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Guns, culture and moors : racial stereotypes and the cultural impact of the Moroccan participation in the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939)

Tuma, A. al

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Chapter 5

Moros y Cristianos.

Religious aspects of the participation of Moroccan soldiers in the war ¹

'...with the spirit of God's vengeance at the point of their bayonets, they pursue, destroy and kill without giving time to the fugitives to protect and save themselves. Covered now with blood, the column advances...'

- Alberto Risco- ²

The Spanish Civil War was not at first supposed to be a holy war in the religious sense. Nor were the majority of the Spanish Nationalist officers who rebelled against the Spanish Republic in July 1936 particularly religious, despite their political conservatism. In fact, it was in the Spanish Protectorate of Morocco where the military coup first received its holy war denomination, and it was the Moroccan Khalifa, the nominal representative of the Moroccan Sultan and the highest Moroccan authority in the Spanish zone, who first did so.³ This chapter will discuss the religious aspects of the Moroccan participation in the Spanish Civil War.⁴ The idea of a religious alliance between the Moroccan Muslims and the Spanish Christians against a supposedly atheist enemy will be examined from the point of view of the Spanish Nationalist propaganda, but also from the point of view of the Moroccan soldiers. The chapter will also demonstrate that the Spanish Nationalists portrayed the Moroccans in their Moroccan Protectorate as devout Muslims. This portrayal influenced the propaganda the Nationalist used to win the loyalty of the people in Spanish Morocco. With regard to the Moroccan soldiers, many aspects of their daily life had to defer to the notion of the religious Moroccan and the Spanish Nationalist military endeavoured to create a separate Muslim religious sphere for the Moroccan soldiers. The chapter will show that the Nationalist authorities did not only want to respect the Islamic religion of their troops but also expected the Moroccan soldiers to adhere to the idealised

¹ The phrase 'Moros y Cristianos' translates as Moors and Christians. It refers to the battles between the medieval Moors and Christians in Spain during the age of the Reconquest, and to the festivals in Spain that have been commemorating and re-enacting these battles for centuries.

² Describing the entrance of African units in Toledo. Alberto Risco, *La epopeya del Alcazar de Toledo* (Burgos 1937) 216.

³ Stanley G. Payne, *The Franco Regime 1936-1975* (Madison 1987) 197n1. Initially, as Payne states, religious concerns did not play an overt role in the rebellion of July 1936, but it was its counterrevolutionary character that made Catholics natural allies from the start. Ibidem. This was not the first instance in which authorities in Morocco appealed against 'atheism' in a war in Spain. Though in no way relevant, it is still interesting to know that French atrocities against religion during the Napoleonic invasion of Spain brought condemnation from the Sultan of Morocco who pleaded with the Spanish to do everything to destroy the 'atheist' French hordes. John Lawrence Tone, *The Fatal Knot. The Guerrilla War in Navarre and the Defeat of Napoleon in Spain* (Chapel Hill 1994) 217n7.

⁴ A large part of this chapter has appeared under the title 'Moros y Cristianos. Religious Aspects of the Participation of Moroccan soldiers in the Spanish Civil War', in: Bekin Agai, Umar Ryad and Mehdi Sajid, eds., *Muslims in Interwar Europe. A Transcultural Historical Perspective* (Leiden 2015) 151-177.

image of devout Muslims even when some of these soldiers did not desire to comply with that idealised image.

Soon, after the outbreak of the Civil War, strange scenes started to emerge during the war: the archbishop of Toledo, Isidro Gomá y Tomás, returning to his archiepiscopal see escorted by Moroccan Muslim troops or a priest accompanying Moroccans into battle. Cheering crowds pinned scapularies on the chests of the Moroccans. Andalusian girls handed out images of the Sacred Heart of Christ or *détentes* (stops) to the Moroccans and Legionaries who arrived in Cádiz or Jerez. José María Pemán, a Spanish conservative writer told Franco in Seville how these *détentes* ‘carry embroidered around the heart a short prayer saying “Stop, bullet, for the Heart of Jesus is with me!” They have been a great success with the Moors, who call them “bullet stoppers”’. There were many similar scenes.⁵ In Ceuta, the Nationalists authorised the building of a new mosque in which stones from the battlefields of the Alcazar of Toledo, Oviedo and Teruel were integrated as an ‘official recognition’ of the existence of Islam in Spain and as a ‘proof’ of the significance these ‘martyr cities’ had for the Muslims.⁶

In fact, the Spanish Republicans inadvertently helped the Nationalists’ propaganda in portraying this war to the Moroccans as a struggle in which the Republic targeted Islam and Moroccans in particular. Early in the war, Republican planes struck the native medina of Tetuan, hitting a mosque in the process, and later dropped bombs near a ship that was to take pilgrims on their trip to Mecca, while the Republican navy shelled a number of coastal towns in Spanish Morocco.⁷ In August 1936, the Spanish paper *Diario Marroquí* highlighted an air raid that supposedly targeted the Mezquita of Córdoba, ‘the historical monument of Arab civilisation’.⁸

The Nationalists portrayed the struggle against the Republic to the Muslims of Spanish Morocco as a conflict in which religion played a prominent role because the Nationalists saw the Moroccans as primarily driven by religion and religious biases. The Moroccans were first and foremost Muslims. That they were perceived as extremely religious was obvious to both those who held either a negative hostile view or a benign and paternalistic one of Islam and Moroccans. A comment by an officer in the Spanish Foreign Legion reminds us of the inseparable link that the

⁵ Hugh Thomas, *The Spanish Civil War*, 400; Claud Cockburn, *Cockburn in Spain. Despatches from the Spanish Civil War* (London 1986) 161; Frasier, *Blood of Spain. An Oral History of the Spanish Civil War*, 155; Hilari Ragner, *Gunpowder and Incense. The Catholic Church and the Spanish Civil War* (London 2001) 48.

⁶ Tomas García Figueras, *Marruecos. La acción de España en el Norte de África* (Madrid 1944) 292.

⁷ Balfour, *Deadly Embrace. Morocco and the Road to the Spanish Civil War*, 273, 281; Shannon E. Fleming, ‘Spanish Morocco and the Alzamiento Nacional, 1936-1939’, 36, 37. The target of the bombing in Tetuan was perhaps the building of the High Commissariat which lies not far from the *medina* (the native old quarter). The Republican air and naval bombardments caused relatively (by later standards of the same war) few casualties in Spanish Morocco and the Spanish African territories. Naval bombing on Ceuta in July 1936 and April 1937 caused 9 military and 2 civilian fatalities. Larache suffered one military fatality after two naval bombardments in August 1936 (as well as the partial destruction of both the Muslim and Catholic cemeteries) and no fatalities due to aerial raids in July. Arzila (today Asilah) suffered three civilian deaths (including one child) during one naval attack in August 1936. The air raid on Tetuan on 18 July caused the largest number of fatalities: one military and fourteen civilian (4 men, 7 women and 3 children). Archivo General Militar de Ávila (AGMAV), Caja 2239, Cp. 6

⁸ ‘Los Aviones Rojos Bombardean la Mezquita de Córdoba’, *Diario Marroquí*, 19 August 1936. The famous mosque that was turned into a cathedral after the Reconquista, however, was not hit.

Spanish perceived between being Muslim and Moroccan. Seeing for the first time the *Tiradores de Ifni* soldiers, who were darker in skin than the Moroccan soldiers he had met so far, he called those of Ifni ‘more religious and rough, in one word: more Moorish’.⁹ One Spanish soldier who fought for the Nationalists remarked retrospectively on the ‘Moors’ he met in Melilla in 1936 that they were ‘in this aspect [being religious] superior to us who never remembered to visit a church’.¹⁰ The religiosity of the Moroccan soldiers was admired by a Spanish army chaplain who remarked how ‘in Spanish land some renegades who abused the faith and the churches and assassinated the priests. On the contrary, some simple Muslims idolised God and entrusted themselves to him. It was not difficult to guess that these men, who wore *chillabas* and rural garments were simple folk and of grand religiosity’.¹¹ The Nationalists also forbade foreign journalists - and we must presume Spanish ones too - to describe the Moroccans in any way except as devoted God-fearing soldiers.¹²

García Figueras, one of the most prominent administrators of the Spanish Protectorate in Morocco, considered the greatest achievements of the Nationalist administration in Morocco those that took into account the spiritual and religious nature of the Moroccan populace. This understanding obviously applied not only to Moroccans but to Muslims in general. In 1939 Franco sent a letter to the Association of Muslim Youth in Cairo, answering a memorandum that the Islamic Conference in Cairo sent to him. In his letter, Franco commended the ‘Muslim people’ for succeeding in preserving their ‘spiritual treasures’ in a materialistic age, and pointed to the blood bonds that were formed with the Moroccan people in defence of the ‘faith and spiritualism’.¹³ Regardless of propaganda, Franco seemed genuinely to believe that the idea of a deeply religious Muslim was not a palatable one. In a less public remark he declared that ‘the Arab without a turban is a future Marxist’.¹⁴

This Spanish policy regarding Islam was much older than the Spanish Civil War. From the 1920’s onwards, the policy guidelines for colonial officers from the Delegation of Native Affairs insisted on the need of a respect for Islam, provided that this respect did not contradict the principal objective of political domination. Among the arguments used to justify this ‘respect’, Spanish Africanism appealed to Spain’s Islamic past. As stated in the manuals written for colonial officers, the official strategy was that of a formal respect of Islam, combined with the aim of controlling the chiefs of the brotherhoods in order to avoid potential dangers.¹⁵ Once local resistance was defeated in 1927, the Delegation of Native Affairs promoted the reconstruction of religious buildings and support of

⁹ Francisco Cavero y Cavero, *Con la Segunda Bandera en el frente de Aragón. Memorias de un alférez provisional*, 36

¹⁰ Jose Llordes Badía, *Al Dejar el fusil. Memorias de un soldado raso en la Guerra de España*, 60.

¹¹ Juan Urrea Lusarreta, *En las Trincheras del Frente de Madrid*, 108-109.

¹² Judith Keen, *Fighting for Franco. International Volunteers in Nationalist Spain During the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939* (London 2001) 69.

¹³ The text was published in the Moroccan *Al Hurriya*, 16 February 1939.

¹⁴ Abel Albet-Mas, ‘Three Gods, Two Shores, One Space: Religious Justifications for Tolerance and Confrontation Between Spain and Colonial Morocco During the Franco Era’, *Geopolitics* 11 (2006) 593.

¹⁵ Josep Lluís Mateo Dieste, ‘The Franco Pilgrims: The View of *Al-Hajj* by a Spanish Colonial Officer (1949)’. Paper presented at the *Europe and Hajj in the Age of Empires. Muslim Pilgrimage Prior to the Influx of Muslim Migration in the West* conference at the Museum Volkenkunde in Leiden, 14 May 2013.

certain rituals which reinforced the submission of the local political and religious authorities or which legitimised the power of the new colonial government.¹⁶ In accordance with this propaganda policy, the Spanish administration restored religious buildings, promoted rituals and maintained the formal independence of the *habus* (religious endowment) properties. The Spanish policy of toleration towards Islam went so far as to annoy the Spanish bishop in Tangier who in 1921 criticised the participation of Spanish soldiers in Muslim festivities ‘as if they were Muslims, or as if it did not matter that they acted like Muslims, when they were Christians’. He also criticised constructing shrines for Muslim holy men and ‘not one shrine for the Christians’.¹⁷

Some of the Nationalist veterans of the Protectorate perceived that the religiousness of the Moroccans was neither blind nor absolute. Ruiz Albéniz, also known as El Tebib Arrumi or The Christian Doctor, an important journalist and radio speaker for the Nationalists during the Civil War, observed in the early years of the Protectorate that the Moroccan religiousness was practical in nature and that religious observance was ultimately subordinated to profit.¹⁸ Once secure in his faith the Rifi, guided by his innate desire for profit would associate himself with the actions of the Protectorate.¹⁹ But that security in faith for the Moroccan must first be guaranteed by the Spanish.. The Spanish considered it essential to attach the greatest importance to the religious factor when communicating with the Moroccans of their protectorate or when buying their support. One remarkable example on the Republican side proves the point. Early in the war the communist paper, *Mundo Obrero*, published what seemed to be a note by a young Moroccan prisoner of war denouncing Franco. The paper published a Spanish translation of the letter as well as a picture of the original. While the Spanish version denounced Franco as a ‘traitor’, it is visible in the Arabic text that the word ‘infidel’ is added to ‘traitor’, but which the paper omitted from the translation.²⁰ Perhaps the Republican paper’s lack of accuracy in translation stemmed from the unwillingness to portray the conflict in religious terms. Its Republican readers would not in any case identify with an orthodox Islamic perspective. But this example shows that even when the Moroccan soldier wanted, or in this case (it is not easy to ascertain) probably felt forced to attack the Francoists he could only do so in terms of who was a believer and who was an infidel. It comes then as no surprise that early in the war Franco paid a lot of attention to sponsoring the pilgrimage of Moroccans to Mecca.

El Hajj Franco

In early 1937 Franco scored one of his most impressive propaganda achievements in relation to the Muslims of the Spanish Protectorate and his army: the Franco-sponsored pilgrimage to Mecca. In December 1936 the High Commissariat had requested Franco to assign a ship for the Spanish

¹⁶ Mateo Dieste, ‘The Franco Pilgrims’.

¹⁷ Josep Lluís Mateo Dieste, ‘Una hermandad en tensión. Ideología colonial, barreras e intersecciones hispano-marroquíes en el Protectorado’, *AWRAQ* nrs. 5-6 (2012) 79-96, here 91-92.

¹⁸ Filipe Ribeiro de Meneses, ‘Popularizing Africanism: The Career of Víctor Ruiz Albéniz, *El Tebib Arrumi*’, *Journal of Iberian and Latin American Studies* 11(2005) 39-63, here 40.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, 42.

²⁰ María Rosa Madariaga, *Los moros que trajo Franco*, 323-324.

