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 3

The Moroccan and his army[1]

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

Moroccan units for Moroccans

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

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

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

[2] Interview with Al Hussein ben Abdesselam, 24 January 2011, Ceuta.

[3] Maadani, a Moroccan veteran, talking to Lmrabet, 'Los fieros marroquíes en la guerra civil', 24.

[4] El Merroun, *Las Tropas Marroquíes en la Guerra Civil Española*, 200.

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

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

[5] Moshe Gershovich, 'Memory and Representation of War and Violence: Moroccan Combatants in French Uniforms During the Second World War', in: Eric Storm and Ali Al Tuma, eds., *Colonial Soldiers in Europe, 1914-1945. "Aliens in Uniform" in Wartime Societies* (New York 2016) 77-94, here 92n14.
[6] Nerín, *La guerra que vino de África*, 171.
[7] Ibidem.
[8] Ibidem, 174.
[9] Sebastian Balfour, 'El otro moro en la guerra colonial y la Guerra Civil', in: J.A. González Alcantud ed., *Marroqíes en la Guera Civil española* (Granada 2003) 95-110, here 106.
[10] Nerín, *La guerra que vino de África*, 170.
[11] Interview with Kendoussi ben Boumidien, Nador, 4 July 2011.
[12] Orgaz to Franco, 15 July 1938. AGMAV, A.2, L.161, Cp. 40.

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

Uniforms and emblems

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

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

[13] Interview with Mohammed Abdullah Susi, Ceuta, 19 January 2011.
[14] Montes Ramos, *Los Regulares*, 48.
[15] González Rosado and Del Río Fernández, *Grupo de Fuerzas Regulares de Ceuta nr. 3*, 107.

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

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

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

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

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

[16] Testimony of Ahmad ben Abdullah Al Omari, Tetuan, 12 April 1994, El Merroun archive.
[17] Jorge Vigón Suerodíaz, *Cuadernos de guerra y notas de paz* (Oviedo 1970) 201.
[18] Pablo Montagudo Jaén, *1936, Regulares. Diario en el campo de batalla*, 52.
[19] Testimony of Abdelkader Amezian, 9 November 1993, El Merroun archive.

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

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

Discipline

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

[20] Testimony of Al Ayyashi, Tetuan, 11 November 1993, El Merroun archive.
[21] See below.
[22] Interview with Al Hussein ben Abdesselam, Ceuta, 24 January 2011. Although he does not specify the year of this incident, the events and the locations mentioned point clearly to either spring or summer of 1938.

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

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

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

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

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

[23] Manuel Justiniano y Martínez, 'Dos defensivas de nuestra Cruzada de Liberación. (Recuerdos e impresiones de un alférez de complemento)', *Ejército,* nr. 204 (1957) 45-52, here 48.
[24] Gonzalo Queipo de Llano, 'Nuestro proposito', *Revista de Tropas Coloniales,* nr. 1 (1924) 1-2, here 1.
[25] Luis Bermúdez de Castro, 'Moros y Cristianos', *Ejército,* nr. 73 (1946) 49-54, here 50.
[26] Bermúdez de Castro, 'Moros y Cristianos', 50.

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

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

Moorish officers

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

[27] Archivo Histórico Municipal de Cadiz (AHMC), Varela, 132/319-320.
[28] Archivo General Militar de Ávila (AGMAV), A.1, L.59, Cp. 127.
[29] Juan Ignacio Salafranca Álvarez, 'Los oficiales moros', *Revista de Historia Militar* 56 (2012) 243-272, here 251.
[30] Ibidem.

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

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

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

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

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[31] José María Gil and Carlos del Campo, *Regulares de Melilla. 100 Años de Historia* (Valladolid 2012) 45.
[32] The establishment of non-commissioned officers as a separate category (*suboficiales* or subofficers) in the Spanish Army came only during the 1930s. Until then, sergeants were considered a sub-category of the *tropa.* Salafranca Álvarez, 'Los oficiales moros', 247.
[33] Mesa, *Los moros de la guerra civil española,* 55.
[34] Salafranca Álvarez, 'Los oficiales moros', 248.
[35] Mesa, *Los moros de la guerra civil española,* 63. Provisional Second Lieutenants, overwhelmingly Spanish, were often well-educated civlian men who volunteered for the Nationalist Army and received, due to the necessities of the war, commissions after a rapid military formation of no more than several weeks, to fill command vacancies.
[36] Ibidem, 57.

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

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

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

[37] 'El ''hermano'' marroquí del Caudillo. El único general ''moro'' de España', *El Mundo* (crónica), 12 May 2002, nr. 343.
[38] For the military career and decorations of Mohammed Ben Mizzian see Archivo General Militar de Segovia, Caja 746.
[39] José Luis de Mesa, *Los moros de la Guerra Civil española*, 120-121

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

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

Relations with officers: The Moroccan perception

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

[40] AGMAV, A.2, L.158, Cp. 25.

