Moros y Cristianos: Religious Aspects of the Participation of Moroccan Soldiers in the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939)¹

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Introduction

The Spanish Civil War, in which around 80,000 Moroccan Muslims fought, was not, initially, 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 that the military coup first received its designation as a holy war, 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.² In this chapter I discuss the religious aspects of the Moroccan participation in the Spanish Civil War. I examine the idea of a religious alliance between Moroccan Muslims and Spanish Christians against a supposedly atheist enemy from the point of view of Spanish Nationalist propaganda, but also from the point of view of the Moroccan soldiers. I also demonstrate that the Spanish Nationalists portrayed the Moroccans in their Moroccan protectorate as devout Muslims. This portrayal influenced the propaganda the Nationalists used to win the loyalty of the people in Spanish Morocco. With regard to the Moroccan soldiers, many aspects of their daily life was deferred to the notion of the religious Moroccan. The Spanish Nationalist military endeavored to create a separate Muslim religious sphere for the Moroccan soldiers. In this chapter I show that the Nationalist authorities not only wanted to respect the Islamic religion of their troops but also expected the

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- 1 The phrase 'Moros y Cristianos' translates to Moors and Christians. It refers to the battles between the medieval Moors and the Christians in Spain during the age of the Reconquest, and to the festivals in Spain that commemorate and re-enact these battles.
 - 2 Stanley G. Payne, *The Franco Regime 1936–1975* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987), 197nn. Initially, as Payne states, religious concern did not play an overt role in the rebellion of July 1936, rather it was its counter-revolutionary character that made Catholics natural allies from the start.

Moroccan soldiers to adhere to the idealized image of devout Muslims, even when some of these soldiers had no desire to comply with that idealized image.

Soon after the outbreak of the Civil War, strange scenes started to emerge: the archbishop of Toledo returned to his archiepiscopal see escorted by Moroccan Muslim troops, a priest accompanied Moroccans into battle, pro-Nationalist crowds cheered and pinned crosses and scapularies on the chests of African soldiers, and many similar scenes.³ In Ceuta, the Nationalists authorized the building of a new mosque in which stones from the battlefields of the Alcazar of Toledo, Oviedo, and Teruel were integrated as “official recognition” of the existence of Islam in Spain and as “proof” of the meaning of these “martyred cities” for Muslims.⁴

As a matter of fact the Spanish Republicans inadvertently helped the Nationalist 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.⁵ In August 1936 the Nationalist newspaper *Diario Marroquí* highlighted an air raid that supposedly targeted the Mezquita of Cordoba, “the historical monument of Arab civilization.”⁶

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 and presented the Moroccans as primarily oriented and driven by religion and religious biases. The Moroccans were first and foremost Muslims. It was clear that they were perceived as extremely religious by those who held a negative, hostile view and by those with a benign or

3 Hugh Thomas, *The Spanish Civil War* (New York: Modern Library, 2011), 400; Claud Cockburn, *Cockburn in Spain: Despatches from the Spanish Civil War* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1986), 161; Ronald Frasier, *Blood of Spain: An Oral History of the Spanish Civil War* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1979), 155.

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

5 Balfour, *Deadly Embrace: Morocco and the Road to the Spanish Civil War* (Oxford: Oxford university press, 2002), 273, 281; Shannon E. Fleming, “Spanish Morocco and the Alzamiento Nacional, 1936–1939: The Military, Economic and Political Mobilization of a Protectorate,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 18, no. 1 (January 1983), 36, 37. The target of the bombing in Tetuan was perhaps the building of the High Commissariat which lies not far from the medina.

6 “Los aviones rojos bombardean la Mezquita de Córdoba,” *Diario Marroquí*, 19 August 1936. The famous mosque-turned-cathedral was not hit.

paternalistic view of Islam and Moroccans. 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.”⁷ García Figueras (1892–1981), 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 applied not only to Moroccans but to the rest of the “Muslim people.” 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 defense of the “faith and spirituality.”⁸ Regardless of propaganda, Franco seemed to truly believe that the alternative to 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.”⁹

Of course 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, an important journalist and radio speaker for the Nationalists during the Civil War, observed in the early years of the protectorate that Moroccan religiousness was rather practical in nature and religious observance was ultimately subordinated to profit.¹⁰ Once one from the Rif does not perceive a threat to his faith, he would be guided by his innate desire for profit and would associate himself with the actions of the protectorate.¹¹ But for the Moroccan, that security in faith must first be guaranteed by the Spanish, and a part of that involved communication. The Spanish considered it essential to attach the greatest importance to religious matters when communicating with the Moroccans of their protectorate or when buying their support. One remarkable example from the Republican side

7 Jose Llordes Badía, *Al dejar el fusil: Memorias de un soldado raso en la guerra de España* (Barcelona: Ariel, 1969), 60.

8 The text was published in the Moroccan newspaper *al-Ḥurriyya*, 16 February 1939.

9 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, no. 4 (2006), 593.

10 Filipe Ribeiro de Menezes, “Popularizing Africanism: The Career of Víctor Ruiz Albéniz, El Tebib Arrumi,” *Journal of Iberian and Latin American Studies* 11, no. 1 (April 2005), 40.

11 *Ibid.*, 42.

