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

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Theses

Pertaining to the PhD Thesis

Guns, Culture and Moors

Racial Stereotypes and the Cultural Impact of the Moroccan Participation in the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939)

By: Ali Al Tuma

1- The tactical employment of Moroccan troops during the Civil War was largely determined by the stereotypes the Spaniards had about the supposedly unique physical and cultural characteristics of the Moroccans. Chief among them were the perceived fatalistic nature of Islam, the strong eyesight of the Moroccans and their natural skills in adapting to the terrain. Their reputation as bloodthirsty and merciless was as useful in the battlefield as were their training and weapons.

2- The official policy of the Spanish Nationalists with regard to the Moroccan troops in Spain was to isolate them as much as possible from their Spanish cultural surroundings. Nevertheless, and in spite of a special emphasis in policy meant to prevent mixed sexual relationships, the daily realities, defiance of the rules by Moroccans and Spaniards, and the reluctance of some Spanish commanders to enforce such policies meant that they were not uniformly applied.

3- Despite the Catholic and even Crusading nature of the Nationalist regime, it insisted on respecting the religious sensitivities of the Moroccan soldiers and on protecting them from undue influence by the Catholic Church. The religious policy went so far as to identify Moroccan soldiers as more devout than most of them were or wanted to be.

4- The majority of the Moroccan soldiers, as well as the Moroccan authorities, favoured a separate Moroccan (Muslim) cultural space and actively participated in creating it.

5- The recent studies of the role of colonial soldiers who served in European armies have proved essential for a balanced discussion of some of the conceptions that have dominated European literature about these soldiers. As a result of that it has emerged that the colonial soldiers were more in control of their destiny than was previously thought.

6- The scale of the crimes attributed to colonial soldiers serving in Europe has been exaggerated, and sometimes accounts of these alleged crimes have even been fabricated.

7- European policies towards colonial (coloured) soldiers serving in Europe resulted from a combination of the partial application of racial policies, dominant in the colonies and protectorates, and *ad hoc* measures taken in Europe in the face of unexpected circumstances.

8- A common characteristic of the majority of colonial (coloured) soldiers in European armies was their loyalty to their armies during the European conflicts they were engaged in, even among those soldiers who became prisoners of war. Concerns about their families, and their own future after the end of a conflict, might have played a major role in these displays of loyalty. However, a great deal of this apparent loyalty can be attributed to the generally good rapport between the colonial soldiers and their European officers, as well as the policies of European governments and armies that sought, with varying success, not to offend the sensitivities of the colonial soldiers or the native population in the colonies or protectorates.

9- Ideas about the influence of culture on military efficiency still have a large following among Western military thinkers and practitioners. Characteristics such as: spirit of initiative, honesty in communication, capitalistic entrepreneurship and a democratic culture, are largely claimed as Western attributes and seen as lacking in non-Western societies, influencing the quality of non-Western (particularly Arab) military leadership.

10- Knowledge of the historical experience of European colonial armies could be beneficial today and in the near future, especially in the context of long-term European military training missions in African and Asian (particularly Muslim) countries. It can even be argued that, in the long term, the growth of Muslim communities in the West itself and the growth of Muslims serving in European armies could lead to the formation of Muslim majority units. The European colonial experience could, in such a case, provide useful insights.