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Globalizing the Rif War? Spanish Officialdom´s Perceptions of Transnational Anti-Colonialism

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GLOBALIZING THE RIF WAR? SPANISH OFFICIALDOM'S PERCEPTIONS OF TRANSNATIONAL ANTI-COLONIALISM

Master's Thesis

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ABSTRACT

The Rif War and the subsequent proclamation of the Rif Republic marked a watershed for anti-colonial movements during the interwar period. Traditional historiography tended to categorize the episode as an isolated tribal revolt. Nevertheless, recent studies shed light on the international significance the conflict had on the emergence of global anti-colonial solidarity. This thesis uses Orientalism to analyze how transnational anti-colonial solidarity associated with the Riffians was perceived by the Spanish intelligence and interpreted by colonial military officers. It argues that orientalist and essentialist assumptions caused colonial officials to misinterpret transnational anti-colonialism, exaggerating the Riffian rebellion's dimension and altering their sense-making of foreign and domestic politics.

Keywords: Rif War, Orientalism, transnational anti-colonialism, Spanish intelligence, perceptions.

1. INTRODUCTION

In 1921 the Berber tribes of Northern Morocco, led by 'Abd al-Karim al-Khatabbi (hereafter Abdelkrim), defeated the Spanish armies in Annual and proclaimed the Rif Republic. From 1921 to 1926, Abdelkrim successfully waged war on the Franco-Spanish protectorates while conducting an international anti-colonial campaign to legitimate his nascent state.

The proclamation of the Rif Republic (1921-1926) converged with the emergence of internationalist anti-colonial ideologies inspired by Pan-Islamism, Bolshevik socialism, and Wilsonian ideals of self-determination.[1] Colonial empires faced revolts in Egypt (1919), Iraq (1920), Morocco (1921-1926), and Syria (1925-1927). In India in 1919, Gandhi launched his campaign of nonviolent resistance, which intersected with the Khilafat movement, a platform led by prominent Indian Muslims and non-Muslim who demanded the Allies to preserve the caliphate in Istanbul.[2] The same year, in Afghanistan, the emir Amanullah began the Third Anglo-Afghan War that ended with the country's independence. China also witnessed anti-colonial demonstrations in 1925, sponsored by the 30th May movement.

Public opinion favored the Riffian cause within this global anti-colonial milieu, spawning transnational anti-colonial solidarities. As a result, what began as a small-scale movement in an isolated area of the Spanish Protectorate, turned from 1923 into a transnational phenomenon. Under these circumstances, Spanish officials struggled to understand the nature of the Riffian rebellion and transnational anti-colonialism. Misperceptions and misinterpretations made colonial military officials see transnationalism despite its modest material capacities –anti-colonial activism never formed a centralized network controlled by the Riffian leader–, as the proof that professional foreign countries were aiding the Riffians.

[1] Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism.* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).
[2] Erez Manela, "Asia in the Global 1919: Reimagining Territory, Identity, and Solidarity", *The Journal of Asian Studies,* 78/2, (2019): 410-411.

This thesis uses the Rif War as a case study to shed light on how transnational anti-imperial politics of the interwar years altered Spanish colonial officers' perceptions. The paper argues that orientalist and essentialist assumptions guided colonial officers' misinterpretations and misperceptions. Prejudices regarding the tribal character of the Berber and Arab societies made them exaggerate the dimension of the rebellion seeing it as a broader offensive of a Muslim-Communist alliance directed from Moscow and Ankara. By doing that, the paper aims to locate the Rif War in its larger context exploring how anti-colonial movements shaped Spanish colonial officialdom's mentalities towards foreign and domestic politics. Ultimately, it expands our understanding of how misperceptions of international politics can affect the attitudes of decision-makers.[3]

1.1. LITERARY SURVEY

The Rif War has been subjected to considerable attention. Shortly after the conflict, reporters specialized in the region wrote the first accounts from their personal experiences.[4] The first academic studies appeared after Moroccan independence in 1956 at the hand of Moroccan official historiography that depicted the Berber resistance as part of the making-process of Moroccan nationalism, beginning a debate on how to conceptualize the episode.[5]

Abdallah Laroui, in his seminal work on the formation of the Moroccan state, categorizes the Rif War as one of the several rural uprisings that Spanish penetration faced from 1860 until 1927, conceptualizing it as a rural proto-nationalist resistance relegating its significance to a mere tribal revolt.[6] These works paid significant attention to the dichotomy between *bled al-Makhzan* (urban

[3] Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press. New edition, 2017), 3-10.
[4] Vincent Sheean, *Personal History.* (New York: Houton Miffin Company, 1935) and Walter B. Harris, *France, Spain, and the Rif.* (Naval and Military Press Edition, 2014).
[5] The precursor was the study of John Halstead which ascribed the formation of the nationalist movement to a small urban elite, relegating to "tradition" and "traditional tribalism" the resistance in rural areas such as the Rif and Yebala. See John P. Halstead, *Rebirth of a nation: the origins and rise of Moroccan nationalism, 1912-1944.* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967).
[6] Abdallah Laroui, *The History of the Maghrib: An Interpretive Essay.* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 351.

environments controlled by the Sharifian empire) and *bled al-Siba* (rural areas barely controlled by Rabat, such as the Rif and the Atlas Mountains).[7] Focusing on the origins of the war, Ayache categorizes the Berber movement as a short-lived episode of "primary resistance" with barely international significance.[8]

Conversely, Richard Pennell rejects this approach. With his exhaustive study of the Rif Republic, Pennell argues Abdelkrim attempted to create a modern state merging Islamic and Western principles.[9] Based on this, Pennell pinpoints the necessity of a more nuanced analysis, pointing that a sharp distinction between urban nationalism and rural resistance does not successfully explain the fluid nature of the Riffian movement. He stresses the influence of the Islamic reform *(salafiyaa)* on Abdelkrim and his desires to modernize the area at the image of European states.[10] Although he acknowledges Abdelkrim's state-building project was top-down directed, he notes that to understand the Rif War, it is necessary to put it "in relation to other political movements in its historical context",[11] concluding that "it is nonsense to draw a sharp boundary between the urban and the rural".[12]

Recent studies reinforce Pennell's conceptualization identifying a mixture of Islamic reformism and political pragmatism in Abdelkrim and stressing the connections between urban and rural environments through his formative years in Fez.[13] Wyrtzen argues that Abdelkrim created an "anti-colonial political field" responding to colonial penetration not to defend tribal autonomy but to create his

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[7] Scholarship on resistance movements traditionally differentiates them between "primary" and "secondary". The first refers to armed struggles backed by religious and sectarian mobilizations. The second refers to mass demonstrations and the appearance of national consciousness. See Terence Ranger, "Connexions between 'Primary Resistance' Movements and Modern Mass Nationalism in East and Central Africa," *The Journal of African History*, 94, (1968): 437-453. In Islamic countries, literature tends to identify primary and secondary resistance with rural or urban respectively. See Richard C. Pennell, "The Rif War: link or Cul-de-sac? Nationalism in the cities and resistance in the mountains", *The Journal of North African Studies,* 1/3, (1996): 236-245.

[8] Germaine Ayache, *Les Origines de la Guerre du Rif.* (Paris: Editions de la Sorbonne and Rabat, 1981).

[9] Richard Pennell, *A Country with a Government and a Flag: The Rif War in Morocco, 1921-1926* (Outwell: Middle East and North African Studies Press, 1986).

[10] Islamic reformism was an intellectual and political movement born in Egypt nourished by a cultural renaissance in the Middle East (*al-Nahda)*. It promoted the modernization of Muslim peoples merging Islamic principles and European technology to challenge imperial domination. Intellectuals such as Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, Mohamed Abduh, or Rashid Rida were among the main promoters of this thought.

[11] Pennell, "The Rif War: link or Cul-de-sac?", 236.

[12] *Ibidem,* 241.

