



## DOSSIER

ESPAÑA Y MARRUECOS: DEL DESASTRE DE ANNUAL A LA DICTADURA DE PRIMO DE RIVERA (1921-1930)

## A GENERAL, A COLONIAL CRISIS, AND A NATIONALIST SCHISM: PRIMO DE RIVERA AND THE GAULLIST PARADIGM

### Un general, una crisis colonial y un cisma nacionalista: Primo de Rivera y el paradigma gaullista

Sasha D. Pack

University at Buffalo, State University of New York

[sdpack@buffalo.edu](mailto:sdpack@buffalo.edu)

Recibido: 28-04-2021 - Aceptado: 10-10-2021

#### Cómo citar este artículo/Citation:

Sasha D. Pack, "A general, a colonial crisis, and a nationalist schism: Primo de Rivera and the Gaullist paradigm", *Hispania Nova*, 20 (2022): 737 a 765.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.20318/hn.2022.6475>

**Copyright:** © HISPANIA NOVA es una revista debidamente registrada, con ISSN 1138-7319 y Depósito Legal M 9472-1998. Los textos publicados están –si no se indica lo contrario– bajo una licencia [Reconocimiento-Sin obras derivadas 3.0 España](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nd/3.0/es/) de Creative Commons. Puede copiarlos, distribuirlos y comunicarlos públicamente siempre que cite su autor y la revista y la institución que los publica y no haga con ellos obras derivadas. La licencia completa se puede consultar en: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nd/3.0/es/deed.es>

**Resumen:** Este artículo desarrolla un análisis comparado entre la Guerra del Rif y la Guerra de Independencia Argelina. La Guerra del Rif y la política colonial de la dictadura primorriverista han sido sometidas a varios marcos comparatistas, pero éstos tienden a aislar elementos específicos—política interna, política internacional, y guerra colonial—prestando menos atención a las interrelaciones entre ellos. Dejando aparte las diferencias importantes entre la experiencia española en el Rif y la francesa en Argelia, surgen paralelismos instructivos: (1) la emergencia de un “cirujano de hierro” militar, gozando del apoyo inicial del ejército colonial a pesar de su posición ambivalente hacia los objetivos militares; (2) una dinámica internacional

que acabó restringiendo toda independencia de acción de cada líder; y (3) como resultado del conflicto colonial, una escisión en la derecha nacionalista de cada país entre los que favorecían la colaboración en el marco internacional hegemónico y los que se organizaron en contra de aquel marco. Aunque imperfecto, este análisis comparado puede iluminar de forma original las relaciones entre procesos de política, colonialismo, e identidad nacional.

**Palabras clave:** Guerra del Rif, Miguel Primo de Rivera, Guerra de Independencia de Argelia, Charles de Gaulle, política exterior española, política exterior francesa.

**Abstract:** This article develops hitherto unexplored comparisons between the Rif War and the Algerian War of Independence. The Rif War and the colonial policy of the Primo de Rivera dictatorship have been placed in various useful comparative frames, but these have tended to isolate specific elements of the overall history, eschewing the interrelationships between processes of domestic politics, international politics, and colonial warfare. Looking beneath the major differences between the Spanish experience in the Rif and the French in Algeria, three illuminating parallels emerge: (1) the emergence of a military “strongman” with the initial support of the colonial army despite his uncertain commitment to the army’s goals; (2) an international dynamic that circumscribed any real

capacity for each “strongman” to dictate colonial policy; and (3) schism on the nationalist right of each country as a result of the conflict, pitting those who favored operating within the hegemonic international framework against those who organized against that framework. Although imperfect in many respects, this comparison emphasizes interrelated processes of politics, colonialism, and national identity.

**Keywords:** Rif War, Miguel Primo de Rivera, War of Algerian Independence, colonialism, Charles de Gaulle, Spanish foreign policy, French foreign policy.

## INTRODUCTION

The defeat of Abd el-Krim’s rebellion by a joint Franco-Spanish campaign in the Moroccan Rif was one of the most consequential events of twentieth-century Spanish history. The military success marked the high point of the Primo de Rivera era, giving the dictator the confidence to pursue an ill-fated renovationist agenda that would soon bring down his regime and the monarchy that had supported it. Collaborating with French forces to suppress the Riffians also permitted Spain to retain its modest position in the European imperial system, restoring the partnership with France in the Protectorate of Morocco that had been marked by mutual mistrust since its establishment in 1912. Now able to occupy the northern zone of the Protectorate permanently and effectively, the Spanish colonial army could establish a polity where its peculiar *Africanista* ideology could flourish<sup>1</sup>.

If this narrative is well known, it has rarely been subjected to thorough comparative analysis. Rather than considering this history as an integrated whole, historians have tended to isolate its specific elements—the dictatorship, the occupation

---

<sup>1</sup> On the the development of *Africanismo* during and after the Rif War, see Gustau Nerin, *La guerra que vino de África* (Barcelona: Crítica, 2005), and Sebastian Balfour, *Deadly Embrace: The Moroccan Road to the Spanish Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

of Morocco, the sources of colonial ideology—resulting in a hodgepodge of comparative framings. Spanish policy has been cast as “second-rate” imperialism, carried out, much like Italian and Portuguese colonial ventures in Africa between roughly 1870 and 1930, with the approval of the Great Powers in order to assert status at the apogee of European imperialism<sup>2</sup>. At the same time, the Spanish colonial army contrived a quasi-racial solidarity with the Moroccans, built on the ideology of *Africanismo*, the belief in Spain’s historical destiny lie in Africa, that may have been more reminiscent of the *Lusotropicalista* thesis of later Portuguese colonialism or Japanese imperial claims in East Asia than to other contemporaneous European models<sup>3</sup>. Like most colonial wars of the era, the Spanish effort to occupy northern Morocco relied on an open-ended dynamic of political, cultural, and military strategies that often received only secondary attention from political leaders. Primo, who sought to renovate domestic politics but was uneasy about colonial ventures, fits the mold of neither the revolutionary fascist imperialist nor the traditional conservative dictator<sup>4</sup>.

It may be, however, that the most consequential aspects of the Rif War for Spain become obscured when we confine our analytical regard to the high era of European imperialism and authoritarianism of the interwar period. This article therefore proposes to capture new perspective on this history by placing it in comparative tension with a later episode: Algeria’s nationalist war of independence from France. Some three decades after Primo’s fleeting success in the Rif, Charles de Gaulle came to power with a mandate to resolve an ongoing colonial conflict that threatened to plunge France into civil war. Like Primo, De Gaulle believed that an entrenched governing class had failed his country, but understood that meaningful political renovation was predicated on first resolving the immediate problem of colonial rebellion. Though a patriot in every respect, De Gaulle approached the Algeria crisis with little sentimentality; his realist

---

<sup>2</sup> Shannon Fleming, *Primo de Rivera and Abd el-Krim: The Struggle in Spanish Morocco, 1923-1927* (New York: Garland, 1991), 3-15.

<sup>3</sup> Geoffrey Jensen, “The Spanish-Moroccan Military Campaigns in the Context of European Colonial History”, *Revista Universitaria de Historia Militar* 8, 16 (2019): 17-40, and Idem., *Cultura militar española. Modernistas, tradicionalistas y liberales*, trans. Jaime Blasco (Madrid: Biblioteca Nueva, 2014), 175-183; Susan Martin-Márquez, *Disorientations: Spanish Colonialism in Africa and the Performance of Identity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 50-60.

<sup>4</sup> Carlos Seco Serrano, *La España de Alfonso XIII. El estado. La política. Los movimientos sociales*. (Madrid: Espasa Calpe, 2002), 763-764; Shlomo Ben-Ami, *El cirujano de hierro. La dictadura de Primo de Rivera (1923-1930)* (Barcelona: RBA, 2012), 13-14.

course of action was largely overdetermined by events, and not least the pressure applied by a larger power, in this case the United States. And perhaps most significantly, France's Algerian crisis, like the Rif War, laid bare the contrast between two competing visions of the nation and its international personality. The Algeria question centered on whether France was a universal project of imperial assimilation or a particular national community whose survival depended on an inexorable process of decolonization. For Spain, colonial crisis also revealed divergent views of the national destiny: Were Spain's interests best served operating within the hegemonic imperial system led by France and Britain, or should Spain cultivate non-European clients to resist that system, as the Africanistas increasingly believed? In both instances, the colonial army, feeling betrayed by the political classes, would sooner or later attempt to take power. If De Gaulle's skills and charisma were sufficient to save France from civil war, Spanish politics would within a decade prove too fractious to ward off an Africanista revolution<sup>5</sup>.

