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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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Chapter 2

The Moroccans in the battlefield

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

From a diary describing the entrance of the *Regulares* into an Andalusian town.¹

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

The Moroccan as a combatant

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

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

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

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

Table 1

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

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

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

Table 2

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

³ AHMC, Varela, 95/346.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

¹¹ José Montes Ramos, *Los Regulares* (Madrid 2003) 35.

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

¹³ *Ibidem*, 20.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, 18n13.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, 33.

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

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

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

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

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

¹⁸ Montes Ramos, *Los Regulares*, 38.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, 36.

²⁰ *Ibidem*, 46.

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

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

The uniqueness of a Moroccan soldier

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

²⁸ Jose Alonso Mayo, 'Un breve ensayo de investigación psicológica' 34.

²⁹ Ibidem, 30.

³⁰ Ibidem, 31.

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

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

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

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

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

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

³¹ Ibidem, 34.

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

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

³⁴ Jose Alonso Mayo, ‘Un Breve Ensayo de Investigación Psicológica’, 34.

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

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

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

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

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

³⁶ Fernández-Aceytuno, *Ifni y Sáhara*, chapter VII.

³⁷ *El Telegrama del Rif*, 26 July 1939

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

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

Coup de main attacks

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

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

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

⁴¹ As quoted in Hughes, *They Shall not Pass!*, 81.

⁴² Llordes Badía, *Al dejar el fusil*, 53, 120.

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

⁴⁴ Testimony of Abdelkader Amezian, Tetuan, 9 November 1993, El Merroun archive.

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

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

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

⁴⁵ Hughes, *They Shall not Pass!*, 77.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

⁵⁴ Interview with Al Filali Abdelkader, Alcazarquivir, 21 February 2011.

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

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

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

Moors versus tanks

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

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

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

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

⁵⁹ Bartels, unpublished memoirs, 128, 143.

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

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

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

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

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

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

The difference between Spanish and Moroccan soldiers

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

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

⁶⁵ Interrogation of Larbi ben Sellam. SHD, 3 H 266.

⁶⁶ Interview with Masoud Bellah, Brussels, 5 November 2011.

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

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

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

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

⁶⁷ Manuel Gómez Domingo, *Guerra* (Valladolid 1937) 21-22.

⁶⁸ Estrada Vidal, *Los que estuvimos en la batalla del Ebro*, 369.

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

The Moroccan as a psychological weapon

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

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

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

⁷¹ This rank equals the French rank of Adjutant.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

⁷⁹ Koltsov, *Diario de la Guerra de España*, 105.

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

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

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

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

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

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

⁸⁴ Nerín, *La guerra que vino de África*, 170.

⁸⁵ AHMC, Varela, 69/591.

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

⁸⁷ Ben Hughes, *They Shall not Pass!* 76- 77.

⁸⁸ *Ibidem*.

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

⁹⁰ Ruano, *Islam y Guerra Civil española*, 247.

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

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

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

⁹¹ El Merroun *Las tropas marroquíes en la Guerra Civil española*, 202.

⁹² Testimony of Al Massari, Tetuan, 31 March 1994, El Merroun archive.

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

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

⁹⁵ 'The Moor has horns'.

⁹⁶ Interview with Mohamed ben Al Ayyashi Al Zerki, Ceuta, 30 June 2011.

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

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

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

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

⁹⁸ *The Daily Worker*, 18 February 1937.

⁹⁹ Gonzalo Sastre Molina, ‘Operaciones nocturnas. (Un caso concreto de nuestra Guerra de Liberación)’, *Ejército*, nr. 176 (1954) 33-38, here 35.

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

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

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

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

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

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

¹⁰² Peter Kemp, *Mine were of trouble*, 71-72.

¹⁰³ Ruano, *Islam y Guerra Civil española*, 175-194.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibidem*, 379.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibidem*, 244, 246, 247.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibidem*, 381.

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

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

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

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

¹⁰⁸ Balfour, *Deadly Embrace*, 286.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibidem*, 3.

¹¹⁰ *Ibidem*, 293.

¹¹¹ Gárate Córdoba, *La guerra de las dos Españas*, 221.

¹¹² *Ibidem*.

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

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

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

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

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

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

¹¹⁵ Testimony of Al Bouyekra, 21 April 1996, Tetuan, El Merroun archive.

¹¹⁶ Ruano, *Islam y Guerra Civil española*, 160.