[13] Mohamed Tahtah, *Entre pragmatisme, réformisme et modernisme: le rôle politico-religieux des Khattabi dans le Rif (Maroc).* (Leuven: Departement Oosterse Studies, 2000).

modern state. Consequently, he notices that colonial penetration and national anti-colonial identities were shaped in a continuous interplay.[14]

Other studies stress the international significance of the conflict. In her biography of Abdelkrim, Maria Rosa de Madariaga describes how the success of the rebellion increased the prestige of the Riffian leader, attracting solidarities from different countries, individuals, and ideologies.[15] With an approach from global history, Goebel notes the Rif revolt's influence in the origins of Third World nationalism and anti-colonial internationalism mobilizing anti-colonial solidarities.[16] Some had even noted that Riffian guerrilla warfare inspired anti-colonial leaders during the Cold War.[17] Finally, it has been argued that anti-colonial uprisings across the Middle East and North Africa must not be seen as isolated events but rather a continuity of the massive violence triggered in 1914, which expanded into colonial areas during the 20s.[18]

Based on this research, it can be argued that the conflict impacted international politics as part of the wider anti-colonial upheavals that shaped a global anti-colonial milieu. Requests undertaken by Abdelkrim to the League of Nations for self-determination,[19] the interconnections between the rebellion and socialist movements in France,[20] and the impact the war had in shaping the perceptions of imperial powers towards Spain,[21] demonstrate how the Rif War intertwined with the making of a transnational anti-colonial discourse.[22] The analogies constructed by mass media between anti-colonial leaders such as Mustafa Kemal [Atatürk]

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[14] Jonathan Wyrtzen, *Making Morocco: Colonial Intervention and the Politics of Identity.* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2015), 116-135.

[15] María Rosa de Madariaga, *Abd-el-Krim el Jatabi: la lucha por la independencia.* (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 2009), 425-469.

[16] Michael Goebel, *Anti-Imperial Metropolis: Interwar Paris and the Seeds of Third World Nationalism*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 149-175.

[17] Mevliyar Er, "Abd-El-Krim Al-Khattabi: The Unknown Mentor of Che Guevara." *Terrorism and Political Violence,* 29/1, (2017): 137–59.

[18] Robert Gerwarth and Erez Manela. "The Great War as a Global War." *Diplomatic History,* 38/4, (2014): 786-800.

[19] On the impact of the Rif War on international politics and international law see Anna Chotzen, "Beyond Bounds: Morocco's Rif War and the Limits of International Law." *Humanity,* 5/1, (2014): 33–54 and Pablo la Porte, "'Rien à Ajouter': The League of Nations and the Rif War (1921—1926)." *European History Quarterly*,41/1, (2011): 66–87.

[20] David H. Slavin, "The French Left and the Rif War, 1924-25: Racism and the Limits of Internationalism." *Journal of Contemporary History,* 26/1, (1991): 5–32.

[21] Pablo La Porte, "La sombra de la percepción: Las autoridades coloniales británicas y francesas y el protectorado español en Marruecos (1912-1936)", *Hispania*, 74/247, (2014): 495-524.

[22] Michael Goebel, *Anti-Imperial Metropolis*, 176-215.

and Abdelkrim proved this. Quoting Moureau, "the emergence of national ideas across the Maghrib cannot be considered in isolation from the rest of the world".[23]

However, how Spanish officialdom saw the emergence of this transnational anti-colonialism had been barely studied. One way to do so is to analyze perceptions of Spanish intelligence and colonial officers.[24] Recent studies noted the importance of intelligence misperceptions in the decision-making process of colonial powers facing interwar revolts.[25] Some of these analyses reveal that cultural representations shaped colonial officers' strategies. British officers, for instance, made up stories pointing to Bolsheviks as the cause of uprisings in Islamic countries.[26] This has been almost unexplored for the Spanish case, but some sources suggest a similar reaction among Spanish colonial officialdom and diplomacy.[27]

What seems clear is that the significance of the Rif War lies beyond national historiographic narratives and that it was not an isolated revolt.[28] As Abdullatif states, new approaches to North African studies demand a "more inclusive and transnational perspective if we want to move beyond orientalist and nationalistic histories".[29]

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[23] Odile Moreau, "Echoes of National Liberation: Turkey Viewed from the Maghrib in the 1920s," *The Journal of North African Studies,* 8/1, (2003): 19.

[24] A good analysis of transnational anti-colonial politics and its consequences on perceptions of colonial powers in Alp Yenen, *The Young Turk Aftermath. Making sense of transnational contentious politics at the end of the Ottoman Empire, 1918-1922.* (Doctoral Thesis: University of Basel Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, 2019). Chapter 4.

[25] Thomas Martin, "Crisis Management in Colonial States: Intelligence and Counter-Insurgency in Morocco and Syria after the First World War." *Intelligence and National Security,* 21/5, (2006): 697–716.

[26] John Ferris, "'The Internationalism of Islam': The British Perception of a Muslim Menace, 1840-1951." *Intelligence and National Security,* 24/1, (2009): 57–77.

[27] Daniel Macías Fernández, "La Conspiración Turco-Comunista: Espías, Contrabandistas e Instructores En El Rif." *Diacronie,* 8/28, (2016): 1-16. With another approach, Sebastian Balfour has analyzed the impact of colonial wars in Morocco on Spanish domestic politics and how they shaped the cultural and military mentalities among Spanish Generals that would carry out the coup d'état in 1936 against the Republican government. See Sebastian Balfour, *Deadly Embrace: Morocco and the Road to the Spanish Civil War.* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

[28] George Joffe, "Nationalism and the Bled: The Jbala from the Rif War to the Istiqlal." *The Journal of North African Studies,* 19/4, (2014): 475–89.

[29] Ali Abdullatif Ahmida, "Beyond Orientalist, Colonial and Nationalist Models: A Critical Mapping of Maghribi Studies (1951-2000)." *Third World Quarterly,* 30/6, (2009): 127–36.

1.2. HYPOTHESIS, METHODOLOGY, AND SOURCES.

This thesis explores the research question: **How did the Rif rebellion connect with networks of transnational anti-colonial activism, and how did Spanish government officials interpret these connections?**

It uses Orientalism as an analytical framework to explore how Spanish officialdom traced transnational anti-colonialism and interpreted it. Orientalism is used in the sense Edward Said coined it, as an imagined discourse that Western powers constructed based on cultural stereotypes of Islamic countries to legitimize colonization and imperial dominance.[30] Said used the term to analyze how Western literature and scholars created cultural representations depicting Arabs as "chaotic, prompted to violence, and uncivilized" to legitimate the "civilizing mission".[31]

In the last decades, Orientalism has become a fertile theory to analyze imperial and anti-imperial politics from a post-colonial perspective. Priya Sitia, for instance, uses Orientalism as her core theory to explore what cultural representations guided British intelligence agents' strategies in Arabia a how this shaped British policy in the region.[32] Orientalism has also proved fruitful to analyze what misperceptions affected colonial officers' sense-making and decision-making of anti-colonial struggles during the first years of the Interwar period in Anatolia.[33]

Regarding the Spanish Protectorate, Orientalism explains the narrative that legitimized the Spanish occupation of Northern Morocco. Intellectual, political, and military circles used an ambivalent discourse depicting Spaniards as the "civilized" brothers of Moroccans based on al-Andalus's myth.[34] In the Spanish colonial army, these ideas formed a military culture, Africanism, that saw Morocco as the place where Spanish international prestige –lost after the loss in 1898 of

[30] Edward Said, *Orientalism.* (New York: First Vintage Books edition, 1979).
[31] Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism.* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994).
[32] Priya Satia, *Spies in Arabia, the Great War and the culture's foundations of the Covert Empire in the Middle East.* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).
[33] Alp Yenen, "Elusive Forces in Illusive Eyes: British Officialdom's Perception of the Anatolian Resistance Movement." *Middle Eastern Studies,* 54/5, 2018: 788-810.
[34] Anna McSweeney and Claudia Hopkins, "Editorial: Spain and Orientalism", *Art in Translation*, 9/1, (2017): 1-6.

the last colonies of Cuba, Puerto Rico, and Filipinas– could be restituted.[35] Africanism conceptualized the occupation as a benevolent mission carried out by military officials that could understand the unique nature of these Near Orient and the Berber and Arab psychology.[36] The military faction of Africanists virtually controlled all aspects of the Protectorate, relegating the civilian administration.[37] As noted by Cañete and Padilla, an important number of studies still today reproduce this idea of "atypical colonialism," reinforcing the perception of an "exceptional, unique, and benevolent colonialism". Contrary, they claimed Spanish Africanismo was all but exceptional constituting another brutal colonial intervention legitimized through stereotypes and cultural prejudices.[38]

The thesis does not try to reconstruct the Spanish intelligence apparatus during the Rif War. Yet, it focuses on how cultural biases and prejudices of Spanish colonial officials and the military altered the interpretation of information regarding transnational networks. To do that, it uses primary sources from the General Administration Archive (AGA). We selected reports informing about anti-colonial activities from the Spanish embassies and consulates and crossed them with private correspondence between Spanish colonial officers trying to identify essentialist and orientalist assumptions across the documents.