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

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

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

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

[43] Interview with Abdullah Abdelkader, Nador, 4 July, 2011.
[44] Interview with, Ahmed Mohammed Ahmed, Alcazarquivir, 21 February, 2011.
[45] Interview with Abdelkader ben Mohammed, Alcazarquivir, 21 February, 2011.
[46] Interview with Aderghal Hassan, Nador , 4 July, 2011.
[47] Interview with Al Dhahri Abdesselam, Ceuta, 30 June, 2011.
[48] Ibidem.
[49] Balfour, *Deadly Embrace*, 307.
[50] Ibidem.

interviewees of Mustapha El Merroun, in the 1990s, also concede that their treatment by their Spanish superiors was good.[51]

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

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

[51] Several testimonies. El Merroun Archive.
[52] Interview with Al Hussein ben Abdesselam, Ceuta, 24 January, 2011.
[53] Interview with Mohammed Abdullah Susi, Ceuta, 19 January, 2011.
[54] Interview with Abdesselam Mohammed Al Amrani, Ceuta, 30 June, 2011.
[55] Testimony of Abdul Nabi ben Al Omari, Tetuan, 11 July 1993, El Merroun archive.
[56] Interview with Al Filali Abdelkader, Alcazarquivir, 21 February, 2011.
[57] Testimony of Abdelkader Amezian, Tetuan, 3 November 1993, El Merroun Archive.
[58] Testimony of Masoud, Tetuan, 25 April 1994, El Merroun archive.
[59] Testimony of Ahmed ben Abdullah Al Omari, Tetuan, 12 April 1994, El Merroun archive.
[60] Interview with Mohamed ben Al Ayyashi Al Zerki, Ceuta, 30 June, 2011.

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

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

The Moroccan deserters' perception

[61] Interview with Al Filali Abdelkader, Alcazarquivir, 21 February 2011.
[62] Testimony of Mohammed ben Amar ben Al Hashmi, Tetuan, 11 November 1993, El Merroun archive.
[63] Ibidem.
[64] Testimony of Mohammed Mhauesh, Tetuan, 2 April 1995, El Merroun archive.
[65] Interview with Dandi Mohammed, Tetuan, 15 February, 2011.
[66] In one of the documents of the Delegation of Native Affairs, dated July 1941, it is mentioned that a number of soldiers of Regulares and Mehal-las took a refuge in a sanctuary called Sidi Saidi, protesting that the army would not discharge them, and that they were unsatisfied with their employment as labourers instead of soldiers, which was why they enlisted in the first place. "Delegación de Asuntos Indígenas, Información núm. 2168, Tetuán 31 Julio 1941". Archivo General de la Administración (AGA), África (Af), 81.1774.

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

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

[67] See for example the interrogations of Moahmed ben Naceur; Ali ben Abid; Mohamed ben L'hassen; Abdesselem ben Lahcene; Abdesslem ben Ahmed ben Abdelkrime; Laarbi Ould M'feddel Bel Kassem; Abdesselem ben Tourhami; El Ayachi Ould Mohammed el Mesmoudi as well as others. SHD, 3 H 266.
[68] Interrogation of El Hadi ben Mohamed ben el bou Haninia. SHD, 3 H 266.
[69] Interrogation of Mohamed ould Mohamed. SHD, 3 H 266.
[70] Interrogations of Mimoun ben Mohamed ben Aberkane and Mohammed ould Sellem ben M'feddel. SHD ,3 H 266.
[71] Interrogations of Mimoun ben Haboud and Mfeddel ben Taieb bel Hadj Ali. SHD, 3 H 266.
[72] Interrogation of Ahmidou ben Mohamed. SHD, 3 H 266.
[73] Interrogation of Mohammed ben Abdesselem Lmrabet. SHD, 3 H 266.

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

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

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

[74] Pedro Corral, *Desertores. La Guerra Civil que nadie quiere contar*, 431.
[75] James Matthews, *Soldados a la fuerza. Reclutamiento obligatorio durante la Guerra Civil 1936-1939*, 265, 315.

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

Breaking contact by way of desertion

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

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

[76] Interrogation of Ahmed ben Ali ben Abdelkrim. SHD, 3 H 266.
[77] Corral, *Desertores,* 20, 534.
[78] See Mesa, *Los moros de la Guerra Civil,* 169; and Ruano, *Islam y Guerra Civil española,* 279-280.
[79] María Rosa de Madariaga, *Los moros que trajo Franco,* 330
[80] Balfour, *Deadly Embrace*, 308.