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,” we can see that in the Arabic text the word “infidel” is added to “traitor,” though the paper omitted this from the translation.¹² Perhaps the Republican paper’s lack of accuracy in translation stemmed from its unwillingness to portray the conflict in religious terms. But this example shows that even when the Moroccan soldier wanted, or in this case, probably felt forced to attack the Francoists he could only do so in terms of religion: believers and infidels. It comes then as no surprise that early in the war Franco paid a great deal of attention to his famous sponsorship of the pilgrimage 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 (the seat of the Spanish administration in Morocco) requested that Franco assign a ship for the Spanish Moroccan pilgrims to sail to Mecca; Franco agreed on the same day and ordered the navy to make the necessary preparations.¹³ 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.¹⁴ 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.” The Nationalists’ air force and navy protected the pilgrimage part of the way until the Italians took over.¹⁵ Nationalist Spain appointed a

12 María Rosa Madariaga, *Los moros que trajo Franco: La intervención de tropas coloniales en la guerra civil española* (Barcelona: Ediciones Martínez Roca, 2002), 323–324.

13 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.

14 This according to his British mistress Rosalinda Powell Fox in her memoirs: *The Grass and the Asphalt* (Puerto Sotogrande: J.S. Harter and Associates, 1997), 130.

15 See the account by Abdel Krim Kerrisch, a Dutch protégé who accompanied the Spanish-Moroccan pilgrims to Arabia; the account can be found in the Dutch national archives: Nationaal Archief, Gezantschap Marokko, 2.05.119, inv.nr. 36. Missive nr.: 821/103. According to this witness, the Spanish warships escorted the pilgrims to Tripoli. According to a Spanish document, the plan was to provide protection, which would be “indispensable until” the

consular agent for Jeddah and Mecca. The choice for this position fell on a Muslim officer of the Regulares (though of Spanish nationality).¹⁶ Franco also prepared an audience for the pilgrims in Seville upon their return in March. This gesture was not an easy matter, given the fact that much of the Spanish navy had fallen into the hands of the Republicans at the start of the Civil War, and Franco could not easily 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.”¹⁷

The Francoist pilgrimage not only helped Franco’s message that he was a friend of Islam, it shined in comparison with the transport the French provided for the Algerian pilgrims, and strengthened Franco’s credentials even more.¹⁸ One of the fruits of this propaganda was evident in the words of the Khalifa in Tetuan, who described Franco as the “protector of Islam.”¹⁹ Next to its political benefits in Spanish Morocco itself, the pilgrimages must have left an impression on the soldiers fighting in Spain too. 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 for a long time.²⁰ For some he remains to this day a good man partly because “he had the character of Muslims.”²¹

Oran meridian, from where the Italians could take over. AGAMV, A.1, L.59, Cp. 87. Note by Generalissimo HQ on 25 January 1937.

- 16 AGAMV, A.1, L.59, Cp. 87. Note by Generalissimo HQ on 25 January 1937. Regulares is short for Regulares Indígenas, which refers to military units composed of native Moroccan soldiers and a corps of officers who were largely Spanish. The forces were founded in 1911 to help combat Moroccan rebels; they became part of the Spanish army and therefore had, officially, a different status, compared to the Mehal-la units that belonged to the Moroccan government, but were also largely commanded by Spanish officers. They were called “Regulares” because they were full-time soldiers who conducted regular army missions, and this also distinguished them from the irregular auxiliary groups of natives who helped the Spanish army.
- 17 Powell Fox, *The Grass and the Asphalt*, 130.
- 18 See the account by Abdel Krim Kerrisch in the Dutch national archives.
- 19 AGAMV, A.1, L.59, Cp. 87. Cable by the office of the High Commissariat.
- 20 Mohamed Choukri mentions, in his internationally acclaimed autobiographical novel *al-Khubz al-hāfi* (known in English as ‘For bread alone’), those who were disabled in 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-hāfi* (Casablanca: Le Fennec, 2010), 28. I even heard this “Hajj Franco” reference in Tetuan in early 2011.
- 21 Interview with Abdessalam Mohammed Amrani, a veteran of the Spanish Civil War, Ceuta, June 2011.

A Religious Alliance?

In the struggle to save Catholic, spiritual, and traditionalist Spain, the Moor who was the old enemy of these three had become the ally of the regenerated traditional country. It certainly was not a self-evident development and it was sometimes an uncomfortable one and it required some justification for at least a part of the masses that the Nationalists appealed to. 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."²² 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 symbolized the birth of the first successful Christian resistance to the medieval Muslims and the start of the Reconquista.²³ In one anecdote, the Spanish priest and Arabist Miguel Asín Palacios related that in one hospital a print of the Virgin was going to be removed so as not to hurt the feelings of the wounded Moroccans, and a Moroccan protested against the removal, stating "the Virgin is good for everyone."²⁴ The priest used this anecdote to demonstrate how much these Moroccans had in common with the supposedly true Spanish.

In 1940 Miguel Asín Palacios published a paper called "Why did the Muslim Moroccans fight on our side?" In one of the most eloquent of the Nationalists' rationalizations 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

22 From an article entitled "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 Archivo Histórico Municipal de Cadiz (AHMC), Varela, doc. 15/22.

23 "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.