The thesis establishes the premise that some transnational connections across the Spanish Protectorate existed before 1921 from the confluence of regional dynamics (the resistance to Spanish colonial penetration, the alteration of indigenous socioeconomic structures) with international politics (the effects of the Great War, the onset of the Russian revolution, and the Pan-Islamic mobilization). From here, the article elaborates a threefold argument. First, Abdelkrim's attempts to legitimate his rebellion at the international stage spawned transnational solidarity fanned by religious, Wilsonian, or socialist principles. Second, Spanish intelligence and colonial officers were aware of this transnational activism, but they exaggerated it. Third, this led to

[35] The Spanish king Alfonso XIII, for instance, liked to use the nickname "El Africano".
[36] An example in Francisco Franco, 'Pasividad e inacción', *Revista de las Tropas Coloniales,* 4/4, (1924), 4. Available in http://hemerotecadigital.bne.es/issue.vm?id=0004279995&search=&lang=en.
[37] Jose Luis Villanova, 'La pugna entre militares y civiles por el control de la actividad interventora del Protectorado español', 2/220, (2005): 684-715.
[38] Gonzalo Fernández Parrilla and Carlos Cañete, Spanish-Maghribi (Moroccan) relations beyond exceptionalism: a postcolonial perspective, *The Journal of North African Studies*, 24/1, (2019): 111-133.

misinterpretations among Spanish colonial generals due to orientalist and essentialist assumptions. Reproducing stereotypes that denied the agency of tribal and Islamic peoples, they conceptualized the rebellion as part of a larger offensive to subvert the Western world directed from Moscow and Ankara. Ultimately, misperceptions and misinterpretations reinforced the conservative ideology of the Africanist generals shaping an extreme-right discourse that permeated their attitudes towards Communism and Islamic peoples.

1.3. STRUCTURE

First chapter contextualizes the emergence of transnational anti-colonialism in the Spanish Protectorate. It presents Northern Morocco as a transnational space rather than an isolated region, describing how colonial penetration and rapid modernization embedded the area into a wider geopolitical context. The Frist World War is presented as the turning point for the full-scale uprising of the Riffians in 1920. Finally, it presents the proclamation of the Rif Republic vis-à-vis its global context

Second chapter focuses on how the Riffian revolt catalyzed networks of transnational anti-colonialism and how the Spanish officials reported on them. It establishes three vectors that mobilized transnational solidarities; Pan-Islamism, Wilsonian liberalism, and Bolshevik socialism, and traces how Spanish officers and diplomats perceived these emerging solidarities through their reports. When possible, the chapter focuses on individuals' cases. The chapter shows that Spanish officers were aware of transnational anti-colonial activism, but they misperceived their capacities, seeing them as centralized networks based on circumstantial evidence such as newspaper articles, rumors, and the state of public opinion.

Third chapter dives into misinterpretations of transnational anti-colonialism among the colonial officers. It shows that misperceptions were fostered by a collective mentality of the Spanish colonial officials that reproduced orientalist and essentialist prejudices. Believing a tribal people could not have revolted by themselves, Africanist generals assumed conspiracy theories that

attributed the success of Riffian resistance to external support, mainly from Turkey and the USSR. These cultural representations fostered Spanish colonial officers' and generals' misperceptions of foreign and domestic politics denied rebels' agency and defined the identity of Europe's cultural others.[39]

[39] Said, *Orientalism,* 139-148.

2. THE EMERGENCE OF TRANSNATIONAL ANTI-COLONIALISM IN THE SPANISH PROTECTORATE

2.1. SETTING THE SPANISH PROTECTORATE

On 30 March 1912, the Treaty of Fez established a protectorate dividing the Shariffian Empire. France occupied most of their territories, while a Northern strip comprehending the mountainous regions of the Rif and Yebala was allocated to Spain. Spain and France figured as partners, but in reality, the protectorate was under French dominion, which agreed to cede Northern territories to Spain under British pressure to create a buffer zone between French-African territories and the Strait of Gibraltar.[40]

A second-class power under a structural socioeconomic crisis, Spain had difficulties occupying the territories assigned. With its presence limited to urban coastal enclaves in Melilla and Ceuta, colonial officials reproduced the traditional European mentality exaggerating the dichotomy between *bled al-Siba*, seeing it as rebellious rural areas isolated from any external influence, and *bled al-Makhzan,* urban areas controlled by the sultan where colonial administration established.[41] In reality, a more fluid society and culture existed, connecting the two areas thanks to commercial routes, markets, and religious brotherhoods.[42]

Spanish colonial army, poorly organized and with limited resources, had to merge military conquest with cooptation of tribal chiefs to access the tribal areas.[43] At the same time, colonial penetration hastened connections between rural and urban environments. Colonial administration established in urban centers attracted indigenous and foreign people seeking economic opportunities. Rumors

[40] Officially, Spain never established a protectorate in Northern Morocco but a "zone of influence". See "El Tratado de 1921: Un subarriendo de Francia" in M. Rosa de Madariaga, *Marruecos, Ese Gran Desconocido: Breve Historia Del Protectorado Español* (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 2013). Kindle.

[41] Spain's previous attempts to control rural areas ended in military disasters like the one in 1909 of El Barranco del Lobo with significant consequences in the metropolitan territory where leftist parties mobilized public opinion against military conscription. See Maria Rosa de Madariaga, *En el Barranco del Lobo: las Guerras de Marruecos.* (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 2005), 59-70.

[42] Sebastian Balfour, *Deadly Embrace,* 294. Prior to 1912 already existed a high transnational seasonal mobility among tribal peoples that crossed regularly to Algeria to work in times of special necessity. Amina Mimoum, *La Sociedad rifeña frente al protectorado español.* (Barcelona: Ediciones Bellaterra, 2014).

[43] Commonly known as "moros pensionados" (subsidized moors), they became the cornerstone for the Spanish colonial administration to exert effective control over tribal territories.

about vast mineral wealth in the Eastern Rif attracted Western investors who established in Tangier, Melilla, and Tetouan.[44] With its strategic location, Tangier thrived with Westerners and a nascent indigenous bourgeoisie. Mass media proliferated, and in 1902, the Spanish administration founded *El Telegrama del* Rif in Tetouan. The press and the mobility of people fostered transmission and introduction of novel ideas embedding the region within the wider colonized Muslim world, thereby turning the area into a transcontinental space.[45] These transformations also altered socioeconomic structures across the tribal areas as the Spanish strategy of *divide et impera* progressed. Al-Khatabbi's family's case is paradigmatic.

'Abd al-Karim al-Khattabi, the father of Abdelkrim, was a notable of the Beni Urriagel tribe. Believing in Western colonization's benefits for the Rif, he became a close collaborator of the Spanish administration. He sent Abdelkrim to study at the Qarawiyyin University in Fez, where he came into contact with the reformist movement of the *salafiyya* promoted from Egypt. After his studies, Abdelkrim returned to work for the Spanish, as a translator and teacher in Tetouan and also as collaborator of the Arabic section in the newspaper *El Telegrama del Rif* between 1907 and 1915. His younger brother, Mh'ammed, was sent to study mining engineering in Madrid at the expense of the Spanish government.

