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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 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.¹

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.² 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’.³ 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

¹ María Rosa de Madariaga, ‘Arabes y Españoles: Complicidades y Recelos Mutuos’, *Revista Internacional de Sociología* 46 (1988) 509-520, here 509.

² Madariaga, ‘Arabes y Españoles’, 509-511.

³ 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.⁴

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’.⁵ 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’.⁶

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 Knoblaugh, who reported that captured Moroccans were burnt alive by the Republicans in the neighborhood of the Escorial.⁷ 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.⁸

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,

⁴ Chaves Nogales, *A sangre y fuego*, 165-186.

⁵ AHMC, Varela, 68/419.

⁶ Manuel Tagüeña Lacorte, *Testimonio de dos guerras* (Barcelona 2005) 130.

⁷ Sanchez Ruano, *Islam y Guerra Civil española*, 279-280.

⁸ 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.⁹

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.¹⁰ While in Spain he assumed the alias of Mustafa bin Kala.¹¹ 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’.¹² 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.¹³

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.¹⁴ 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

⁹ Ronald Radosh, Mary R. Habeck, and Gregory Sevostianov eds., *Spain Betrayed. The Soviet Union in the Spanish Civil War* (New Haven 2001) 49.

¹⁰ 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.

¹¹ 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.

¹² Sidqi, *Mudhakkarat*, 147, 152, 153.

¹³ Ibidem, 148-151.

¹⁴ 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’.¹⁵ 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.¹⁶ 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’.¹⁷ 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.¹⁸

The Republicans’ hostile attitude was translated into a general refusal to give quarter or accept surrender by Moroccan troops.¹⁹ 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’.²⁰ 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’.²¹ Another affirmed that ‘the reds, if they captured one [Moroccan] they would kill him and that is just that’.²² Or, as already mentioned, the execution could be postponed as ‘at first they would parade them in the streets and then kill them’.²³ A few Moroccans who deserted back to French Morocco told their interrogators similar tales. Layachi o si Mohamedould 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

¹⁵ Juan Goytisolo, *Crónicas sarracinas* (Barcelona 1981) 37-39.

¹⁶ Madariaga, *Los moros que trajo Franco*, 400.

¹⁷ Ibidem, 403.

¹⁸ José E. Álvarez, ‘The Spanish Foreign Legion During the Asturian Uprising of October 1934’, 223-224.

¹⁹ Mesa, *Los moros de la Guerra Civil*, 169.

²⁰ 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’.

²¹ In the documentary *El laberinto marroquí* by Julio Sánchez Veiga, Icarus Films, New York 2009.

²² Testimony of Al Siddiq Al Kumaili, Tetuan, 24 September, 1996, El Merroun archive.

²³ 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.²⁴ 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'.²⁵ 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,²⁶ 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.²⁷

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.²⁸

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'.²⁹

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*.³⁰ This piece of document does not provide however, information on whether there were other Moroccan prisoners, and if there were,

²⁴ Interrogation of Layachi o si Mohamed oudsi Ali. SHD, 3 H 266

²⁵ Mfeddel ben Taieb bel Hadj Ali. SHD, 3 H 266.

²⁶ Corral, *Desertores*, 446.

²⁷ *Ibidem*, 444.

²⁸ AGGC, EM (2), 59/ 8.7.

²⁹ Madariaga, *Los moros que trajo Franco*, 403-405.

³⁰ 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*’.³¹ 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’,³² their eyes gouged out, or the genitals cut off and put in their mouths.³³

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!’³⁴ 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”’.³⁵

³¹ Testimony of Abdelkader Al Shaoui, Tetuan, 3 December 1992, El Merroun archive.

³² Interview with Mohammed ben Al Ayyashi Al Zerki, Ceuta, 30 June 2011

³³ Interviews with Abdesselam Mohammed Al Amrani, Ceuta, 30 June 2011.

³⁴ Interview with Mohammed ben Al Ayyashi Al Zerki, Ceuta, 30 June 2011.

³⁵ 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’.³⁶ 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’.³⁷ 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’.³⁸

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’.³⁹

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

³⁶ Ibidem.

³⁷ Testimony of Al Bouyekra, Fnideq, 21 April, El Merroun archive.

³⁸ Testimony of Mohammed ben Amar ben Al Hashmi, Tetuan, unclear date, El Merroun archive.

³⁹ ‘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’.⁴⁰ 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”’.⁴¹ 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’.⁴² 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’.⁴³ 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?’⁴⁴ 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’.⁴⁵ 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

⁴⁰ Testimony of Al Bouyekra, Fnideq, 21 April 1996, El Merroun archive.

⁴¹ Testimony of an unnamed member of the Association of Ancient Combatants and Victims of War, Tetuan, 2 December 1993, El Merroun archive.

⁴² Testimony of Ahmad ben Abdullah Al Omari, Tetuan, 12 April 1994, El Merroun archive.