24 Miguel Asín Palacios, "Porqué lucharon a nuestro lado los musulmanes marroquíes," in *Obras escogidas II y III de historia y filología árabe*, ed. Miguel Asín Palacios (Madrid: Viuda de Estanislao Maestre, 1948), 136. He published this text first in 1940 in the *Boletín de la Universidad Central* in Madrid.

dogmas which we follow and which atheist Marxism repudiates and persecutes.²⁵

To illustrate that this was not a figment of his imagination, he referred to a Moroccan soldier who allegedly used a hand-grenade to intimidate 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!].²⁶

One wonders whether the position that Palacios took was representative of the Spanish Catholic clergy, even in the 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 renders their statements less than ideal and somewhat unreliable, but it is interesting because it shows the Republicans asking 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 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.”²⁷ As a prisoner, the priest might naturally have given his interrogator the answer he wanted, 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 Bishop Polanco who was also captured 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 the Christian order of things, the bishop answered in the affirmative. He stated that, in his opinion, history has witnessed many occasions in which people from different religions form alliances to fight an enemy, alliances that were

25 Asín Palacios, “Porque lucharon,” 148–149.

26 Ibid., 145. By “Right” he meant of course the Nationalist camp that was usually referred to as “people of the Right” as opposed to the Republican Left.

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

based on a “perspective that had nothing to do with religion.”²⁸ Asín Palacios’s grand depiction of Muslim-Christian brotherhood may have been a minority voice among the Spanish clergy after all, even if it was offered in the cause of propaganda. Perhaps his sympathies with the Moors derived more from his background as an Arabist than as a priest.

The positive image of the Moroccan soldiers as devout allies in a common struggle is at odds with the extremely negative view that most of the Spanish, including many in the military, had of the Moroccans a couple of decades earlier. Centuries of embedding the image of the Moor as a traditional enemy were strengthened by the military engagements of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in Morocco, especially during the colonial war (1920–1926) against the Rif rebels of Muḥammad b. ‘Abd al-Karīm al-Khaṭṭābī, when Spain suffered one the most humiliating colonial defeats in the battle of Annual in 1921. Racist attitudes towards the Moroccans were prevalent among the vengeful officials, soldiers, Spanish politicians, and the press, who described the Moroccans as uncivilized, xenophobic, fanatical, brutal, degenerate, and deceitful. Some even called for their complete extermination. But at the same time there were some who felt an attraction to Moroccan culture and recognized a shared history between Morocco and Spain and even saw the Moroccans as younger brothers. In fact, many Spaniards displayed contradictory responses towards Morocco and the Moroccans, and the course of the brutal colonial war in Morocco, which ultimately ended with a Spanish victory, had its effect on the development of the image of the Moroccans in the eyes of the Spanish.²⁹

In any case, the Moor, the fanatic foe of the recent Rif wars, was rehabilitated in Nationalist Spain by the Nationalist state, by its leading military figures, and its propaganda machinery, which included press, the film industry, and poetry.³⁰ This rehabilitation was perhaps not difficult to accomplish. It required a simple 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 spiritual. The Nationalists forbade foreign journalists—and we must presume Spanish ones too—from describing the Moroccans in any way except as devoted God-fearing soldiers.³¹

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

29 Balfour, *Deadly Embrace*, 193–200.

30 On the aspects of this rehabilitation, see Madariaga, *Los moros que trajo Franco*, 345–364.

31 Judith Keen, *Fighting for Franco: International Volunteers in Nationalist Spain during the Spanish Civil War, 1936–1939* (London: Leicester University Press, 2001), 69.

The view of the Moroccan soldiers as religiously devout and controlled by religious prejudices, which was in turn derived from the same view the Spanish had of the Moroccan society that they ruled, was behind both the explanations the Nationalists gave to the outside world with regard to the motivations of the Moroccan soldiers for fighting in Spain and the policies of the Nationalists with regard to the actions of the Moroccan soldiers in their Spanish environment, especially those 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. In fact, this sometimes mixed with wishful thinking, and it is here that we try to 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 promoted this idea, the Moroccans were not far behind in their support of it. The native urban political elite helped the religious interpretation for the enlistment of the Moroccans to fight in Spain as well. The day after the official end of the Civil War, *al-Ḥurriyya*, the daily of the Spanish Morocco-based Nationalist Reforming Party, 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.”³² Either this merely and blindly followed the Spanish Nationalist line or the paper could not accept the stigma that comes with the notion of the mercenary, or both.³³

32 *al-Ḥurriyya* (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.”

33 I am inclined to believe the second interpretation, because *al-Ḥurriyya*, both during and after the war, was not devoid of articles criticizing aspects of the Spanish Nationalist administration, nor of warning Spain against the consequences, should it fail in the fulfillment of its promises towards the Moroccans after the war. The newspaper of the other and rival Moroccan nationalist party, *al-Waḥda al-Maghribiyya* (Unidad Marroquí; Moroccan Unity), also claimed that the Moroccans did not fight for money, for “feelings can not 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

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.³⁴

The Nationalists went to great lengths to portray the enlistment of their Moroccan troops as ideologically motivated, but historians have found this interpretation difficult to defend. Maria Rosa 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 were any higher ideological causes behind the participation of the Moorish troops in the Civil War. For them, and perhaps the majority of those studying the Spanish Civil War, the issue was quite simple.

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 of Moorish recruits to enlist in the Spanish Nationalist army. According to El Merroun, Franco's rhetoric about Communism and its destruction of Christianity and Islam 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."³⁵ Indeed religion was an important aspect in pulling the Moroccans towards the Nationalist Spaniards.³⁶

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 in an angry tone the historians who did not trouble themselves with the real reasons for the Moroccan participation in the war. According to him, the real reasons 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."³⁷

cite 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).