Moroccan pilgrims to Mecca, and Franco agreed on the same day and ordered the navy to take the necessary preparations.²¹ At the time the High Commissioner in Morocco was General Orgaz, but it seems that the one behind the idea was the Arabist Colonel Juan Luis Beigbeder, secretary general of the Commissariat at the time and later High Commissioner himself.²² The Nationalist navy prepared a ship that was to depart from Ceuta at the end of January 1937, and which was arranged so as to become a 'floating mosque'. Nationalist aviation and navy protected the pilgrimage part of the way until the Italians took over.²³ Nationalist Spain appointed a consular agent for Jeddah and Mecca. The choice for this position fell on a Muslim officer of the *Regulares* (though of Spanish nationality).²⁴ Franco also prepared an audience for the pilgrims in Seville upon their return in March. This gesture was not an easy matter, considering that much of the Spanish Navy had fallen into Republican hands at the start of the Civil War, and Franco could barely dispense with any ships. In the words of Rosalinda Fox, it was 'like asking Whitehall [British War Ministry] in the middle of a war to release half of the Royal Navy'.²⁵

The first pilgrimage that left from Ceuta in 1937, carried with it 298 pilgrims who were joined by others in Melilla and Libya which was then under Italian occupation. The next year the expedition took 451 pilgrims from Ceuta and Melilla plus 337 from Libya, and the 1939 took a total of 800 pilgrims to Mecca.²⁶ The Francoist pilgrimage not only helped spread and reinforce Franco's message that he was a friend of Islam. The Franco-sponsored pilgrimage shined in comparison with the transport the French provided for their Algerian pilgrims, strengthening the credentials of Franco even more.²⁷ But the Spanish sponsorship and control of the pilgrimage was also meant to shield the Spanish Moroccans from any undesirable outside political influence, particularly French propaganda, as until the first Francoist pilgrimage, French shipping companies monopolised the transport of pilgrims to Mecca.²⁸ As a result of Franco's sponsored pilgrimage to Mecca, the Khalifa in Tetuan described Franco as the 'protector of Islam'.²⁹ In addition to the political benefits in Spanish Morocco

²¹ Archivo General Militar de Ávila (AGMAV), A.1, L.59, Cp. 87. Cables: Generalissimo to Orgaz on 12 December, 1936, and Generalissimo to naval general staff on 12 December 1936.

²² This is the case according to his British mistress Rosalinda Powell Fox in her memoirs: *The Grass and the Asphalt*, 130.

²³ See the account by Abdel Krim Kerrisch, a Dutch protégé who accompanied the Spanish-Moroccan pilgrims to Arabia in the Dutch national archives: Nationaal Archief, Gezantschap Marokko, access nr. 2.05.119, inventory nr. 36. Missive nr.: 821/103. According to this witness, the Spanish warships escorted the pilgrims until Tripoli. According to a Spanish document, the plan was to provide protection, which would be 'indispensable until' the Oran meridian, from which point the Italians could take over. AGAMV, A.1, L.59, Cp. 87. Note by Generalissimo HQ on 25 January, 1937.

²⁴ AGAMV, A.1, L.59, Cp. 87. Note by Generalissimo HQ on 25 January, 1937.

²⁵ Powell Fox, *The Grass and the Asphalt*, 130.

²⁶ Josep Lluís Mateo Dieste, 'The Franco Pilgrims'. During the Second World War, and specifically between 1940 and 1943 the pilgrimage was not organised. After it was postponed, following preparations to carry out the regular expedition, the Delegation of Native Affairs spread information – misinformation according to Mateo Dieste - that attributed the suspension of travel to France and the United Kingdom. Ibidem.

²⁷ See the account by Abdel Krim Kerrisch in the Dutch national archives.

²⁸ Mateo Dieste, 'The Franco pilgrims'.

²⁹ AGAMV, A.1, L.59, Cp. 87. Cable by the office of the High Commissariat.

itself, the pilgrimages must have left an impression on the soldiers fighting in Spain too.³⁰ Some soldiers were selected to be awarded grants (tickets and travel expenses) for the trip to Mecca. The pilgrimage was presented as a reward for the Moroccans for helping Spain, and therefore lists of ‘loyal Moroccans without resources or with merits of war’ were presented by each *intervención* or Group of *Regulares*. Also selected were religious figures and tribal figures who were invited for being a ‘*moro amigo*’ (friendly Moor) and as a reward for efforts to recruit Moroccan soldiers for the war effort.³¹ It is probably due to this pilgrimage and others that followed during the course of the war that Franco became known as El Hajj Franco (the pilgrim Franco), a title the northern Moroccans and his ex-soldiers used to refer to him, some doing so even to this day,³² because ‘he had the character of Muslims’.³³

A religious alliance?

In the struggle to save Catholic, spiritualist, and traditionalist Spain, the Moor who was the old enemy of these three had become the ally of the regenerated traditional country. In an interview that appeared in a French publication, Franco declared that ‘we, all of us who fight, Christians or Muslims, are soldiers of God and we do not fight against other men, but against atheism and materialism’.³⁴ This alliance with the Muslim Moroccans was certainly not a self-evident development but proved to be an uncomfortable one that required justification for at least a part of the masses to which the Nationalists appealed. One Nationalist Catholic writer commented, perhaps uneasily: ‘It does not matter that next to Christians, the turbans of Mohamed are seen. The sword is of rich Toledan steel, even if the hilt had an Arab enamel, and the Moors and Christians were united in some of the endeavors of the medieval Christian kingdoms’.³⁵ One Nationalist newspaper, *ABC Sevilla*, while commending the Moors of whom ‘no one put a step backwards’ went further by calling Morocco the ‘Covadonga of the current reconquista’ in a reference to the place that symbolised the birth of the first successful Christian resistance to the medieval Muslims and the start of the Reconquista.³⁶ In one anecdote, the Spanish priest and Arabist Miguel Asín Palacios related how in one hospital a print of the Virgin was going to be removed so as not to hurt the feelings of the Moroccan wounded, when one of these protested

³⁰ The soldiers in Spain who would not be able to go to Mecca could, for a different, though less unique spiritual ritual, continue in Spain the *ziyaras* (saint veneration rituals). As one Moroccan deserter told his French interrogators in French Morocco, Moroccan *Mokaddemin* (masters) of the *zawiyas* (Sufi lodges) would often come to Spain to perform these rituals. See the interrogation of Mansour ben Ghazi. SHD, 3 H 266.

³¹ Mateo Dieste, ‘The Franco pilgrims’.

³² Mohamed Choukri mentions in his internationally acclaimed autobiographical novel *Al khubz al hafi* (known in English as: For Bread Alone), the disabled of the Civil War in Tetuan, some of whom ‘were proud of it for it allowed them to have adventure and to have memories of the battles they fought whether victorious or defeated. The Caudillo was called El Hajj Franco among them’. Mohammed Choukri, *Al khubz al hafi* (Casablanca 2010) 28. I even heard this ‘Hajj Franco’ reference once in Tetuan in early 2011.

³³ Interview with Abdessalam Mohammed Al Amrani, Ceuta, 30 June 2011.

³⁴ Nerín, *La guerra que vino de África*, 177-178.

³⁵ From an article: ‘El Cerro de los Angeles y el General Varela’, *La Correspondencia de San Fernando*, 9 November 1936. The copy of the article, cited here, is in AHMC, Varela, 15/22.

³⁶ ‘Marruecos: Covadonga de la actual reconquista’, *ABC Sevilla*, 17 July 1938, 24. Ironically the ‘Moors’ contributed to the occupation, in October 1937 of that place.

against the removal by stating that ‘the Virgin is good for everyone’.³⁷ The priest used this to demonstrate how much these Moroccans had in common with the supposedly true Spaniards.³⁸ García Figueras saw no problems in coexistence between Islam and Christianity as the political issues of the Reconquista no longer were applicable and both religions were engaged in a fight against the godless nations and creating bonds between people who believe in the one and only God.³⁹

The propagation of religion as the bond that united the Spaniards and Moroccans comes also as part of the wider Nationalist camp. Catholicism, like nationalism, was a powerful instrument for the unification of the disconnected rebellious factions that lacked a common goal other than overthrowing the Popular Front government. The Francoists mixed national struggle with religious struggle because Catholicism was a privileged and central element in traditional Spain, and it seems that Francoist recruits were exposed to the religious awakening of Nationalist Spain.⁴⁰

In 1940 Miguel Asín Palacios published a paper called ‘Why did the Muslim Moroccans fight on our side?’ In one of the most eloquent Nationalist rationalisations of the Moroccan participation he answers: ‘Below the rugged crust of these simple and brave Moroccan soldiers, beats a heart that is identical to the Spanish, which renders reverence to some other-worldly ideals, not very dissimilar to ours, and which feels the religious emotions which we feel, because it follows many of the Christian dogmas which we follow and which atheist Marxism repudiates and persecutes’.⁴¹ To illustrate that this was not an opinion based on wishful thinking, he refers to a supposed Moroccan soldier who, using a hand-grenade, intimidated a ‘Marxist’ soldier by crying in Spanish ‘*Tú no estar de Mahoma! Tú no estar de derechas!*’ (You are not of [the followers of] Mohammed! You are not one of the Right!).⁴²

One wonders whether the position that Palacios took was representative of the Spanish Catholic clergy, even in a mere propagandistic sense. Let us consider two views, those of a priest and a bishop, both captured by the Republicans. Their situation as prisoners of war might not make their statements ideally reliable, but it is interesting since it gave the Republicans the chance to ask, face to face, the representatives of the Church about why it stood in the same camp as the Moors. In January 1938, the priest García Blasco was captured by the Republicans during the battle of Teruel. During his interrogation he was asked whether he ever thought of protesting against the use of Moroccan troops by the Nationalist command. The priest answered: ‘Not in public. But of course during private

³⁷ Miguel Asín Palacios, ‘Porqué lucharon a nuestro lado los musulmanes marroquíes’, 136.

³⁸ Seidman argues that the Francoist regime was partly successful in creating a kind of monotheistic unity (that purposely excluded the Jews) against the ‘atheist’ enemy. In Zaragoza not only Spanish and Italian soldiers but also German Protestant and Islamic Moroccan troops visited and venerated the Virgin of Pilar. Seidman, *The Victorious Counterrevolution*, 39-40.

³⁹ Figueras, *Marruecos: La acción de España en el Norte de África*, 340.

⁴⁰ Matthews, *Soldados a a la fuerza. Reclutamiento obligatorio durante la Guerra Civil (1936-1939)* 139-140, 144.

⁴¹ Asín Palacios, ‘Porque lucharon a nuestro lado los soldados marroquíes’, 148-149.

⁴² *Ibidem*, 145. By ‘Right’ he meant of course the Nationalist camp that was usually referred to ‘people of the Right’ as opposed to the Republican Left.

conversations I commented upon it, that the old history would feel disturbed when the greatness which we acquired by fighting Islam would look like a lie now that we are fighting alongside those who used to be our enemies'.⁴³ Speaking as a prisoner the priest might naturally have given his interrogator the answer he desired, although his other answers with regard to morale in the Nationalist rearguard - which he described as high - was not what a Republican would necessarily wish to hear.

But ingratiating oneself to an enemy interrogator does not seem to be the case with the bishop Polanco who also fell prisoner in Teruel. When questioned in January 1938 about the presence of the Moroccan troops in Spain, he answered that he saw nothing wrong in Franco using them, for Franco saw them as 'soldiers in the service of Spain'. When the interrogator pressed that it was strange that the Church, after long years of fighting the Muslims, was now coexisting with them, and asked whether that could be considered an acceptable Christian approach, the bishop answered in the affirmative. In his opinion history witnessed many occasions of alliances between people from different religions to fight an enemy, alliances that were based on a 'perspective that had nothing to do with religion'.⁴⁴ Perhaps, with his grand depiction of Muslim-Christian brotherhood, Asín Palacios was a minority voice among the Spanish clergy after all, even in the pure propagandistic sense. Probably his sympathies with the Moors derived more from his background as an Arabist rather than as a priest.

Not all the Spanish combatants on the Nationalist side seem to be impressed by the religious brotherhood propaganda either. One officer of the *Regulares*, an *alferez provisional*, writes in his diary entry for 17 and 18 September 1937 that this unit arrived in Sigüenza and was taken to the cathedral, which was in a deteriorated state and where the soldiers spent their night, while their commander slept in an adjoining house. The next day the lieutenant met a number of indignant comrades. Asking them what happened they answered him 'the Moors did one of their deeds this night. It seems that they found the chapel open and they took the mats, the carpets and the garments the priests use to officiate'. But the lieutenant did not blame his soldiers. For he writes that when his unit arrived at night everyone thought that the town was abandoned and 'my Moors' thought that this was the front, even to the extent that 'when witnessing the ruins and the ominous silence that surrounded us they loaded their guns'. And they thought furthermore, the lieutenant continues, that the cathedral was abandoned. But then, in his defence of his 'Moors' he counters 'In addition, why did they order to billet the *Tabor* there, knowing that the Moors do not understand our religion? Because of all of this, my opinion is that it is the fault of those who brought us there'.⁴⁵ After all the propaganda efforts of the Nationalists to cast the Moroccans as religious allies, this officer (and certainly many like him) who is supportive of his Moroccan soldiers to the point of defending stealing from the cathedral, is not affected by that

⁴³ Interrogation of the priest García Blasco, dated 13 January, 1938. Archivo General de la Guerra Civil (AGGC), 58/8.1

⁴⁴ Interrogation of the bishop Polanco, dated 28 January 1938. AGGC, 58/8.1. During the collapse of the Republican army in Catalonia in early 1939 both the priest and the bishop were shot.

⁴⁵ Pablo Montagudo Jaén, 1936, *Regulares. Diario en el campo de batalla*, 173-174.

propaganda and does not consider the Moroccan soldiers as people who understood the religion they were supposed to defend.

In any case, the Moor, the fanatic foe of the recent Rif wars, was rehabilitated in Nationalist Spain by the Nationalist state, its leading military figures and its propaganda machinery, which included press, cinema and poetry.⁴⁶ This rehabilitation was perhaps not difficult to accomplish. In the end it required simply an adjustment to the presentation of basically the same image of the Moor. As the irrational Moor became simple, childlike and innocent, so the fanatic became pious, in fact spiritualist.