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

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

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

[81] Interrogation of Tahar d'Alilou Hammou si Ali. SHD, 3 H 266.
[82] Interrogation of El Khamar ould ben Mohamed El Bernouss. SHD, 3 H 266.
[83] In one case a soldier deserted because his parents asked him to do so, promising him that there would be no punishments by the French authorities. See Interrogation of Lachmi ben bi Rebbouh. Three extra cases simply list as reason the desire to go home to work, without explicitly mentioning family, homesickness or any other reasons. SHD, 3 H 266.
[84] See for example the interrogations of: Mohamed ben L'hassen who was 'well disposed towards his chiefs'; Abdesslem ben Ahmed ben Abdelkrime who was 'well treated' and had 'no grievances'; and Laarbi Ould M'feddel Bel Kassem who described the Spanish as 'full of kindness towards the Muslims', as well as others, all of whom stated that they deserted to see their families not because of any event that took place in Spain. SHD, 3 H 266.
[85] One possible exception out of these 54 cases concerns, Youssef ben Hamed, claimed to have been forcibly recruited, though he does not mention this as reason for his desertion. SHD, 3 H 266.
[86] Interrogation of Mohamed ben Abdesslem ben Si Ahmed. SHD, 3 H 266. In addition to the 54 mentioned cases there are two Moroccan deserters who did not state their motives for desertion but mentioned that while the morale of Moroccans from the Spanish Protectorate were high and their army life was good, the Moroccans of the French Protectorate could not send their earnings to their families and could not correspond with them. Perhaps that is what motivated the desertion of these two. Interrogations of Mohammed ben Sellem and Mohammed ben Al Madani.

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

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

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

[87] An additional case concerns Ahmed ben Abderrahman, who does not state explicitly any motive for desertion, but who was twice injured, and then refused to go back to Spain. Having been imprisoned for one month, he was sent to the Teruel front where he was later evacuated due to frostbite. It is obvious that he deserted for fear of repeated injury.
[88] Interrogation of Mohamed bel Hadj Mohamed. SHD, 3 H 266.
[89] For examples see: Interrogations of El Hadi ben Mohamed ben el bou Haninia; Ahmed ben Mohammed Er Riffi; and Ali ben Mohammed D'Abdesselem. SHD, 3 H 266.
[90] See interrogations of: Mohammed ben Naceur; Ahmed ben Abdesselam ben Alilou; Lhacen ben Ali and Lkhammar ben Hammou . SHD, 3 H 266.
[91] Interrogation of Ali ben Mohammed D'Abdesselem. SHD, 3 H 266.
[92] In the case of Mhamed ben Si Mohamed ben Ahmed, he complained about failing to attain promotion while Mohamed B. Omar ben Amar Taliouani was demoted from the rank of corporal and could not face returning to his unit as a lower ranking soldier. SHD, 3 H 266.
[93] Examples include: Mimoun ben Mohamed ben; Mohamed ben Said el Fetouaki; Mokhtar ben El Hadj Rahal; Mansour ben Ghazi; Si Ahmed ben Mohamed; as well as the earlier mentioned Youssef ben Hamed. See their interrogations. SHD, 3H 266.

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

Protest

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

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

[94] Interrogation of Ahmad ben Mohamed Soussi. SHD, 3 H 266.
[95] Interrogation of Said ben Mbarek. SHD, 3 H 266.
[96] AGMAV, A.1, L.40, Cp. 50, different documents.
[97] Ibidem.

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

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

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

[98] '-:Nota:- sacada de la hoja secreta nr. 158, del 16-3-1937, de la Regional de Tetuán'.AGA, Af, 81.2195
[99] Note from the 23rd Division, 25 June 1937. AGMAV, A. 1, L. 59, Cp. 27.
[100] Delegation of Native Affairs/Service in Spain to Commander of the Army of the South. 14 July 1937. AGMAV, A. 1, L. 59, Cp. 27.

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

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

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

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

The lieutenant also heard from the troops that the:

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

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

[101] 'Confidencial', AGMAV, A.1, L.59, Cp. 17.

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

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

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

Violent protest and rebellion

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

[102] Ibidem.
[103] 'Propuesta del Capitán Torres', AGMAV, A.1, L.59, Cp. 17.
[104] The report goes to suggest ways to make sending recuperating soldiers to their original units possible as a standard practice. AGMAV, A.7, L.359, Cp. 36. The Spanish High Commissioner in Morocco Colonel Juan Beigbeder had already in 1937 suggested taking measures to raise the effectiveness of Moorish troops like doing as much as possible to guarantee that a solider would always return to his battalion. AGMAV, A.2, L.152, Cp.25

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

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

[105] Fernández-Aceytuno, *Ifni y Sáhara*, chapter VII.
[106] Jorge Vigón Suerodíaz, *Cuadernos de guerra y notas de paz,*, 210-212.

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

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

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

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

[107] Mesa, *Los moros*, 246-248. I was not successful in finding, in the Ávila military archives, the war diaries of said Tabor.
[108] One wonders whether the incidents mentioned by Vigón, Mesa and the Varela documents are not different interpretations of the same incident. If that is the case then one must accept, given the documentary evidence that it involved the Larache *Regulares*, not the Alhucemas ones.
[109] AHMC, Varela, 19/293-294.
[110] AHMC, Varela, 19/291-292.
[111] Letter to Franco, AHMC, Varela, 19/296.

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

Conclusions

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

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

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