¹¹⁷ *Ibidem*, 161.

¹¹⁸ *Ibidem*, 162.

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

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

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

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

¹²⁰ Ian Gibson, *Queipo de Llano. Sevilla, verano de 1936*, 146.

¹²¹ *Ibidem*, 151

¹²² *Ibidem*, 174.

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

¹²⁴ Testimony of Abdelkader Amezian, 9 November 1993, Tetuan, El Merroun archive.

¹²⁵ AHMC, Varela, 87/580, 581.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Moroccans meet the civilians

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

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

¹²⁹ Interview with Stitou Bouinou, Zumi, 21 May 2012.

¹³⁰ Interview with Abdesselam Mohamed Al Amrani, Ceuta, 30 June 2011.

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

¹³² Interview Masoud Ballah.

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

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

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

Post war terror of the Moor

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

¹³⁴ Interview Kendoussi ben BouMidien, Nador, 4 July 2011.

¹³⁵ Testimony of Al Siddiq Al Kumaili, Tetuan 24 September 1994, El Merroun archive.

¹³⁶ Testimony of Mhaush, Tetuan, unclear date (1995), El Merroun archive.

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

¹³⁸ Testimony of Abdelkader Amezian, Tetuan, 9 November 1993, El Merroun archive.

¹³⁹ Interview with Al Hussein ben Abdesselam, Ceuta, 24 January 2011.

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

¹⁴¹ Testimony of Ben Al Siddiq Tetuan 21 May 1996.

¹⁴² Interview with Masoud Ballah, Brussels, 5 November 2011.

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

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

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

¹⁴⁴ Secundino Serrano, *Maquis*, 79.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibidem*, 140.

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

¹⁴⁷ Madariaga, *Los moros que trajo Franco*, 378.

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

In his study on the Maquis, *Historia de los Maquis. Entre dos fuegos*, David Baird gives special attention to the Andalusian region of Frigiliana where he conducted a number of interviews with elderly citizens. One notices, in the study, that whenever the Civil Guards are mentioned, the Moroccan *Regulares* are very often mentioned in the same breath. A *Tabor* of *Regulares* was destined to the regions of Málaga and Granada, and a part of it was stationed in Frigiliana. The consequences of causing problems with Moroccan troops were manifested in 1950 in an incident which, apparently, led to traumatic memories for the villages long after.¹⁴⁹ A Spanish supporter of the guerrilla, to prove his loyalty to two prominent guerrillas, whom he wanted to join and who asked him to demonstrate his loyalty by doing something strong, attacked a Moroccan soldier who was taking a bath, knocking him down and causing injuries before fleeing. The fellow Moroccans of the attacked soldier, who eventually recovered, destroyed the attacker's house and his belongings but failed to find any guerrillas. The Civil Guard then took it upon itself to search for 'the usual suspects', relatives of guerrillas, and detained three young men. They were found dead with their bodies badly beaten. It is not clear how they met their fate. Some neighbours maintain that the three were delivered by the Civil Guards to the *Regulares* who took their revenge on them.¹⁵⁰ No Moroccan soldier was attacked in Frigiliana afterwards. By the early 1950s the guerrilla movement in Andalusia, and the rest of Spain for that matter, was all but destroyed and as a consequence the Moroccan troops were withdrawn in 1951.¹⁵¹

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

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

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

¹⁵⁰ Ibidem, 113-115, 227.

¹⁵¹ Jorge Marco Carretero, *Resistencia armada en la posguerra*, 315.

¹⁵² Directed by Luis Felipe Capellín, 2013.

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

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

The guerrilla who let the Moor go free

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

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

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

¹⁵⁵ Interview with Abdelkader ben Mohammed, Alcazarquivir, 21 February 2011.

¹⁵⁶ Interview with Dandi Mohammed, Tetuan, 15 February 2011.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

North Africans in the French Army

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

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

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

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

¹⁵⁸ Fogart, *Race and War in France*, 78.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibidem*, 80.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibidem*, 81.

¹⁶¹ *Ibidem*, 82.

¹⁶² *Ibidem* 79.

¹⁶³ *Ibidem*, 85.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibidem*, 59.

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

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

Conclusion

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

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

¹⁶⁶ Fogarty, *Race and War in France*, 61-62.

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

¹⁶⁸ *Ibidem*, 92n15.

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

¹⁷⁰ *Ibidem*, 2

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