To accept this comparison, readers must set aside the differences, both obvious and subtle, between Primo and De Gaulle and between European colonial trajectories of the 1920s and 1950s. Primo arrived at the zenith of European imperialism while De Gaulle presided over its sunset. De Gaulle was already a towering figure when he returned to power in 1958, whereas Primo remains largely unknown outside Spanish historiography. Spanish Morocco and French Algeria shared a border but little else in common. The former was a subsidiary mandate under Moroccan sovereignty and French suzerainty, the latter was claimed as an integral part of French territory; the former was a poor, rugged land unsuited to agricultural settlement, the latter was a land of milk of honey where settlers of European descent held considerable influence.

Accordingly, this article suggests a limited set of comparative criteria in three aspects. (1) The "ambivalent savior": in both cases, an army general came to power with considerable mandate to solve a colonial crisis, but without a clear indication of how he would proceed. (2) The international dynamic: both colonial crises had international origins, but their early stages played out chiefly as internal matters. As outside powers exerted greater pressure, the latitude enjoyed by Primo and De Gaulle became

---

<sup>5</sup> Nerín, *La guerra...*, *op. cit.*, 91.

constrained and the international character of each crisis became unavoidable. (3) Schism of the nationalist right: As both leaders worked to re-domesticate the situation, elements of their armies precipitated a “counter-internationalization” of the problem. In the Spanish case, the colonial army, imbued with a strong Africanista belief that Spain harbored a special relationship with African peoples, rejected the Anglo-French imperial framework. Instead, it pursued a version of German *Weltpolitik* writ small, seeking alliance with the enemies of these empires. In the French case, colonial settlers and dissident portions of the army rejected their government’s acquiescence to American-sponsored decolonization, doubling down on the belief that French Republican values possessed universal applicability and capacity to assimilate all peoples to its culture<sup>6</sup>.

### AMBIVALENT SAVIORS

At first blush, General Miguel Primo de Rivera was an unlikely figure to have presided over the pacification and consolidation of Spain’s Moroccan colony. His record of opposition to the Spanish presence in Morocco was well known. In 1917, he criticized the Africanista mission, noting, “Marruecos, ni parte alguna de África, es España misma.” Primo further opined that “la generosa y abundante sangre en África derramada no podía tener nunca fructificación más honrosa ni útil que la de habernos puesto en posesión de algo que sirva para recuperar a Gibraltar<sup>7</sup>.” Primo’s skepticism appeared vindicated in July 1921, when Spanish attempts to advance into the Riffian interior led to disaster at the thinly guarded outpost of Anual, where Riffian forces initiated an attack that resulted in over 8,000 Spanish deaths. In November, Primo, who lost his brother at Anual, reiterated his belief that, “desde el punto de vista estratégico, que un soldado más allá del Estrecho es perjudicial para España<sup>8</sup>.” Three months later, now Captain General of Barcelona, Primo signaled an about-face on the Morocco question, signing a letter to the liberal government advocating a renewed offensive

---

<sup>6</sup> See Todd Shepard, *The Invention of Decolonization: The Algerian War and the Remaking of France* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), 90.

<sup>7</sup> Miguel Primo de Rivera, *Discurso leído ante la Real Academia Hispano-Americana el 25 de marzo de 1917* (Cádiz: Imprenta Manuel Álvarez, 1917), 20.

<sup>8</sup> Quoted in Fernando Sodevilla, *El año político 1921* (Madrid: Julio Cosano, 1922), 392-393.

against the Riffians<sup>9</sup>. But here, Primo's motives had less to do with any strategic conception than with a political need to gain the confidence of the Africanistas combined with a sincere desire to defend the army's honor, which was increasingly in question amid public scrutiny of the Anual defeat. Moreover, from his vantage point in the tumultuous Catalan capital, Primo had begun to consider more direct military intervention in political affairs and was eager to establish *bona fides* with a monarch and officer corps largely favorable to relaunching the Morocco campaign<sup>10</sup>.

Primo's ambivalence toward Morocco, paradoxically, helps to explain how he emerged as a favorite among conservative and military figures, along with the king, to lead a military coup against the liberal government in September 1923. On the one hand, his record of opposition to colonial occupation helped to cement his political alliance with the Catalan bourgeoisie, who supported Primo's hard line on revolutionary activity in their region but also displayed a certain sympathy for Riffian independence. Although expressed in moral terms, this sympathy on the part of some Catalan elites also reflected commercial interests, which the prospect of war and occupation would threaten. The most prominent political figure associated with bourgeois Catalanism, Francesc Cambó, was an outspoken advocate of Riffian independence, and was rumored to be pursuing a secret deal with Abd el-Krim on agricultural and mining concessions in an independent Rif Republic<sup>11</sup>. At the same time, Primo was well positioned to extricate his king and army from ongoing humiliation in the aftermath of Anual. His well-documented commitment to military honor contrasted sharply with the ongoing debate raging in the Cortes throughout 1923 over assigning responsibility for the Anual disaster. Separate from the more consequential problem of finding a strategy to adopt going forward, this debate was politically convenient for republican groups seeking to discredit Alfonso

---

<sup>9</sup> Julio Gil Pecharromás, *Niceto Alcalá Zamora. Un liberal en la encrucijada* (Madrid: Síntesis, 2005), 139.

<sup>10</sup> Ben-Ami, *El cirujano de hierro...*, *op. cit.*, 56-60; Xavier Casals, "Auge y declive del 'partido militar' de Barcelona (1898-1936)", *Iberical* 4 (2013): 163-182.

<sup>11</sup> On Cambó's support for Riffian independence, see his series of editorials, "El problema de Marroc," *La Veu de Catalunya*, 13-19 October, 1922. On rumors concerning Cambó's secret negotiations with Abd el-Krim, see Sasha D. Pack, *The Deepest Border: The Strait of Gibraltar and the Making of the Modern Hispano-African Borderland* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2019), 171.

XIII and embarrass the army, and would be definitively short-circuited once Primo was in power<sup>12</sup>.

National honor, rather than specific policy prescription, was similarly the decisive factor behind support for Charles de Gaulle on the part of the French army in Algeria in 1958. De Gaulle himself had long shown receptivity to imperial reform and telegraphed flexibility on the Algeria issue—one observer called him “the prince of ambiguity”. The French army in North Africa, which had been carrying out a dirty war against the Algerian nationalist movement since 1954, was, like its Spanish counterpart of the 1920s, vehemently opposed to abandonment. It was thus in spite of the charismatic French general’s apparent open-mindedness that hardline officers in Algeria declared “Vive De Gaulle!” as they revolted in May 1958 to demand his return to power. Though begrudgingly and under pressure, French army leadership in Algeria initially accepted De Gaulle as the figure best equipped to navigate the crisis<sup>13</sup>.

The rise of these “iron surgeons” portended such a radical shift in the political lives of their respective nations that it is easy to forget the improvisational character of their colonial policy. Over time, both adapted their colonial policies to outside pressures, understanding above all that the swift resolution of colonial crisis was a precondition to achieving their broader aims: in De Gaulle’s case, to liquidate the Fourth Republic and consolidate the nascent Fifth Republic’s position as a world power; in Primo’s, to restore domestic tranquility and to regenerate Spain’s national governing institutions, though the latter goal was never plausibly articulated. In neither case did the arrival of a strongman with a broad institutional mandate suddenly clarify a path forward on the colonial problem.

The dithering that characterized Spain’s previous three civilian governments was recreated within Primo’s Military Directory. Primo hoped to address the crisis through politics and diplomacy rather than military action. His search for an expedient and inexpensive resolution meant anything but staging a repeat of the disastrous attempt occupies the colonial interior. The Spanish leader cast about for a way to abandon the

---

<sup>12</sup> Seco Serrano, *La España de Alfonso XIII...*, *op. cit.*, 776.

<sup>13</sup> Alistair Horne, *A Savage War of Peace: Algeria, 1954-1962* (London; MacMillan, 1977), 287, 377-381; Matthew Connelly, *A Diplomatic Revolution: Algeria’s Fight for Independence and the Origins of the Post-Cold War Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 168-170.