34 One Canadian volunteer in the International Brigades, Jules Paivio, remembered decades later the "Moors" who believed "it's an honor 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).

35 Mustapha El Merroun, *Las tropas marroquíes en la Guerra Civil española* (Madrid: Almena ediciones, 2003), 40.

36 El Merroun, *Las tropas marroquíes*, 224.

37 Mohammed Ibn Azzuz Hakim, *La actitud de los moros ante el alzamiento: Marruecos 1936* (Malaga: Algazara, 1997), 45. The historian José Luis de Mesa does not explicitly endorse a

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 as unfair the view that the "Moors" died or became handicapped for a cause that was not theirs, and were only attracted by money and as simple mercenaries.³⁸ It appears that both historians base these opinions mainly on the discourse of the Spanish Nationalists and the Moroccan nationalists and collaborating elite. El Merroun and Ibn Azzuz Hakim are 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 about whom the debate of religious motives revolves, is the voice least heard. The historians of the 1990s and early 2000s 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 arguments in favor of or against this religious aspect of the conflict. Of course it is not an easy matter for historians now. There are only a few indications and examples to help us understand the views of the Moroccan soldiers with regard to the religious nature of their struggles 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 military controller (*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 "*mujāhidīn*," to lead the prayers for their souls or even to attend the funerals. Adding insult to injury, he stated that "everyone who died in the lands of Spain was an infidel and a half."³⁹ The complaint denounced this man and called him "red." This document is notable for its use of the terms "jihad" and "*mujāhidīn*" to describe

view on the issue of possible ideological motivations for Moroccan troops fighting for Franco, but the way he presents historical opinions and citations leads one to believe that he agreed with the views of Ibn Azzuz Hakim. Mesa quotes a Moroccan, who was apparently a young friend, 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." See José Luis de Mesa, *Los moros de la guerra civil española* (Madrid: Actas, 2004), 124.

38 Hakim, *La actitud de los moros*, 45.

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

the war in Spain and its Moroccan participants, but also for its labeling those who disputed the religious legitimacy of fighting in Spain as “red.”

The term “jihad” also appears in the recruitment calls that circulated in Spanish Morocco. One important source is the personal archive of Mustapha El Merroun, which includes scores of interviews with Moroccan veterans.⁴⁰ One of these Moroccan veterans described the recruitment by stating that the *qā’ids* (tribal chiefs) shouted “O servants of God! Those who wish to perform the Jihad, the Jihad has now returned.”⁴¹ On the battlefield itself, the attacking waves of the Moroccans started with cries exalting God or the Prophet Muḥammad. Ruiz Albéniz, the Nationalist propagandist, cites one such cry “Jandulilah! La [Ilaha] illa Allah, Sidi Mohamed Rasul Allah...” [Mobilize for Allah, there is no god but Allah].⁴² According to Sanchez Ruano,⁴³ the Moroccans entered the battle crying “Allah Akbar.” A more typical charging battle cry commenced with praise of the prophet: “O lovers of the prophet, pray on him,” only to end with “heaven is for the patient, and hell is for the infidels.”⁴⁴ Do such religiously inspired battle cries necessarily mean that the soldiers, or the majority of them, believed at the time that they were fighting for a religiously sanctioned cause? Or do they merely reflect the cultural background of the Moroccans, for whom it would have been inconceivable to have come up with any other sort of verbal encouragement? Or is this simply a confirmation of the view 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 religion played a role in how the Moroccan volunteers viewed or justified their part in the war.

Regardless of whether or not the Moroccan soldiers actually went to war motivated by the moral message that this was a holy war, it seems that many, if not the majority, deemed their Republican opponents on the wrong side with regard to godly matters. We see this in the way the veterans describe the

40 During the 1990s El Merroun conducted interviews with Moroccan veterans of the Spanish Civil War. He kindly offered me special access to these transcripts. I refer to this personal archive as El Merroun papers.

41 Clerics also called 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 El Sebtaoui, El Merroun papers.

42 Víctor Ruiz Albéniz, *Las crónicas de El Tebib Arrumi, Tomo II, Campañas del Jarama y el Tajuña* (Valladolid: Librería Santarén, 1938), 35. The author might have misheard the cry, which is perhaps why he missed the “Ilaha” which means “god.”

43 Francisco Sánchez Ruano, *Islam y Guerra Civil Española, Moros con Franco y con la República* (Madrid: La esfera de los libros, 2004), 233.

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

Republican *rojos* or reds. According to one Moroccan, “the *rojos* killed the monks and destroyed the churches so they believed only in the hammer and sickle.”⁴⁵ A similar definition of a *rojo* was “the enemy of Spain or the criminal who abandoned his religion.”⁴⁶ 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.”⁴⁷ It followed that if a Moroccan defected to the reds “he would die as an infidel.”⁴⁸ 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.”⁴⁹ So for the majority of Moroccan soldiers, the Nationalist propaganda about a holy war succeeded, at least in convincing Franco’s Muslim soldiers that if they were not on the right side of the conflict, at least they did not stand on the wrong side.