⁴³ ‘Son of Pasionaria, son of whore’. Testimony of Mohamed ben Amar ben Al Hashmi, Tetuan, 24 June 1994, El Merroun archive.

⁴⁴ Interview with Abdelkader ben Mohammed, Alcazarquivir, 21 February 2011.

⁴⁵ 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’.⁴⁶ 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.⁴⁷

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’.⁴⁸

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.⁴⁹ 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

⁴⁶ AGMAV, C.2494, Cp. 12/34

⁴⁷ AGGC, EM (2), 60. T 26.

⁴⁸ Testimony of Bachir, Tetuan, 26 September, 1996, El Merroun archive.

⁴⁹ ‘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 5th 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 5th Regiment, and later among units of the International Brigades, and that the Militia Battalion might not have existed.⁵⁰ 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.⁵¹ He does quote however the *Journal de l'Afrique Française* 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.⁵²

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 800.⁵³ 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.⁵⁴ According to Castells there were 716 Arab volunteers, the greater part of whom came from Algeria (493), while Morocco

⁵⁰ Gárate Córdoba, ‘Las tropas de África en la Guerra Civil española’, 64.

⁵¹ 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 Guerra Civil española. Campos equivocados* (Granada 2003) 111-131, here 117.

⁵² Ibidem. See also a short presentation of the subject by Pedro Corral in his *Desertores*, 447-449.

⁵³ Ben Salem, ‘La participación de los voluntarios árabes’, 120.

⁵⁴ 123 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).⁵⁵ 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.⁵⁶ 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?"'⁵⁷ 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.⁵⁸

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'.⁵⁹

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*,⁶⁰ 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

⁵⁵ 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.

⁵⁶ 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.

⁵⁷ Malraux, *L'Espoir*, 303.

⁵⁸ Ruano, *Islam y Guerra Civil*, 289-290.

⁵⁹ 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'.

⁶⁰ 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’.⁶¹ 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.⁶² 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’.⁶³ 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.⁶⁴ 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.⁶⁵

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

⁶¹ Skoutelsky, *Novedad en el Frente*, 207.

⁶² Ibidem.

⁶³ 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.

⁶⁴ AHMC, Varela, 91/446.

⁶⁵ 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 75th Disciplinary Battalion in Belchite.⁶⁶ 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.⁶⁷

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.⁶⁸ 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

⁶⁶ Report on Hamido ben Mohamed Hach. AGA, Af, 81.1117

⁶⁷ 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.

⁶⁸ 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 14th 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'.⁶⁹

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.⁷⁰ 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.⁷¹

The fact is that the Republic was ready to give up the Protectorate to France, give concessions to Britain in Morocco,⁷² 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.⁷³ These initiatives failed, especially as Britain did not wish a greater French influence in that part of Morocco facing Gibraltar.⁷⁴ 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.

⁶⁹ George Orwell, *Homage to Catalonia* (London 2000) 219.

⁷⁰ María Rosa de Madariaga, 'The Intervention of Moroccan Troops in the Spanish Civil War: a Reconsideration', *European History Quarterly* 22 (1992) 67-97.

⁷¹ Ruano, *Islam y Guerra civil*, 215.

⁷² Thomas, *The Spanish Civil War*, 562.

⁷³ Mesa, *Los moros*, 167.

⁷⁴ 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’.⁷⁵ 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,⁷⁶ 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’.⁷⁷ 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’.⁷⁸ 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

⁷⁵ Radosh, Habeck and Sevostianov, *Spain Betrayed*, 54.

⁷⁶ ‘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.

⁷⁷ ‘Informe’, 11.

⁷⁸ *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.⁷⁹

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.⁸⁰ 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.⁸¹ 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'.⁸² 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

⁷⁹ 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.

⁸⁰ Thomas, *The Spanish Civil War*, 562.

⁸¹ 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.

⁸² 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.⁸³ 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.⁸⁴

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.⁸⁵ 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.⁸⁶ 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,⁸⁷ though the plan itself noted that the collaboration of France had to be obtained.

⁸³ 'Informe', 12.

⁸⁴ 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.

⁸⁵ AGMAV, A.3, L.227, Cp.3.

⁸⁶ NL-HaNA, Gezantschap Marokko, access nr. 2.05.119, inventory nr.. 36. Missive nr.: 890/119.

⁸⁷ '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',⁸⁸ 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'.⁸⁹ 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.⁹⁰ 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'.⁹¹ It turned out that '50 Arabs and red Spaniards' were surprised and detained after one of the conspirators reported them. The arrests by the

⁸⁸ Ibidem, 24.

⁸⁹ Ibidem, 25.

⁹⁰ AGGC, EM (2), 56.

⁹¹ 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 Législative 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'.⁹² 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,⁹³ 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

⁹² Ibidem.

⁹³ 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.