excluding Moroccans.

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<sup>87</sup> 'Entrevista. José Antonio González Alcantud', *Kántara*, nr. 3, February 2011, 45.

## Conclusions

When El Hussein ben Abdesselam, the veteran I met in 2011 in Zaouiat Sidi Ibrahim in Ceuta, was wounded during the war, he was transferred to the Salamanca military hospital where he was treated and then given 24 days leave upon recovering. After spending the leave in Ceuta, he requested returning to his Tabor where he, on a doctor's orders, was to carry out only non-combat duties. It did not matter, as the war had ended when El Hussein reached his Tabor. Having been discharged from the army, his Tabor commander arranged a job 'for me with his father in law who was a retired military man in Ceuta. I used to carry milk and helped with ironing the clothes and then I helped the lady in the kitchen and that became my job'.<sup>1</sup> With that, El Hussein who originated in French Morocco, became a resident of Ceuta and later a Spanish subject. The family he later established consisted of Spanish Muslim citizens, and that thanks to the Spanish Civil War. Not all the veterans became Spanish subjects or residents of the Spanish African enclaves. Some of them continued serving in the Spanish Army (deployed to different parts of Morocco, the Sahara, or even Equatorial Guinea) until Moroccan independence when they were transferred to the Moroccan Royal Army; some continued to serve as soldiers for Spain years beyond the independence and then retired and remained in Morocco; and some retired and later emigrated to Europe. The post-war lives of these soldiers took different directions, but they were united by the experience of the encounter with Spain within a context of war, an experience that has left traces visible even today.

Now that the journey with the Moroccan soldiers of the Spanish Civil War and their encounter with Spain has come to an end, what about the question: to what extent was the Spanish-Moroccan encounter influenced by both the perception of the *Otherness* of the Moroccan soldiers' presence in Spain (i.e. their different racial and cultural background as African Muslims in a European 'Catholic' country) and by the agency of the Moroccan soldiers? The short answer is: the perception of *Otherness* determined the development of this encounter in almost every aspect, and the Moroccan soldiers did exercise significant agency within this encounter. In fact, both parts of the answer go hand in hand.

The perceptions of race, culture and religion determined to a large extent the participation of Moroccan soldiers in the Spanish Civil War, their presence in Spain, and their treatment by both the Nationalists and the Republicans. The value of the Moroccan troops in the Spanish army was based on Spanish racial views of the Moroccans as natural born warriors and views on the influence of Islam and geography on the warlike capabilities of the Moroccans. Specific physical and psychological qualities determined the way the Moroccan troops should ideally be employed. Given their alien nature and their reputation as fierce and savage warriors, they were also on many occasions useful to the Nationalists as a psychological weapon spreading terror through the ranks of the enemy, both military and civilian alike. But beyond the role of the infantryman, and to a lesser extent cavalryman,

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<sup>1</sup> Interview with El Hussen ben Abdesselam, Ceuta, 19 January 2011.

the Moroccan soldiers were not used in other branches of the army such as artillery or armour, not even as drivers of motorised vehicles. Their soldierly capabilities, however magnificent they could be considered, were limited.

The Moroccans were deemed by the Spanish Nationalists to have a different psychology and therefore merited different treatment in comparison to Spanish soldiers. Those who commanded Moroccan troops would, ideally, be officers with knowledge of that psychology and of Moroccan customs, though rates of attrition in war were not always conducive to the achievement of that ideal. Differences in language played an obvious role in this need for officers with especial aptitudes, but also Spanish perceptions of the Moroccan soldiers' understanding of soldierly life and discipline. The Spanish attitude was a paternalistic one towards soldiers deemed less mature than their Spanish counterparts. The Moroccans needed a firm but also just, and occasionally generous hand to lead them, a guiding hand to be provided by Spanish leadership. But the relationship between the Spanish Army and its Moroccan soldiers went in two directions. Too firm a hand, too long a pay delay, too offensive a character of a superior officer, might occasionally lead the Moroccans to display their dissatisfaction through loud or even violent protest, or simply desertion.

To bridge the distance between the Spanish leadership and the Moroccan troops, there was a need, in addition to Spanish officers with 'especial aptitudes', of Moroccan officers who could consult and translate but also command Moroccan troops. But such officers were relatively few in number, even though that number grew as war necessities demanded. And though some managed to gain promotions that otherwise would not have been available, there was a limit to the rank they could attain. They were also expected to command Moroccan troops, not Spanish ones. After all they were not simply called officers but *oficiales moros* (Moorish officers). They were even limited to wearing a headgear that was Moroccan, and not allowed the Spanish officer's cap (perhaps with the exception of Mizzian who followed a regular military career of a Spanish officer rather than a Moorish one).

The Moroccan units of the Spanish army were to be distinguished in their appearances. The uniforms, the insignia, the unit flags, they all carried Moroccan or Islamic symbols. That was the case long before the Spanish Civil War, and it served to reduce the cultural distance between the Moroccan troops and their Islamic Moroccan environment. In Spain, that distinctively outer Moroccan appearance showed the contrast between the Moroccan troops, their Spanish military counterparts and their Spanish civilian surrounding. This distinctive Moroccan world, as it were, was not limited to appearances. The Moroccan soldiers had their own military police and served (when convicted for crimes) their prison terms separately from Spanish prisoners. They had their own camp followers composed of Moroccan merchants, Moroccan café owners, Moroccan musicians and even their own Moroccan prostitutes. In hospitals they had their own wards, were served food according to Islamic diet, and when died they were buried in separate Islamic cemeteries. Actions aimed at converting Moroccan soldiers to Catholicism were prohibited, even though a few Moroccans determined enough



to convert (for whatever reasons, earthly or otherwise) could still defy Spanish policy. The Spanish Nationalists created and maintained a separate cultural space for their Moroccan troops.