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 religious beings first and foremost, it was natural that the Nationalists took great care not to offend the religious feelings of their Muslim soldiers. Sometimes this happened at the request of the Moroccan soldiers themselves, other times at the request of higher Moroccan authorities, and at times even when this care was not asked for. This attention to policies manifested itself in many aspects of the daily lives of the Moroccan soldiers, for example, on Muslim religious festivities Moorish detainees (troops incarcerated for different offenses) were released as a sign of respect for the religious feelings of the Moorish troops;⁵⁰ this was a clear assertion of the pro-Islamic stance of the Francoist government. Other aspects such as correspondence paper, graveyards, diet, conversions, and especially life in hospitals display the great lengths the Nationalists went to create a religious space in which, the Nationalists believed, their Muslim soldiers wanted to remain.

45 Testimony of Abdel Kader Amezian. El Merroun papers. “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.

46 Testimony of El Bubakra. El Merroun papers.

47 Testimony of El Ayyashi. El Merroun papers.

48 Testimony of Messoud, a corporal. El Merroun papers.

49 Sánchez Ruano, *Islam y Guerra Civil*, 233.

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

One 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 Moroccans and that of the Spanish was manifested in the issue of letters the soldiers sent home 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 the concern of the political section that many Muslim soldiers were sending letters to their families on a kind of stationery with Christian religious symbols printed on it.⁵¹ To correct the mistake, considerable effort and time was invested in the arduous task of copying the letters on a different type of paper. There were already requests (going back as far as October 1937) to closely monitor the type of paper used by the Muslim soldiers.⁵² The February 1938 complaint suggested measures that involved the coercion of 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 contribute to the rumors of Christian missionary activities among the Muslim troops.⁵³ 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.

Graves formed another aspect of the religious policy that must have been of more emotional importance to the Moroccan soldiers than the letters were. We can say with certainty that no Moroccan soldier (or at least almost none) who died during the Spanish Civil War was returned to Morocco for burial. They were all buried in Spain, as were almost all those of foreign nationality who participated in the war in great numbers.⁵⁴ In many cases and 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, sometimes collectively. In some cases the dead were buried with the Christians, especially in the beginning.⁵⁵ Whether by their own initiative or in response to the 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,

51 AGA, Af, 81.1122, Cp. 4.

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

53 AGA, Af, 81.122, Cp. 4.

54 For example, 4,175 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," *Journal of Military History* 59, no. 4 (October 1995), 713.

55 Testimonies of veterans of the Spanish Civil War: El Zeru'ali, Hamido el Mi'dani, Mohammed Emhawesh, and Krimo ben Abdel Kader. El Merroun papers.

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.”⁵⁶

When burial in a proper cemetery proved possible, it seems that the Nationalist army tried to provide for separate Muslim cemeteries fairly early in the war. In October 1936, the chief staff of 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 Talavera de la Reina to be buried in the “Moorish cemetery” there.⁵⁷ There were also those who died later in hospitals as a result of their wounds. As these Moroccan soldiers were usually treated in so called “Muslim” hospitals, the Nationalist military authorities required the hospitals to take careful measures when burying the dead Muslim troops, so that even if they were to be buried in a Catholic cemetery, the deceased Muslims should have their own separate section within the cemetery and, if possible, a separate entrance point.⁵⁸

It is not clear whether the idea for separate Muslim cemeteries first came from the Spanish Nationalist army or from Moroccan officials. In March 1937 a Moroccan minister from the Spanish zone of Morocco visited Spain and suggested that Muslim hospitals dedicate a place for burying the Muslim dead;⁵⁹ this suggestion was welcomed by the Nationalist authorities and included in subsequent instructions for military hospitals. But as we have seen there was already a Moorish cemetery in Talavera in 1936. The use of some of the cemeteries for Muslim soldiers was re-continued, decades later, by the (migrant) Muslim communities of Spain (e.g. Granada. See Figure 7.1).

The efforts to provide for separate burial space for Moroccan soldiers continued after the war. In 1940 the Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs requested (at the request of the Moroccan authorities) that efforts be undertaken to determine the burial places of many Moroccan soldiers with the goal of separating the Muslim dead from the Christians.⁶⁰ It seems that no one managed to find the burial places of all the Muslim dead, and many are unidentified to this day.⁶¹

56 Testimony of El Sebtai. El Merroun Papers.

57 AHMC, Varela, 14/389.

58 Directorate of Moroccan Affairs in Spain, January 1938. AGA, Af, 81.1122, L.2958, Cpt.3.

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

60 AGA, Af, 81/1114. Leg, 3747/2, Cementerios.

61 The request by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs resulted in some findings. Among the regions that answered the request were Toledo in which 614 dead Moroccans were identified plus an undetermined number in Seseña and Puente del Arzobispo; Barcelona with 28 plus two questionable cases; and Guadalajara where 43 were buried. According to some of these responses, in a few cases the dead were shot by firing squads.