The view of the Moroccan soldiers as religiously devout and controlled by his religious prejudices, which was in turn derived from the same view the Spanish had of the Moroccan society that they ruled, motivated the explanations the Nationalists gave to the outside world with regard to the motivations of the Moroccan soldiers for fighting in Spain as well as the policies the Nationalists conducted with regard to the interaction of the Moroccan soldiers with their Spanish environment, especially when involving direct religious aspects. The actions of the 'Moorish' troops, their lifestyle, the incentives etc, were supposed to be shaped by or directed towards their Muslim-ness. On this point, facts were sometimes mixed with wishful thinking, and it is here that we explore the border between the two, starting with the supposed religious motivations of the Moroccans for fighting against the Republic.

Jihad

While the Spanish Nationalists adequately promoted the idea of a religious alliance to defend the faith against godless Communism, the Moroccan side did not fail to support this rhetoric. The native urban political elite helped the religious interpretation for the enlistment of the Moroccans to fight in Spain as well. In 1937 *Al Hurriya*, the daily of the Spanish Morocco-based Nationalist Reforming Party, explained in an article called 'The Nationalist Movement and Communism' its position towards Communism. 'The Moroccan nationalism is totally contradictory in its principles and directions to the corrupting Communism. Even more, it [Moroccan nationalism] considers anyone who belongs to Communism to be alien from Islam and the Moroccan nationality.'⁴⁷ Then on the day following the official end of the Civil War in April 1939, the paper expounded on the circumstances and motives of the Moroccan soldiers who went to Spain. The newspaper rejected any notion that economic motives were primarily behind the enlistment of the locals. Instead it listed other reasons, among which was the fear for their 'religious sentiments'. 'For Communism has run rampant and dominated these lands [Spain], for the Muslims are, by the nature of their situation, staunch enemies of the idea of equality in wealth'.⁴⁸ Either this merely and blindly followed the Spanish Nationalist line or the paper could not

⁴⁶ On the aspects of this rehabilitation see: Madariaga, *Los moros que trajo Franco*, 345-364.

⁴⁷ 'Al Haraka Al Wataniyya wal Shiu'iyya', *Al Hurriya*, 4 November 1937

⁴⁸ *Al Hurriya*, 2 April, 1939. It also claimed that the Islamic world 'supported us in our position, despite some mad campaigns directed against us from some Muslim countries. Those campaigns were the result of hire and bribery by France or Communism itself'.

accept the stigmatisation that came with the notion of the mercenary, or both.⁴⁹ In fact, and at the start of the Civil War in July 1936, the future leader of the not yet established Nationalist Reforming Party, Abdeljalek Torres clashed with High Commissioner Orgaz against the recruitment for the *Mehal-la* units and their imminent participation in the war on religious grounds. Torres pointed out to Orgaz that the *Regulares* were units which were part of the Spanish Army. The *Mehal-las*, however, were Moroccan Muslim units which served under the Moroccan flag, and hence were religiously prohibited from participating in war among Christians serving a cause and under a flag which was not Moroccan or Islamic, a participation which would make the Moroccan government a warring party and violate the neutrality which Torres and his comrades sought.⁵⁰ Given the circumstances, the ruthlessness with which the Nationalists in general dealt with their opponents and the importance that the Spanish Protectorate and its Moorish troops had for Franco, Torres was lucky to escape with merely being angrily dismissed by Orgaz, who countered that he had the support of the Khalifa, the Grand Vizier, the ministers, the tribal chiefs, the chiefs of the religious brotherhoods and the Cheriffians (descendants of the Prophet).⁵¹ Torres later made a complete turnabout and threw his weight behind the Nationalists, with his *Al Hurriya* paper providing the already mentioned religious justification for the Moroccans' support for the war. In his new position he had the support of prince Shakib Arslan, a leading Pan-Islamic exile from Lebanon, who was based in Geneva and who functioned since the early 1930s as a mentor for the Moroccan nationalists of both the French and Spanish protectorates.⁵² In November 1936 Arslan wrote to Torres:

I am satisfied about your policy towards Spain (..) a different attitude would have hurt you much...it is more likely that the government of Madrid will not be victorious (..) the Muslims would not like a victory for Madrid (..) nobody ignores that this communist government is in favour of disorder...if the Republic wins, its disastrous ideas will run the risk of spreading in

⁴⁹ I am inclined to believe the second interpretation because *Al Hurriya*, both during and after the war was not devoid of articles criticising aspects of the Spanish Nationalist administration, nor of warning towards Spain should it fail in the fulfilment of its promises towards the Moroccans after the war. The newspaper and rival of the other Moroccan nationalist party, Moroccan Unity also claimed that the Moroccans did not fight for money for 'feelings cannot be bought or sold, but because of the honest belief that the victory of Spain will immediately bring victory for the cause of the Moroccan people'. But it did not explicitly put Islam as a factor in siding with the Nationalists. See: 'La guerra ha terminado. Marruecos confía en la palabra del Caudillo de España', *Unidad Marroquí*, 30 March, 1939.

⁵⁰ Ibn Azzuz Hakim, *La actitud de los moros ante el Alzamiento*, 157.

⁵¹ As explained by other witnesses in the publication of Ibn Azzuz Hakim, *La actitud*, the Islamic identity of many was the reason they escaped fates similar to Spanish counterparts. For instance, several Moroccan notables, like Torres himself, were members of the Masonic order, but not a single Moroccan was shot or even jailed for that reason.

⁵² On his relation with the Moroccan nationalist movement see: Umar Ryad, 'New Episodes in Moroccan Nationalism in the inter-war period: The Influence of Shakib Arslan in the Light of Unpublished Materials', *Journal of North African Studies* 16 (2011) 117-142; and David Stenner, 'Networking for Independence: The Moroccan Nationalist Movement's Global Campaign against French Colonialism', *Journal of North African Studies* 17 (2012) 573-594.

the northern zone. The only thing that we could have expected from it is the independence which it [the Republic] never considered.⁵³

The pro-Franco political forces, be they Spanish or Moroccan, might have used the religious element in their propaganda to justify the participation of Moroccans in the war, but it was apparently an impression that even some on the Republican side believed.⁵⁴ The same narrative was adopted by some foreign pro-Nationalists observers of the war. A prominent one among them is the American Russell Palmer who spent the period between 1936 and 1938 filming the war in Spain and then presented his documentary that was called *Defenders of the Faith*,⁵⁵ in which he adopts the Nationalist narrative of the war as an effort to save Spain from the chaos and destruction for which the Republicans were responsible. Among the faith defenders he shows are the Moroccan soldiers. Palmer, who was also the film narrator, describes the ‘Moors’ as ‘famous for their hatred of communism’ and that they consider the reds ‘infidels’ because they burnt churches.

The Nationalists went to great lengths to portray the enlistment of their Moroccan troops as ideologically motivated, but that is an interpretation that has proven difficult to defend by historians. María Rosa de Madariaga and Sebastian Balfour, convinced as they are that the volunteers who filled the ranks of the Moorish units in the Spanish peninsula joined for purely economic reasons, reject the idea that there are any higher ideological causes behind the participation of the Moorish troops in the Civil War. For them the issue is simple and they probably represent the opinion of the majority of those studying the Spanish Civil War.

The issue is less simple for two Moroccan historians who seem convinced that the religious appeal of the cause, propagated by Franco’s agents, was an important factor in the decision made by Moorish recruits to enlist in the Spanish Nationalist army. According to El Merroun, Franco’s rhetoric about Communism and its destruction of Christian and Muslim religions left an impression on the Moroccan troops. He cites a Moroccan soldier ‘In Spain ar-rojo [the red one, the communist] comes, burns shrines, kills saints. Moor comes to help Franco fix Spain’.⁵⁶ Thus, the religious aspect was an important one in pulling the Moroccans towards the Nationalist Spaniards.⁵⁷

Ibn Azzuz Hakim (perceived in Morocco as one of the most prominent historians working on the history of the Moroccan nationalist movement and northern Morocco) attacks the historians who did not trouble themselves with the real reasons for the Moroccan participation in the war which,

⁵³Abdelmajid Ben Jelloun, ‘La participacion de los mercenarios marroquies en la Guerra Civil española 1936-1939’, 531.

⁵⁴ One Canadian volunteer of the International Brigades, Jules Paivio, remembered decades later the ‘Moors’ who believed ‘it’s an honour to die for Allah, so they keep coming at you. They won’t stop’. From the TV documentary series *Battlefield Mysteries*, episode *The Lost Graves of the International Brigades*, produced by Breakthrough Entertainment, Canada, 2008.

⁵⁵ *Defenders of the Faith*. Directed by Russell Palmer, 1938. The credits at the beginning describe the film as ‘The first picture of actual warfare ever to be made in natural colour’.

⁵⁶ Mustapha El Merroun, *Las tropas marroquíes en la Guerra Civil española*, 40.

⁵⁷ *Ibidem*, 224.

according to him, were that ‘the agents of Franco wanted to give the Muslims the opportunity for Jihad alongside the People of the Book, the believers in one God, against the Infidels’ and that the Moroccans ‘entered the war alongside the Catholics of Franco for religious solidarity’.⁵⁸ He continues: ‘some chiefs of Muslim brotherhoods, paid by the Francoists, were spreading in low voice the news that general Franco had converted to Islam’ and was waging a campaign against ‘those without god’. In fact, Hakim regards the view that the ‘Moors’ died or became handicapped for a cause not theirs, only attracted by money and as simple mercenaries, as unfair.⁵⁹ It appears that both historians base these opinions mainly on the discourse of both the Spanish Nationalists and the Moroccan nationalist and collaborating elite. But they are deeply motivated by the morally negative presentation of the Moroccan soldiers as pure mercenaries attracted solely by money and the prospect of looting.

Ironically, the voice of those around which the debate of religious motives revolves, is the voice least heard. The historians of latter day rarely if ever based their statements on the views of the soldiers whose motives they interpreted, or even took the trouble of citing them to support the pro or contra arguments of this religious aspect of conflict. Today, there are only a few indications and examples that can help modern historians understand the position that the Moroccan soldier held with regard towards the religious nature of his struggle in Spain, and the image that arises from these examples is still a mixed one.

In March 1938 a group of spokesmen for the 6th *Tabor* of the *Regulares* Ceuta and for the wounded soldiers in the Granada military hospital sent a letter to the *interventor* in Seville complaining against one of the Muslim clerics serving in Spain. After the death of a number of soldiers during the ‘jihad’, this cleric refused to wash the bodies of the ‘mujahedeen’, to lead the prayers for their souls or even to attend the funerals. Compounding this insult, he stated that ‘everyone who died in the lands of Spain was an absolute infidel’.⁶⁰ The complaint denounced this man calling him ‘red’. This document draws attention for its use of the terms ‘jihad’ and ‘mujahedeen’ to describe the war in Spain and its Moroccan participants, but also for its labelling as *rojo* those who disputed the religious legitimacy of fighting in Spain.

The ‘jihad’ term also appears in the calls for recruitment that circulated in Spanish Morocco. One important source is the personal archive of Mustapha El Merroun, in which dozens of interviews with Moroccan veterans are preserved. One of these Moroccans described the recruitment by stating

⁵⁸ Ibn Azzuz Hakim, *La actitud de los moros*, 45. José Luis de Mesa is one historian who does not explicitly endorse a view on the issue of possible ideological motivations for Moroccan troops fighting for Franco, but his presentation of a choice of historical opinions and citations tends to make clear that he stands on the side of views like that of Ibn Azzuz Hakim. Mesa quotes a Moroccan, who was apparently a childhood friend of his saying that ‘it was natural. Mohammed and Christ proclaimed and represented God who was rejected by the Reds. That is why we could stand with the Christians against them’. Mesa, *Los moros de la Guerra Civil española*, 124.

⁵⁹ Ibn Azzuz Hakim, *La actitud de los moros*, 45.

⁶⁰ Archivo General de la Administración (AGA), Af, 81.1179, Leg. 3962, Letter from notables of the 6th *Tabor* of *Regulares* Ceuta to Sanchez Pol (in Arabic). There is a Spanish translation accompanying the letter that replaced ‘jihad’ with ‘operations’ and ‘mujahedeen’ with ‘soldiers’.

that the tribal chiefs shouted ‘O, servants of God! Those who wish to perform the Jihad, the Jihad has now returned’.⁶¹ In the battlefield itself, the attacking waves of the Moroccans started with cries exalting God or the prophet Mohammed. Ruiz Albéniz, the Nationalist propagandist, cites one such cry ‘Jandulilah! La [Ilaha] Illa Allah, Sidi Mohamed Rasul Allah...’ (Mobilise for Allah, there is no god but Allah).⁶² According to Sanchez Ruano,⁶³ the Moroccans entered the battle crying ‘Allah Akabar’. A more typical charging battle cry commenced with praising the prophet ‘O lovers of the prophet, pray on him’, and ending with ‘heaven is for the patient, and hell is for the infidels’.⁶⁴ Do such religiously inspired battle cries necessarily mean that the soldiers, or the majority of them, believed at the time they were fighting for a religiously sanctioned cause? Or do they merely reflect their cultural background and as such it would not only be normal to utter cries and perform pre-battle rituals by way of self-encouragement and perhaps protection?⁶⁵ Or was that simply a confirmation of the point of view that asserts that everyone is religious in the trenches? There is no easy answer but such examples make it difficult to dismiss out of hand the notion that the religious factor played a role in how the Moroccan volunteers viewed or justified their part in the war.