Was that a token of respect towards the traditions of the Moroccans or primarily a measure to maintain the distance between these alien troops and Spanish society? Great problems would certainly have been created had the Spanish tried to Hispanicise their troops, i.e. systematically blend Moroccan troops with Spanish ones, hospitalise injured Moroccans in the same wards as the Spanish soldiers and provide them with non-Islamic diet, allowing conversions of Moroccans to Catholicism, or replacing the crescent on the *Regulares* flag with a cross. In short, little good would have come out of making the Moroccans look, eat and pray Spanish. That is clear because in many ways, the Moroccans welcomed and even participated in the creation of the separate Moroccan sphere. In this the agency of the Moroccan soldiers becomes apparent. Moroccan recruits generally favoured enlisting in Moroccan units to be among Muslims. Many Moroccan soldiers favoured a commanding officer who could understand their culture and speak their language, i.e. an officer who was more familiar with their culture than they with his. Respecting the Islamic religion whether in the field, burial grounds or in the hospitals was one of the most important positive examples the Moroccan veterans usually cite when remembering their Spanish war experience, and was not rarely the result of their own demands. Moroccan government officials also participated in creating the separate sphere to maintain the Islamic tradition of their Moroccan troops, and Moroccan nationalists were not keen to Hispanicise the Moroccan soldiers either, and when many Moroccan soldiers were offered the Spanish nationality at the end of their military service, years after the war, most of them declined it. The Spanish Nationalists thought the Moroccans should remain Moroccans. The latter equally thought that they should maintain their Muslim separate space, and a Moroccan identity (as opposed to a family or tribal one) of which many probably became conscious only after serving in the army and moving to Spain. The Moroccan side, both soldiers and officials, participated in shaping the cultural space the Moroccans filled during their stay in Spain. It is true that the Spanish military and civilian authorities were in a stronger position to shape that space, but the Moroccan influence is not in anyway negligible, and with the prolongation of the war, the Moroccan agency grew stronger.

Despite the fact that maintaining a separate cultural space for the Moroccans was sound strategy and that it was conducted in cooperation with the Moroccans themselves, it nevertheless responded to Spanish needs to maintain a distance with the Moroccans. The Moroccans could not be buried in Catholic cemeteries, not only because the Moroccans would not wish it, but because the Spanish Catholics would not prefer it. Moroccan soldiers could not become Catholics, not because of respect towards Islamic sensitivity, but because in the Spanish mind it was doubtful whether any Moroccan Muslim could genuinely convert without having a hidden agenda. Ironically, the Moroccans were welcome to defend the Christian faith, but not to embrace it. Moroccans could not marry Spanish women because that would hurt the prestige of the Spanish protective power. They were occasionally welcome to, as Queipo de Llano put it, show the 'red' women what 'real men' are, but not to be

romantically involved with Spanish women who chose to be with them. The Moroccans were excellent soldiers and they were welcome to fight, but they could hardly serve any other function in Spain after their military duties came to an end. The Moroccan presence was justified religiously, historically and racially by people like Miguel Asín Palacios, José María Pemán, Juan Priego López, and others on Nationalist news papers or Queipo de Llano's Seville Radio. Despite that justification, the Moroccans (whose presence in Spain was justified by shared race and history) had, in the end, to leave the country.

The Spanish experience with excluding, separating and constraining the Moroccans is not without its notable exceptions. Moroccan officers faced a limit to what they could attain in rank or command, but one of them, Mizzian, was allowed to have a Spanish-style military career, enrolling in a Spanish military academy, and ended up commanding Spanish troops and officers. He concluded the war commanding a division, and later attained the rank of Lieutenant General. Despite his own merits, one wonders whether he was shown favour by the Spaniards in order to be a symbolic example of the success of the Protectorate. While the majority of Moroccan recruits enlisted in the *Regulares* units, the Spanish Foreign Legion nevertheless (unlike its French counterpart) opened its doors for Moroccan enlistees, even though Moroccan enlistment in that corps dwindled with the passage of time. The Fascist Falange's own military unit in the Spanish Protectorate, the *Bandera de Marruecos* contained Moroccan recruits. While tens of thousands of Moroccan troops were sent back to Morocco, a select few hundred were chosen to stay and become an elite guard of the head of state himself, although this might have occurred, in part, because they would form a symbolic deterrent to future opponents of Franco, and because they would be less inclined to sedition or to commit a coup. When Moroccan soldiers and officers were supposed to look Moroccan, Spanish officers and commanders walked around wearing a *chillaba* or a *tarbush*, sat drinking mint tea, and threw Arabic or Berber words in their conversations. When Moroccan soldiers were not supposed to look or act Spanish (even though the practice might have been different), Spanish officers could, though only in appearance, 'go native'.

Policy might ban mixed marriages, but in practice they took place, a sign that the agency of a determined Moroccan soldier (and a determined Spanish partner) could overcome official opposition to such marriages. Such marriages might even prevent Moroccans who remained in Spain after the war from being deported to Morocco. While being Spanish meant in Francoist Spain to be Catholic, many a Moroccan was offered and given Spanish nationality and the opportunity to become Spanish without the necessity of becoming Christian too, even though many Moroccans declined the opportunity.

It has also become clear that the rhetoric, policies and practices with regard to Moroccans in Spain during the war, reflected the rhetoric, policies and practices in the Spanish Protectorate of Morocco. The rhetoric of mixed Spanish-Moroccan identity that justified Spanish imperialism in Morocco was the same rhetoric that brought the Moroccans to Spain. The policies of separation between different communities in the Protectorate were the same as those practiced in Spain. In

practice this policy was often breached, both in Spanish Morocco as well as in the Peninsula. In some ways, the Moroccan military presence in Spain might be interpreted as an extension of the Protectorate policies and realities by other means. That the Delegation for Native Affairs brought its offices to Spain to try and continue the functions it usually undertook in Morocco is a clear enough indication of that continuation.