Colonial penetration also fostered influences from the Middle East. Egyptian newspapers like *al-Mulayyad*, *al-Ahram* (pro-French), *al-Muqattam* (pro-British), and *al-Liwa* (Pan-Islamic) already circulated in 1912.[46] Pan-Islamic ideas penetrated the region when the Moroccan sultan in 1912, under French diplomatic pressure, had attempted to establish an alliance with the Ottoman Empire based on religious solidarity (*Ittihad-i Islam).* By 1909 Ottoman officers were sent in unofficial military missions aided by German diplomacy. The leader of the mission, 'Aref Taher Bey, was eventually expelled to Egypt in 1911, from

[44] These rumors also attracted European investors from Britain, France, and Germany. De Madariaga, *Historia del Protectorado Español,* Kindle, Chapter 2.
[45] David Stenner, "Mediterranean Crossroads: Spanish-Moroccan Relations in Past and Present." *The Journal of North African Studies,* 24/1, (2019): 7–16.
[46] Edmund Burke, "Pan-Islam and Moroccan Resistance to French Colonial Penetration, 1900–1912." *Journal of African History,* 2/1, (1972): 97–118.

where he sponsored a secret society to promote Moroccan independence (*al-Ittihad al-Maghrib*).[47]

Under these geopolitical circumstances, the Spanish zone became a crucial area for anti-colonial networks that benefited from Spanish authorities' Germanophilia, who facilitated the circulation of anti-French propaganda. Taher Bey, for instance, returned to Morocco in 1912 with the mission to launch an Arabic newspaper, *al-Haqq,* that opposed French colonization. The newspaper was sponsored by German funds and published under the auspices of the Spanish legation in Tangier.[48] The promotion of anti-French activities by Spanish citizens did not go unnoticed by the French press that reported in 1912 that "Spanish consuls were especially active in fomenting anti-French propaganda".[49] The absence of control over rural territories was also an essential factor attracting foreign agents since Ottoman and German agents could move freely across the porous borders smuggling guns and materials between Algeria, the Rif, and the French area. Subaltern political actors like racketeers, smugglers, foreign agents, and stateless men thrived within this context.[50] These dynamics would increase with the arrival of the First World War.

2.2. PAN-ISLAMIC PROPAGANDA AND FOREIGN AGENTS: THE FIRST WORLD WAR

The global conflict of 1914 significantly impacted the area despite Spain's non-belligerent status. Ottoman and German empires appealed to Islam to promote a general uprising of Muslim peoples against French and British empires. Issuing a declaration of *Great Jihad,* the Ottoman caliph hoped to take advantage of his status and the cultural ties that tied Ottoman Empire with Islamic peoples. This fanned the dissemination of anti-colonial propaganda across the Spanish Protectorate and galvanized the tribes, concerning Spanish officials about

[47] Odile Moreau and Stuart Schaar, *Subversives and Mavericks in the Muslim Mediterranean: A Subaltern History.* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2016), 57-73.
[48] Odile Moreau, "Press Propaganda and Subaltern Agents of Pan-Islamic Networks in the Muslim Mediterranean World Prior to World War. In *The Press in the Middle East and North Africa, 1850-1950.* (Edinburgh University Press, 2018).
[49] Quoted in Edmund Burke, "Pan-Islam and Moroccan Resistance", 113.
[50] Odile Moreau, "Press Propaganda and Subaltern Agents", 6-7.

possible infiltrations of foreign agents that could promote rebellions across the tribal areas.

The war split Spanish public opinion. Among the Spanish colonial military, who controlled the Protectorate, existed a strong pro-German opinion rooted in their admiration for the Prussian military.[51] Adding to the previous existence of anti-French networks, this turned the Spanish area into a perfect operational base to disseminate anti-colonial propaganda and fund pro-Ottoman guerrillas.[52] Anti-colonial propaganda and political activism increased across Northern Morocco as German and Ottoman operatives spread propaganda and equipped tribal leaders with guns. The anti-French campaign reached an especial intensity in the areas around French-Spanish borders.[53] One of the most prominent German agents, ‘Abd al-Malek, grandson of emir ‘Abd al-Kader, who had fought the French in Argelia at the end of the 19th century, used regularly Spanish zone as haven after his incursions.

This global geopolitical battle over the Muslim “imagined community” had two significant effects in the region. On one side, it produced internal disputes among the Riffian tribes, increasing the anti-Spanish coalition's influence. On the other, it fostered colonial authorities’ perceptions of potential external threats and possible rebellions among their indigenous collaborators.[54] Any display of support towards the Ottoman Sultan was seen as a serious threat, an atmosphere that worsened the relations between the colonial officers and the family al-Khattabi.[55]

From 1915 ‘Abd al-Kareem al-Khattabi had made public statements sympathizing with the Ottoman sultan. Spanish authorities perceived these as a threat turning to his son Abdelkrim, who was in Melilla. In August 1915, a report from a Spanish official informed that, in his interview with Abdelkirm, he had expressed his desire for the “independence of the Muslim peoples and the non-occupied Rif”. The

[51] The Spanish Army split into two factions in 1917. The first was composed of officers that served in the metropolitan territories who formed the Juntas, counsels to request the end of the promotion based on “merits of war”. The second was formed by the Africanist officers of the Colonial Army who vehemently rejected this petition. See Pablo La Porte. “Civil-Military Relations in the Spanish Protectorate in Morocco.” *Armed Forces and Society,* 30/2, (2004): 203–26.
[52] Pablo la Porte, “La espiral irresistible: la Gran Guerra y el Protectorado español en Marruecos”, *Hispania Nova*, 15, (2017): 500-526.
[53] De Madariaga, *Abd el-Krim,* 119.
[54] La Porte, “La espiral irresistible”, 503.
[55] De Madariaga, *Abd el-Krim,* 128.

Spanish official deduced from Abdelkrim's statements that he supported the Young Turks against France and that this "could bring diplomatic consequences to Spain".[56] When this information reached the Spanish High Commissioner, General Gomez Jordana, he ordered his preventive imprisonment on 7 September 1915. Abdelkrim was freed in 1916 after his father compromised to resume collaboration with colonial authorities. However, from that moment 'Abd al-Kareem maintained an ambiguous attitude towards Spanish authorities, continuing his contacts with Riffian rebels. This was probably due to the increasing pressure of the anti-Spanish Riffian coalition, which had publicly pointed al-Khatabbi family as collaborators threatening them with burning their properties.

Ottoman-German aspiration of a general Muslim insurrection never materialized, proving the inexistence of a unified Muslim World.[57] Nevertheless, the circumstances brought by the conflict had exposed the extreme dependence of the Spanish colonial administration and military on its indigenous collaborators. In the light of this, the Spanish colonial army was pressured to fulfill the occupation of the remaining uncontrolled rural areas before the French moved into them to secure the zone.[58] Parallelly, increasingly harassed by anti-Spanish Riffian militias, the al-Khatabbi broke relations with Spanish authorities in February 1920.

The Ottoman-German campaign in the Protectorate would leave a long-term imprint on the attitudes of Spanish colonial officers shaping their subsequent perceptions towards the resistance in the Rif. In 1919, for instance, commenting on the motives of al-Khatabbi to break their relations with the Spanish, the Minister of State, Marquis of Lema, wrote that Abdelkim's change of attitude towards Spain "seemed to be inspired by enemy agents of Spain".[59] Laporte even suggests that the Frist World War was the underlying cause behind the jumpy

[56] The report quoted in *Ibid.,* 134-135.
[57] Tilman Lüdke, "(Not) Using Political Islam: The German Empire and its Failed Propaganda Campaign in the Near East and Beyond, 1914-1918, in Erik J. Zurcher, *Jihad and Islam in World War I: Studies on the Ottoman Jihad on the Centenary of Snouck Hurgronje's "Holy War Made in Germany"* (Leiden: Leiden University Press, 2016), 71-95.
[58] Sasha D. Pack, *The Deepest Border*. (Redwood City: Stanford University Press, 2019), 158-164.
[59] De Madariaga, *Abd el-Krim,* 191.

attempt of General Silvestre to conquest the Rif in 1920 and the subsequent full-scale uprising of the tribes that led to the military disaster of Annual in 1921.[60]

2.3. TRANSNATIONALIZATION OF THE RIF REVOLT

The advancement of Spanish troops towards the edge of the Eastern Rif in 1920 provoked a general uprising of the tribes. Unprepared, barely knowing the area, and with their supply lines cut, Spanish armies faced an astonishing defeat at Annual in 1921, where it is estimated around 10.000 soldiers perished.[61] An even more staggering act followed the defeat; the proclamation of an independent state. On 1st February 1922, the tribal coalition recognized Abdelkrim as its leader, entitled him Emir of the Rif (*Amir al-Muʻminin*).[62] A Bayʻa signed by the tribal chiefs made the Rif Republic official one year later.[63] From 1921 to 1926, the new state succeeded in its war against Spain, and from April 1925 against the French too, until a Franco-Spanish coalition obliged Abdelkrim to surrender in May 1926.