Whether the Moroccan soldiers actually went to war motivated by the moral message of a holy war or not, it seems in any case that many, if not the majority, deemed their Republican opponents on the wrong side as far as godly matters were concerned. This is shown in the way veterans, interviewed by El Merroun, describe the Republican *rojos*. According to one Moroccan, ‘the *rojos* killed the monks and destroyed the churches so they believed only in the hammer and sickle’.⁶⁶ A similar definition of a *rojo* was ‘the enemy of Spain or the criminal who abandoned his religion’.⁶⁷ One veteran remembered that ‘our *jefes* [chiefs] told us that the *rojos* have come from Russia and from France to occupy Spain’, and that the Moroccans were in Spain defending their own country ‘for if the *rojos* would win, northern Morocco would be occupied by the *rojos*’.⁶⁸ The first impression the ‘reds’ left upon the memory of another soldier was equally typical: ‘When we went [to Spain] we found that the *rojos* were burning churches’.⁶⁹ Consequently it would normally follow that if a Moroccan

⁶¹ Also clerics would call on the people: ‘O servants [of God]! The bread will come from them [the Spanish], the munitions from them and the weapons from them’. Testimony of Mohammed ben Amar ben Al Hashmi, Tetuan, 24 June 1994, El Merroun archive.

⁶² Víctor Ruiz Albéniz, *Las crónicas de El Tebib Arrumi*, Vol.II, *Campañas del Jarama y el Tajuña*, 35. Of course the author might have misheard the cry, which is perhaps why he missed the ‘Ilaha’ which means ‘god’.

⁶³ Francisco Sánchez Ruano, *Islam y Guerra Civil española*, 233.

⁶⁴ Interview with Abdessalam Mohammed Al Amrani, Ceuta, 30 June 2011. This veteran still believed in 2011 that they emerged victorious because God stood on their side.

⁶⁵ According to a Moroccan deserter, the Moroccans on the eve of a battle would perform a *ziyara* ritual. See the interrogation of Seddik ben Amar ben Ahmed. SHD, 3 H 266.

⁶⁶ Testimony of Abdelkader Amezian, Tetuan, 9 November 1993, El Merroun archive. ‘The Spanish took us to the Churches and we found them ruined and the idols destroyed. So they told us “are these people going to be successful?”’, he continues.

⁶⁷ Testimony of Al Bouyekra, 21 April, Fnideq, El Merroun archive.

⁶⁸ Testimony of Abdelkader Al Shaoui, Tetuan, 3 December 1992, El Merroun archive.

⁶⁹ Testimony of Al Ayyashi, Tetuan, 11 November 1993, El Merroun archive.

defected to the reds 'he would die as an infidel'.⁷⁰ One veteran told Sánchez Ruano that the Moroccan soldiers would not desert to the Republicans, for they thought that 'if they died, they would go to heaven for performing the Jihad'.⁷¹

Given these late testimonies it seems that the Nationalist propaganda about a holy war succeeded in so much as convincing Franco's Muslim soldiers that they were at least not fighting for the wrong camp. David Montgomery Hart, who did an ethnographic and historical research on the Beni Uriagel in the Rif, commented on the religious character of the call to arms and the Riffians' response to it by stating that 'at any rate as far as they were concerned it seems that the moral issues of the war were clear enough: they were helping those Spaniards, whom they knew and liked, as against others whose lack of religious belief was both incomprehensible and insulting'.⁷²

Hart arrived at this conclusion in the 1970s, although he does not make clear whether this was based on his interviews with those Riffians who returned from Spain or whether this was based on Spanish or other literature. Discussing the tribe of Ulad Settut, David Seddon, who also conducted research in the Nador province, concludes that there was a rapid development of 'a considerable hostility against those who came to be known locally as "reds"'.⁷³

When turning however to the accounts by Moroccan deserters who originated from the French zone, there is an absence of religious rhetoric in fighting the Republicans. Religion does feature in a few testimonies in terms of the praise for how the Nationalists respected the Muslim religion and Muslim religious festivities,⁷⁴ or the visits of religious figures to the fronts. There is one testimony that mentioned the existence of activities of religious brotherhoods in propagating the Francoist cause but without going into further detail.⁷⁵ However, none of the interrogated deserters originating in the French zone mention, in their interviews with the French officers, traces of coming in contact with the religion versus atheism or Christian-Islamic alliance propaganda, or traces of the description of the Republicans as anti-religion fanatics. This element is completely absent in these interrogations. How should this fact be interpreted? Does it signify that the narrative of the religious war was adopted by the veterans only after the war as they were trying to make sense of their participation or to idealise it? Or that somehow those of Spanish Morocco were more susceptible or more frequently subjected to the religious propaganda than soldiers from French Morocco? The absence can also simply be ascribed to an absence in questioning on the part of the French officers. Indeed never once did the French officers put this question to the deserters.

⁷⁰ Testimony of Masoud, Tetuan, 25 April 1994. El Merroun archive.

⁷¹ Ruano, *Islam y Guerra Civil española*, 233.

⁷² David Montgomery Hart, *The Aith Waryaghar of the Moroccan Rif*, 416. He further adds 'Many Rifians feel a respect for Franco himself which, it might be added, persists to this day'. Ibidem.

⁷³ David Seddon, *Moroccan Peasants. A Century of Change in the Eastern Rif, 1870-1970* (Folkestone 1981) 157.

⁷⁴ Interrogations of Mohamed ould Mohamed, deserted: September 1938; and Abdesselem ben Tourhami, deserted: Augustus 1938. SHD, 3 H 266.

⁷⁵ Interrogation of Mohamed ben L'hassen, deserted: April 1938. SHD, 3 H 266.

It was only a decade before since French Morocco found itself the subject of the Jihad of Mohammed ben Abdel Krim's Riffian rebels, whose attack on the French Protectorate pushed the French to collaborate with the Spaniards in destroying the movement. A decade before that, France had found itself the target of a guerrilla movement in Morocco that was financed and partly managed by German agents who encouraged Moroccan tribesmen, mainly in the Rif, to wage Jihad against the French, as the Ottoman Empire had taken the side of Germany during the First World War. Germany at the time thought it could mobilise the religious feelings of a large Muslim nation to destabilise the colonial empires of its enemies, even though the German endeavour produced little results, though it did provoke great concern among the French in Morocco.⁷⁶ In light of the experiences of the two decades prior to the Spanish Civil War, one would have expected the French interrogators to show more interest in talk of holy war on their northern frontier which was controlled by a not so friendly Spanish regime that was allied to Germany.

Letters and Graves

Since the Nationalists perceived and presented the Moroccan soldiers fighting in Spain and the Moroccan population of the Protectorate in general as first and foremost religious people, it was natural that the Nationalists took great care not to offend the religious feelings of their Muslim soldiers. This happened sometimes at the request of the Moroccan soldiers themselves, others at the request of higher Moroccan authorities and at times even when this care was not requested. Such attention in policy manifested itself in many aspects of the daily lives of the Moroccan soldiers, for example when making use of Muslim religious festivities to release Moorish detainees (troops incarcerated for different offences) as a sign of respect for the religious feelings of the Moorish troops,⁷⁷ and therefore asserting the pro-Islamic stance of the Francoist government. Other aspects such as correspondence paper; graveyards; dietary habits and preoccupations; conversions; and especially life in hospitals display the great lengths the Nationalists went to create the religious space in which the Nationalists wanted their Muslim soldiers to stay and which they assumed their soldiers wanted.

The provision of an Islamic diet is one of the first issues that comes to mind when considering religious necessities of the Moroccan Muslim troops, and the Spanish army seems to have been relatively successful in this regard. As Seidman puts it, the quartermaster was especially proud that meals of *Regulares* contained a considerable quantity of meat, which North Africans were allowed to butcher themselves according to Muslim rite. Authorities permitted Moroccan butchers to supervise operations in their canning and meatpacking factories.⁷⁸

One less evident aspect of the military policy of respecting the religion of their Muslim troops or, alternatively, the policy of maintaining a safe distance between the religious sphere of the

⁷⁶ On the German Jihad in Morocco see Ali Al Tuma, 'Si Herman en Abdel Malek. De Duitse jihad in Marokko tijdens de Eerste Wereldoorlog', *ZemZem* 1 (2015) 27-34.

⁷⁷ See for example: AGMAV, C.2374, L.145, Cp. 63.

⁷⁸ Seidman, *Republic of Egos. A Social History of the Spanish Civil War*, 104.

Moroccans and that of the Spaniards was manifested in the issue of letters the soldiers sent to their families. These letters were naturally subjected to censorship. In February 1938 the political section of the High Commissariat in Tetuan wrote to the chief of staff of the Morocco Forces expressing concern that many Muslim soldiers were sending letters to their families on a type of stationery with Christian religious symbols printed on it.⁷⁹ To correct this, considerable effort and time was invested in the arduous task of copying the letters on a different type of paper. There were already requests to closely monitor the type of paper used by the Muslim soldiers, going back as far as October 1937.⁸⁰ The February 1938 complaint suggested measures such as to force vendors accompanying the units to carry a different kind of paper. More importantly, and to understand what annoyed the author of the angry complaint, and it was one of many similar complaints, was the argument that the use of the aforementioned kind of paper would help circulate rumours of the existence of Christian missionary activities among the Muslim troops.⁸¹ This was a concern that the Nationalist military authorities reiterated several times in relation to other aspects of the daily life of the Muslim soldiers.

Burial places formed another aspect of the religious policy that must have been of greater emotional importance for the Moroccan soldiers than the letters. It can be said with certainty that no Moroccan soldier (or at least almost none) who died during the Civil War in Spain had his corpse taken to Morocco for burial. They were all buried in Spain, which applies to almost all of the foreign nationalities that participated in the war in great numbers.⁸² In many cases, particularly during the heat of battle, it was not possible to bury the dead Moroccan soldiers in proper cemeteries, and these fatalities were buried where they died, collectively sometimes. In some cases, the dead were buried mixed with the Christians, especially in the beginning.⁸³ Whether by their own initiative or in response to demands of Moroccan soldiers, the Spanish started to separate the burial places. According to a veteran 'during one of the battles, the dead were mixed, so they [the Spanish] looked for the Muslim corpses to bury them. So they took the trousers off the dead to see who was circumcised'.⁸⁴

Burial in a proper cemetery proved sometimes possible, but Spanish Catholics were not keen on having Muslims buried in Catholic cemeteries so the Muslim corpses were put to rest in civil cemeteries, along with the 'red' the Moroccans had come to fight.⁸⁵ The Nationalist army tried, early in the war, to provide for separate cemeteries that were to be designated as Muslim. In October 1936, the chief of staff General Varela instructed the military commander of the northern town of Vargas (near Santander) to send all Moorish soldiers, killed in fighting or dead as a result of sickness, to

⁷⁹AGA, Af, 81.1122, Cp. 4.

⁸⁰AGA, Af, 81.1150, Missive: Exp./5429.

⁸¹AGA, Af, 81.1122, Cp. 4.

⁸² For example, 4175 Italian dead were buried in Spain, with scores of others buried elsewhere or lost at sea. Brian R. Sullivan, 'Fascist Italy's Military Involvement in the Spanish Civil War', *The Journal of Military History* 59 (1995) 697-727, here 713.

⁸³ Testimonies of veterans of the Spanish Civil War: Hamido Al Ma'dani., Mohammed Mhauesh and Karimo ben Abdelkader. El Merroun archive.

⁸⁴ Testimony of Mohammed ben Amar Al Hashmi, Tetuan, date unclear, El Merroun archive.

⁸⁵ Seidman, *The Victorious Counterrevolution*, 179.

Talavera de la Reina to be buried in the ‘Moorish cemetery’ there.⁸⁶ The Talavera de la Reina cemetery was established by taking the part of the municipal cemetery that was usually reserved for non-believers and suicides. A room was constructed there for washing the bodies. In 1939, a tile was dedicated to the buried soldiers that was adorned with the ‘Solomon seal’ (a six point star), and that read ‘From the Group of Regulares Tetuan nr. 1 to its Muslim comrades, fallen for Spain’.⁸⁷

There were also those who died later in the hospitals as a result of their wounds. As these Moroccan soldiers were usually treated in so called ‘Muslim’ hospitals, the Nationalist military authorities required them to take careful measures when burying the Muslim dead troops, so even if they were to be buried in a Catholic cemetery the Muslim deceased should have their own separate section within the cemetery and, if possible, with a separate entrance point.⁸⁸

One of the earliest descriptions of the rituals for the preparation of the burial of dead soldiers came from the memoirs of Mekki Redondo who was curious as to how his father died in Spain in 1936. He was gravely wounded in September at Talavera de la Reina near Madrid and died shortly after admission to the hospital near that city.⁸⁹ The *faqih* had inculcated the *shahada* (the statement that there is no god but Allah and that Mohammed is his messenger) and prepared his body for burial.⁹⁰ The *faqih* was the only religious official in the campaign hospital that Colonel Yagüe established at Talavera de la Reina. He recalled being woken by a nurse to tell him:

that one of the four heavily injured soldiers was dying. I went instantly to him and found him dying while at the same time trying, in vain, to pronounce the *shahada* [the statement that there is but one God and that Mohammed is his Messenger], and therefore I had to inculcate this until his soul was given to the creator. I later called the doctor, Lieutenant Castro, who certified his death. His corpse was then brought to the hall of ablutions where, at sunrise, I washed him and put him in a shroud. After saying prayers for his soul, we buried him in a cemetery that I myself habilitated, a cemetery where, the previous day, we had buried 104 Muslims who had perished on the same day. I still have the register where I wrote down the names of the dead Muslim soldiers I helped wash, laid shrouds for and buried during the three months I stayed in Talavera, and which reached 597.⁹¹

It is not clear whether the idea for separate Muslim cemeteries, in hospital grounds, first came from the Spanish Nationalist army or from Moroccan officials. But sometimes the Moroccans appeared to take the initiative. In March 1937 a Moroccan minister of the Spanish zone of Morocco, visiting Spain,

⁸⁶ AHMC, Varela, 14/389.

⁸⁷ Anonymous, ‘El cementerio musulmán de Talavera de la Reina’, *Estela*, nr. 1 (1997) 9-10, here 9.

⁸⁸ Bureau of Control for Moroccan Affairs in Spain, January 1938. AGA, Af, 81.1122, L.2958, Cp.3.

⁸⁹ Ibn Azzuz Hakim, *La actitud de los moros*, 85.