Rif while working within the Anglo-French imperial system to gain a concession elsewhere<sup>14</sup>. After failing to get a hearing with Britain to discuss a Gibraltar swap, he approached France with a proposal to relinquish the Spanish Zone of the Protectorate entirely in exchange for rights to Tangier, a city that had been placed under multilateral European control in 1923. To actually accept such a deal would have amounted to an unlikely act of charity by the French, who had spent much of 1923 exploiting Spain's difficulties in Morocco, even subtly encouraging the Riffians, in order to weaken the Spanish position in negotiations on the status of Tangier<sup>15</sup>. All the while, Primo tried to appease Abd el-Krim, offering the Riffian leader generous terms, including rights to lucrative iron mines, the title of emir, and general autonomy, if he would accept Spanish presence in coastal cities. Unlike De Gaulle, whose army was proving its ability to suppress the Algerian uprising in a strictly military sense, Primo could not pretend his offer to Abd el-Krim was the magnanimous gesture of a stronger power, even after an aerial bombardment of poison gas bombs was unleashed over Riffian domains in the summer of 1924<sup>16</sup>. The Riffians remained convinced they could drive the Spanish out.

De Gaulle differed from Primo in his ability to overcome the binary debate within the previous government over whether to continue the war. On inheriting the Algerian debacle in October 1958, De Gaulle continued to wield force against the rebellion, but in his hands the army became less a means of colonial repression than a tool for forging a political solution on the best possible terms for France. On assuming power, De Gaulle began to show deference to international opinion, refusing to defend his army's dirty tactics, including the widespread torture of Algerian prisoners, and signaled a willingness to experiment with reforming Algeria's relationship with France in exchange for an end to violence. Initially, he insisted that the Algerian rebels surrender and envisioned the creation of some kind of federated arrangement with Algeria rather than full independence. As these proposals proved untenable, De Gaulle gradually modified his goals, slowly opening the hypothesis of Algerian independence. In summer 1959, De Gaulle announced his desire to hold a referendum on Algeria's

---

<sup>14</sup> Susana Sueiro Seoane, "El mito del estratega. Primo de Rivera y la resolución del problema de Marruecos", *Cuadernos de Historia Contemporánea*, 16 (1994): 113-129.

<sup>15</sup> On the tacit support given to Abd el-Krim by the French colonial administration, see M. Hubert-Jacques, *L'aventure riffaine et ses dessous politiques* (Paris: Éditions Bossard, 1927), 18-21.

<sup>16</sup> Balfour, *Deadly Embrace...*, *op. cit.*, 138.



independence, and further military action was subordinated to the goal of creating security conditions in which such a referendum could be held<sup>17</sup>.

Primo, like De Gaulle, was unable to find a political or diplomatic tool to blunt the uncompromising nationalism of his colonial adversary. And, faced with the choice between military escalation or retreat, he too chose the latter. In November 1924, over the unanimous objections of his field officers, Primo ordered what turned out to be the very costly withdrawal of Spanish forces to the much more limited position of securing the coastal Larache-Tetuán-Tangier-Ceuta road. Spain's military leadership, both in Morocco and in Madrid, continued to insist that a landing at Alhucemas was indispensable to prevent the Riffians from overrunning Ceuta and Melilla, but throughout the first half of 1925 Primo would consider it only as part of a coordinated deal with Abd el-Krim<sup>18</sup>. Later commentators have suggested, with limited evidence, that Primo's retreat was part of a strategic plan to raise Riffian morale and embolden Abd el-Krim to turn southward, at last forcing the French to act<sup>19</sup>. Indeed, Primo's withdrawal does seem to have motivated the French to take a more active role in interdicting the Riffians' overland supply lines from the French Zone<sup>20</sup>. Overall, however, engaging a troop withdrawal as a strategy to force the French hand would have been risky. The French supreme commander, General Hubert Lyautey, had already become aware of the Riffians' expanding ambitions several months before Primo's withdrawal order and, as discussed below, he developed a strategy to combat Riffian expansionism unilaterally and with little regard for Spanish interests.

---

<sup>17</sup> Connelly, *Diplomatic Revolution...*, *op. cit.*, 208.

<sup>18</sup> Carlos Seco Serrano, *Militarismo y civilismo en la España contemporánea* (Madrid: Instituto de Estudios Económicos, 1984), 326.

<sup>19</sup> First expressed by Francisco Gómez-Jordana, a member of Primo's military directory, this belief is most recently articulated in Julián Paniagua López, "La última batalla de la Guerra del Rif", *Guerra Colonial: Revista Digital* 3 (December 2018): 63-81. For a critical view, see Sueiro Seoane, "El mito...", *op. cit.*

<sup>20</sup> Fleming, *Primo de Rivera and Abd el-Krim...*, *op. cit.*, 230-232; Martin Thomas, *Empires of Intelligence: Security Services and Colonial Disorder after 1914* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 151-157.

### From internal matter to international crisis

However much both Primo and De Gaulle might have wished otherwise, the crises they faced were not internal matters. Rather, they were linked to the international order and attracted broad attention. In both cases this was increasingly the case as time went on, a common trend that constrained the ability of each leader to act with real autonomy. From the perspective of the French Fourth Republic, Algeria was sovereign French territory that could only be considered an internal question. The case of Spanish Morocco was not so straightforward, as Spanish rights to the northern zone were derived from a subsidiary agreement with France only after France established its protectorate over the entirety of the sultan's domains in 1912. Nevertheless, international treaty law recognized a Spanish sphere of administrative and military action, a point that prime minister Eduardo Dato had underlined in 1914 with the assertion that “the Moroccan problem is above all a national matter, and its development shall not in any way influence the foreign policy of Spain<sup>21</sup>.”

In treating their North African crises as internal problems, Spain and France flouted the grand strategies of two larger powers. For Spain in the 1920s, that power was France. France had conceded to Spain the right to occupy and administer northern Morocco chiefly as part of its grand compromise with Britain: The creation of a neutral Spanish buffer between French and British imperial spheres had been a precondition for the 1904 Entente Cordiale. The French geopolitical vision was nevertheless to control the entire Maghreb, and as a junior partner in this enterprise Spain was never fully trusted. French fears that Spain might become the proxy of a rival power had been realized when German agents made considerable inroads with Muslim tribal allies there during World War I. Although the Spanish Protectorate leadership in Tetuán professed solidarity with the French cause, it had been slow and ineffectual in suppressing the pro-German activities of much of the Spanish army. Lyautey was determined to “hold Spain accountable” for its tacit acceptance of German wartime intrigue in Morocco and to prevent it from allowing Germany or another rival power to sponsor an “independent caliphate” in the northern zone. Taking advantage of Spain's absence from the postwar peace conference, French negotiators launched a bid to revise the status Morocco in

---

<sup>21</sup> Quoted in Seco Serrano, *La España de Alfonso XIII...*, *op. cit.*, 340.

order to cut out Spanish presence completely. Indeed, it was this prospect that had provoked Spain's civilian government to precipitate the fateful advance into the Riffian interior in 1919-1920<sup>22</sup>.

The Spanish bid to achieve effective territorial occupation of its zone initially sufficed to keep the French at bay. By April 1920, France formally renounced its effort to revise the Morocco treaties; in exchange, the liberal Prime Minister, the Count of Romanones, affirmed Spain's commitment to maintaining the colony<sup>23</sup>. This marked the start of an "internal phase," when Spanish governments enjoyed relative freedom to develop colonial strategy without direct outside pressure. Even after the Anual disaster forced a Spanish retreat, France remained on the sidelines—not out of any particular respect for some idea of Spanish sovereignty in the Rif, but because broader strategic considerations favored *attendisme*. Intervening in Morocco would necessarily mean weakening French defenses on the Rhine, where conflict was brewing over German war reparations. Moreover, from his position in Rabat, Lyautey advised that it was in France's interest that the Spanish colonials and their Moroccan subjects remain locked in conflict. Many Spanish officers and politicians were convinced that France was providing clandestine support to the Riffians—and such suspicions were not unjustified. Although Lyautey did not recognize Abd el-Krim's self-styled republic, he did allow low-level French officials to meet with Riffian agents. Until December 1924, French patrols refused to interdict contraband grain and armaments destined for the Riffian army, and the French-controlled municipal police of Tangier permitted Riffians there to organize, recruit, and procure supplies for their cause. But none of this amounted to direct intervention on the part of the French, who continued to consider the Riffians to be a Spanish problem for Primo to deal with. Even as the combative Lyautey claimed the right to enter the Spanish Zone to suppress rebellious cross-border tribes, the French prime minister, Paul Painlevé, reiterated his nation's policy not to seek colonial aggrandizement in Morocco<sup>24</sup>.

---

<sup>22</sup> Pack, *The Deepest Border...*, *op. cit.*, 159-160.