The Republicans displayed a clear negative attitude towards the Moroccans. The intervention of Moroccan troops in the Asturian Uprising of 1934 and the violent deeds that accompanied the march of the Army of Africa in the first months of 1936 stimulated the Republicans to spread a demonizing image of the Moroccan troops that often encouraged Republican fighters to show no mercy towards those Moroccans who fell prisoner. The Republican attitude probably better reflected traditional Spanish hostile images of the Moroccans and position towards them than the Nationalist attitude did. The Republic had little interest in promoting a discourse of brotherhood or shared history since the Republicans had not imported tens of thousands of Moroccans into Spain and did not need to justify their presence. Nor were people who had worked to justify the establishment of Spanish imperialism in Morocco by bonds of blood and history were prominently represented in Republican circles. But the Republicans let their negative view of the Moroccans, and Maghrebis in general determine their attitudes towards those Maghrebis who helped their cause or offered to do so. The fact that rightist Spain was more tolerant of and less racist toward the Moroccans is, despite the explanation given, remarkable to say the least.

On the issue of how far can war bend, break, or reshape pre-existing limits, prejudices, and taboos that separated the Spanish society from the colonial one, and how far it shaped Spanish policies towards the colonials, this study has demonstrated that on the Nationalist side (where this question matters most) there existed a (positive) reshaping of existing prejudices on the level of propaganda and imagery. There was a slight and temporary liberalisation and expansion of the limits of human and cultural interaction and intermixing, a liberalisation that grew partially as a result of the new propaganda and imagery and partially as a result of the efforts of the Moroccans who defied and crossed the boundaries and taboo-lines between Moroccans and Spaniards. There was also a growth in the consideration that the Moroccan colonial society (because of its military value and contribution) was accorded in Nationalist Spain. The war had indeed a great impact on the Spanish-Moroccan relationship and led to the elevation of the Moroccans to a higher level of partnership with the Spaniards, even though the Moroccans were still obviously a junior partner by far. However, what the war proved is that, and despite the glaring exceptions, the broad structures that sought to maintain the limits separating the Spanish and Moroccan societies from one another were (and again with significant Moroccan participation) relatively successfully maintained.

The agency of the Moroccan soldiers played an important role in both the small opening of the Spanish and Moroccan human spaces towards each other, as well as in generally maintaining both spaces separate. Indeed, a Moroccan soldier could choose to enlist in the Spanish Foreign Legion,

befriend Spanish civilians, consume alcohol, have a romantic relationship with a Spanish girl, and yet be adamant that he received a halal diet in a military hospital, request burial at an Islamic cemetery should he die, cause enough trouble to be discharged from the Legion (if unsatisfied) and enlist in the *Regulares*, and decide to return to Morocco should he be offered a stay in Spain. More importantly the role of agency reflects both the will of the large number of individuals who chose to cross the cultural divide, and the agency of the majority who preferred the comfort of the separate Moroccan and Muslim sphere and worked for creating and maintaining it. The temporary nature of the stay of the Moroccan troops in Spain (as well as the decision by most of the Moroccans who were offered the Spanish nationality to decline the offer) meant that the majority of the Moroccan soldiers could easily maintain their familiar cultural identity. Had they remained in large numbers in Spain, as tens of thousands of North Africans did in France after the First World War, they could have been captives of their new homeland from which they would have had to lend part of a new and conflicting identity. In that way, returning to Morocco, or even to the much Islamicised Ceuta and Melilla, must have been a great comfort.

In many ways the Moroccan participation during the Spanish Civil War reflects other European experiences with colonial troops that fought in Europe during both world wars, and especially in the French Army. Racial perceptions determined the military role of Maghrebi and other African soldiers and the tactics they should use in a similar way to that of the Moroccan soldiers in Spain. The French and British armies paid much attention to showing respect and sensitivity towards the religious feelings of the colonial troops, whether Muslims or otherwise. In the case of the French, they regarded their Maghrebi soldiers as fanatical Muslims. Nevertheless, many of these Muslim young men showed themselves not to be strict followers of Islamic tenets in their daily life. Relations between colonial soldiers and European women was a sensitive point for European authorities, both civilian and military as well as European populations. Aside from the shocking accusations of mass rapes by colonial troops, whether in Germany in the 1920s or in Italy in 1944, even consensual relationships were frowned upon and met with discouragement. Measures were taken by European authorities to hinder this kind of romantic liaisons, justifying them by pointing to the European prestige that had to be protected.

In the light of these similarities what sets the Spanish experience apart, in light of this study is that: firstly, no other European country went so far as the *Africanistas* in Spain in claiming bonds of religion, history and blood between them and the colonial soldiers they employed in fighting their war. Secondly, as a result of their larger role and closer historical bonds, the presence of the colonial troops in Spain was, in terms of visibility and in terms of acceptance, greater in Nationalist Spain than in other parts of Europe between 1914-1945. The Nationalists did not attempt to diminish or downplay the significance of their colonial troops in the war. Furthermore, Nationalist Spain had, due principally to the religious propaganda it conducted, probably more success in making its colonial soldiers ideologically embrace the cause of the struggle they were fighting for, than the other major colonial

powers. However, it remains unclear how much a lack of such an ideological embrace would have mattered, given the accompanying material incentives to enlist.

An innovative aspect of this study is constituted by the fact that it has explored, on a significant scale, sources that provided the Moroccan perspective of the Civil War, and that it has provided these sources with a greater share in the discussion and presentation of evidence, than has so far been the case. The Moroccan perspective not only gives a fresh view of the war and the role of the Moroccans in it, but it continues where Spanish documentation stops, by showing the effects of Spanish preconceptions, policies and practices and how were they were received and negotiated with by the Moroccans. The sources on the Moroccan perspective are varied and range from the contemporary perspective of Moroccan soldiers and deserters, captured in documents written in Spanish, French and Arabic, to the latter day interviews conducted by this and other authors. In doing so, it has emerged that both sets of perspectives, separated by long decades, have much in common in the facts and insights they provide. Indeed, they have more in common than not. This study has also explored a myriad of sources of multifaceted nature: military; administrative; diplomatic; journalistic; published diaries as well as private papers and from multiple non-Moroccan points of view: Spanish (both Nationalist and Republican) and foreign (British, American, French, Soviet, German and Dutch). Despite the significance of the Moroccan perspective, the picture of the Moroccan participation in a civil war that took place in Spain and that involved fighters and observers from many countries would not be complete without this international perspective.