Conversions

If writing letters on paper with Christian symbols caused enormous irritation with the bureaus of native affairs and the Spanish military, then the conversions of Moroccan soldiers raised great alarm. Such proselytizing activities apparently happened only in hospitals, as these were the places where priests might have enough time to engage in the process. The military authorities were never happy with Spanish religious personnel roaming around inside hospitals where wounded Moroccan soldiers were treated. It was probably in November 1936 when a report by the army inspector brought to the attention of Franco for the first time the disturbing effects of the efforts of the “señoritas” and priests to convert the injured Moroccans to Catholicism.⁶² Immediately, Franco instructed military hospitals to “respect the religious creeds of the natives.”⁶³

It appears, however, that missionary zeal still persisted in some places. In November 1938 the Inspector of Moroccan Affairs suggested more active observation of non-hospitalized people entering hospitals, and advised that some sort of tough talk should be undertaken with religious authorities.⁶⁴ Copies of a telegram by Franco forbidding the conversions of Moroccans were supposedly hung in some hospitals “in big letters.”⁶⁵ The generalissimo himself personally demonstrated his will and dissipated 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 wounded Moorish soldiers were being taken care of, he looked around and noticed a couple of crosses hanging on the walls of the ward. He obviously did not like that and ordered them to be removed immediately.⁶⁶ 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 Directorate of Moroccan Affairs in Spain reported such a case. The directorate reported on the conversion of a Moorish soldier named Bin Kiran. This case was especially difficult because the conversion happened under the auspices of General Moscardó, the famous protagonist of the siege of the Alcázar of Toledo. Still, the report instructed

62 AGMAV, A.I, L.59, Cp. 86. Report on 19 November 1936.

63 AGMAV, A.I, L.59, Cp. 86. Cable by the army of the north on 27 November 1936. It reported that the instructions of Franco, on 24 November, were communicated to the hospitals of that army.

64 AGA, Af, 81.1113, Cp 3.

65 AGA, Af, 81.1150.

66 Antonio Corral Castanedo, *Esta es la casa donde vivo y muero* (Valladolid: Ateneo de Valladolid, 1992), 236.

directors of military hospitals to warn charity sisters as well as nurses of the damage their proselytizing activities would cause to the National Movement. The damages would include reversing years of work done in the Protectorate, and besides all this, the Directorate of Moroccan Affairs believed the conversions were “almost always fake.”⁶⁷ It is difficult to ascertain the real motives of those who converted since there are no testimonies of Moroccan veterans who had converted. These religious transformations were still an issue even after the war, when a couple of conversions were recorded, like one in Cordoba. In March 1941 the Bureau of Moroccan Affairs commented on the case of Mohammed El Uariachi, who was expelled from Spain after the war; he returned and managed to stay by being baptized and marrying a Spanish woman. The bureau commented that the majority of such cases revolved around “opportunistic people.” It is safe to say, however, given the relatively few cases mentioned, that those conversions were certainly not significant enough to have an impact in Spanish Morocco or on the army fighting in Spain.

Hospitals

The one place where Muslims and Christians interacted most was in military hospitals. There, Moroccan soldiers fell in love with Spanish women, priests tried to win new souls for Christianity, complaints on religious matters were made, and compromises were reached. A military hospital was almost the only place for Moroccan soldiers to get to know Spanish society, or at least its Nationalist version.

If the testimonies of the surviving Moroccan veterans are any indication, then a very large segment of the Moroccan combatants in Spain stayed for short or long periods in the Spanish military hospitals. There is scarcely a soldier who was not wounded in battle and sent to recuperate in the military hospitals of Spain. But within months of the start of the war, wounded Moroccans were hospitalized in separate spaces, usually separate wards in the same hospitals. Gradually, the Nationalists founded separate Muslim hospitals all around Spain, to accommodate the presence of Moroccan units in all theaters of operation.⁶⁸ Late in the war, the Muslim hospital in Zaragoza grew to be the

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

68 In the spring of 1937 hospitals of significant size for the Moroccans were located in Zaragoza, Burgos, Valladolid, Caceres, Coruña, Almendralejo, Zafra, Cordoba, Sevilla, Jerez de la Frontera, Cadiz, Huelva, Medina del Campo, Plasencia, Villablanca, Ronda, and Puerto de Santa Maria, among others. At the time beds per hospital varied between 225

most prominent one. In such hospitals on the peninsula, care was taken to provide Muslim a diet for the wounded,⁶⁹ and to distribute the tables for prayers times.⁷⁰ For the entertainment of the inmates there were Moorish cafs. Even storytellers were sent to the hospitals to “mitigate the torment of these wounds.”⁷¹

As the presence of Muslim hospitals in Spain had no precedent in recent times, and certainly not on such a large scale, some problems and complaints arose at the beginning because of the lack of an established organization to provide for Islamic dietary needs, of organized religious personnel, of 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 proselytizing 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.⁷² Such complaints led to individual efforts to correct the situation and, in 1937, the Moroccan authorities and the Spanish Nationalists organized their efforts to adapt the hospitals to make them a more Islamic environment and ensure that the stay of the wounded was 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 separately from the Mehal-las. The vizier also suggested a Moorish staff consisting of, first, a *faqih* (cleric) who would be charged with the duties of the Imam, butcher, notary, and undertaker; second, a *raqqs* whose duties were to carry letters and money to the soldiers’ families in Morocco; and third, an interpreter. Among other suggestions, like the establishment of ablution and prayer halls and a burial place, Ben Ali suggested that each town with a Muslim hospital establish an “Arab caf” for the Muslim wounded. In that case, he continued, the Muslim

and 400, with the possibility of an additional 200 beds in Zaragoza and 300 in Medina del Campo. See AGMAV, A.2, L.190, Cp 12/6 and AGAMV, A.2, L.190, Cp 14/1.

69 AGA, Af, 81.1122, Racionado para moros hospitalizados. 31 December 1937.

70 See examples in AGA, Af, M.1685, L.2963.

71 AGA, Af, 81.1180, Proponiendo el envo a Espaa de narradores de cuentos para que recorran los Hospitales para marroques all instalados. 28 December 1937.