<sup>23</sup> Graham H. Stuart, *The International City of Tangier*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1955), 70-72.

<sup>24</sup> Pack, *The Deepest Border...*, *op. cit.*, 165-167; Max Schiavon, *La Guerre du Rif. Maroc (1925-1926)* (Paris: Éditions Pierre de Taillac, 2017), 73-75.

Once again, the parallel with the French Algeria is noteworthy: Though part of an international groundswell across what one French geographer had in 1952 labeled the “Third World”, the first phase of the Algerian War remained internal to France. The Republic’s legal self-understanding rendered the violence in Algeria after 1954 as a matter of domestic concern. Among the French political parties, only the Communists regarded the Algerian uprising as a legitimate nationalist cause; even French socialism bathed the Algerian problem in the broader language of internationalism and European federalism<sup>25</sup>. French officials had grudgingly accepted American brokerage of Moroccan and Tunisian independence in 1955, but these had always been protectorates, not sovereign French territory—and therefore an integral part of the NATO trans-Atlantic alliance—as they insisted was the case with Algeria. As such, the Algerian rebels represented Islamic-nationalist proxies for direct Soviet aggression against a NATO member. As with Spain vis-à-vis Lyautey in 1922-24, many French politicians were suspicious of American intrigues, observing, for example, the arrival of Standard Oil prospectors soon after the discovery of petroleum reserves in the French Sahara. Yet although many in the Eisenhower administration regarded Algerian independence as inevitable, the United States avoided permitting policy differences over the colonial question to upset the stability of the NATO alliance, and continued to support French positions in the United Nations. In March 1956, on the heels of Moroccan and Tunisian independence, the American ambassador to Paris called French relations with Maghrebi nations a “bulwark of the free world” and affirmed that the US stood “solidly behind France in her search for a liberal and equitable solution to the problems in Algeria<sup>26</sup>.” At the same time, the Americans offered direct aid to Morocco and Tunisia, a kind of insurance policy against French attempts to strong-arm its two former protectorates.

American policy began to change after 1956, when the Suez Crisis and other events heightened concern within the Eisenhower administration that French intransigence would drive the Arab world into the Soviet camp. By this time, the Algerian nationalists were encountering success in uniting the Arab world—and the colonial world and the United Nations as well—around their cause. When De Gaulle

---

<sup>25</sup> Brian Shaev, “The Algerian War, European Integration, and the Decolonization of French Socialism,” *French Historical Studies* 41, 1 (February, 2018): 63-94.

<sup>26</sup> Connelly, *Diplomatic Revolution...*, *op. cit.*, 99-100.

came to power in June 1958, he threatened to withdraw from NATO unless the United States unreservedly agreed to support the French effort in Algeria. In doing so, De Gaulle forced the Americans' hand, and the remaining pretense that Algeria represented an internal French matter fell away. The United States increased its pressure, giving economic aid to allies of the Algerian nationalists. Eisenhower privately considered the French claim on Algeria as sovereign territory to be "damn nonsense"<sup>27</sup>.

Much as the Americans lost patience with French policy in 1956, the French came to regard Primo's appeasement of the Riffians in 1923-25 as damaging to their grand strategic goals. The turning point occurred in the spring of 1925, as French army losses at the hands of Abd el-Krim's accumulated<sup>28</sup>. Having converted tribes hitherto under French protection to their cause, the Riffians were becoming a threat not only to French Morocco, but also, it was feared, to the entire colonial system. Abd el-Krim's putative Islamic republic inspired hopes of a resurgence of Muslim power, the Riffian struggle against Spain evoking nostalgia for the golden age of al-Andalus among the literati of Beirut and Cairo<sup>29</sup>. Loss of Morocco might embolden rebellion elsewhere in the colonial world, a development that would undoubtedly be exploited by a resurgent Germany or the nascent Soviet Union. The French prime minister, the Radical Socialist Paul Painlevé, publicly blamed the Rif crisis on German and Bolshevik intrigues, features that were indeed present but probably far less significant than the colonial system itself in animating the Riffian movement<sup>30</sup>. The Spanish monarch, Alfonso XIII, took this fear to a greater extreme, confiding in a French military attaché his conviction that "the current Riffian offensive is only the first step in a general rebellion of the entire Muslim world, instigated by Moscow and international Jewry, capable of causing serious disturbances ... throughout Europe"<sup>31</sup>.

Once established as an international crisis, the Riffian rebellion demanded French attention. As far the greater power, France might have pursued Spain's expulsion from Morocco altogether. This was the course of action favored by Lyautey, who was

---

<sup>27</sup> Connelly, *Diplomatic Revolution...*, *op. cit.*, 89, 119-121.

<sup>28</sup> Schiavon, *La Guerre du Rif...*, *op. cit.*, 71-72.

<sup>29</sup> C. R. Pennell, *Morocco since 1830* (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 192-195.

<sup>30</sup> Schiavon, *La Guerre du Rif...*, *op. cit.*, 112.

<sup>31</sup> Quoted in Schiavon, *La Guerre de Rif...*, *op. cit.*, 144, n. 169.

already requesting reinforcements to launch operations in the Spanish Zone. The French general believed that entering in common cause with the Spanish would weaken French imperial prestige, and was prepared to present piles of evidence that Spain was an unfaithful collaborator<sup>32</sup>. Lyautey might have gotten his wish, but for French domestic politics. The elections of April 1925 produced a leftward swing, and the Radical prime minister Édouard Herriot, with whom Lyautey had enjoyed warm relations, was replaced in favor of the Republican-Socialist Painlevé, whose parliamentary majority counted on the support of an anti-colonial wing. It was unclear how long his coalition would tolerate the mounting death toll that could be tied directly to Lyautey's strategy of unilateral escalation.

From Painlevé's perspective, a more appealing option would be to enlist Spanish assistance in a joint operation to encircle and rout Abd el-Krim's forces. But courting Primo to the French cause would not be straightforward. Primo was reluctant to reengage in Morocco, and good will was in short supply. Not only had Primo's attempts to negotiate a deal with France in 1923 and 1924 met with rebuff, French troops were now advancing into the Spanish Zone from the south. Painlevé became convinced of the need to replace the aging, fatigued Lyautey, but was hard-pressed to find a replacement who was both qualified and willing<sup>33</sup>. It was only through the quiet intervention of France's most prestigious military figure, Philippe Pétain, that progress toward a Hispano-French rapprochement could be made. Convinced of the urgency to forge an alliance with Spain, Pétain convinced Painlevé to send the pro-Spanish politician Louis-Jean Malvy to Madrid. Officially there on a mission to discuss the suppression of contraband arms, Malvy's ulterior purpose was to signal the French government's desire to work out a broader deal to send a joint expedition into the Riffian heartland. But despite French overtures in June and July 1925, Primo remained singularly focused on negotiating a territorial exchange of Tangier for the Rif than in committing his army to a new campaign<sup>34</sup>. In late July, Pétain contrived a meeting with Primo at Tetuán, where he reiterated the French desire for a joint operation to defeat Abd el-Krim. He assured

---

<sup>32</sup> Schiavon, *La Guerre du Rif...*, *op. cit.*, 145.

<sup>33</sup> Louis Neute, *Monsieur le Maréchal: la parcours militaire de Philippe Pétain, 1878-1939* (Paris: Éditions de l'École de Guerre, 2020), 55-56.

<sup>34</sup> Sueiro Seoane, "El mito...", *op. cit.*

the Spanish leader that any French operations in the Spanish Zone would be temporary, meticulously planned, and subject to advance approval by the Spanish. This time Primo agreed, promising the Marshall of France he would prepare a landing at Alhucemas for 8 September<sup>35</sup>. In the pages of the Africanista press, Primo justified his *volte-face* on intervention by appealing to the responsibility of the “pueblos viriles” to act on behalf of “la civilización, y para la humanidad” in order to “ahogar, a sofocar el naciente incendio que por el desarrollo de sus llamas, inflamadas por el viento de fronta del bolcheviquismo, podrían llevar el fuego a nuestra propia casa<sup>36</sup>.”