This study has demonstrated that the Moroccan soldiers were active agents in determining their fate during their service in the Spanish Nationalist forces, and not completely hapless victims, even though this Spanish-Moroccan relationship was not even-handed. The Spanish military and political authorities obviously had more power in determining the fate of the Moroccan soldiers and in shaping the relationship between these soldiers and their Spanish employers. In this regard, this study is one among few in the field of colonial military history that systematically discussed the agency of colonial troops, and has done so significantly from the perspective of these colonial troops. This research has also made clear how the separation in cultural spheres between the Moroccans and the Spaniards was something the Moroccans (both officials as well as soldiers) cooperated with the Spaniards in achieving.

The memory of the Moroccan troops' role in the Spanish Civil War has not disappeared. Many Spaniards blame the Moroccans for helping establish Franco's dictatorship. As a former Moroccan ambassador to Spain put it in 2009, when Spain was governed by the Socialist Party: 'Memories of this war are still alive. These emotional things are difficult to erase. So the participation of Moroccans in the war is a negative factor in ties between the two countries'.<sup>2</sup> The opening, in 2006, of the Mizzian Museum in Beni Ansar (Nador) celebrating Franco's Moroccan general, caused outrage

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<sup>2</sup> Zakia Abdennebi, 'Morocco Tackles Painful Role in Spain's Past', *Reuters*, 14 January 2009.

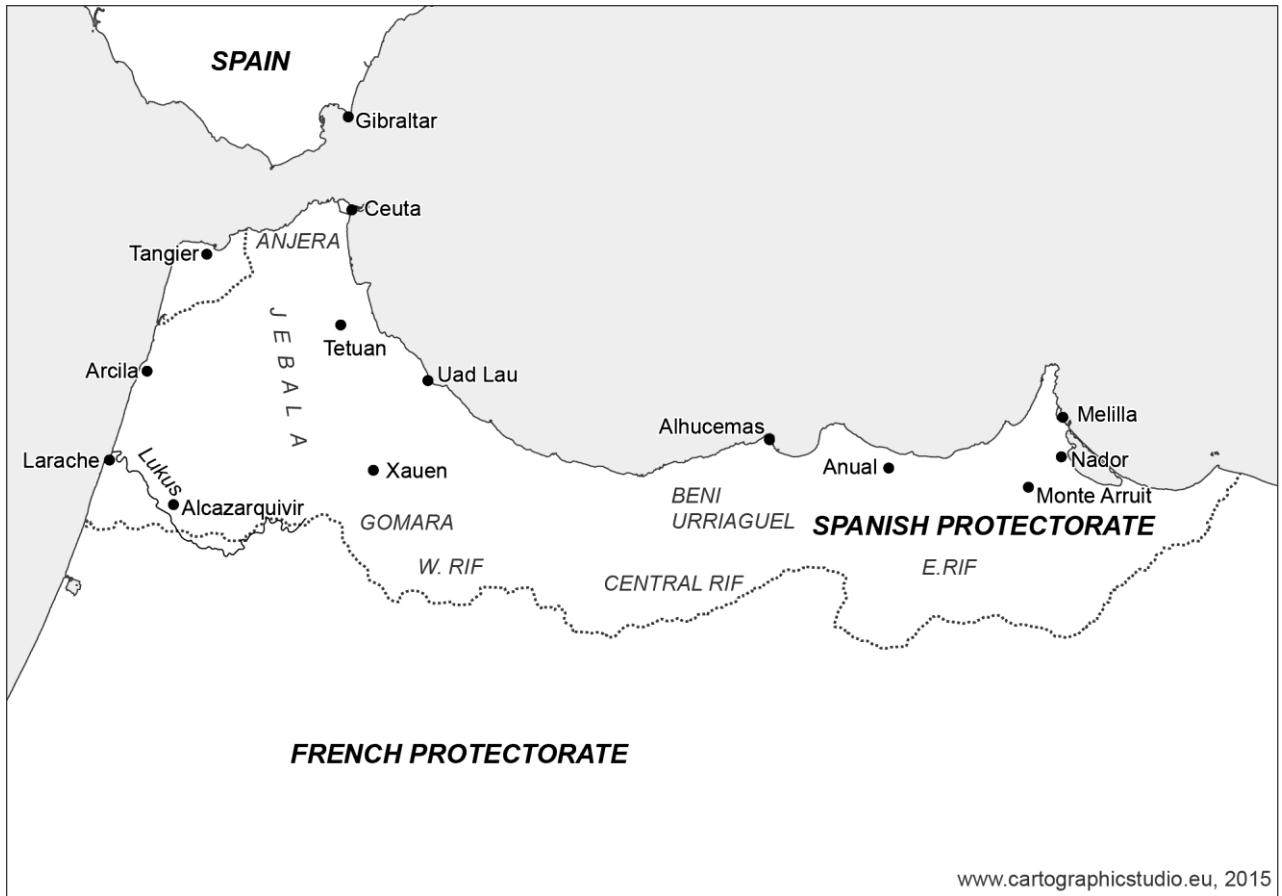
among many progressive Spaniards.<sup>3</sup> But there are other aspects of the continuing influence of the Moroccan participation in the Spanish war. Cemeteries in Seville, Granada or Griñón, which were established to bury Moroccan soldiers have re-assumed their functions as cemeteries that Muslim communities nowadays use to bury their departed loved ones. The *Regulares* units still exist and have re-established much of the traditional Moorish features of their uniforms which they had abandoned in the 1970s and 1980s, and (in the case of Ceuta) they have annually invited their aging Moroccan veterans to attend the 30 June celebrations of the foundation of the *Regulares*. Many of the sons of the Muslims of Ceuta and Melilla continue to serve in the *Regulares*, and many of them are descendants of veterans of the Spanish Civil War. The ghost of the Moroccan participation in the Spanish Civil War has influenced Spanish Moroccan relationships and it will continue to do so in the foreseeable future.

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<sup>3</sup> Ignacio Cembrero, 'La última victoria de Mizzian, el general exterminador', *El País*, 4 June 2006.