⁹⁰ *Ibidem*.

⁹¹ *Ibidem*, 88. The number of burials he cites does not correspond with a more recent estimation of 300 burials at that cemetery. ‘El Cementerio musulmán de Talavera de la Reina’, *Estela*, 9.

suggested that Muslim hospitals dedicate a place for burying the Muslim dead,⁹² a suggestion that was welcomed by the Nationalist authorities and was included in subsequent instructions for military hospitals. But as we have seen, there was already a Moorish cemetery in Talavera in 1936. In some cases the establishment of a Muslim cemetery was done without Moroccan supervision, such as the one in Seville, which had a Muslim cemetery built in September 1936, while in another case, that of Barcia (Valdés region of Asturias), the Muslim cemetery was built by civilians from the Valdés region, but the process was completely directed and controlled by Moroccan religious officials.⁹³

The efforts to provide separate burial spaces for the Moroccan soldiers continued after the war. In 1940 the Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs requested that efforts be undertaken to determine the burial places of many Moroccan soldiers with the goal of separating the Muslim dead from the Christians. A Moroccan official was to participate in efforts as head of a special section created for this goal at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.⁹⁴ A number of provincial governors and heads of municipalities provided information that made it possible to identify a number of places and in some cases the number and identities of Moroccans buried there. For example: in Toledo 614 dead Moroccans were located plus an undetermined number in Seseña and Puente del Arzobispo (both in Toledo province). In the Barcelona province 31 Moroccans were located plus two questionable cases. In the province of Guadalajara the burial places of 42 Moroccans were located in different municipalities. The causes of death were in some cases identified. Some had died from sickness and there was one case of suicide in the municipality of Fuentelsaz. In the case of three soldiers buried in the municipality of Molina de Aragón, they were court-martialled and received capital punishment for unknown reasons. 24 were buried in the capital city of the Ávila province, in the municipal cemetery, with the specific numbers of the graves provided. In the case of Tarragona province only the names of the municipalities where Moroccans were buried were provided without an estimation of numbers. Many Moroccans in these different reports were buried in the municipal cemeteries; in some cases, it is explicitly mentioned that they were buried in the civil part of the cemetery. In one case, Torremocha de Jadraque (Guadalajara province) was a Moroccan buried in a 'Catholic' cemetery. From the reports we can also identify special cemeteries for Muslims established in the cities: Puerto de Santa María (Cádiz province), Jerez de la Frontera (Cádiz province), Seville, Granada,⁹⁵ Córdoba, Penarroya-Pueblonuevo (Córdoba province), Saragossa, Salamanca, Cáceres, Plasencia, Antequera (Málaga

⁹² AGMAV, C.2396 A.2, L.190, Cp 14. Letter in Arabic.

⁹³ Álvarez Martínez, Expósito Mangas and González Álvarez, 'El cementerio moro de Barcia: Breve acercamiento a su estudio', 136-137, 137n30. According to the authors between 400-500 bodies were buried here. Ibidem, 142.

⁹⁴ AGA, Af, 81.1114. Leg, 3747/2, 'Cementerios'.

⁹⁵ In the city of Granada a small piece of land was chosen to bury the Moroccan soldiers close to the Catholic cemetery (itself uphill from the Alhambra), on a spot higher than the Christian burial ground, with a steep path leading upwards to it. Currently, three rows of around 26 each constitute the graves of Moroccan soldiers. They are all unidentified. After later Moroccan migrations to Granada, the burial place for the Moroccan soldiers (to which the author was granted access outside regular visiting days) was rehabilitated as the Muslim cemetery of Granada. Newer burials take place around the three central rows. See Appendix 5

province), Ronda (Málaga province), as well as other localities where Muslims were buried but where the reports were not certain whether there were separate burial grounds for Moroccan Muslim soldiers.⁹⁶

Conversions

If writing letters on stationery with Christian symbols caused enormous irritation with the bureaus of native affairs and the Spanish military, then converting the Moroccan soldiers raised great alarm. Such proselytising activities apparently happened only in hospitals, as these were the places where priests, or others with a strong religious fervour, likely had enough time to engage in the process. But the military authorities were never happy with Spanish religious personnel roaming inside hospitals where wounded Moroccan soldiers were treated. It was probably in November 1936 when a report by the Army Inspector brought to Franco's attention for the first time the disturbing effects of the efforts of the '*señoritas*' and priests to convert the injured Moroccans to Catholicism.⁹⁷ Immediately, Franco instructed military hospitals to 'respect the religious creeds of the natives'.⁹⁸

It appears, however, that the missionary zeal still persisted in some places. The Inspector of Moroccan Affairs suggested in November 1938 more active observation of non-hospitalised persons entering hospitals, and issuing serious instructions to religious authorities on this topic.⁹⁹ Copies of a telegram by Franco forbidding converting Moroccans were supposedly hung in some hospitals 'in big letters'.¹⁰⁰ The Generalissimo himself personally gave demonstrations of his will to dissipate any doubts as to the sanctity of the Islamic space of his Muslim soldiers. One day he arrived at a hospital for a quick inspection. Entering a ward where Moorish wounded soldiers were being treated, he took a look around noticing a couple of crosses hanging on the walls of the ward. He obviously did not like that and ordered them to be removed immediately.¹⁰¹ Nevertheless and despite all the stern warnings and precautions, there were individual cases of Moorish soldiers who converted to the Catholic faith. In 1938 for example the Bureau of Control for Moroccan Affairs in Spain reports about such a case, a Moorish soldier named Bin Kiran. A difficult aspect of this case was the fact that the conversion happened under the auspices of General Moscardó, the famous protagonist of the siege of the Alcázar of Toledo. Still, the report goes on to instruct directors of military hospitals to warn charity sisters as well as nurses of the damage their proselytising activities would cause to the National Movement. The damages would include reversing years of work done in the Protectorate, and besides all this, the Bureau of Control for Moroccan Affairs believed the conversions were 'almost always fake'.¹⁰² It is difficult to ascertain the real motives of those converted since there are no testimonies of Moroccan veterans who had converted. The concerns for these religious transformations were still an issue even

⁹⁶ For more details, see the different reports in the 'Cementerios' file in AGA, Af, 81.1114. Leg, 3747/2.

⁹⁷ AGMAV, A.1, L.59, Cp. 86. Report on November 19, 1936.

⁹⁸ AGMAV, A.1, L.59, Cp. 86. Cable by the army of the north on November 27, 1936.

⁹⁹ AGA, Af, 81.1113, Cp 3.

¹⁰⁰ AGA, Af, 81.1150.

¹⁰¹ Antonio Corral Castanedo, *Esta es la casa donde vivo y muero*, 236.

¹⁰² AGA, Af, 81.1113, Cp 3: letter, 20 May, 1938.

after the war when a couple of conversions were recorded, like one in Córdoba. In March 1941 the Bureau of Control for Moroccan Affairs commented on the case of Mohammed El Uariachi who after the war was expelled from Spain only to return and manage to stay by being baptised and marrying a Spanish woman. The bureau commented that the majority of such cases revolve around ‘opportunistic people’. It is safe to say, however, given the relatively few cases mentioned,¹⁰³ that those conversions were certainly not significant enough to have an impact in Spanish Morocco or in the army fighting in Spain.

Hospitals

As the conversion issue makes clear, hospitals were the places where the Muslims and Christians interacted the most. In hospitals Moroccan soldiers fell in love with Spanish women, priests tried to win new souls for Christianity, complaints on religious matters were made and compromises reached. A military hospital was almost the only place that offered the Moroccan soldiers a better chance to get to know Spanish society well, or at least its Nationalist version.

While the stay in hospitals was comfortable for the majority of the Moroccans, many might have missed the opportunity of resting in those hospitals and even having their lives saved. It appears that in some cases the evacuation of Moroccan injured was not as effective as it should have been and that many of those responsible laxed in their tasks. One Spanish officer angrily wrote in December 1936 how: ‘on the road I come across various stretchers with corpses of *Regulares* of Tetuan and I curse the stretcher-bearers who abandoned them. I send a go between so that people of my tabor would come to collect them’.¹⁰⁴ An incident recounted by a German observer is quite illustrative. He tells how one day he entered a house which was used as a station where wounded soldiers, who were carried to it by stretcher-bearers, would be further evacuated by a motorised vehicle. He comments:

Immediately, two Moroccans were carried in. Jebalans whom nobody could understand. One had a chest wound, the other had his shin shattered. They sat there speechless. The young emergency doctor wanted to sit with his aides at the table. I watched the misery of the Moroccans and asked the doctor, why the wounded were not being immediately transported further. When he says, these are lightly wounded, I attack him sharply and tell him that I would report his roughness to General Yagüe. Yagüe would have the doctor shot, because this

¹⁰³ AGA, Af, 81.1113, letter, 27 March, 1941. José Luis de Mesa mentions a few Moroccans who underwent name changes, indicating that they probably converted. Among those were Mohamed Ben Mizziam, a corporal in the Spanish Legion, of whom it was said, according to de Mesa, that he was a cousin of his more famous namesake Colonel Mizzian (note the difference between the M and N in spelling both surnames. Mizziam must be a mistake made during registration in the official documents). De Mesa thinks that this corporal is the same person as Manuel Ben Mizziam, who figures in the military records as a sergeant in 1949. Another name he found is Antonio Said el Sadi, and José Antonio ben Yilali Ben Baka-li. Interestingly there is a Turkish member of the Spanish Foreign Legion at the time of the Civil War who was called Otoman Slah Ed Dim Ben Said and whom the records show in 1945 as having substituted Otoman for Juan. José Luis de Mesa, *Los otros internacionales. Voluntarios extranjeros desconocidos en el bando nacional durante la Guerra Civil (1936-1939)* (Madrid 1998) 246, 249, 250.

¹⁰⁴ Montagudo Jaén, 1936, *Regulares. Diario en el campo de batalla*, 60.

efficient general would commit his life for his Moroccans. No minute more lasted before the wounded were taken away. The eyes of the Moroccans glistened with gratitude when I spoke to them.¹⁰⁵

This story illustrates two points: the first is that the fate of Moroccans was apparently not taken seriously by some Spaniards, and that they displayed total apathy towards them. The second point, is that it appears that *Africanista* commanders were well-known to have a great attachment to the value of Moroccan troops to such an extent that would make these medical personnel fearful for their lives.

Once the Moroccans reached the hospitals, the care they received greatly improved. If the testimonies of the surviving Moroccan veterans are any indication, then a significant segment of the Moroccan combatants in Spain spent some amount of time in the Spanish military hospitals. Barely any one of those witnesses who was not wounded in battle and stayed in the military hospitals of Spain. But soon, the Moroccan wounded were hospitalised in a separate space. This usually meant separate wards in the same hospitals where Spaniards were treated. The Nationalists, however, also began to establish separate Muslim hospitals, which spread all around Nationalist Spain, given the presence of the Moroccan units in all areas of operation.¹⁰⁶ The Muslim hospital in Saragossa grew later in the war to be the most prominent one. In such hospitals in the Peninsula, care was taken to provide a Muslim diet for the wounded,¹⁰⁷ and to distribute the tables for prayers times.¹⁰⁸ For the entertainment of the inmates there were Moorish cafés. Even story-tellers were sent to the hospitals to ‘mitigate the torment of these wounds’.¹⁰⁹ It appears that sometimes, even in the field of surgery, the Spanish doctors had to accommodate religious sensitivities of some of the soldiers. In Salamanca, a young Moroccan patient being prepared for surgery in March 1938 asked not to be given the ‘water that makes you stupid’ (ether, which is alcohol-based), and, in deference to his wishes and his religious sensibilities, the doctor induced the patient with Evipan before then giving ether to maintain anaesthesia.¹¹⁰ At other times, it seems that Spanish doctors wrongly attributed to religious motives or afterlife considerations, fears that were understandably normal. An example of such attributions we find in the diary of Sir Robert Reynolds Mackintosh, a New Zealand-born surgeon who volunteered in 1937 to help in Nationalist Spain. Describing a visit to the Muslim hospital in Saragossa, he recorded that:

¹⁰⁵ Albert Bartels, unpublished memoirs, 178.

¹⁰⁶ In the spring of 1937 hospitals of significant size for the Moroccans were located in Saragossa, Burgos, Valladolid, Cáceres, Coruña, Almedralejo, Zafra, Córdoba, Seville, Jerez de la Frontera, Cádiz, Huelva, Medina del Campo, Plasencia, Villablanca, Ronda and Puerto de Santa María, among others. Beds per hospital at the time varied between 225 to 400 with the possibility for 200 extra beds in Saragossa and 300 in Medina del Campo. See AGMAV, A.2, L.190, Cp 12/6 and AGAMV, A.2, L.190, Cp 14/1.

¹⁰⁷ AGA, Af, 81.1122, ‘Racionado para moros hospitalizados’. 31 December, 1937.

¹⁰⁸ See examples in: AGA, Af, M.1685, L.2963.

¹⁰⁹ AGA, Af, 81.1180, Proponiendo el envío a España de narradores de cuentos para que recorran los Hospitales para marroquíes allí instalados. 28 December, 1937.

¹¹⁰ Jonathan Browne, ‘History of Anaesthesia: Anaesthetics and the Spanish Civil War. The Start of Specialisation’, *European Journal of Anaesthesiology* 31(2014) 65-67, here 67.

the men [the Moroccan inmates] appeared to be very contented. One of the doctors told me that they had great difficulty in persuading the Moors to submit to any amputation. It appears that their religion tells them that paradise is full of *houris* [female companions in paradise], whose sole mission is to smile on the fortunate men who reach paradise, but unfortunately these *houris* will have nothing at all to do with a man who has not a complete body, and I am told by the doctor that dozens of Moors have preferred to die without having their leg amputated, when by having it taken off, they could have saved their lives.¹¹¹

This is another example of how the Spanish attributed the behaviour, motives and fears of the Moroccan soldiers to their religious background, when fear of amputation, due to its permanent nature and the impediment it could cause for having a normal functioning life, would be a normal fear expected from anyone in a similar situation, even if there were any truth to the *houris* story.