The proclamation of the Rif Republic occurred within a post-war context in which anti-colonial mobilizations were attempting to redefine the global order. Wilsonian ideals of self-determination gave hopes for independence to colonial subjects. The emergence of the Bolshevik state and the specter of world revolution, promoted from 1919 by the Comintern, galvanized anti-colonial movements. Parallelly, Pan-Islamic mobilizations increased as neither Wilsonian nor Bolshevik critiques to the imperial world order could fully articulate the Muslim discontent produced by the dissolution of the caliphate institution in 1923.[64] Anti-colonial internationalist ideas nourished a global narrative that questioned the

[60] La Porte, "La espiral irresistible", 526.
[61] De Madariaga, *En el Barranco del Lobo,* 119-159.
[62] De Madariaga, *Abd el-Krim,* 400.
[63] The dates of the official proclamation of the Republic are confusing. Some authors talk about the Rif Republic from 1921, others from 1922. He we follow Pennell's studies that set the official declaration of the Rif Republic in 1923 based on primary sources. See Jonathan Wyrtzen, *Making Morocco,* 118; and Richard C. Pennell, "Ideology and Practical Politics: A Case Study of the Rif War in Morocco, 1921–1926." *International Journal of Middle East Studies,* 14/1, (1982): 22-23.
[64] Cemil Aydin, *The Idea of the Muslim World.* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2017), 122-126.

benevolence of the "Western civilizing mission".[65] Visions of alternative global orders competed as Pan-Islamism, Soviet Bolshevism, and Wilsonian self-determination attracted supporters.[66] This global anti-colonial milieu fanned revolts across the Middle East and North Africa, which converged with the proclamation of the Rif Republic. Britain faced uprisings in Egypt and Afghanistan in 1919 and Iraq in 1920. In Anatolia, the "Turkish War of Liberation", led by Mustafa Kemal between 1921-1924, established an independent state in 1923. The French mandate faced the Syrian Revolt from 1925-1927. Although not coordinated events, uprisings influenced each other enhancing transnational solidarities that redefined regional, national and local anti-colonial identities.[67]

Abdelkrim took advantage of this context, launching a diplomatic and propaganda campaign to achieve official recognition for the Rif Republic. From 1922 he sent several petitions to the LON requesting official recognition for the Rif Republic. His demands were denied on the basis that the LON could not intervene in the sovereign territory.[68] He also requested official recognition to France in May 1922, hoping that Franco-Spanish rivalry would be useful, although these petitions were denied.[69]

Abdelkrim used the press to forward his anti-colonial political agenda as an alternative. According to Spanish sources, he followed different newspapers, even using translators to read French, German, Italian, and Portuguese newspapers.[70] The presence of foreign correspondents in the area provided him with an opportunity to forward his demands. In October 1924, he conceded an interview to Paul Scott Mowrer, the Chicago Daily News correspondent. Abdelkrim welcomed the American interest in the conflict, judging the United States to be a "modern, progressive country that could be a potential investor for the Riffian economy" and expressed "his desire for a peaceful resolution through

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[65] Michael Adas, "Contested Hegemony: The Great War and the Afro-Asian Assault on the Civilizing Mission Ideology." *Journal of World History*, 15/1, (2004): 31–63.
[66] See Cemil Aydin, *The Politics of Anti-Westernism in Asia: Visions of World Order in Pan-Islamic and Pan-Asian Thought*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).
[67] Emilio Spadola, "The Call of Communication: Mass Media and Reform in Interwar Morocco." In *Middle Eastern and North African Societies in the Interwar Period*. (Leiden: Leiden Brill, 2018), 97–122.
[68] Pablo La Porte, 'Rien a ajouter', 71.
[69] Sasha Pack, *The deepest border,* 165.
[70] Archivo General de la Administracion (hereafter AGA), Fondo África (15), Box M-265, (81/31/265). 'Report containing information about the prisoners in the Rif'. October 1924.

an international conference to reconsider Morocco's status".[71] The American correspondent Vincent Sheean also interviewed Abdelkrim, who explained his demands for the end of the conflict, which included (1) a total evacuation of the Spanish Protectorate, (2) the absolute independence of the Rif, and (3) the recognition of the Rif Republic.[72] Similarly, Walter B. Harris, British correspondent of *The Times* based in Tangier, established contact with Abdelkrim, even acting as an intermediator between him and the French authorities before France joined the fray in April 1925.[73] Harris published in *The Times* the correspondence between Abdelkrim, Mohamed Azerkan (the Riffian Minister for foreign affairs), and the Spanish authorities in which the Riffians demanded the right to self-determination.[74]

The attempt to achieve international recognition via official diplomatic channels failed since no official body recognized the Rif Republic as a valid interlocutor. However, this continuous shadow diplomacy and propaganda campaign achieved some outcomes across the public opinion in Europe and colonial territories. From 1924, although the Rif War was a secondary concern compared to the international affairs of post-war Europe, it acquired a significant presence across the European press, reaching humanitarian organizations like the Red Cross in Geneva, which received requests to intervene.[75] Abdelkrim became a public figure praised in national newspapers in America and Europe and pro-peace movements depicting him as a liberator from Western colonialism in Islamic countries.[76] Arabic newspapers from Buenos Aires and Sao Paolo circulated across Morocco and Algeria praising Mustafa Kemal and Abdelkrim as national liberators.[77] Even in Japan, news about the Riffian Revolt could be found.[78] His popularity was such that he even appeared on Time magazine's front

[71] Shannon E. Fleming, "The First American Among the Riffi: Paul Scott Mowrer´s October 1924 Interview with Abd-el-Krim". *The Journal of North African Studies,* 25/4, (2020): 594-615.
[72] Vincent Sheean, *Personal History.* (Ontario: Citadel Press, 1934), 90-105.
[73] Walter B. Harris, *France, Spain, and the Rif,* 210.
[74] *Ibid.,* 249-255.
[75] Pablo La Porte, "Humanitarian Assistance During the Rif War (Morocco, 1921-6): The International Committee of the Red Cross and 'an Unfortunate Affair'." *Historical Research: the Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research*, 89/243, (2016): 114–35.
[76] Pablo La Porte,"Rien a ajouter", 68.
[77] Odile Moreau. "Echoes of National Liberation: Turkey Viewed from the Maghrib in the 1920s." The *Journal of North African Studies,* 8/1, (2003): 59–71.
[78] AGA, 15, Box 273, (81/31/273). 'Dispatch from the Spanish Legation in Tokio'. 29th June 1925.

page on 17 August 1925. The result was the spread of anti-colonial solidarity across the entire globe with the Riffian cause turning a peripheral conflict into one that mobilized transnational sentiments, especially between 1924-1926. Quoting Harris, "the Rif cause appealed to sympathy".[79]

Spanish officials and colonial military, imbued with Orientalist and essentialist assumptions, struggled to understand this transnational solidarity towards the Riffian rebellion. Downplaying the Riffian agency, they suspected the rebellion's success and its attempt to build a centralized Western-style state must be controlled by external actors. As late as October 1923, they believed France must support the rebels to take over Northern Morocco –even the Spanish Socialist Deputy, Indalecio Prieto, shared these beliefs–.[80] From 1923 these perceptions changed. Now it was Turkish officers and elusive foreign agents sponsored by international Communism who were behind the rebellion. Hence, the monitoring of these transnational anti-colonial networks became the primary concern.

[79] Walter Harris, *France, Spain, and the Rif,* 257.
[80] Sasha Pack, *The Deepest Border,* 165.