Primo’s decision to collaborate with France was hardly a decision at all—the events of summer 1925 imposed a new set of constraints on his Morocco policy that made war the only realistic option. Had he rebuffed Pétain’s offer, Primo would have in effect given France a green light to seize the Spanish Zone for nothing in return. Yet because Primo had for years signaled his lack of regard for Spain’s position in Morocco as anything but a bargaining chip, it is appropriate to ask why he was so quick to answer Pétain’s appeal. The Painlevé government did not conceal its desperation to resolve the crisis without colonial expansion. Might Primo’s moment have arrived to press for a privileged status in Tangier?—not in exchange for the northern zone of the Protectorate, as previously attempted, but in exchange for committing forces in a campaign to suppress the Riffians. Instead, Primo waited until after Abd el-Krim’s surrender to make this demand, staging a dramatic walkout of the League of Nations in September 1926 to no avail. Such a protocol on Tangier would not have been out of the question—in fact, Spain did gain command of the city’s police force in 1928, and a plan to place the municipal administration under Spanish control was discussed with France in 1935, though never implemented<sup>37</sup>. If these gains proved possible when Spain’s diplomatic

---

<sup>35</sup> Schiavon, *La Guerre du Rif...*, *op. cit.*, 122, 144-45.

<sup>36</sup> Miguel Primo de Rivera, “Nueva visión del problema de Marruecos,” *Revista de Tropas Coloniales*, August 1925, 3.

<sup>37</sup> On the changing Spanish role in the international administration of Tangier, see Stuart, *International City...*, 101; José Luis Neila Hernández, “Revisionismo y reajustes en el Mediterráneo: Tánger y las expectativas de la II República española (1934-1936),” *Hispania: Revista de Historia Española* 52, 2 (1992): 655-685. José María de Areilza and Fernando María Castiella, *Reivindicaciones de España* (Madrid: Instituto de Estudios Políticos, 1941), 29, assert, without citing evidence, that Édouard Herriot, then French Minister of State, secretly pressured Spain to cede the entire Western Sahara to France in exchange for extra privileges in Tangier.



leverage was far weaker, it is all the more curious that Primo did not attempt to tie military collaboration to the Tangier question during Painlevé's moment of need.

Comparison with Charles de Gaulle throws Primo's passivity into sharper relief. De Gaulle was dogged in his refusal to accept the inevitable without gaining something in return. The French president negotiated relentlessly for all kinds of concessions in exchange for hastening the Algerian independence process: a revised command structure for NATO, rights for the European community in a postcolonial Algeria, rights to oil and gas reserves and nuclear test sites in the Sahara, among others. De Gaulle's most essential requirement—that France grant Algeria independence in peace rather than withdraw in defeat—was scuttled by settlers (so-called *pieds-noirs*) and army factionalists, who, under the name Organisation Armée Secrète (OAS), carried out a terrorist campaign in 1961 and 1962 to subvert De Gaulle's plan. As with Primo witnessing a renewed Riffian offensive in 1925, a new escalation of violence on the ground accelerated De Gaulle's time frame to act, even if it meant abandoning previous demands and conditions. In the Evian accords of 18 March 1962, De Gaulle did manage to salvage some protections for *pieds-noirs* and rights to exploit Saharan oil and gas, but the Algerians would unilaterally revoke these concessions over the next decade<sup>38</sup>.

Even recognizing the sharp difference between Primo's apparently passive acceptance of Pétain's proposal and De Gaulle's tireless attempts to salvage French *grandeur*, neither leader enjoyed much latitude to execute a policy that was not strictly circumscribed by external constraints. However much Primo personally wished to leave Morocco to the Moroccans, abandonment of the Spanish Zone to French forces for nothing in return would have been disastrous for his regime and potentially for Spain's position within the European order. The international perspective also reveals the relative weakness of De Gaulle's position. His charisma was enough to overcome the violent resistance of the OAS and obstinate *pieds-noirs*, but, as Matthew Connelly has observed, the Gaullist myth ought not to overshadow the fact that he was unable to extract meaningful concessions from the Algerian nationalists<sup>39</sup>.

---

<sup>38</sup> Connelly, *Diplomatic Revolution...*, *op. cit.*, 266.

<sup>39</sup> *ibidem*, 175.

Both Primo and De Gaulle achieved resolutions to their respective crises by bending military action and diplomacy to fit an arc of inevitability that was dictated by greater powers and global trends. For Primo, military success—and the cascade of decorations and promotions to follow—represented a prophylactic against conspiracies to defenestrate him. A constitutionalist coup d'état planned for summer 1926 was aborted for lack of support of the monarch and in the face of the newfound prestige of the Africanista officer class<sup>40</sup>. De Gaulle, too, emerged with tremendous popularity, with OAS renegades captured and imprisoned in time, their threat neutralized. The savage terror endured by *pieds-noirs* and Arab colonial collaborators (*harkis*) at the hands of Algerians in the summer of 1962 resembled an unpleasant coda to a bitter divorce of two distinct and incompatible nations, and, perhaps to some, just deserts for those who had resisted the inevitable tide of history. As the radical fringe of the *pieds-noirs*' cause tried and failed to assassinate De Gaulle, a series of elections and referenda demonstrated growing popular support for his new Fifth Republic<sup>41</sup>.

## NATIONAL PARTICULARISMS AND GLOBAL VISIONS

### France: republican universalism vs. a world of nation-states

Both colonial crises opened deep and enduring fissures within the nationalist right between competing worldviews. Historiography on the French case has characterized this fissure in terms of national particularism against Republican universalism. For the Gaullists, adjusting to the new postwar American hegemony required abandoning the myth that Frenchness could be made universal. It soon became clear that the post-World War II global order would be built on independent nation-states, all represented in the United Nations and most aligned with one of the two Superpowers. Struggling to retain global influence in this new context, French imperial reformers, many Gaullists among them, had searched for formulas to grant equal rights to subjects across the empire (rechristened the “French Union” in 1946) and to

---

<sup>40</sup> González Calleja, *La España de Primo de Rivera: La modernización autoritaria, 1923-1930* (Madrid: Alianza, 2005), 117-118; Seco Serrano, *La España de Alfonso XIII..., op. cit.*, 785-786.

<sup>41</sup> Olivier Dard, *Voyage au Coeur de l'OAS* (Paris: Perrin, 2005), 268.

“integrate” colonial subjects into the republican body politic without assimilating them fully to republican values. It proved impossible, however, to reconcile the goal of equal citizenship across the Union and in Algeria with deeply held feelings of nationalism and ethno-racial difference both in France and among the aspiring states of North and West Africa<sup>42</sup>.

Algeria posed a particular challenge because it was Republican soil, from the perspective of French law, and not a colony. For Algerian Muslims, French citizenship had been a theoretical possibility since 1865, but the requirement that they reject Sharia law and tribal affinities disqualified almost all of them, while at the same time attainment of French citizenship for Spanish and Italian settlers and for Algerian Jews became nearly automatic. After 1945, French liberal reformers experimented with lowering the barrier to Muslim integration, abandoning the demand they accept all Republican legal and political structures in order to qualify for citizenship. To do so, however, required compromising the cherished ideal of uniformity in the relationship between citizen, state, and law. In 1956, the Fourth Republic created new legal categories of “Algerian French Muslim” and “French of European Descent”—thereby establishing a racial distinction among French citizens for the first time (excluding the period 1940-1944, under a government considered illegitimate by the Fourth Republic). With these ethnic markers established in law, it was a small step for De Gaulle to recognize the existence of two discrete peoples, each entitled to self-determination in a world of nation-states<sup>43</sup>. With this, the French president reversed a century of republican precedent—precedent he had little use for: As he famously remarked, “We founded our colonization ... on the principle of assimilation ... We made them recite ‘our ancestors the Gauls’; this was not very bright<sup>44</sup>.”

As De Gaulle rejected the possibility that the French nation could accommodate Algerian Muslims, the OAS argued the opposite, doubling down on the principle of Republican universalism. The exponents of *Algérie française* proposed accelerating the process of true Republican assimilation. In their view, saving the Republican ideal at

---

<sup>42</sup> See Frederick Cooper, *Citizenship between Empire and Nation: Remaking France and French Africa, 1945-1960* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 344-347.

<sup>43</sup> Shepard, *Invention of Decolonization...*, *op. cit.*, 46-52.

<sup>44</sup> Quoted in Alain Peyrefitte, *C'était de Gaulle* (Paris: Fayard, 1994), 54-55.

this moment of crisis required the sincere embrace of Algerian Muslims. “Nothing in the Muslim religion,” as the young activist Jean-Marie Le Pen put it in 1958, “prevented a believer or practitioner, from a moral point of view, from becoming a full French citizen<sup>45</sup>.” While this embrace of Muslims might have looked hypocritical in light of the ongoing dirty war being carried out in Algeria by the OAS and associated *pieds-noirs* militias, these groups considered violence a necessary means to defend French Republican universalism against a global scourge of ethno-nationalist ideology abetted by the United States and the Soviet Union. As Todd Shepard has shown, the OAS placed its struggle in the lineage of the Revolution of 1789, the Paris Commune, and the anti-fascist Resistance of World War II. OAS propaganda emphasized traditional Republican ideals: the inviolability of Republican territory; the universal applicability of the ideals of 1789; the secular state; and the respect for the constitution and laws, which, it claimed, De Gaulle was subverting by recognizing the Algerian Provisional Government as a negotiating partner.

