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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)**

Tuma, A. al

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## Introduction

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### **Points of contention**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### **On oral history**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### **Interviewing the Moroccan protagonists**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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