## **Appendices**

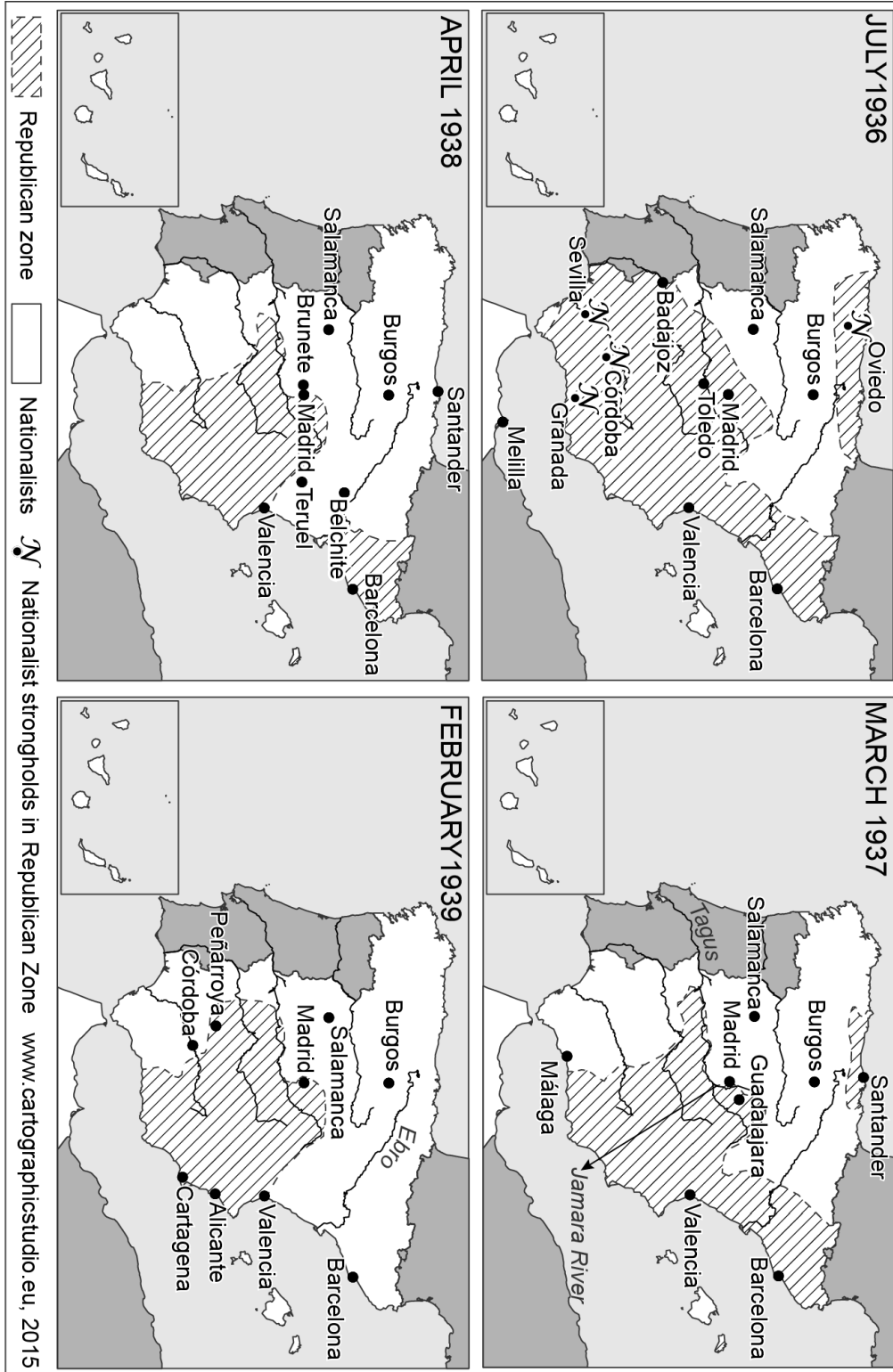
**Appendix 1**  
**Spanish Morocco**





## Appendix 2

### The progress of the Spanish Civil War



**Appendix 3**  
**Uniforms of the *Regulares***



*(Source: Museo Específico de Regulares. Ceuta)*

#### Appnedix 4

#### Emblems of Moroccan units



*The emblem of Regulares of Ceuta, featuring the Islamic crescent (Source: Museo Específico de Regulares. Ceuta)*



*The emblem of the 13<sup>th</sup> Division, featuring the 'hand of Fatima'. The text in Moroccan Arabic states 'Who was victorious in Brunete [?]'.* Source: Museo Específico de Regulares. Ceuta)

**Appendix 5**  
**The Muslim cemetery of Granada**



*The author at the Muslim cemetery of Granada. The three rows in the middle are formed by the graves of Moroccan soldiers killed during the Spanish Civil War. The graves do not reveal the names of the killed soldiers, and they had fallen in disrepair, before being rehabilitated as a Muslim cemetery for the immigrant Muslim community in Granada, decades after the war.*



**Appendix 6**  
**Queipo de Llano's radio station**



*The headquarters of Radio Sevilla, where General Queipo de Llano transmitted his speeches, threatening the Republicans with horrific punishment at the hand of the Army of Africa. (Source: author).*

**Appendix 7**  
**Moroccan veterans**



*The first two Spanish Civil War veterans interviewed by the author: Mohammed Abdullah Susi (above) and El Hussein ben Abdesselam. Ceuta, January 2011.*



*The author with two Spanish Civil War veterans: Ahmed Mohammed Ahmed (left) and Abdelkader ben Mohammed. Alcazarquivir, February 2011.*

**Appendix 8**  
**Moroccan veterans**



*Abdesselam Mohammed Al Amrani (left) and Mohammed ben Al Ayyashi Al Zerki, two Spanish Civil War veterans in Ceuta, during the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the foundation of the Regulares. Ceuta, June 2011. (Source: author).*



*Masoud Ballah, a veteran of the Spanish Civil War during which he lost the use of one eye due to injury. Brussels, November 2011. (Source: author)*

**Appendix 9**  
**Republican propaganda**



*'The Nationalists', a Republican piece of propaganda portraying the chief supporters of the Nationalists, both domestic and foreign, including two figures representing the Moroccans.*

(Musée de L'Armée. Paris)



Appendix 10

One hundred years of *Regulares*



Poster of the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the foundation of the Regulares. Ceuta, June 2011. (Author's collection).