### **Spain: *Africanismo* vs. the Anglo-French order**

Although the particulars differ from the French case, the Rif crisis also opened fissures over the political and racial meanings of Spain’s colonial mission. Primo de Rivera’s common cause with the Africanista army between mid-1925 and mid-1926 was never more than temporary and conjunctural, no less so than Spain’s alliance with France to eliminate the common enemy of Abd el-Krim. Whereas the Africanistas of the colonial army cultivated a sense of Spain’s historical, quasi-racial mandate in Africa, Primo’s concern was to advance Spanish interests within the Anglo-French imperial order. Convinced that Spain had no interest in the Moroccan interior, Primo had pursued a tried-and-true method of modern European diplomacy, attempting to negotiate the exchange of extra-European territorial possessions. When this diplomacy failed, Primo determined that joint military action with France was the only plausible option available to him. To explain his about-face in terms that united the widest possible coalition, he cited Spain’s responsibility as a civilized nation to join with France to face the new threat of Bolshevism and its potential proxy in the Rif.

---

<sup>45</sup> Quoted in Dard, *Voyage...*, *op. cit.*, 315. Also see Shepard, *Invention of Decolonization...*, *op. cit.*, 90-92.

After Abd el-Krim's defeat, adhering to the hegemonic framework of liberal imperialism required maintaining a "broad spirit of cordiality," as the prolific Africanista writer Tomás García Figueras called it, between the French and Spanish Protectorate administrations. This would mean, for example, sharing intelligence, building and maintaining a common railway network, and making public displays of Franco-Spanish solidarity as a means to dissuade potential rebels from attempting to exploit divisions between the colonial powers<sup>46</sup>. It also meant maintaining an effective territorial occupation that barred third-party proxies from access to the Protectorate. The colonial army had been the principal facilitator of such access, notably during World War I, and thus a more thorough subjugation of the Protectorate forces to peninsular command became a priority. Legislation of 1927 laid the groundwork for civilian leadership in the Protectorate, though a civilian would not be appointed to lead the High Commission in Tetuán before the advent of the Republic of 1931. More significantly, Primo acted to debilitate the notoriously roguish exclaves of Ceuta and Melilla, which were known for giving sympathy and shelter to German agents and anti-French Moroccans. The government had placed the General Commands of Ceuta and Melilla under Tetuán's authority early in 1923 as a wartime exigency, a move Primo made permanent after the war's conclusion<sup>47</sup>. Moreover, military control over municipal leadership in the two exclaves was reduced in favor of greater civilian representation, in accord with the dictatorship's general transition from a military to a civilian mode after 1925<sup>48</sup>. Although in 1927 Primo touted the notion of a "Mediterranean bloc" with Fascist Italy to balance Anglo-French hegemony in the region, this amounted to little more than the bluster of a dictator seeking the respect of the Great Powers<sup>49</sup>.

Also central to the liberal-imperial vision was the conceit of modernization—bringing progress and civilization to the benighted people of northern Morocco. Transport infrastructure received considerable attention after 1927. A long-delayed rail

---

<sup>46</sup> Tomás García Figueras, "Actividad militar en Marruecos", *África: Revista de Tropas Coloniales*, April 1927, 97; Pack, *The Deepest Border...*, *op. cit.*, 179.

<sup>47</sup> Real Decreto, 17 January 1923, *Gaceta de Madrid*, 18 January 1923, 249; José Luis Villanova, *El Protectorado de España en Marruecos: organización política y territorial* (Barcelona: Edicions Bellaterra, 2004), 171.

<sup>48</sup> Pack, *The Deepest Border...*, *op. cit.*, 191.

<sup>49</sup> González Calleja, *La España...*, *op. cit.*, 124.

project linking the Spanish and French Zones was at last realized, and the road network expanded as well. These projects were financed with a combination of loans and direct state subsidies, providing a measure of employment to Moroccans and Spanish settlers. Creating a self-sustaining commercial colony was a greater challenge. As spotty rebellions continued, infrastructure that did not have direct military application was shunted aside, much to Primo's frustration. Civil projects like irrigation and water treatment received far less attention than transport, and agricultural development remained anchored to coastal areas near Alhucemas. A fledgling tourism industry attempted with little success to entice motorists from the French Zone to visit<sup>50</sup>. The most important industry, the iron mines of the Rif, had been coveted by German investors during World War I, and was now the target of interest by a French group. Controlled by a well-connected set of Spanish bourgeois families, banks, and politicians, the industry gained state protection in November 1927 when Primo's Civil Directorate approved a law requiring that 75 percent of the ownership stake be Spanish<sup>51</sup>. Primo also cultivated a relationship with the wealthy robber baron Juan March in hopes of securing the tobacco kingpin's commitment to invest in the Protectorate. March financed the construction of a Catholic church in Tetuán and a tobacco processing facility in Tangier. By 1927 Primo granted the Majorcan magnate the tobacco monopoly to the entire Spanish Zone plus Ceuta and Melilla, generating a concession fee that accounted for about 3 percent of the Caliphate budget.

Despite these efforts, the Spanish colony remained chiefly a military affair in which the spirit of Africanismo predominated. Suspicion of French motives prevailed in the ranks of the colonial army. In rallying his men to resume the war against Abd el-Krim in 1925, Colonel Francisco Franco registered only qualified support for collaborating with the French: "Cualesquiera sean las causas que motivaron la situación presente, existe un programa marcado por los Gobiernos de ambas naciones del que no debemos apartarnos." Writing in the pages of the main Africanista organ, of which he

---

<sup>50</sup> Alet Valero, "Le tourisme au Maroc espagnol: La période du Patronato Nacional de Turismo (1928-1936)", in *Le tourisme dans l'Empire français: Politique, pratiques, et imaginaires (XIX-XX siècles)*, ed. Colette Zytnecki and Habib Kazdaghli (Paris: Société Française d'Histoire d'Outre-Mer, 2009), 235-254; Pack, *The Deepest Border...*, *op. cit.*, 183.

<sup>51</sup> Vicente Moga Romero, *Las minas del Rif y Melilla, 1916. Las vetas de una mirada centenaria* (Melilla: Consejería de Cultura, 2009), 31; Real Decreto, 23 November 1927, *Gaceta de Madrid*, 27 November 1927, 1164-1165.

was editor-in-chief, Franco leveled the implicit charge that French imperialism formed “las verdades causas del problema rifeño,” adding, “no cabe culpar a la acción española.” According to Franco, French claims to bringing civilization to Morocco were disingenuous because they relied on the sultan’s existing administrative structures to extend their influence. In the tribal domains that comprised the northern zone, “España empezó a abrir los caminos de la civilización con su propio esfuerzo<sup>52</sup>.”

This sense of special mission permeated Africanista ideology, which, like that of the *Algérie française* movement, generated discourse on race relations that ranged from condescending paternalism to genuine fraternity, depending on the context. Unlike the French defenders of empire, however, Africanistas emphasized Spaniards’ shared historical and racial origins with North African peoples. The colonial army press, which played a key didactic role for Spanish troops and officers, gave frequent attention to concepts of Hispano-Arab and Hispano-Muslim civilization rooted in the common experience of medieval Al-Andalus. Rodolfo Gil Benumeya, a frequent columnist who published under the pseudonym Amor Benomar, went so far as to opine of Spain that “su Raza y su historia la ponen al lado de los inferiores<sup>53</sup>.”

From this standpoint, it was not a difficult leap of logic for Spanish occupation authorities to find common cause with the northern tribes, who for centuries had jealously guarded their independence from the Sultanate administration. The Spanish Protectorate administration presented itself, paradoxically, as successor to Abd el-Krim’s rebellion against the pro-French sultan. Already during the campaigns of 1925-26, as the Spanish colonial army hit Riffian tribes with brutal force and chemical weapons, it also saw the usefulness of maintaining the political structures established by Abd el-Krim. As inducement to surrender and disarm, the Spanish promised to keep tribal prerogatives intact, including maintaining the status of tribal leaders whom Abd

---

<sup>52</sup> Francisco Franco, “La guerra en el Rif: Comentarios a un crítico extranjero”, *Revista de Tropas Coloniales*, August, 1925, 2-3.