3. (MIS)PERCEIVING TRANSNATIONAL ANTI-COLONIALISM

3.1. ANTI-COLONIALISM AND SOCIALISM: THE CASE OF JOHN ARNALL (1921-1925)

Socialist Bolshevism nourished transnational solidarities towards the Rif. With his *Imperialism: The Highest State of Capitalism,* Lenin provided anti-colonial activists a theory that denounced Imperialism as the result of capitalist exploitation. These principles crystallized in political actions after the Bolshevik revolution and the foundation of the Comintern in 1919, which made self-determination and racial equality critical demands in its program for the world revolution.[81] From 1920, Moscow promoted alliances with "bourgeois nationalists of the Islamic World" when in the Congress of the Eastern Peoples of Baku of 1920, Soviet representatives encouraged colonized Muslims everywhere to revolt against Imperialists. In 1925 this propaganda campaign intensified when it seemed Islamic nationalist uprisings were threatening the imperial domains from Morocco, Syria, Iran, and Palestine.[82]

Although this anti-colonial rhetoric never materialized into official alliances between the USSR and Muslim countries, the possible existence of an Islamic-Bolshevik alliance terrified intelligence apparatuses of Colonial Empires.[83] Similarly, Spanish officialdom tended to see the shadow of Moscow in any external support towards the Rif. Perceptions of colonial agents were, in fact, correct in one point. The convergence of Socialism with anti-colonial struggles fostered transnational solidarity of individuals towards the Riffian cause. However, the hidden hand of Moscow was far from reality.

During the first years of the conflict, the best example was the case of John Arnall. Arnall was a British citizen who supported the Riffian rebels from the onset of the revolt until his demise in 1925. Spanish officers were well-informed on Arnall's activities, but they tended to misread them in the light of his socialist background, misinterpreting his aims and motives. According to Spanish intelligence, Arnall

[81] Oleska Drachewych and Ian Mckay, *Left Transnationalism: The Communist International and the National, Colonial, and Racial Questions.* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2019).
[82] Slavin, "The French Left and the Rif War, 1924-25.", 17.
[83] John Ferris, "The Internationalism of Islam", 66-67.

was born in 1871 and settled on Tangier at the end of the 19th century. It seems he settled there for economic motives. Already in 1914, Spanish colonial authorities believed Arnall was smuggling guns between the city of Oran and the Oriental Rif. They also noted his sympathy towards "radical organizations" as the Anglo-Ottoman society, a Turkophile organization that promoted British alliance with the Ottoman Empire, and the Indian League, a British anti-colonial organization that campaigned for the independence of India. [84]

The onset of the Russian revolution in 1917 was a watershed for Arnall's political activities. In 1918 he stood as a candidate for the Labor Party, and in 1919 and he participated in the movement "Hands-off Russia", a platform created by British socialists to protest for the intervention of Western powers on the side of the White armies in the Russian Civil War. However, his influence in the party was non-existent to the point that in a report, the Foreign Office referred to him as an "insignificant communist".[85]

Spanish colonial officials, however, had different perceptions. Reports referred to him as a "prominent socialist" who had traveled continuously from 1919 to 1920 between the South of Spain and Tangier promoting "Bolshevik ideology among the indigenous workers from Gibraltar and Tangier".[86] In October 1920, Spanish authorities detained Arnall for smuggling guns in Algeciras, followed by a request of British authorities to free him.[87] The case of Arnall continued to be a subject of diplomatic tensions between the British and Spanish government when, in January 1921, Spanish colonial authorities believing he could have a "detrimental impact on the worker population of the South of Spain", expelled him from Spanish territories following British diplomatic requesting in December 1921 to allow Arnall cross to the Spanish Protectorate assuring he would not suppose "any kind of agitation in Spain, Morocco or Tangier".[88]

When the Riffian rebellion succeeded, Arnall became one of the first supporters of Abdelkrim. He probably was introduced to him throughout his Riffian

[84] AGA, 15, Box 23, (81/31/23). 'Expedient number 968: Biography of John Arnall'. London 21st July 1920.
[85] Foreign Office's report quoted in De Madariaga, *Abd el-Krim,* 447.
[86]Ibid., 'Expedient number 968: Biography of John Arnall'. London 21st July 1920
[87] Ibid., 'Dispatch from the British Embassy in Madrid'. October 1920.
[88] Ibid., 'Dispatch from the British Embassy in Madrid to the High Spanish Commissioner Office in Tetouan'. 21 December 1921.

commercial partner, Hach Ali Loh. He became a regular visitor of the British consulate in Tangier lobbying on behalf of the Riffians, promising to the British authorities that the new nation would be "open to commerce".[89] He was the first person that addressed the LON on 5 September 1921, requesting official recognition of the Rif Republic.[90] Arnall was present in a Riffian delegation that traveled to London to lobby on behalf of their cause in 1922. The delegation, composed by Mohammed Bouyibar, brother-in-law of Abldekrim, Hach Ali Loh, and Arnall, was not received by any British government official for considering not representative of a sovereign state, and its activities were reduced to several minor meetings. However, Spanish intelligence and diplomats closely monitored Arnall's activities believing he could be a communist agent. For instance, the Spanish Ambassador in London, Merry del Val, protested to the British authorities stating Arnall was a "well-known agitator and communist agent".[91]

Nevertheless, Arnall's support for the Riffian cause was motivated by materialistic rather than ideological reasons. Days before the Annual Disaster, Arnall had applied to the Spanish colonial administration to grant him permission to explore and exploit the mineral wealth in the Rif, but it was denied.[92] Spanish withdrawal from those territories constituted a perfect opportunity for Arnall to gain permission from the new Riffian state to gain exploitation of the minerals.

Spanish intelligence reported continuously on the propaganda campaign conducted by Arnall, attaching to their reports Arnall's letters to the LON issued from London. In these letters, Arnall requested the recognition of the Riffian state on the basis that it could "guarantee the rights of foreigners" and a "stable government open to commerce" in the region.[93] Arnall's support to the Riffian cause accentuated the beliefs of Spanish officers regarding the involvement of communists. Overstating Arnall's ties with Moscow, Spanish intelligence looked into any of his past activities that could connect the Riffian rebellion with other anti-colonial struggles. In 1922 Spanish reports from the London Embassy gathered information on Arnall's past activities, reporting that "the socialist

[89] De Madariaga, *Abd el-Krim, 446.*
[90] *Ibid.,* 444.
[91] Report from the Foreign Office quoted in *Ibid.*, 449.
[92] *Ibid.,* 446.
[93] AGA, 15, Box 23, (81/31/23). 'Dispatch informing John Arnall's activities'.

agitator" Arnall had attended in 1921 the second Pan-African Congress held in London between 27 and 29 August. The Congress, according to the Spanish report, was "mainly a reunion of colored-men" in which some agitators had taken advantage of the "radical tendencies of the majority of negroes to bring to the forefront the Moroccan question" and stressed that Arnall "took the floor attacking France and Spain and defending the moors".[94] The report tended to overstate the importance of Arnall's past activities in the light of the Riffian revolt. However, some days later, new information admitted the situation of Morocco had had a minor impact on the conference.[95] Eventually, at the end of the year, Spanish Embassy in London recognized the reports were of "scarce importance" requesting permission to suspend the surveillance on the Riffian delegation.[96]

Transnational anti-colonial activism of individuals like Arnall and his alleged connections with Bolshevik Russia altered the perceptions of the Spanish central government towards the Riffian resistance. From 1922 Spanish intelligence from the embassies in Europe began reporting to Madrid any Socialist support to the Riffian cause on newspapers speaking against "Spanish colonialism and militarism".[97] The difficult domestic situation that faced the Spanish government, with a widespread mobilization of the working class and anarchist associations that even had murdered on 8th March 1921 the Spanish President, Eduardo Dato, reinforced these perceptions that Socialist agents were a threat to the Protectorate.

Arnall died in 1925 without achieving any significant international support for the Riffian cause. His activism, however, exemplifies how the Rif War acted as a catalyzer for individuals that sympathized with socialists and Wilsonian principles. Arnall's activism was a product of an individual sympathy but for the Spanish intelligence constituted the proof of official external support towards the Riffians, who perceived Arnall as a "professional revolutionary", using Hobsbawm's term,

[94] Ibid., 'Dispatch number 356 from London informing of anti-Spanish activities of the socialist John Arnall'. 18 March 1922.
[95] Ibid.
[96] Ibid., 'Spanish Embassy in London to the Spanish State Ministry'.
[97] AGA, 15, Box 127, (81/31/127). 'Expedient number 1: Foreign press sent by Spanish Embassies on Europe to the State Ministry'.

under the orders of the Comintern.[98] These perceptions would accentuate from 1925 due to the convergence of the Rif War with the onset of the Great Syrian Revolt and the increasing presence of the Rif across the public opinion.