**Appendix 11**  
***Regulares today***



*Regulares during the celebrations of the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the foundation of their regiment. Ceuta, June 2011. (Source: author).*

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## **Dutch summary**

### **Samenvatting van het proefschrift**

#### **Wapens, Cultuur en Moren**

#### **Raciale stereotypen en de culturele impact van de deelname van Marokkaanse troepen aan de Spaanse Burgeroorlog (1936-1939)**

#### **Door**

#### **Ali Al Tuma**

Tussen 1936 en 1939 namen meer dan 80,000 Marokkaanse soldaten deel aan de Spaanse Burgeroorlog. Ze waren voornamelijk afkomstig uit het protectoraat dat Spanje aan het begin van de twintigste eeuw had gevestigd in Noord-Marokko, om – zoals de Spanjaarden beweerden – de inwoners de voordelen van de Europese beschaving te brengen. Ze vochten in Spanje, toen een republiek, voor de Nationalisten van Generaal Francisco Franco die steun kregen van veel conservatieven, monarchisten, katholieken en de fascistische Falange partij, tegen de democratisch gekozen Volksfront regering, bestaande uit een coalitie van linkse republikeinen, socialisten en communisten die steun kregen van anarchisten.

Dit proefschrift behandelt het verloop en de gevolgen van de aanwezigheid van Marokkaanse troepen in Spanje, een aanwezigheid die – in groten getale, over lange periodes, en verspreid over heel het land – leidde tot een ontmoeting tussen twee vreemde culturen. Het ging hier om een cultuurshock, waarbij koloniale stereotypes, oorlogsomstandigheden, beleid en praktijk met elkaar botsten. In hoeverre konden de Marokkaanse soldaten het verloop van deze ontmoeting beïnvloeden?

Uit het onderzoek wordt duidelijk dat de Marokkaanse soldaten veel meer invloed hadden over hun lot dan algemeen is aangenomen. Ze waren niet passieve werktuigen in de handen van hun Nationalistische officieren, noch routinematige plegers van beestachtige oorlogsmisdaden zoals ze meestal worden afgeschilderd in de bestaande literatuur. Op basis van uitputtend bronnenonderzoek in Spanje, Marokko en Frankrijk laat dit proefschrift zien dat zij de speelruimte die hen toebedeeld was konden oprekken en dit gold zowel op het slagveld als daarbuiten. Dit proefschrift laat bovendien het perspectief van de Marokkaanse soldaten zelf, op basis van interviews, een uitvoerige rol spelen in het beschrijven en analyseren van hun interactie met het Spaanse leger en het Spaanse maatschappij. in de oorlog. Als eerste komt de militaire rol van de Marokkaanse soldaten aan de orde, vervolgens hun interactie met de Spaanse maatschappij en als laatste de visie op hen vanuit zowel het Nationalistische als het Republikeinse kamp

De militaire bijdrage van de Marokkanen, vooral tot begin 1937, was van vitaal belang voor het verloop van de strijd. Zonder hun inzet had de Republiek de Nationalisten zeker kunnen verslaan.

Veel van de Marokkaanse militairen namen dienst in het leger van Franco vanwege economische motieven. Anderen zochten avontuur. Velen werden beïnvloed door religieuze propaganda van Franco die de Spaanse Republiek afbeeldde als een vijand van alle religies. Deze propaganda was niet alleen gericht aan de Marokkanen maar ook aan de Spanjaarden die zich afvroegen hoe het kon dat de Moor, de oeroude vijand van katholiek Spanje, opnieuw naar Spanje werd gebracht om een kruistocht tegen andere Spanjaarden te ondernemen?

De percepties van ras, cultuur en religie bepaalden in belangrijke mate de inzet van de Marokkaanse soldaten in de oorlog, hun verblijf in Spanje en de manier waarop ze werden bekeken en behandeld door de Spanjaarden, zowel de Nationalisten als de Republikeinen. De militaire waarde van de Marokkanen en de manier waarop de Spaanse Nationalisten hen tactisch inzetten werden beïnvloed door de vooroordelen die de Spanjaarden hadden over de fatalistische karaktertrekken van islamieten en de aangeboren fysieke kwaliteiten van de Marokkanen als strijders. Fatalisme zou zorgen voor goede soldaten die niet bang waren om te sterven. De fysieke eigenschappen van de Marokkaanse soldaten en de invloed van het bergachtige terrein waaraan ze gewend waren, rechtvaardigde de inzet van deze soldaten als infanteristen in een aanvallende rol. Ze werden ook gezien als ideale soldaten voor nachtaanvallen en operaties in bergachtig terrein. Het historische idee van de vijandige Ander, met een zeer gewelddadige reputatie (het gevolg van de demonisering van de Marokkanen als gevolg van de koloniale oorlogen in de jaren 1920), maakte dat de Marokkanen werden gebruikt als een psychologisch wapen dat de Republikeinen, zowel strijders als burgers, angst moest aanjagen.

Spanjaarden beschouwden de Marokkanen als soldaten met een bijzondere geestelijke aard en daarom verdienden ze een andere benadering vergeleken met Spaanse soldaten. Idealiter moesten Spaanse officieren die de leiding hadden over Marokkaanse eenheden genoeg kennis hebben van de cultuur en gewoontes van hun ondergeschikten. De opeenvolgende verliezen onder de officieren tijdens de oorlog betekenden wel dat dit ideaal niet altijd realiseerbaar was. De Spaanse houding ten aanzien van de Marokkaanse soldaten was paternalistisch van aard. De Marokkaanse soldaten werden gezien als minder volwassen vergeleken met de Spaanse soldaten. Zij zouden harde, maar rechtvaardige leiders nodig hebben. Toch bestond de relatie tussen de Marokkaanse troepen en het Spaanse leiderschap uit tweerichtingsverkeer. Een te harde hand, vertraagde uitbetaling van loon, of een te hardvochtige officier kon leiden tot protest, desertie of mouterij.