<sup>53</sup> Amor Benomar, “Introducción al problema de las razas de color”, *África: Revista de Tropas Coloniales*, February, 1927, 45.



el-Krim had appointed as caids—sovereign representatives vested with the right to collect land taxes and administer justice<sup>54</sup>.

Colonial officers understood the expediency of portraying France to their subjects as a common adversary. Although the French also favored indirect rule, maintaining the sultan on the throne, the Spanish sought to draw sharp contrasts between their approach in the northern zone and what many regarded as heavy-handed structural modernization and assimilation in the French Zone. The Spaniards' main mechanism was a system of *interventores*, representatives drawn from military ranks and trained to studiously respect local customs, even when at odds with modernization goals. *Interventores* were trained to seek approval from the local caid before introducing European sanitation and medical practices. They were also instructed to display a “discreet Catholicism”—sufficient to convey fear of the almighty, but without evoking the specter of Crusade<sup>55</sup>. Schools for Moroccan boys (and, to a much lesser extent, girls) in the Spanish Zone, established under the aegis of the army and foreign ministry, emphasized classical and Moroccan Arabic and Quranic teaching. Unlike in the French sector, there was little effort to cultivate a “native elite” trained in European language and civilization<sup>56</sup>. The largely working-class character of Spanish colonial settlement delivered another contrast with the French colony. Spaniards and Moroccans lived and labored side by side, sometimes in agricultural and mining operations, but more often in the public works and service sectors that sprouted under military auspices<sup>57</sup>. Mixed neighborhoods lent credibility to the Africanista myth of Hispano-Moroccan

---

<sup>54</sup> Schiavon, *La Guerre du Rif...*, *op. cit.*, 181-182, 214-215; Josep Lluís Mateo Dieste, *La “hermandad” hispano-marroquí: Política y religión bajo el Protectorado español en Marruecos (1912-1956)* (Barcelona: Edicions Bellaterra, 2003), 153.

<sup>55</sup> Mateo Dieste, *Hermandad...*, *op. cit.*, 32, 111-112, 149-153; José Luis Villanova Valero, *Los interventores. La Piedra angular del Protectorado español en Marruecos* (Barcelona: Edicions Bellaterra, 2006), esp. 122-137.

<sup>56</sup> Geoffrey Jensen, “Military Memories, History, and the Myth of Hispano-Arabic Identity in the Spanish Civil War”, in *Memory and Cultural History of the Spanish Civil War: Realms of Oblivion*, ed. Aurora G. Morcillo, (Leiden: Brill, 2014), esp. 504-506; Irene González González, *Spanish Education in Morocco, 1912-1956: Cultural Interactions in a Colonial Context* (Brighton, UK: Sussex Academic Press, 2015), 47-79.

<sup>57</sup> Mateo Dieste, *Hermandad...*, *op. cit.*, 80-83.

brotherhood, while at the same time the interventores labored to enforce taboos on private intimacy between Christians and Muslims<sup>58</sup>.

The most visible figure in the Spanish Zone was not the High Commissioner, let alone the sultan, but the Moroccan figurehead designated as “caliph”. Nominally the sultan’s representative in the Spanish Zone under the terms of the 1912 Protectorate arrangement, the caliph acquired a quasi-sovereign aura after 1927. Selected for his dynastic pedigree rather than his administrative experience, the caliph traveled with “toda la solemnidad y ritual con que tradicionalmente lo efectuaron los soberanos marroquíes.” On occasion, the Africanista press slipped into referring to the caliph as “el soberano”—legally inaccurate, but an indication of the obsolescence of the 1912 Protectorate treaty in Africanista thinking<sup>59</sup>. As Franco pointed out in 1928, Riffian tribes showed greater willingness to submit to the rule of their client caliph than they ever had to any sultan<sup>60</sup>. The gradual “sovereignization” of the caliph defied the central principle of the Protectorate agreements of 1912, namely, the indivisibility of the Sultanate as an integral political, economic, and sovereign space. Although the Spanish Zone never formally broke from the Sultanate, the Africanista uprising of 1936 led to a de facto partition of Morocco that lasted until the Anglo-American landings in North Africa in 1942 drastically changed the geopolitical landscape<sup>61</sup>.

## LEGACIES

Within a decade, the Spanish colonial army would again invite German agents into Morocco to aid in its struggle against the liberal empires. The Africanista military rebellion of 1936 was launched not against the Primo de Rivera regime, of course, but rather against the republic that came along in 1931 in the wake of Primo’s downfall. But

---

<sup>58</sup> Fernando Rodríguez Mediano, “Delegación de Asuntos Indígenas, S2N2. Gestión racial en el Protectorado español en Marruecos”, *Awraq* 20 (1999): 173-206; Josep Lluís Mateo Dieste, “‘Rarezas’: conversiones religiosas en el Marruecos colonial (1930-1956)”, *Hispana. Revista española de historia* 73, 243 (2013): 225-254.

<sup>59</sup> “S. A. I. el Jalifa de la Zona Española visita la ciudad de Xauen,” *África: Revista de Tropas Coloniales*, May, 1929, 129.

<sup>60</sup> Francisco Franco, “La paz y el Tertib,” *África: Revista de Tropas Coloniales*, February, 1928, 25.

<sup>61</sup> Pack, *The Deepest Border ...*, *op. cit.*, 221-228.

the rebel army was in many respects forged in the colonial experience and its progressive divergence from peninsular politics, which had already begun toward the end of the Primo years<sup>62</sup>. Although the ideological differences between Nazi Germany and the Africanista rebels who started the Spanish Civil War—and between Imperial Germany and its Nazi successors—are well known, all shared a common antipathy toward the liberal empires. Not coincidentally, the presence of Wehrmacht advisors in Ceuta, Melilla, and Spanish Morocco after 1936 was accompanied by a burgeoning cult of Francisco Franco among some Moroccans. Represented as a latter-day El Cid who led Christians and Muslims together in battle against an atheist government supported by the French imperialists, “al-Hajj Franco” was even rumored so have adopted a Muslim orphan girl—a cunning variation on the theme of anti-Bolshevik religious crusade developed on the Peninsula<sup>63</sup>. As during the Rif War, the specter of Bolshevism united many elements of the Francoist coalition, but to Africanistas revolution was nothing more than the ineluctable result of the atheist republicanism imported from France. Theirs was a rebellion not only against Bolshevism, but against a liberal-conservative establishment they believed had allowed the Anglo-French global order to bury Spain’s national destiny<sup>64</sup>.

The failure of Primo de Rivera’s regime to convert success in the Rif campaign into a new era of political dynamism on the peninsula contrasts sharply with the trajectory of De Gaulle, whose Fifth Republic survived him and thrived. The Gaullist Republic experienced no equivalent to the Africanista rebellion of 1936; those who had taken to violent opposition mostly went into exile, receiving amnesty over time. Some attempted to rejoin French political life, seeking alternatives both to the socialist left and hegemonic Gaullist right. Several organizations came and went, purporting to stand for the confident defense of Western civilization but more often relying on the foreboding rhetoric of racial decline. The most successful such party, Jean-Marie Le Pen’s *Front National*, leveled harsh criticism of what it regarded as the Fifth Republic’s embrace of

---

<sup>62</sup> Nerín, *La guerra...*, *op. cit.*, 96-98; Balfour, *Deadly Embrace...*, *op. cit.*, 172.

<sup>63</sup> Josep Lluís Mateo Dieste, “De los ‘remendados’ al Hajj Franco: Los españoles en el imaginario colonial marroquí,” *Illes e imperis: Estudios de la historia de las sociedades en el mundo colonial y post-colonial*, 7 (2004): 63-92. Also see Eric Calderwood, *Colonial al-Andalus: Spain and the Making of Moroccan Culture* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2018).

<sup>64</sup> The most forceful articulation of this point of view remains Areilza and Castiella, *Reivindicaciones...* For background, see Pack, *The Deepest Border...*, *op. cit.*, 216-217.

postcolonial immigration and simultaneous abandonment of the assimilationist ideal. Although the party's rank-and-file often mobilized raw racism, the official position emphasized that "strong cultural assimilation" must precede political inclusion<sup>65</sup>. The continuities from the *Algérie française* movement to the Le Penist rejection of multiculturalism follow a bright line of anti-American critique: the American-led global order embraced the rising tide of non-European peoples first by dismantling the French empire and then by forging an inorganic model of multicultural coexistence. Le Pen's party grew steadily, refining its message under a new generation of leadership to soften overt racial prejudice and emphasize the ideals of national sovereignty and republican assimilationism. By the late 2010s, renamed *Rassemblement National*, it had overtaken the Gaullist legacy as the dominant force on the French right.