As the presence of Muslim hospitals in Spain had no precedent in recent Spanish history, and certainly not on such a large scale, some problems and complaints arose at the beginning due to the lack of an established Islamic diet, organised religious personnel, rules of communication and so on. In November 1936 the army inspector Cabanellas complained to Franco about what he saw in some 'Muslim' hospitals that he visited. In addition to his disapproval of proselytising attempts in the hospital he remarked that some patients were deceived into believing that the meat they were served was slaughtered according to Muslim rites, only to discover later that this was not the case, leading some to refrain from eating for days.¹¹² Such complaints led to individual efforts to correct the situation and, in 1937, to organised efforts that were initiated by both the Moroccan authorities as well as the Spanish Nationalists to adapt the hospitals to a Muslim environment so as to make the stay for the wounded a pleasing one. This adaptation effectively meant the creation of a separate Moorish space.

In March 1937 the Moroccan vizier Ben Ali visited Spanish hospitals, whereupon he wrote a letter suggesting the establishment of separate Muslim hospitals in the rear-lines. He suggested that the wounded be quartered separately according to their military affiliations: the *Regulares* and the *Mehallas*. The vizier also suggested a Moorish staff consisting firstly of a *faqih* (cleric) who would be charged with the duties of Imam, butcher, notary and undertaker; secondly, a *raqqas* whose duties were to carry the letters and money to the families in Morocco; and thirdly, an interpreter. Among other suggestions, like the establishment of ablution and prayer halls and a burial place, Ben Ali suggested the establishment, in each town with a Muslim hospital, of an 'Arab café' for the Muslim

¹¹¹ The Sir Robert Reynolds Macintosh Archive held by the Wellcome Library. PP/RRM/D1/76. The excerpt and the reference were kindly provided by Jonathan Sebastian Browne.

¹¹² Cabanellas to Franco, 19 November, 1936, AGAMV, A.1, L.59, Cp 86.

wounded. In that case, he continued, the Muslim wounded would be prohibited from entering ‘foreign cafés so that they would not have forbidden drinks. For that, a special vigilance must be appointed’.¹¹³

In the requests of the Moroccan minister we see the attempt to exercise some control on the lives of the Moroccan subjects in Spain through limiting the Moroccan soldiers’ contact with the surrounding Spanish ambience and preventing its perceived corrupting influence like alcohol. In February 1937 the High Commissariat had already preceded the Moroccan minister by issuing instructions on the organisation of Moroccan hospitals in Spain. The proposed religious staff was larger than that suggested by the minister. It would consist of an Imam, chief of the religious staff, who also functioned as a notary, a *mudarris* (teacher) to answer religious questions, a *catib* (writer) to write letters to the soldier’s families and a *munadif el mauta* (cleaner of the dead) who was responsible for the burial preparations. These were assisted by two cooks who were also butchers, as well as four assistant cooks, plus two couriers to carry the needs of the injured as well as inheritance material of the deceased, in addition to an interpreter. As for general hospitals with ‘Moroccan departments’ the staff would vary according to the number of wounded present.¹¹⁴

The General Staff in Salamanca was in agreement with much of the minister’s request and especially with regard to the prohibition of visiting European cafés. It cited as an extra reason the fear of espionage and the necessity of avoiding incidents which had been ‘unfortunately frequent’ in towns where many Moroccans were present.¹¹⁵ Franco had also already referred in February 1937 to ‘Moorish cafés’ which would provide the wounded soldiers with a place that had a ‘familiar’ environment.¹¹⁶ It seems that the prohibition of selling alcohol to Muslims was not an equal success everywhere. In March 1938, a report on drunken Moroccan inmates lamented the absence in the southern town of Jerez de la Frontera of a prohibition on selling alcohol that reigned in other places.¹¹⁷ In March 1938, Salamanca suffered from the same problem, and the local authorities apparently did not prevent selling alcohol to the Moroccan inmates of the military hospital there, necessitating the intervention of Moroccan military police to stop the ‘scandals of the Moors’.¹¹⁸ But hospitals were not allowed to actually forbid Moroccan inmates who were in a state to walk to take strolls outside the hospital. In March 1937, a report brought to the attention complaints of Moroccan soldiers in a Salamanca hospital that they were not allowed outside nor were visitors for them allowed inside, which in turn led to instructions by the commander of the Army of the North to this hospital not to forbid the inmates from taking walks outside the premises.¹¹⁹ Much later, in December 1938, the Army of the South tried one more measure to reduce the strolls of the Moroccan soldiers outside the hospital

¹¹³ AGMAV, C.2396 A.2, L.190, Cp 14. Letter in Arabic.

¹¹⁴ AGMAV, C.2396 A.2, L.190, Cp 14. ‘Instrucciones para la organización de los hospitales instalados en la península, destinados a marroquíes’. 28 February, 1937.

¹¹⁵ AGMAV, C.2396 A.2, L.190, Cp 14. Report by the General Staff, 19 March, 1937.

¹¹⁶ AGAMV, A.1, L.35, Cp. 20.

¹¹⁷ AGA, Af, 81.1179, Varios hospitales.

¹¹⁸ AGA, Af, 81.1180, Intervención del Norte to Sanchez Pol, 10 March, 1938.

¹¹⁹ AGMAV, A.1, L.50, Cp. 17. Instructions on 20 March, 1937; report by the HQ of the Generalissimo on 12 March, 1937.

by exempting the products of the Moroccan *cafeteros* (café owners) from custom duties if they were to be sold inside the hospitals, and therefore to make it cheaper for the inmates to order their consumptions inside.¹²⁰

As one could infer from the previous paragraph, the presence of Muslim hospitals must not have been met with enthusiasm by the local population everywhere. One of the places where the presence of a Muslim hospital troubled the local population was Sánlucar de Barrameda (Cádiz), or at least that is the impression that a Spanish citizen from that town, Dominguez Lobato, gives in his memoirs.¹²¹ Lobato does not hide his disdain for the Moroccans, who were for him a ‘decrepit race, full of misery’. According to him the aversion of the local population to the presence of the Moroccan wounded had its roots in the colonial wars in Morocco, the horrors of which some of the locals had witnessed, as well as the ‘thunderous entry’ of the *Regulares* to the town in July 1936,¹²² which apparently had a strong pro-Republican base. These negative preconceptions were only strengthened when the Moroccan inmates, or those who were fit enough to wander about the town, displayed behaviour that did not endear themselves to the populace, nor it seemed that these Moroccans cared about ingratiating themselves with the people. In Lobato’s version this negative behaviour took the forms of stealing from the local shops,¹²³ loudly expressing their disapproval about the presence of young Spaniards who otherwise should be fighting on the front crying ‘This cannot be, this cannot be... We fight for Spain. The young without fighting for Spain, impossible. Every one fight for Spain! And if not, leave Spain alone...’,¹²⁴ aggressive attempts to win the attention of local girls who disdained them,¹²⁵ as well as the insistence by the relatively healthy inmates to be treated, i.e. pampered, the same way as the badly wounded.¹²⁶ The degree to which the presence of Muslim hospitals troubled the Spanish population in general is difficult to determine, and is dependent on anecdotal evidence. As we saw in the previous chapter, rather than disdain, there was a fair number of women, in other cities, who fell in love with the Moroccan wounded, ended up marrying them, or even took the trouble to travel to Morocco to join them.

¹²⁰ AGA, Af, M1683, L.2958, Cp.3: Commander of the Army of the South, December 1938.

¹²¹ Dominguez Lobato, *Cien capítulos de retaguardia*.

¹²² *Ibidem*, 297-298.

¹²³ *Ibidem*, 300.

¹²⁴ *Ibidem*, 308-309.

¹²⁵ ‘The Moors are much infatuated, and more than infatuated, impudent’, thought Lobato of the Moroccan wounded. According to his memoirs the ‘women disdain them. The Moors do not say, like the Italians: Oh! Bella Signorina! They attack, shouting as in the war. They understand love in another way’. He continues by stating that the attentions to the ‘fairer sex’ caused tension in the town and frequent quarrels. One specific case he mentions involved a furious gypsy girl, the presence of Civil Guards who diplomatically defused the tension, a Moroccan who protested that his only fault was ‘for saying to her beautiful...only for saying to her beautiful’. *Ibidem*, 299, 329.

¹²⁶ ‘The Moors we talk about, these wounded or these sick who are here – have a special psychology. What anyone does, the other comrades of the expedition must systematically repeat’, says Lobato. And then he gives an example of a group of wounded who arrived at the train station, one of them wounded in the leg and could not walk. Being carried on a stretcher into the car that was to bring him to the hospital, everyone else demanded being carried on a stretcher, a demand that was fulfilled in the face of ‘fear that a mutiny would be provoked’. *Ibidem*, 307.

Despite the care the Nationalists took to respect the religious sensitivities of their Moroccan soldiers, complaints in this regard still arose. Sometimes the reason for these grievances was the behaviour of the Moroccan religious personnel themselves. From drinking excessively to continuously shaving their own beards, or failure to lead the prayers were reasons given in a number of complaints about these *foqaha* (plural for *faqih*).¹²⁷ Similar complaints about drinking were occasionally also filed against members of the native military police who were detached to military hospitals.¹²⁸ These complaints seemed, however, not as grave as failing to perform duties towards the dead, or even flatly refusing to do so on the ground that the dead did not deserve them.

When religious-based complaints arose in hospitals the Nationalist authorities spent serious efforts to investigate and verify them. One hospital that received frequent complaints was in Villafranca de los Barros (Badajoz province). The complaints against the director of the hospital revolved around the presence of religious (Christian) images, the lack of a separate kitchen for the Muslims and the lack of a separate space within the same kitchen (that the same utensils were used for Spanish Christians as well as for the Moroccan Muslims for halal and non-halal meat), the refusal of the director to provide transport for the burial of the dead, the existence of a 'bar' inside the hospital, etc.¹²⁹ Upon investigation the complaints were found exaggerated: the religious images were all covered, except one in a hall that was forbidden for the inmates to enter; the Europeans cooked and used their utensil in separate space in the kitchen and plans were made for an independent kitchen; the burial transport problem was a one-time incident due to maintenance problems and in fact not all the Muslim religious personnel agreed with the content of the complaints. The investigation recognised, however, that the director of the hospital was not quite amiable.¹³⁰ This shows, if anything, the extent to which the Nationalist military authorities were prepared to accommodate the sentiments of the Moroccan soldiers, and the privileged position these soldiers (and the Muslim clerics) had in imposing their own lifestyle and wishes in hospitals in a country in which they were foreigners. It is remarkable that the archival material neglects to reflect complaints on the Spanish side about these Moroccans who acted with a sense of entitlement rather than of gratefulness.

Some additional examples of the Nationalist efforts to provide a religiously agreeable stay for the Moroccan inmates include a mosque that was established on the grounds of the Military Hospital of Bella Vista in Vigo and another at the Hospital of La Barzola in Seville. At the inauguration of the latter, thousands of pesetas were directly distributed to the Moroccan patients. In the former establishment during Ramadan, Vigo sent its municipal band to entertain patients, who were offered

¹²⁷ AGA, Af, 81.1122, letter of complaint nr. 3159, 9 January, 1939.

¹²⁸ For Complaints about gambling and failing to observe Ramadan against one such *mejasni*, see AGA, Af, 81.1187, letter to the inspector of the Moroccan *Mejasnia*, 1 December, 1937. In this case however, fellow policemen were the ones who complained about his failure to fast.

¹²⁹ AGA, Af, 81.1179, Leg, 3963. Zaragoza, letters on 9 January, 1939; 31 December, 1938; 15 December, 1938.

¹³⁰ *Ibidem*.

treats during the festivities. The walls of the Granada hospital, one of the largest, were covered with lofty Koranic maxims in Arabic.¹³¹

Regardless of the occasional complaints and the initial problems earlier mentioned, the memories the hospitals left on the surviving veterans are mostly positive and remembered with nostalgia. ‘The food was good, the beds were changed daily. The daughters of generals and officers, and the sons of merchants and doctors did that. They were polite’, remembers one who worked there.¹³² ‘The hospital of Seville was very nice. A delegation of Moroccan *kaïds* and *bashas* [tribal leaders and city high officials] visited us. So we were given plenty of clothing and food’.¹³³ The old nurses were remembered affectionately. ‘The nun there [in the Salamanca hospital] was very nice to me and used to call me son’.¹³⁴ Messoud Ballah, recalled that when he was wounded, and as he was dressed in the uniform of the Spanish Foreign Legion, he was taken for ‘a Christian’, and was at first taken to a ward for Europeans. Later he was put in a Muslim ward.¹³⁵ But he praised the treatment of the injured. Another veteran praised the treatment and the food in the hospitals though admitted that ‘the Moroccans displayed some bad behaviour like throwing the plates’.¹³⁶ On this kind of behaviour another veteran remembers that: ‘one Moroccan ordered food and he did not like it so he threw the plate at the nurse. So when chaos arose and the Colonel came and asked, he told the nurses you know that the Moroccans are not civilised people and that they do not understand, that they do not know, that they cannot be patient and they are troublesome. She who can be patient with them can stay and she who cannot must go to another Christian hospital to work’.¹³⁷ This account not only shows that in some hospitals not everyone was completely well disposed towards the Moroccan patients,¹³⁸ (though in this case the inmates share the blame) but it also makes clear the degree to which those working in hospitals were prepared to go in satisfying and showing patience toward the Moroccan inmates.

The majority of the memories of the stay in the military hospitals are positive. It is possible that the passage of decades has filtered out any memories of discomfort or the occasional irritation, but the positive view of the treatment in hospitals is also visible in the contemporary testimonies of the interrogated French Moroccan deserters who fought in Spain, even among those indignant on other aspects of army life. One of them, while on one hand negative about the irregular pay, lack of normal

¹³¹ Seidman, *The Victorious Counterrevolution*, 46-47. See also, Jorge Lamas, ‘Hospital Moro de Bella Vista’, *La Voz de Galicia*, 22 April 2006. Accessed on 12 June 2014:

<http://www.lavozdeg Galicia.es/hemeroteca/2006/04/22/4709790.shtml>

¹³² Testimony of Abdelsalam ben Hussein Rian.. He was a *catib* (writer/notary) in one such hospital. Tetuan, 24 July 2000, El Merroun archive.