Om de kloof tussen de Spaanse leidinggevenden en de Marokkaanse troepen te verminderen, was er behoefte aan Marokkaanse officieren die als tolk of adviseur konden optreden en een link konden vormen tussen de officieren en manschappen. Zulke officieren waren niet talrijk, al zou hun aantal tijdens de oorlog wel toenemen. Hoewel sommigen als gevolg van de oorlog posities zouden bereiken die anders niet voor hen open stonden, was er een limiet aan de rangen die ze konden bereiken. Het was in ieder geval niet de bedoeling dat ze het commando zouden voeren over *Spaanse* troepen.

Marokkaanse eenheden moesten duidelijk herkenbaar zijn als Marokkaans. De uniformen, emblemen en vlaggen droegen allemaal islamitische symbolen. Dat was al het geval vóór de burgeroorlog, en diende om de culturele afstand tussen de Marokkaanse manschappen en hun islamitische omgeving te verkleinen. In Spanje zorgden de uiterlijke onderscheidingstekenen juist voor een contrast tussen de Marokkanen enerzijds en de Spaanse troepen en burgers anderzijds. Een aparte, duidelijk herkenbare Marokkaanse wereld beperkte zich niet tot het uiterlijk. De Marokkanen hadden hun eigen militaire politie. Marokkaanse soldaten die tot gevangenisstraffen veroordeeld waren, zaten hun straf uit in gescheiden ruimtes in Spaanse gevangenissen of werden teruggestuurd naar Marokko. Ze hadden hun eigen cafés, muzikanten en prostituees. In ziekenhuizen hadden ze een eigen afdeling, en naarmate de oorlog vorderde, werden de Marokkaanse gewonden ondergebracht in eigen ziekenhuizen die waar ze volgens islamitische voorschriften voorbereid voedsel kregen. Het bekeren van Marokkaanse soldaten tot het Christendom was verboden. Het Nationalistische leger deed zijn best om ervoor te zorgen dat katholieke geestelijken niet in de buurt van de islamitische soldaten kwamen.

Respect tonen voor de religie en tradities van de Marokkaanse soldaten had natuurlijk zijn praktische voordelen. Had men de culturele gevoeligheden van de Marokkaanse soldaten genegeerd, dan zou dat negatieve gevolgen kunnen hebben voor de moraal en discipline van de troepen maar ook voor de moraal van de Marokkaanse bevolking in het Spaanse Protectoraat van Marokko. Daarnaast droegen de Marokkanen ook zelf bij aan het scheppen van een eigen gescheiden culturele omgeving. Ze meldden zich liever bij inheemse militaire eenheden zoals de *Regulares* en de *Mehal-las*. De speciale voorzieningen in ziekenhuizen waren soms het gevolg van eisen aan de kant van de soldaten of van Marokkaanse overheidsfunctionarissen. Toen (na de oorlog) veel Marokkaanse soldaten de Spaanse nationaliteit aangeboden kregen, weigerden de meesten deze. Er kan dus geconcludeerd worden dat zowel Marokkanen als Spanjaarden hebben bijgedragen aan het creëren van een aparte culturele ruimte, hoewel de Spanjaarden in een sterkere positie verkeerden om de exacte scheidslijnen te bepalen.

Het is ironisch dat Marokkanen naar Spanje werden gebracht om het Christendom te verdedigen, maar werden ontmoedigd om het christelijke geloof te omarmen. Wanneer er geen islamitische begraafplaatsen voorhanden waren, stonden de Spaanse katholieken niet toe dat gevallen Marokkaanse soldaten op een katholieke begraafplaats begraven werden. In plaats daarvan kregen de Marokkanen een laatste rustplaats op civiele begraafplaatsen, naast de ‘kettlers’ tegen wie zij hadden gevochten. Trouwen met een Spaanse vrouw mocht niet, want een seksuele relatie tussen een Marokkaanse man en een Spaanse vrouw was slecht voor het Spaanse prestige, omdat in een seksuele relatie de man als de dominante partner werd gezien. Een Spaanse die gedomineerd werd door een Marokkaan werd zeker niet goedgekeurd. Maar tegelijkertijd werden Republikeinse vrouwen in Nationalistische radio-uitzendingen bedreigd met seksueel geweld (en dus dominantie) door Marokkaanse troepen, een dreiging die soms werkelijkheid werd. Dat was blijkbaar niet schadelijk

voor het Spaanse prestige want de Nationalisten zagen de Republikeinen niet als echte Spanjaarden. De Marokkaanse aanwezigheid in Spanje werd gerechtvaardigd door terug te grijpen op religieuze banden (twee religies die vechten tegen het atheïsme) en het gemeenschappelijke glorieuze middeleeuws verleden van een islamitisch Spanje. De Marokkanen die naar Spanje kwamen, waren de nazaten van middeleeuwse bewoners van Al Andalus, de regio waar Arabisch, Berbers en Spaans bloed zich met elkaar hadden gemengd. Toch moesten de Marokkanen aan het eind van de oorlog weg, terug naar Afrika.

Dit verhaal van gescheiden sferen, uitsluiting en beperking kent ook uitzonderingen. Aan de rang die Marokkaanse officieren konden bereiken, was een limiet. Een van hen, Mohammed ben Mizzian, had echter een ongewoon succesvolle carrière. Aan het eind van de burgeroorlog werd hij commandant van een divisie, met Spaanse troepen en officieren onder zijn bevel, en later werd hij zelfs luitenant-generaal en commandant van de militaire regio's van de Canarische eilanden en van Galicia. Een dergelijke promotie heeft tot op heden niet plaatsgevonden in een Westerse democratie. Hij had dit te danken aan koning Alfonso XIII op wiens instructies en voor de eerste keer in de geschiedenis, een Spaanse militaire academie een Moslim toeliet. Daarmee hebben de Spanjaarden waarschijnlijk niet alleen de loyaliteit van de Marokkaanse 'collaborateurs' willen belonen maar ook van hem een symbool te maken van het succes van de Spaanse Protectoraat.