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

wounded would be prohibited from entering “foreign cafés so that they would not have forbidden drinks. For that, a special vigilance must be appointed.”⁷³

In the requests of the Moroccan minister we see an attempt to exercise some control on the lives of Moroccan subjects in Spain, by limiting the contact of Moroccan soldiers with the surrounding Spanish environment and preventing its perceived corrupting influence, like drinking alcohol. The High Commissariat had already, in February 1937, preceded the Moroccan minister by issuing instructions on the organization of Moroccan hospitals in Spain. The religious staff was larger than that suggested by the minister. It consisted of an Imam, chief of the religious staff, who also functioned as a notary, a *mudarris* (teacher) to answer religious questions, a *kātib* (writer) to write letters to the soldier’s families, and a *munazif al-mawta* (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 attend to the injured and handle inheritance matters of the deceased, in addition to an interpreter. As for general hospitals with “Moroccan departments” the staff varied according to the number of wounded present.⁷⁴

The general staff in Salamanca was in agreement with much of the minister’s request and especially with regard to the prohibition of Moroccan soldiers 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 natives were present.⁷⁵ In February 1937 Franco had also already referred to “Moorish cafés” which would provide the wounded soldiers with a place that had a “familiar” environment.⁷⁶ It seems that the prohibition of selling alcohol to Muslims did not meet with equal success everywhere. A report, in March 1938, on drunken Moroccan inmates, lamented the absence of such a prohibition in the southern town of Jerez de la Frontera.⁷⁷ In March 1938, Salamanca suffered from the same problem: the local authorities would not prevent sales of alcohol to the Moroccan inmates of the military hospital there and this led to the intervention of Moroccan military police to stop the “scandals of the Moors.”⁷⁸ But hospitals were not allowed to actually forbid

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

74 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.

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

76 AGAMV, A.1, L.35, Cp. 20.

77 AGA, Af, 81/1179, Varios hospitales.

78 AGA, Af, 81.1180, Intervención del norte to Sanchez Pol, 10 March 1938.

ambulatory Moroccan inmates from taking strolls outside the hospital. In a report in March 1937, Moroccan soldiers in a Salamanca hospital complained that they were not allowed out, nor were their visitors allowed in; this led the commander of the army of the north to instruct this hospital not to forbid the inmates from taking walks outside the premises.⁷⁹

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 behavior of the Moroccan religious personnel themselves. Excessive alcohol drinking, continuously shaving their own beards, or failing to lead the prayers were reasons given in a number of complaints about these *fuqahā'* (pl. *faqih*).⁸⁰ Similar complaints about drinking were occasionally also filed against members of the native military police who were attached to military hospitals.⁸¹ These complaints seemed, however, not as grave as failing to perform duties towards the dead, or even flatly refusing to handle these duties because the dead did not deserve them.

When complaints related to religion arose in hospitals the Nationalist authorities strived to investigate and verify. One hospital about which repeated complaints were made was the one 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 (i.e., the same utensils were used for Spanish Christians as for the Moroccan Muslims), the refusal of the director to provide transport for the burial of the dead, the existence of a "bar" inside the hospital, etc.⁸² Upon investigation the complaints were found to have been exaggerated: the religious images were all covered, except one in a hall that the inmates were forbidden from entering; the Europeans cooked and used their utensils in a separate space in the kitchen and plans were made for an independent kitchen; the burial transport problem was a one-time incident that resulted from maintenance problems; and in fact not all the Muslim religious personnel agreed with the content of the complaints. The investigation recognized, however, that the director of the hospital

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

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

81 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, it was fellow policemen who complained about his failure to fast.

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

was not quite amiable.⁸³ 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 does not show complaints, on the Spanish side, about these Moroccans who dared act more like hosts than guests.

Regardless of the occasional complaints and the initial problems, surviving veterans record mostly positive memories of the hospitals; they recall them 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.⁸⁴ "The hospital of Seville was very nice. A delegation of Moroccan *qā'id*s and *bashas* [tribal leaders and high city officials] visited us. So we were given plenty of clothing and food."⁸⁵ The old nurses were remembered affectionately. "The nun there [in the Salamanca hospital] was very nice to me and used to call me son."⁸⁶ Such are the majority of the memories of the stays in the military hospitals. It is possible that the passage of decades have filtered out any memories of discomfort or the occasional irritation, but such consistently 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 home-like environment, or a *little Morocco* for its wounded Moroccan men, though it did not always manage to keep them in there.

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 observant Muslims as opposed to those who did not. As we have seen, some hospitals struggled with the issue of Moroccan convalescents who caused

83 Ibid.

84 Testimony of Abdelsalam ben Hussein. He was a *kātib* (writer/notary) in one such hospital. El Merroun papers.

85 Testimony of Abdel Nabi ben Omari. El Merroun papers. He adds: "Those Bashas and dignitaries walked among our beds and told us to be men and [be] patient and to fight."