¹³³ Testimony of Abdul Nabi ben Omari, Tetuan, 11 July 1993, El Merroun archive. He adds: ‘Those Bashas and dignitaries walked among our beds and told us to be men and patient and to fight’.

¹³⁴ Interview with Al Hussein ben Abdessalam. Ceuta, 24 January 2011.

¹³⁵ Interview with Masoud Ballah, Brussels, 5 November 2011. Stitou Bouinou on the other hand observed that the hospital were he was treated was mixed, with Moroccans lying next to wounded Spanish. As a rule that was not the case as archival material demonstrates. So the case of Bouinou was either exceptional, temporary, or his memory failed him. Interview with Stitou Bouinou, Zumi, 21 May 2012.

¹³⁶ Testimony of Mohammed Al Ayyashi Al Bakouri, Tetuan, 7 April 1994, El Merroun archive.

¹³⁷ Testimony of Al Bouyekra, Fnideq 21 april 1996. El Merroun archive.

¹³⁸ One Nationalist psychiatrist equated Moors with ‘the mentally weak’. Seidman, *Republic of Egos*, 104.

shelter, and the ‘stinginess in giving leaves’, he was quite positive on the other hand about how ‘perfectly organised’ the hospitals were where the inmates were treated according to their religion and received food prepared by their fellow believers.¹³⁹ The positive recollections of the Moroccan inmates of Spanish hospitals might also simply reflect a contrast with the medical facilities and treatment available for them in the Moroccan Protectorate itself, whether French or Spanish, which must have been of lower standard with the ones found in the Spanish Peninsula.

The positive memories coupled with the documentary evidence of the hospital policies of the Nationalists lead to the conclusion that the military succeeded to some degree in establishing a *little Morocco* for its wounded Moroccan men, though it did not always manage to keep them within its confines. In any case the Nationalists tried to present the image of Muslim-friendly hospitals. They succeeded in gaining the satisfaction of Moroccan notables visiting the hospitalised in Spain.¹⁴⁰

The Nationalists also tried to sell the image of Muslim-friendly hospitals to the media. In Russell Palmer’s colour film on the war in Spain, footage is shown of Moroccan wounded and recuperating soldiers posing outside a Muslim hospital, along with smiling and friendly looking nurses as well as what seems to be Muslim religious officials and Moroccan officers. The mood seems relaxed, with two Moroccans playing music and dancing. The commentary reminds the viewer that these are special hospitals for the Moroccans where the tenet of their religion could be observed in matters of diet. It then goes further to state that the simple tastes and happy disposition of these men makes life in these hospitals interesting.

A place less pleasant to stay for Moroccan soldiers and the civilians who provided services for them were Spanish prisons. But even there the Spanish authorities deemed it appropriate to separate the Muslim inmates from the Spanish ones. In August 1938, the Delegation of Native Affairs requested the *interventor* of the Bureau of Moroccan Affairs in North Spain to carry out the necessary efforts to locate certain Moroccan prison inmates, as it was not favourable that they ‘would suffer their sentences in coexistence with the Spanish penal population’. The inmates were supposed after being located to be sent to the Uad-Lau prison in Morocco.¹⁴¹ However even after the end of the Civil War there were still Moroccans held in Spanish prisons as it is obvious from a missive sent on 22 January 1941 by a representative of the Delegation of Native Affairs to the director of the Comendadoras prison in Madrid, requesting that the Muslim prisoners should receive food that they could prepare in accordance with their religion, and to try to let the Muslim prisoners sleep in cells or sections that were separated from the Spanish.¹⁴²

¹³⁹ Interrogation of Abdeselem ben Tourhami. SHD, 3 H 266.

¹⁴⁰ Note (on 23 September 1937) of gratitude by the Interventor to Sevilla to directors and staff of a number of Andalusian Muslim Hospitals, on the occasion of the visit of Muslim notables from Ifni and Cabo Juby. AGA, Af, 81.1186 (Visitas – Incidentes).

¹⁴¹ AGA, Af, 81.1125, Leg. 3769, Cp 1.

¹⁴² AGA, Af, 81.1125, Leg. 3770, Cp 2. According to one file there were 166 ‘Muslim inmates’ both military and civilian in Spanish prisons in 1941. Ibidem, It is unclear when the last of them were repatriated to Morocco to

'The sinners'

For all the attention the Nationalists gave to the religious sentiments of the Moroccan soldiers, and for all the efforts to portray them as God-fearing pious soldiers, many of these young men do not seem to have been particularly pious Muslims. There is no way to quantify those who fulfilled the profile of an observant Muslim as opposed to those who did not or those who were only partially observant. These last would have probably formed the majority. As we have seen, some hospitals struggled with the issue of Moroccan convalescents who caused 'scandals' connected to drinking alcohol. In Sanlúcar de Barrameda, Dominguez Lobato sarcastically relates in his memoirs how one of the Moroccan inmates of the hospital 'says that he does not drink, that "the Koran prohibits wine". Well, every evening before dinner, he drinks a whole cup of Moscatel [Spanish Muscat wine]', adding how 'a serious thing' it is to watch a 'drunken Moor'.¹⁴³ Also sarcastically he pointed to how the 'true Koranic practitioners seemed absolutely unaware of the Ninth Commandment', lusting after girls in the town and how the Moroccan convalescents' 'favourite pastimes' was frequenting a little street where four or five houses were 'generously open' and where 'the *moritos* [little Moors] found the best welcome', referring obviously to houses of prostitution.¹⁴⁴ As shown in the previous chapter the Moroccan soldiers developed sexual relations with Spanish prostitutes upon their arrival in Spain. But that sometimes led to brawls with Spanish soldiers, and furthermore, they were not always welcomed by the prostitutes. That was perhaps one reason why the Spanish military arranged, early in the war, for Moroccan prostitutes, as well as dancers and singers who doubled as prostitutes to be shipped to Spain and quartered near Moroccan units where they exclusively serviced the needs of these units. But it also happened that, during hard times and due to lack of food, Spanish women exchanged sexual favours for food with Moroccan soldiers.

The evidence seems to demonstrate that among the Moroccan soldiers who fought in Spain, those who observed prayers, teetotalism and fasting were in the minority. 'Most of them were not religious' remembers one veteran.¹⁴⁵ In the entire company of another Moroccan veteran only one member performed the prayers, though they all fasted in Ramadan.¹⁴⁶ Alcohol was often consumed,¹⁴⁷ although according to one testimony, Muslim officers would be punished by imprisonment if they drank alcohol.¹⁴⁸ Earlier it was referred to some towns' institution of prohibition to sell alcohol to Moroccans while in other towns that same measure did not exist. One veteran remembered that in one unnamed town the '*camarero* [waiter] was punished because he let the Moroccans drink', and that the bar owner excused himself by stating that he was confused because the bar was full of Tercio and

complete their sentences, although the archival material reveals regular transfer of prisoners to Morocco throughout the Spanish Civil War and the years after that.

¹⁴³ Dominguez Lobato, *Cien capítulos de retaguardia*, 320.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibidem*, 299, 301.

¹⁴⁵ Interview with Abdullah Abdekade, Nador, 4 July 2011.

¹⁴⁶ Interview with Kendoussi ben Boumidien, Nador, 4 July 2011.

¹⁴⁷ Interview with Mohammed Abdullah Susi, Ceuta, 19 January 2011. See also Balfour, *Deadly Embrace*, 283.

¹⁴⁸ Testimony of Mohammed Al Ayyashi Al Bakouri, Tetuan, 7 April 1994, El Merroun archive.

Requeté soldiers and that the one who paid the bill was not even a Moroccan. The owner was warned not to give alcohol to the *askaris*.¹⁴⁹ But other sources for alcohol were the Moroccan mobile merchants who followed the troops and installed their shopping posts whether on streets or at the top of mountains, selling tobacco but also alcohol.¹⁵⁰ It is not clear whether in general, the Spanish army was more lenient towards its Moroccan soldiers who consumed alcohol in Spain or did not adhere to Islamic practices in general, compared to Moroccan authorities, or whether those serving in the Spanish *Regulares* were differently treated than those serving in the *Mehal-las* which officially represented the Moroccan state.¹⁵¹

If many Moroccan soldiers proved not to be very practicing Muslims when it came to performing prayers, drinking alcohol, or visiting prostitutes then they at least showed somewhat more observance towards the fasting month of Ramadan. Fernando Fernández de Córdoba, a famous radio announcer for the Nationalists during the war, related how one evening in 1936 near Valdemoro (south of Madrid) the ‘Moors’ suddenly started to fire continuously in the air creating a tense situation that confused Spanish troops nearby until the head of the Moorish unit resolved it by explaining that Ramadan had begun. These ‘infantile and simple men’, believed, according to Córdoba, that “the first one to fulfil the ritual of firing his rifle will gain a place next to Allah”.¹⁵² Whether the majority of the soldiers fasted during actual combat operations is a question in need of clarification, and it would be hardly surprising if the clerics attached to the Moroccan units gave the soldiers permission to break their fast. One veteran however remembers, while speaking about the respect towards Muslim holy occasions that ‘the commander would stop the *Tabor* and would say tomorrow is Ramadan, who is going to fast and who is going to break the fast? The one who wants to fast goes to the right. Then one who wants to break the fast goes to the left’.¹⁵³ This division might imply that those who would choose to observe the fast might expect different, probably lighter, military tasks, at least when the front was calm.

De Mesa mentions that the combats during the Battle of the Ebro in 1938 in which the 1st Navarrese division under the command of Mohammed Mizzian participated, coincided with Ramadan, and that despite the fighting the commander refrained, along with Spanish and Moroccan members of his staff, from having any food until nightfall, maintaining themselves solely with tea,¹⁵⁴ which is not

¹⁴⁹ Testimony of Karimo ben Abdelkader, Tetuan, 25 September 1996.

¹⁵⁰ Cognac appears in three sources as the alcohol that was sold by these Moroccan ambulant merchants. See: Francisco Cavero y Cavero, *Con la Segunda Bandera en el frente de Aragón. Memorias de un alférez provisional*, 34; Pablo Montagudo Jaén, 1936, *Regulares. Diario en el campo de batalla*, 119, and Francisco Pérez, *Diario de operaciones. (Desde el 10 de Marzo de 1938 al 1º de Abril de 1939)*. Unpublished and finished in Boltaña, 3 December 1941. Source: <http://www.cesobrarbe.com/documentos/diario.pdf>, 13.

¹⁵¹ One interviewee of El Merroun, a reservist of the *Mehal-la* during the Spanish Civil War, who did not fight in Spain, stated that ‘in the *Mehal-la* if they catch you outside the law of Islam [i.e. conducting un-Islamic practices] they [the military authorities] would imprison you. Testimony of Bagdad Al Asri, Tetuan, 29 March 1994, El Merroun archive.

¹⁵² Fernando Fernández de Córdoba, *Memorias de un soldado locutor* (Madrid 1939) 109-110.

¹⁵³ Testimony of Al Bouyekra, Fnideq, 21 April 1996, El Merroun archive.

¹⁵⁴ De Mesa, *Los moros de la Guerra Civil española*, 111.

strictly in compliance with the fasting that mandates abstaining from food and liquids. As for the rank and file it seems that in times and places when and where the troops were recuperating or resting most of the troops either observed the fasting or at least refrained from breaking it out of fear of the judgment of other soldiers.¹⁵⁵ It seems that there was a greater tendency to reprimand those who did not fast, compared to those who did not perform prayers.¹⁵⁶

Even in hospitals the wounded seem to have observed Ramadan. Eysyllt Priscilla Scott-Ellis, a British woman who volunteered her services as a nurse in southern Spain, commented negatively on the fasting of the Moroccan wounded. She stated in her diary of November 1937 while working in an unidentified hospital, that she was ‘beginning to loathe the Moors. They are so tiresome ... it makes me mad to have a lot of filthy, smelly Moors ordering me about ... the trouble is that they are doing their periodic fasting and eat nothing till dinner, so are all very irritable’.¹⁵⁷ It seems then that the majority of the Moroccan soldiers who were fighting in Spain, rather than being the devout Muslims the Nationalists portrayed them to be, were in fact often prone to ‘sinning’, while selectively observing their religion at other times.

Islam and European armies

The position of Islam in European armies was treated with perhaps no less care than it was in the Spanish Army, even by countries not traditionally associated with colonial armies that contained large numbers of Muslim soldiers. The Germans during the First World War employed religion as a tool of propaganda to incite Muslim soldiers in the British and French armies to desert. In prisoner of war camps, they spent much effort and money to show the Muslim prisoners how much Germany sympathised with Islam, building mosques in the camps and attending to their religious needs.¹⁵⁸ German fascination with the idea of attracting Muslims as potentially powerful allies resurged during the Second World War. Himmler was personally fascinated by the Islamic faith, which he believed fostered fearless soldiers, and marvelled at the idea of a Bosnian military division composed of Muslims. The SS sought through the creation of such a division to rally all of Islam’s disciples to their side.¹⁵⁹

But the careful attention to the religious feelings of colonial, and especially Muslim, soldiers is also seen in the British and French armies. For the British the crucial lesson of the Indian Mutiny (1857), triggered by a perceived offence against the religious feelings of both Hindu and Muslim soldiers, was that military discipline could be preserved only if the authorities understood the religious needs of the men. Many experienced officers believed that the first qualification of a leader of native

¹⁵⁵ Testimony of Al Siddiq Al Kumeili, Tetuan, 24 Septembet 1996, El Merroun archive.

¹⁵⁶ See: AGA, Af, 81.1187, letter to the inspector of the Moroccan *Mejasnia*, 1 December, 1937.

¹⁵⁷ Eysyllt Priscilla Scott-Ellis, *The Chances of Death. A Diary of the Spanish Civil War*, ed., Raymond Carr (Norwich 1995) 11.