3.2. PAN-ISLAMIC SOLIDARITY

Abdelkrim's demands found a particular ready audience across the Muslim colonial subjects. Religious solidarity catalyzed the support of Muslims who witnessed the Ottoman Empire's dissolution and the caliphate's abolition in 1923. The period from 1924 to 1926 witnessed the peak of Pan-Islamic mobilization. The Middle East Association and the Committee of Khilafat in Bombay, for instance, wrote petitions to the League of Nations denouncing the use of chemical weapons by the Spanish Army from 1924.[99] The Egyptian activist, Huda Sha'arawi, founder of the Feminist Egyptian Movement, supported the Riffian and Syrian revolts, expressing her disillusionment with Wilsonian promises.[100] Across North Africa, the Salafist-Arabist press promoted the unity of Arab peoples supporting the Riffian cause.[101] The Algerian poet Moufdi Zakariyya, who would later participate in the Algerian revolution and wrote the Algerian national anthem, wrote from Tunis in 1925 one of his poems expressing solidarity with the Riffian struggle seeing it as part of the Orient (*al-Sharq)*.[102]

Displays of public support to Abdelkrim across the press in the Middle East concerned Spanish military intelligence that requested Spanish diplomats to report on any suspicious activity. At this point, Spanish colonial officers struggled to understand the nature of the Riffian, receiving confusing information and rumors about the presence of foreign agents in the Rif that could be found in the press.[103] On 26 October 1925, the Spanish legation in Cairo reported to Madrid

[98] Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes: A History of the World, 1914-1991*. (New York: Vintage Books, 1996), 76.
[99] La Porte, ´Rien a ajouter´, 69-70. On the use of chemical weapons and its long-term consequences in the Rif see Sebastian Balfour, *Deadly Embrace,* 207-255.
[100] De Madariaga, *Abd el-Krim,* 472.
[101] Amal N Ghazal, "The Other Frontiers of Arab Nationalism: Ibadis, Berbers, and the Arabist-Salafi Press in the Interwar Period". *International Journal of Middle East Studies,* 42/1, (2010): 122.
[102] Amal N Ghazal, "Tensions of nationalism: The Mzabi Student Missions in Tunis and the Politics of Anticolonialism". *International Journal of Middle East Studies,* 47/1, (2015): 47–63.
[103] AGA, 15, Box 273, (81/31/273). 'Press on Abdelkrim'. 29 August 1925.

that the newspaper *al-Meshawwar* published a caricature of the Spanish action in Morocco followed by a complaint from the Spanish legation in Cairo to British authorities requesting the closure of the editorial.[104] Reports began to signal the presence of young activists from Tunis and Algeria that came to Oran and Port Say, waiting to cross the borders to join the rebels.[105] However, the critical concern for Spanish colonial officers and diplomats was the establishment of the Kemalist Turkish state in 1923.

The Kemalist movement led by Mustafa Kemal had used anti-colonial Islamic rhetoric to denounce the *diktat* of Sevres and the oppression of Muslim peoples.[106] After his success against British, French, and Greek forces in 1923, Mustafa Kemal came to be considered across the Muslim world as a hero of Islam, an archetypal warrior chief (*ghazi*). The comparisons between Abdelkrim and Mustafa Kemal became recurrent throughout the press, exemplifying a case of contingent transnational support that merged anti-colonialism and religious solidarity. Spanish officers perceived Kemalism and the Riffian resistance as part of the same Islamic movement. From 1922 to 1923 Ministry of State, directed by the liberal Santiago Alba, began to receive reports from the Spanish embassies that connected the two rebellions.[107] One of these reports sent from the Spanish Embassy in London on 16th June 1923 attached an open letter from Abdelkrim that had been published in the *Daily Express* of London, which stated:

> "…for two years, I have sent delegations to Paris and London to appeal the government to accept our independence (….). I have appealed the deaf ears of the LON; I have delivered to the diplomatic bodies of Tangier (...) Now I am forced to strongly repeat the words of Mustafa Kemal Pasha: We leave the spoken word and the paths of diplomacy and rely on the sword and the justice of our cause".[108]

[104] AGA, 15, Box 127, (81/31/127). 'Dispatch from Cairo to the Moroccan Office'. 26 October 1926.
[105] AGA, 15, Box 265, (81/31/265). 'Dispatch from Spanish Consulate in Oran to the High Commissioner'. December 1924.
[106] Odile Moreau, 'Echoes of national liberation', 62.
[107] Santiago Alba had to exile on 15 September 1923 to France after the military coup d'etat of the General Commander of Cataluña, Miguel Primo de Rivera, who established a military dictatorship with the acquiescence of the king, Alfonso XIII. In his year in the State Ministry, Alba antagonized the colonial army due to his attempts to establish a civilian administration in the Protectorate.
[108] AGA, 15, Box 127, (81/31/127). 'Report number 1: Dispatch from the Spanish embassy in London to the Ministry of State'. 16 June 1923.

In reality, Kemalist Turkey maintained distance with external anti-colonial struggles reapproaching France and then Britain from 1924 after its military victories. These recurrent comparisons, however, continuously concerned Spanish colonial generals. In their conception, Turkish people were "more advanced" with a "superior culture" than the Riffians.[109] Soon, rumors that Turkish officers were aiding the Riffian resistance spread. Some of these already circulated across British officialdom who in January 1919 believed Enver Pasha and Talat Pasha, leaders of the Young Turks, were among the "pan-Islamic Turkish officers" who joined the resistance of Raisuli, a tribal chief of Yebala.[110] Abdelkrim himself denied these connections in an interview with Vincent Sheean stating that "rumors that circulated on pan-Islamic activities were not true and that their struggle was exclusively national".[111]

What seems to be true is that these rumors attracted individuals and adventurers, probably stateless ex-Ottoman officials unable to return to Turkey after the First World War. In May 1924, a report from the Spanish consulate in Thessalonica informed Madrid that a person who claimed to be the former aide-de-camp of the sultan Abdul Hamid, named Aly Samy Bey, had presented at the consulate offering his services to work as an agent in the Rif. Aly Samy claimed he had been "exiled from Turkey after the coup of the Young Turks" and after that, he had dedicated himself to journalism. He assured he had come into contact with Abdelkrim in 1913 in Paris smuggling arms and from that moment, he had maintained several meetings with the Riffian leader in "Paris, Marseille, Tangier, and Algiers". He claimed to know insurrectional networks across entire Morocco set by the Ottoman officers and of "his ties with Turkey".[112] The report itself recommended not to finance him due to inexactitudes in his story.

There had been, in fact, two Riffian delegations that came to Paris, but Abdelkrim has never visited the French city. The first delegation came in 1922, and according to Spanish intelligence, established contact with a Turkish delegation

[109] AGA, 15, Box 273, (81/31/273). 'Report number 2: Foreign press on Abd el-Krim'.
[110] Alp Yenen, *The Young Turk Aftermath,* 118.
[111] De Madariaga, *Abd el-Krim,* 480.
[112] AGA, 15, Box 265, (81/31/265). 'Dispatch from the Spanish consulate of Thessalonica to Madrid'. 5 May 1924.

of the Kemalist government.[113] The second delegation, led by M'hammed, traveled in March 1923 allegedly to buy guns and establish contacts with mining entrepreneurs. The delegation was composed of Mohammed Bouyibar, Bel Hadj al-Jitmi, and a Tunisian businessman, Zerif Tidjani, who has studied in Paris and has been named by Abdelkrim the Riffian representative in France.[114]

However, Abdelkrim's popularity around Pan-Islamic circles was far from attracting the support of secular Kemalist Turkey. According to Madariaga, his moment of most significant support came when Egyptian scholars considered him a candidate to the caliphate after its abolition by Mustafa Kemal. Among the candidates proposed were the Egyptian king Fu'ad and Ibn Sa'ud.[115] However, this never translated into any kind of material support. Although a Pan-Islamic Congress finally took place in Cairo in May 1926, Abdelkrim could barely send one delegate to Cairo.[116]

In short, transnational support did exist, but it was in the form of religious solidarity rather than material support from any sovereign state. There was no Pan-Islamic unified movement as the Spanish officials perceived or a top-down strategy directed by Abdelkrim. Abdelkrim's political pragmatism and popularity envisioning a modern Islamic state in the Rif was at the heart of these spawning solidarities that gave him prominence across Muslim peoples. On the other hand, on Spanish officials' minds, these rumors would become a perennial concern about the presence of foreign agents in the Rif.

