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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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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.¹ 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.

¹ 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.² 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

² 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.³

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

³ The Spanish Foreign Legion suffered 13 fatalities, the 3rd 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’.⁴ 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.⁵ 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.⁶ Franco responded negatively to the request, pointing that otherwise it would affect the combat value of the grand units.⁷

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.⁸ The image is slightly different with regard to the *Orden de San Fernando*.⁹ 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

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

⁵ Thomas, *The Spanish Civil War*, 738.

⁶ 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.

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

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

⁹ For these see: Servicio Histórico Militar, *Galería militar contemporánea*, Vol.I: *La Real y Militar Orden de San Fernando* (2nd 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 75,000.¹⁰ The military historian colonel Gárate Córdoba, conducting extensive documentary research, put the numbers of Moroccan participants at more than 78,000,¹¹ while Maria Rosa Madariaga does not diverge too far when estimating the number as being around 80,000.¹² This represents less than ten percent of the total combatants who fought under General Franco between 1936-1939.¹³

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.¹⁴ 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,¹⁵ 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.¹⁶ Oral testimonies of Moroccan veterans do not refer to the existence of such rebellions either.

French Morocco

¹⁰ Thomas, *The Spanish Civil War*, 944.

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

¹² Madariaga, *Los moros que trajo Franco*, 172.

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

¹⁴ 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.

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

¹⁶ 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.¹⁷ 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.¹⁸ 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.¹⁹ 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.²⁰

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.²¹ 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.²² 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'.²³ 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.²⁴ 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

¹⁷ 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.

¹⁸ Ruano, *Islam y Guerra Civil*, 221.

¹⁹ Balfour, *Deadly Embrace*, 278.

²⁰ Madariaga, *Los moros que trajo Franco*, 187-192.

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

²² Madariaga, *Los moros que trajo Franco*, 194.

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

²⁴ 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.²⁵ 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.²⁶

The Spanish Nationalist archival military material establishes that in July and August 1938 there were 6215 soldiers originating from French Morocco, fighting in Spain,²⁷ 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.²⁸

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.²⁹ 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,³⁰ while the Italians suffered five percent combat deaths during their intervention to aid Franco.³¹ 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

²⁵ AGMAV, C.2301, L.1, Cp.1/19.

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

²⁷ 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.

²⁸ 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.

²⁹ Thomas, *The Spanish Civil War*, 900.

³⁰ Ibidem, 901.

³¹ 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 11,331.³² 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.³³ 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.³⁴ 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’.³⁵ 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.³⁶

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.³⁷

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.³⁸ Some Moroccan soldiers thought that Franco’s army was only victorious because of the native soldiers.³⁹ Others admitted that the Spanish Legion also played its part along with the Moroccans and that both the Moroccans and the legionnaires

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

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

³⁴ Coverdale, *Italian Intervention*, 398.

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

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

³⁷ Matthews, *Soldados a la fuerza*, 257.

³⁸ 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.

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

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

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.

⁴⁰ Interrogations of Abdesselem ben Lahcene and Ali ben Khammar. SHD, 3 H 266.

⁴¹ 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.

⁴² Interrogation of Ali ben Hamidou ben Mohand. SHD, 3 H 266.

⁴³ Interview with Mohamed Al Ayyashi Al Zerki, Ceuta, 30 June 2011.