¹⁵⁸ Andrew T. Jarboe, ‘The Long Road Home. Britain, Germany and the Repatriation of Indian Prisoners of War after the First 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) 140-157, here 145

¹⁵⁹ George Lepre, *Himmler’s Bosnian Division. The Waffen-SS Handschar Division 1943-1945* (Atglen, PA 1997) 17.

troops is that he should be intimately acquainted with and known to his men.¹⁶⁰ British authorities did much to include customary practices in the routine of military life. Religious teachers, blessed the weapons and colours of the regiment. Religious ceremonies were closely integrated with the regimental calendar. During the First World War a fund was set up in Britain to provide articles of religious importance.¹⁶¹

So did the French who were very particular about not offending the religious feelings of their Muslim soldiers, especially the North African ones. The French army policy also focused on North African soldiers as Muslims because of a long tradition in France, predating the colonial experience in the region but also shaped and intensified by it, of viewing the ‘Arab Islam’ of North Africans as inherently fanatical, politicised and impervious to outside influences, particularly the progressive and modernising influences of French colonialism. This in turn shaped and reinforced a tendency to view the Muslim identity of North Africans as the primary, often the only important consideration when formulating colonial and military policies towards them. They were above all, in some ways ‘only’, Muslim.¹⁶² Officials made special efforts to accommodate Muslim religious beliefs within the French Army. Authorities felt especially vulnerable to criticism on these issues, because it was crucial both to maintaining morale and to combating German and Ottoman propaganda. In fact, efforts in the army to accommodate Islam were particularly focused on three key areas: burial rites, the observance of holy days and the provision of clerics, imams, to minister to soldiers’ religious needs while serving in France.¹⁶³ The army also made attempts to facilitate the observance of Muslim holy days. From the opening months of the conflict, the Ministry of War instructed local commanders to give Muslim soldiers some respite from their daily duties on religious holidays and to allow them to pray in common and to celebrate according to their customs, and observe the fast of Ramadan, even given that some French officials noted the lax religious attitude of many Muslim soldiers outside the Muslim holy month, and the inconvenience for commanders to change work and meal schedules for an entire month.¹⁶⁴ Probably not much changed during the Second World War, at least with regard to the sensitive issue of the precise observance of Muslim burials customs,¹⁶⁵ and respect towards Islamic observation of the holy month of Ramadan.¹⁶⁶

While these different European attitudes share much with, and in many cases are a mirror image of the Spanish Nationalist religious policy towards colonial soldiers, that does not mean that the Spanish experience does not have its own unique elements. In comparison to the British, French and

¹⁶⁰ Omissi, *The Sepoy and the Raj. The Indian Army 1860-1940*, 99.

¹⁶¹ *Ibidem*, 100-101.

¹⁶² Richard S. Fogarty, ‘Islam in the French Army during the Great War Between Accommodation and Suspicion’, in: Eric Storm and Ali Al Tuma, eds., *Colonial Soldiers in Europe, 1914-1945. “Aliens in Uniform” in Wartime Societies* (New York 2016) 23-40, here 25.

¹⁶³ *Ibidem*, 25, 26.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibidem*, 27.

¹⁶⁵ See for example ‘note de service-objet: sépulture des militaires inhumés en Corse’, 14 March 1944. SHD, 3 H 2551.

¹⁶⁶ Interview with Idriss Bouchayeb ben Kaddour, Sidi Kassem, 24 May 2012.

German nations, Spain was the country that had most based the establishment of its nationhood on the struggle against Islam, and yet was the nation which had most shared cultural and historical bonds with Islam and Muslim Morocco. Spain's call to Jihad against infidels might have been similar to Germany in the First World War. But Germany was dependent on the Ottoman Sultan as the official bearer of the Jihad banner, while Franco managed to present Nationalist Spain in its own right as the bearer of a holy war banner that included Islam. For the Spaniards who looked to their struggle against the *rojos* through a religious prism, the Moroccan Muslims might have been more natural allies than the North Africans were to the French or the Indian to the British. The practical benefits of respecting the religious feelings of colonial Muslim soldiers were evident for the different European powers and a strong motivator to show such consideration and tolerance. But the Spaniards could claim, or even convince themselves, that they did so out of genuine historical and religious bonds and goals, which one could regard as distinct from the French with acted upon their propagating of universal, egalitarian values, or from the British with their fears of a repeat of the 1857 Indian Mutiny.

Conclusion: To be or not to be a Muslim

Religion was important in the way the Spanish Nationalists viewed, presented and treated their Moroccan troops. In a *Cruzada* against those accused of anti-religion, religiousness was the *raison-d'être* for the presence of these troops in Spain. Faith, i.e. belief in an old organised religion, and respect for old traditions, was the only binding element that could be argued. The Moroccans therefore, in their participation to create a traditional Spain, had to be religious or at least be presented that way. But it was not only a matter of temporary practicality. The image of the religious Moroccan simply fit the standard stereotype the Spanish had of the Moor and that fluctuated between presenting him as a 'fanatic' at times or as 'deeply religious', two terms referring to two sides of the same coin.

Perhaps one of the most prominent propaganda expressions that praised the religious Moroccan was the film, *La canción de Aixa* (the song of Aixa), a Spanish-German co-production, which was released in Spain just after the end of the Civil War.¹⁶⁷ It tells the story of two cousins, Hamed and Abslam, who come from rival families and who vow to end their rivalry, but who both fall in love with the mixed race singer Aixa, which rekindles their rivalry. From their first encounter in the film the contrast between the two cousins could not be greater. Hamed is a westernised man, wears a tuxedo, drives a car and drinks alcohol. The other cousin, Abslam is traditional and conservative, wearing a white turban and a *Regulares* uniform, the latter not being a small detail, as the Nationalist army's policy was to keep the Moroccans (or to encourage them to remain) in their religious place. When they meet by chance at a hotel in Tetuan, Abslam notices Hamed drinking alcohol and when asked about it, Hamed answers 'it is necessary here. One must be modern and forget the prejudices', an answer which Abslam indignantly retorts with: 'And you call prejudices our faith and the laws of our forefathers?' As the film progresses, we learn more about the two. Hamed is disrespectful of his

¹⁶⁷ Directed by Florián Rey. Produced in UFA studios in Berlin, 1939

father, listens to music from 'Paris', is apparently interested in western books and befriends people who smoke and drink, while Abslam is respectful towards his father and the patriarchal order. The film clearly steers the viewer towards sympathy with Abslam and his values rather than the westernised Hamed who clearly is depicted as morally inferior to Abslam. In the end Aixa decides to give her love to the more religious of the cousins, and 'getting the girl' is usually a strong criterion by which film characters are categorised as deserving the viewers' sympathy. But the film also steers the viewer towards the idea that traditional ways are more befitting of Morocco than western values or even western technology (as in the scene where the car of Aixa and her uncle breaks down and has to be towed by horses).

American writer Susan Martin-Márquez also analysed the film and sees in it a symbolic representation of the contrast between the Spanish and the French colonial practices in Morocco: Hamed who listens to Parisian music and therefore is aligned with the French style of colonisation and is eager to reject his own traditions in favour of European culture and technology, while Abslam served in the Spanish army, an institution that has clearly allowed him to maintain his own cultural inheritance.¹⁶⁸ In addition to this contrast, Martin-Márquez sees the film as expressive of Nationalist Spain's new identity, for Morocco in the film not only signifies Morocco but also Spain, a nation set to embark upon a period of autocracy, characterised on the cultural front by the Nationalist regime's rejection of a modernity now deemed foreign and its exaltation of timeworn national traditions.¹⁶⁹ American writer Daniela Flesler seizes upon this understanding to assert that 'in this way, *La canción de Aixa* erases Moroccan/Spanish differences, emphasising their commonality'.¹⁷⁰ Flesler has a good argument here, but at the same time the 'commonality' between Spain and Morocco that the Spanish Nationalist regime was selling its audience was presented as an implied and *common* understanding between the Moroccans and the Spaniards. The understanding is that Morocco should remain Moroccan, Muslim and therefore *different*. It must have been a relief to watch the film for those wary about the cultural hazards of the presence of Moroccan troops in Spain.

The Spanish Nationalist military and state sought to maintain a separate religious space for its Muslim soldiers. The Muslim hospitals and cemeteries, the Muslim diet, the prohibition of Christian proselytising among Muslim troops, etc., were all part of this separate religious space. In some cases it was the Moroccans who sought it, either soldiers or visiting native officials. This was, therefore, a policy that had the approval of both the Spanish and the Moroccan sides and that was initiated from both sides.

The motives for such a policy suggest a question: did the Spanish Nationalist military conduct the policy of creating a separate religious sphere for Muslims out of a genuine respect for the faith of its Muslim soldiers? Or was it because the Muslim North Africans were seen as impervious to

¹⁶⁸ Susan Martin-Márquez, *Disorientations. Spanish Colonialism in Africa and the Performance of Identity* (New Haven 2008) 240.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibidem*, 241.

¹⁷⁰ Flesler, *The Return of the Moor*, 148.

Christianity? Or because of political calculations regarding the stability of the Protectorate, or a mix of all or some of the above factors?

Whether the respect for the faith itself was genuine or not, a concern for the religious feelings of the Moroccan troops is sensed in the many documents and reports that touch on the matter and therefore must be considered real. These documents do not show any cynicism on the part of the Spanish military with regard to the religious feelings of the Moroccan soldiers. Treating their Moroccan soldiers well, also in matters of faith, ensured that the Spanish officers could obtain the best performance from their soldiers. But it was also of political importance, ensuring stability and continuing support in Spanish Morocco by presenting Franco as a protector of the Muslim faith.

Franco was not the only 'protector' of Islam and Muslims of the time. Mussolini had also decided to declare his friendship to Arabs and Muslims, obviously to rival British and French influence in the Mediterranean, and while visiting Libya in the spring of 1937 (the same period when Franco sent his pilgrims to Mecca in cooperation with Italy), he was handed, during a grand ceremony, 'this well tempered Islamic blade', by a Berber colonel who had served in Italy's forces, reminding him that the Muslims of the Mediterranean 'see in you the great Man of State who guides, with a firm hand, our destiny'. The Duce, riding a horse, lifted the Sword of Islam to the cheers of the public. What the Sword of Islam meant was not quite obvious, but it was a great spectacle which secured the necessary headlines.¹⁷¹

The policy of religious tolerance was continued in Morocco after the war. As Albet-Mas puts it, the political and religious tolerance displayed by Spanish administrators in Morocco during Franco's dictatorship was in sharp contrast to contemporaneous behaviour and policy in metropolitan Spain until the late 1950s. In Albet-Mas' opinion the tolerance was real but reflected a perception of necessity rather than choice.¹⁷² It might be a necessity rather than choice with regard to the Protectorate itself, but when it came to the soldiers, the Nationalists, in their general policy (which was not uniformly translated into practice) went a long way to make sure that the Moroccans did not have the choice of being anything other than pious Muslims.

It seems however, that the religious policy was not only a matter of protecting the spiritual space of the Moroccans or pleasing the Moroccan authorities. The rejection of the idea that conversion to Christianity could ever be genuine, and the presentation of the Moroccans to both the Spanish people and to the world as deeply religious and spiritual, and the establishment of a traditional Spain reminiscent of the medieval one meant that the Moroccan soldiers in Spain *had to be* Muslim and *had to be* religious whether they liked it or not.

¹⁷¹ Sebastian O'Kelly, *Amedeo. The True Story of an Italian's War in Abyssinia* (London 2002) 79-84. The comparisons with Franco has its limits of course, as Franco was more personally involved with Morocco than Mussolini with Libya where Mussolini never lived, though both men led a brutal campaign to curb a local insurgency in Morocco and Libya. In both cases the role of protector of Muslims was somewhat dubious. In the case of Franco it was rather Muslim soldiers who protected him and his regime. As for Mussolini, even his Sword of Islam was fake: it was made in Florence.

¹⁷²Albet-Mas, 'Three Gods, Two Shores, One Space', 598.

It is appropriate to close this chapter with a curious story that illustrates the complexities of the religious aspect in the partly Islamicised Spanish military. In the 1950s Mohammed Ben Mizzian, the only Muslim to attain the rank of general in the Spanish army, was appointed Captain General of Galicia, who in his new position had the duty of conducting the yearly traditional honours, in the name of the head of state, towards the apostle Saint James of Compostela, known as Santiago Matamoros (Santiago the killer of the Moors). It is said that to avoid an embarrassing situation, flowers or a blanket were used to cover the parts which showed the holy apostle crushing the Moors, so as not to offend the general.¹⁷³ There is a similar story, recounted by Federico García Sanchiz in 1941, whereby the crushing of the Moors is covered with branches as a courtesy to the *Regulares* who were garrisoning Compostela. One of the *Regulares*, according to Sanchiz, protested: ‘No, do not cover.... That Moor is a red Moor.....’.¹⁷⁴ Such were the ironies of the holy war.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷³ Madariaga, *Los moros que trajo Franco*, 276.

¹⁷⁴ Federico García Sanchiz, ‘Soliloquio’, *Ejército*, nr. 14 (1941) 54-65, here 63.

¹⁷⁵ Nerín gives two examples of tensions between Catholicism and Islam in Morocco. The first one is Nador, where in 1921 Riffian rebels attacked the church there and destroyed its images. The second is the Barcelona quarter of Gracia where ‘it is told’ that in 1939 the Moroccan forces were billeted in the cavalry barracks in Lepanto street. The barracks was dominated by a statue of Saint James decapitating a Muslim. ‘It appears’, Nerín continues, ‘that the statue suffered the same fate as the saints of Nador’. Nerín, *La guerra que vino de África*, 178. No reference is given for this story, but while it is possible that Moroccans were offended by the statue, it is highly unlikely that they would have destroyed it, especially since they were quartered there. It would have been more likely that they would have destroyed it while in transit so that it would have been more difficult to identify the perpetrators. More plausible is that it suffered damage during combat, or at the hands of the Republicans, in which case it would not have been the first time.