In Spain, the bifurcating effect of colonial crisis was felt with immediacy and terror, and not through the peaceful and methodical process of democratic mobilization that characterized the rise of the Front National in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. This difference, however, should not diminish the key point that, in both cases, colonial crisis in the "near abroad" gave rise to competing global visions within the nationalist right. This extended comparison of the political and international dynamics of the two crises has revealed how leaders' attempts to define the problem as an internal matter collided with imperatives dictated by outside powers. Even as the crises were resolved, protracted disputes arose over whether to collaborate in the hegemonic order or to resist it. In this sense, comparison with the French-Algerian War, though far from generating a perfect parallel, provides a useful analytic frame for understanding the significance and legacies of the Rif War, and for helping illuminate the relationships between politics, empire, and national identity.

## BIBLIOGRAFÍA

- Areilza, José María de, and Fernando María Castiella. *Reivindicaciones de España*. Madrid: Instituto de Estudios Políticos, 1941.
- Balfour, Sebastian. *Deadly Embrace: The Moroccan Road to the Spanish Civil War*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2001.

---

<sup>65</sup> Quoted in Rita Chin, *The Crisis of Multiculturalism in Europe: A History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017), 124.

- Ben-Ami, Shlomo. *El cirujano de hierro. La dictadura de Primo de Rivera (1923-1930)*. Barcelona: RBA, 2012.
- Benomar, Amor. “Introducción al problema de las razas de color”. *África: Revista de Tropas Coloniales*. February, 1927.
- Calderwood, Eric. *Colonial al-Andalus: Spain and the Making of Moroccan Culture*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2018.
- Cambó, Francesc. “El problema de Marroc”. *La Veu de Catalunya*, 13-19 October, 1922.
- Chin, Rita. *The Crisis of Multiculturalism in Europe: A History*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017.
- Connelly, Matthew. *A Diplomatic Revolution: Algeria’s Fight for Independence and the Origins of the Post-Cold War Era*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2002.
- Cooper, Frederick. *Citizenship between Empire and Nation: Remaking France and French Africa, 1945-1960*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014.
- Dard, Olivier. *Voyage au Coeur de l’OAS* (Paris: Perrin, 2005), 268.
- Fleming, Shannon. *Primo de Rivera and Abd el-Krim: The Struggle in Spanish Morocco, 1923-1927*. New York: Garland, 1991.
- Franco Bahamonde, Francisco. “La guerra en el Rif: Comentarios a un crítico extranjero”. *Revista de Tropas Coloniales*, August, 1925.
- . “La paz y el Tertib”. *África: Revista de Tropas Coloniales*, February, 1928.
- García Figueras, Tomás. “Actividad militar en Marruecos”. *África: Revista de Tropas Coloniales*, April, 1927.
- Gil Pecharromán, Julio. *Niceto Alcalá Zamora. Un liberal en la encrucijada*. Madrid: Síntesis, 2005.
- González Calleja, Eduardo. *La España de Primo de Rivera: la modernización autoritaria, 1923-1930*. Madrid: Alianza, 2005.
- González González, Irene. *Spanish Education in Morocco, 1912-1956: Cultural Interactions in a Colonial Context*. Brighton, UK: Sussex Academic Press, 2015.
- Horne, Alistair. *A Savage War of Peace: Algeria, 1954-1962*. London; MacMillan, 1977.
- Hubert-Jacques, M. *L’aventure riffaine et ses dessous politiques*. Paris: Éditions Bossard, 1927.
- Jensen, Geoffrey. *Cultura militar española. Modernistas, tradicionalistas y liberales*, translated by Jaime Blasco. Madrid: Biblioteca Nueva, 2014.

- . "Military Memories, History, and the Myth of Hispano-Arabic Identity in the Spanish Civil War". In *Memory and Cultural History of the Spanish Civil War: Realms of Oblivion*, edited by Aurora G. Morcillo, 495-532. Leiden: Brill, 2014.
- . "The Spanish-Moroccan Military Campaigns in the Context of European Colonial History". *Revista Universitaria de Historia Militar* 8, 16 (2019): 17-40.
- Martin-Márquez, Susan. *Disorientations: Spanish Colonialism in Africa and the Performance of Identity*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008.
- Mateo Dieste, Josep Lluís. "De los 'remendados' al Hajj Franco: Los españoles en el imaginario colonial marroquí". *Illes e imperis: Estudios de la historia de las sociedades en el mundo colonial y post-colonial*, 7 (2004): 63-92.
- . *La "hermandad" hispano-marroquí: Política y religión bajo el Protectorado español en Marruecos (1912-1956)*. Barcelona: Edicions Bellaterra, 2003.
- . "'Rarezas': conversiones religiosas en el Marruecos colonial (1930-1956)". *Hispana. Revista española de historia* 73, 243 (2013): 225-254.
- Moga Romero, Vicente. *Las minas del Rif y Melilla, 1916. Las vetas de una mirada centenaria*. Melilla: Consejería de Cultura, 2009.
- Neila Hernández, José Luis. "Revisionismo y reajustes en el Mediterráneo: Tánger y las expectativas de la II República española (1934-1936)". *Hispania: Revista de Historia Española* 52, 2 (1992): 655-685.
- Nerín, Gustau. *La Guerra que vino de África*. Barcelona: Crítica, 2005.
- Neute, Louis. *Monsieur le Maréchal: la parcours militaire de Philippe Pétain, 1878-1939*. Paris: Éditions de l'École de Guerre, 2020.
- Pack, Sasha D. *The Deepest Border: The Strait of Gibraltar and the Making of the Modern Hispano-African Borderland*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2019).
- Pennell, C. R. *Morocco since 1830*. New York: New York University Press, 2000.
- Peyrefitte, Alain. *C'était de Gaulle*. Paris: Fayard, 1994.
- Primo de Rivera, Miguel. *Discurso leído ante la Real Academia Hispano-Americana el 25 de marzo de 1917*. Cádiz: Imprenta Manuel Álvarez, 1917.
- . "Nueva visión del problema de Marruecos". *Revista de Tropas Coloniales*, August, 1925.
- Rodríguez Mediano, Fernando. "Delegación de Asuntos Indígenas, S2N2. Gestión racial en el Protectorado español en Marruecos". *Awraq* 20 (1999): 173-206.
- "S. A. I. el Jalifa de la Zona Española visita la ciudad de Xauen". *África: Revista de Tropas Coloniales*, May, 1929.

- Schiavon, Max. *La Guerre du Rif. Maroc (1925-1926)*. Paris: Éditions Pierre de Taillac, 2017.
- Shepard, Todd. *The Invention of Decolonization: The Algerian War and the Remaking of France*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006.
- Seco Serrano, Carlos. *La España de Alfonso XIII. El estado. La política. Los movimientos sociales*. Madrid: Espasa Calpe, 2002.
- . *Militarismo y civilismo en la España contemporánea*. Madrid: Instituto de Estudios Económicos, 1984.
- Shaev, Brian. "The Algerian War, European Integration, and the Decolonization of French Socialism". *French Historical Studies* 41, 1 (February, 2018): 63-94.
- Stuart, Graham H. *The International City of Tangier*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1955.
- Sueiro Seoane, Susana. "El mito del estratega. Primo de Rivera y la resolución del problema de Marruecos". *Cuadernos de Historia Contemporánea*, 16 (1994): 113-129.
- Thomas, Martin. *Empires of Intelligence: Security Services and Colonial Disorder after 1914*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008.
- Valero, Alet. "Le tourisme au Maroc espagnol: La période du Patronato Nacional de Turismo (1928-1936)". In *Le tourisme dans l'Empire français: Politique, pratiques, et imaginaires (XIX-XX siècles)*, edited by Colette Zytnicki and Habib Kazdaghli, 235-254. Paris: Société Française d'Histoire d'Outre-Mer, 2009.
- Villanova, José Luis. *El Protectorado de España en Marruecos: organización política y territorial*. Barcelona: Edicions Bellaterra, 2004.
- . *Los interventores. La piedra angular del Protectorado español en Marruecos*. Barcelona: Edicions Bellaterra, 2006.