86 Interview with Al Hussein ben Abdessalam. Ceuta, January 2011.

“scandals” connected to alcohol drinking. The documentary and oral evidence seem, however, to demonstrate that among the Moroccan soldiers who fought in Spain, those who observed prayers, abstained from drinking alcohol, and fasted were in the minority. “Most of them were not religious” remembers one veteran.⁸⁷ In the whole company of another one, only one member performed the prayers, though they all fasted in Ramadan.⁸⁸ Alcohol was often consumed.⁸⁹

The Moroccan soldiers also engaged in sexual relations with Spanish prostitutes upon their arrival in Spain,⁹⁰ and this sometimes led to brawls with Spanish soldiers.⁹¹ And they were not always welcomed by these prostitutes.⁹² This was, perhaps, one reason 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.⁹³ It also happened that, during hard times and because of a lack of food, Spanish women exchanged sexual favors with Moroccan soldiers in exchange for food.⁹⁴

If many Moroccan soldiers proved not to be practicing Muslims when it came to performing prayers, drinking alcohol or visiting prostitutes, they were, at least, somewhat more enthusiastic about fasting the month of Ramadan.

87 Interview with Abdellah Abdekader. Nador, July 2011.

88 Interview with Kendoussi Bu Midyen, Nador, July 2011.

89 Interview with Mohamed Abdallah Susi, Ceuta, January 2011. See also Balfour, *Deadly Embrace*, 283.

90 Antonio Bahamonde y Sánchez de Castro, *Un año con Queipo, memorias de un nacionalista*, (Barcelona: Ediciones españolas, 1938), 28.

91 For examples of quarrels at prostitution houses between Moroccan and Spanish soldiers see AGA, Af, 81/1125, Leg. 3770, escándalos—reyertas. In one such incident, a Moroccan military policeman was beaten up by a Requeté and a Legionnaire. The madam of the house claimed that he had mistreated one of the prostitutes while he accused the two Spanish men for attacking him without reason. While being interrogated he threatened to take revenge on the madam for testifying against him.

92 J.R. Saiz Viadero, *Conversaciones con la Mary Loly: 40 años de prostitución en España* (Barcelona: Ediciones 29, 1976), 18.

93 AGA, Af, 81.1150, Exp.5429; Letter on 12 September 1938, AGA, Af, 81/1125, Leg.3370, Cp 2 Varios; AGMAV, A.1, L.50, Cp. 45. See also the report by a Republican spy: Servicio de Información Exterior, December 1937, in International Institute for Social History, Archivo FAI, CP, 33A/5.

94 Testimony of Ihmidy El Ma'dani. El Merroun papers. The witness recalls that women in Barcelona, upon its fall, called on Moroccan soldiers to sleep with them “for there was hunger.”

Fernando Fernández de Córdoba, a famous radio announcer for the Nationalists during the war, related that 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. According to Córdoba, these “infantile and simple men,” believed that “the first one to fulfill the ritual of firing his rifle will gain a place next to Allah.”⁹⁵ Whether the majority of the soldiers fasted during actual combat operations is a question in need of clarification. But it seems that in times and places when and where the troops were recuperating or resting most of the troops either observed the fast or at least refrained from breaking it out of fear of the judgment of other soldiers.⁹⁶ It seems that there was a greater tendency to reprimand those who did not fast than those who did not perform prayers.⁹⁷

It would seem that the majority of Moroccan soldiers who fought in Spain, rather than being the devout Muslims the Nationalists portrayed them to be, were in fact men prone to “sinning,” and they only selectively observed their religion at other times.

Conclusion

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, at least in terms of the justification of their use. The presence of Italians or Germans could not be justified in those same terms. Faith, i.e., belief in an established organized religion, was the only binding element that could be argued. Therefore, the Moroccans, in their participation to create a traditional Spain, had to be religious or at least be presented that way. But this was not just a temporary and practical matter. The image of the religious Moroccan fit the standard stereotype the Spanish had of the Moors: at times he was presented as a “fanatic,” at other times as “deeply religious,” two terms that referred to two sides to the same coin.

95 Fernando Fernández de Córdoba, *Memorias de un soldado locutor* (Madrid: Ediciones Españolas, 1939), 109–110.

96 Testimony of El Siddiq El Kumeili. El Merroun papers.

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

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

The motives for such policies suggest a question: Did the Spanish Nationalist military conduct these policies and establish separate religious spheres out of a genuine respect for the faith of its Muslim soldiers? Regardless of whether the respect for the faith itself existed and was genuine, the concern for the religious feelings of the Moroccan troops is clear from the many documents and reports that touch on the matter and therefore must be considered genuine. 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 Spanish officers could obtain the best from them. It was also politically important to ensure stability and the continuing support of the Spanish protectorate. It seems, however, that the religious policies were not only a matter of protecting the spiritual space of the Moroccans, or pleasing the Moroccan authorities. The rejection of the idea that a conversion to Christianity could ever be a genuine one, 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.

It is appropriate to finish this chapter with a curious story that illustrates the complexities of the religious issue of the partly Islamicized Spanish military. In the 1950s Mohammed Amazyān, the only Muslim to attain the rank of general in the Spanish army, was appointed Captain General of Galicia; in his new position he had the duty of conducting a yearly traditional honor, 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 of the statue which show the holy apostle crushing the Moors, so as not to offend the general.⁹⁸ Such were the ironies of the holy war.

⁹⁸ Madariaga, *Los moros que trajo Franco*, 276.

FIGURE 7.1 *Granada Muslim cemetery*
THE THREE ROWS IN THE MIDDLE WITHOUT THE HEADSTONES BELONG TO MOROCCAN SOLDIERS
WHO DIED IN THE SERVICE OF THE ARMY OF GENERAL FRANCO. PHOTOGRAPH BY THE AUTHOR

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