Terwijl de meerderheid van de Marokkaanse troepen diende in inheemse eenheden zoals de *Regulares*, opende het Spaanse Vreemdelingen Legioen (in tegenstelling tot het Franse Vreemdelingen Legioen) de mogelijkheid voor Marokkaanse rekruten om zich daar als soldaten te melden. In het fascistische bataljon in Spaans Marokko dienden ook Marokkanen, hoewel hun aantal afnam, waarschijnlijk als gevolg van de openlijk racistische houding binnen de eenheid. Tienduizenden Marokkanen werden teruggestuurd naar Marokko, maar een elitegroep van een paar honderd man bleef achter als de persoonlijke garde van Franco zelf, de beroemde *Guardia Mora*. Terwijl Marokkanen zich moesten kleden in Marokkaanse kledij, droegen de Spaanse officieren zelf Marokkaanse *djillaba's* en *tarboejen* (Marokkaanse roodkleurige hoofddeksel) en dronken zij muntthee. De Marokkanen dienden zich niet te kleden of gedragen als Spanjaarden, terwijl de Spanjaarden zich als inheemsen mochten voordoen, al was het vooral oppervlakkig. Spaans beleid verbood gemengde huwelijken, maar toch werden deze gesloten en achteraf geaccepteerd. Dit was een teken dat de *agency* van een Marokkaanse soldaat (en een vastberaden Spaanse vrouw) de officiële tegenstand kon overwinnen. Het Spanje van na de burgeroorlog was vooral een katholiek land. Toch mochten Marokkanen zich als Spanjaard naturaliseren zonder zich tot hetatholicisme te bekeren. Kortom, er stonden veel uitzonderingen tegenover retoriek en beleid.

De retoriek, het beleid en de praktijk ten aanzien van de Marokkanen die in Spanje hebben gevochten, was een weerspiegeling van de retoriek, het beleid en de praktijk in het Spaanse Protectoraat van Marokko. De zogeheten gemeenschappelijke Spaans-Marokkaanse identiteit en geschiedenis die het Spaanse imperialisme in Marokko moesten rechtvaardigen, werden ook



aangewend om de Marokkaanse aanwezigheid in Spanje goed te praten. De politiek van het gescheiden houden van de gemeenschappen in het protectoraat werd ook in Spanje toegepast. In sommige aspecten was de Marokkaanse aanwezigheid in Spanje een voortzetting van de politiek en praktijk van het protectoraat. Dat het Bureau van Inheemse Zaken in Marokko haar kantoren in Spanje vestigde om zich met het leven van de Marokkaanse soldaten te bemoeien, is een duidelijk bewijs hiervan.

De Republikeinen hadden een duidelijk negatieve houding tegenover de Marokkanen. De gewelddadige opmars van het Afrikaleger gedurende de zomer en herfst van 1936 heeft tot de demonisering van de Marokkaanse troepen onder de Republikeinen geleid en heeft Republikeinse strijders aangemoedigd om geen genade te tonen jegens Marokkaanse krijgsgevangenen. Vergeleken met de Nationalisten lieten de Republikeinse zich veel sterker leiden door de traditionele negatieve stereotypen over Marokkanen. De Republikeinen hadden niet de beschikking over tienduizenden Marokkaanse soldaten en hoefden hun aanwezigheid in Spanje niet te rechtvaardigen. In Republikeinse kringen werd het Spaanse imperialisme slechts zelden in termen van bloed- en historische banden gerechtvaardigd. De meeste linksgezinden waren (al vóór het ontstaan van de Republiek) tegen het militarisme en imperialisme van de militairen en politici die een Spaans imperium in Marokko wilden vestigen. De negatieve kijk op Marokkanen beïnvloedde bij de Republikeinen zelfs hun beeld van Noordafrikaanse moslims in het algemeen. Zo stonden ze over het algemeen negatief tegenover Algerijnen en Tunesiërs die zich als vrijwilligers meldden bij de pro-Republikeinse Internationale Brigades en tegenover Marokkaanse nationalisten die aanboden om een opstand te organiseren in Spaans-Marokko in ruil voor de onafhankelijkheid of een grote mate van politieke autonomie. Het is op zijn minst opmerkelijk dat Nationalistisch Spanje toleranter en minder racistisch was tegenover de Marokkanen dan de linkse Republiek.

Aan Nationalistische zijde waren de vooroordelen over, en het imago van, de Marokkanen onderworpen aan zekere aanpassingen. Ondanks het Nationalistisch beleid, was er sprake van een beperkte liberalisering als gevolg van de nieuwe Nationalistische pro-Marokkaanse propaganda en als gevolg van de Marokkanen en Spanjaarden die de gevestigde culturele grenzen durfden over te steken. Het besef in Nationalistisch Spanje van het belang van de militaire bijdrage van het protectoraat leidde tot een verhoging van de status van de Marokkanen en een beloning op een aantal terreinen. Van de vrijheden van politiek en pers in Marokko onder de Nationalisten kon men in het Spanje van na 1939 alleen maar dromen. Toch bleven de Marokkanen nog altijd de juniorpartners in het Spaanse imperium die de paternalistische hand van de Spanjaarden nodig hadden.

## About the author

Ali Al Tuma (Karbala, Iraq, 1979) spent several years of his early life in Spain. After moving to The Netherlands he studied at Leiden University where he received his bachelor degree in history. His bachelor thesis focused on the daily lives of soldiers in the Iraqi Army in the period 1980-1991. He went on to complete his master at the same university, writing about the motives behind the enlistment of the Moroccan troops in the Spanish Army during the Spanish Civil War. He worked as a translator before receiving an NWO research grant to write a PhD thesis. He has published articles in Dutch and in English on the histories of Morocco and the Spanish Civil War in: *War & Society; The Journal of North African Studies* and *ZemZem: Tijdschrift over het Midden-Oosten, Noord-Afrika en islam*. He also published chapters in three edited volumes, including: *Colonial Soldiers, 1914-1945. "Aliens in Uniform" in Wartime Societies* (Routledge 2016) which he co-edited with Eric Storm. In 2015 he won the Sharjah Award for Arabic Creativity (UAE) for a historical play on the Moroccan troops of the Spanish Civil War, titled *Yusuf Melik Ispanya* (Yusuf King of Spain).