[113] Daniel Macías Fernández. "La conspiración turco-comunista: espías, contrabandistas e instructores en el Rif". *Diacronie Studi di Storia Contemporanea,* 28, (2016): 11-12.
[114] Julián Paniagua, "La Red de Servicios Secretos Españoles durante la Guerra del Rif: Los servicios especiales resevados dirigidos por Ricardo Ruiz Orsatti", *Historia Contemporanea,* 57, (2018): 491-521.
[115] De Madariaga, *Abd el-Krim,* 477.
[116] Cemil Aydin, *The idea of the Muslim World,* 137.

3.3. PROPAGANDA FROM SOUTH AMERICA TO EUROPE.

By 1925 the failure of the LON to promote self-determination and guarantee peace in colonial territories was evident. The fading of the "Wilsonian movement" in the Middle East translated into a full-scale revolt in 1925 in Syria. The convergence of anti-colonial movements in North Africa, Asia, and China formed what Goebel labeled as a "global moment" that mobilized anti-imperialists worldwide with the Rif War, reaching its climax at its center.[117] The ex-Ottoman officers that participated in the Syrian rebellion looked at the Rif as an inspiration.[118] In Indonesia, the emergent nationalist movement praised uprisings in Morocco, Cairo, and Damascus as examples to follow anti-colonial resistance.[119]

In France, in 1925, the French Communist Party (PCF) launched an anti-war campaign. Until 1924 PCF leaders had been resisting orders from Moscow to take direct actions against French colonialism. Nevertheless, the global anti-colonial effervescence propitiated a significant change of attitude within communist European parties. The anti-war campaign targeted leaders across the expatriated Arab communities and indigenous workers from Algeria, Tunis, and Morocco to attract them to the PCF militancy.[120] Abdelkrim's popularity grew exponentially among North African workers in Paris who spoke about joining Riffian guerrillas and carried pictures of him in their pockets.[121] The PCF's newspaper, *L'Humanite,* distributed leaflets calling French workers to support the Riffians and their North African "comrades". New platforms like the Congress of North African Workers in Paris led by the Algerian communist leader, Messali Hadj 'Ali, joined the anti-war effort. Similarly, the Senegalese and Pan-African leader, Lamine Senghor, criticized in pages of the *Le Pariah* the war stating that "the Riffians were not alone" and that they were part of a "movement of liberation that stretched from Shangai to Tetouan".[122]

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[117] Goebel, *Anti-colonial Metropolis,* 165.
[118] Michael Provence, *The Last Ottoman Generation and the Making of the Modern Middle East,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 166.
[119] Xose M. Seixas, Enrique Ucelay-Da Cal, and Arnau Gonzalez , *Patrias Diversas, ¿Misma Luchas? Alianzas transnacionalitas en el mundo de entreguerras (1912-1939),* (Barcelona: Ediciones Bellaterra, 2020), 156.
[120] Slavin, "The French Left and the Rif War", 17.
[121] Goebel*, Anti-colonial Metropolis, 150.*
[122] Quoted in Michael Goebel, *Anti-Imperial Metropolis,* 159-160.

Aware of this situation, Abdelkrim redoubled his overseas campaign to lobby for a peaceful settlement of the conflict and the official recognition of the Rif Republic. Under these circumstances, Spanish officers assumed the Riffian rebels were receiving external support. This was reinforced by the domestic situation the Military Directorate of Primo de Rivera faced. The defeat at Annual had brought forth the fragility of the Spanish regime, and popular mobilizations sponsored by the Socialist Party (PSOE) and the General Union of Workers (UGT) demanded the end of the colonial war. Primo de Rivera had assumed himself the High Commissioner Office in Morocco between 17 October 1924 and 3 November 1925, promising a rapid end of the conflict which encountered opposition from the colonial Africanist generals.[123] Spanish officers from the embassies and consulates began to report regularly to the Spanish High Commissioner Office, showing the dimension the conflict had acquired on their perceptions and the imminent threat to Spanish stability. On 19 August 1925, for instance, a report from the Spanish embassy in Lisbon informed of "non-sense petitions" in the *Diary of Lisbon* demanding the independence of the Rif and "denouncing" the situation Portuguese volunteers of the Spanish Foreign Legion had to endure.[124]

With the popularity of Abdelkrim reaching its peak, so too did the concerns of military intelligence about the presence of foreign agents. The case of Ahmed Hassan Mattar exemplifies this. Mattar was an Egyptian national born in Sudan that resided in Paris. By the 1920s, he was an anti-colonial activist that had traveled across the world promoting anti-imperial politics. He traveled to Tangier in early 1924 to work as a correspondent for the newspaper *Akhbar al-'Alam*. He came into contact with the Riffian rebels apparently through his activism in the British Red Crescent Society. In the summer of 1924, he met Abdelkrim, who instructed him to be the spokesman of the Rif Republic.[125]

Mattar traveled in April 1925 to Latin America to lobby on behalf of the Riffian Republic. He founded the so-called "Rif Defense Society in South America and Europe" and attempted to mobilize public opinion across South American

[123] Shannon Fleming, and Ann K. Fleming, "Primo de Rivera and Spain's Moroccan Problem, 1923-27." *Journal of Contemporary History,* 12/1, (1977): 85–99.
[124] AGA, 15, Box 265, (81/31/265). 'Reports on Foreign press on Abdelkrim'. 19 August 1925.
[125] Dirk Sasse, *Franzosen, Briten und Deutsche Im Rifkrieg 1921-1926.* (Berlin/Boston: Walter de Gruyter Gmbh, 2006), 311.

nationalists founding two newspapers in Rio de Janeiro from where he published letters from Abdelkrim declaring his determination to make peace with France. In July 1925, we forwarded a letter from Abdelkrim to a group of young nationalists in Buenos Aires. This attempt to promote the Riffian cause fell on fertile ground among Latin American intellectuals such as the Peruvian intellectual, Mariategui, who constructed analogies between the Riffian leader and the national South American heroes like Simon Bolivar and San Martin.

Nonetheless, Mattar's campaign to enlist proxies with access to official international relations failed.[126] In the fall of 1925, he returned to Europe without having secured any essential support. He continued his shadow diplomacy meeting with the General Secretary of the LON, Eric Drummond, on October 28th, 1925, where he purportedly denounced the war crimes of the Spanish Colonial Army. Mattar also sent a letter to the LON requesting "urgent intervention of the League to protect the Rif". The petition, again, was dismissed since it was issued by a non-recognized representative of a governmental body.[127] Despite his failures, Mattar continued his anti-colonial activities across Europe. At the end of 1925, he could be found in Berlin lecturing in Muslim circles on the Rif War and at events organized by International Workers Aid (LA) and the Red Front Fighters League.[128] A few days later, he appeared in Berlin, where Chinese students and communist members hatched the League against Imperialism (LAI) founded in 1927.[129]

Despite not having a significant impact on diplomatic circles, Mattar's attempts to promote the Riffian were noted by Spanish diplomats. On 5th November 1925, a report from the Spanish embassy in London was issued directly to the Moroccan Office, an organ of the presidency in Madrid.[130] The report informed that a Spanish official had received two leaflets in "Arabic characters" from a British journalist that were the "confirmation" that "Mr. Mattar from Riffian origin" had successfully established a newspaper in Rio de Janeiro. Until this point, the

[126] Goebel, *Anti-Imperial Metropolis,* 162.
[127] Quoted in La Porte, *'Rien a ajouter',* 77.
[128] Sasse, *Franzosen, Briten und Deutsche Im Rifkrieg*, 312.
[129] Goebel, *Anti-Imperial Metropolis,* 162.
[130] Established in 1924, the Moroccan Office was the first body of the Spanish Administration dedicated exclusively to Moroccan affairs. Primo de Rivera substituted it in 15 December 1925 for the Dirección General de Marruecos y Colonias.

information was accurate but just two lines after it mentioned that the leaflets "compromised" the Maharaja of Kapurthala, a princely state in India, with the Riffian cause.[131] In reality, the Maharaja named Sir Jagatjit (1872-1949) nothing had to do with the Rif War. He had been serving as the Indian representative in the League of Nations Generally Assembly from 1925.

Although the Rif War officially ended in May 1926, Mattar continued his activities representing the "Rif Defense Society in South America and Europe" at the Anti-Imperial League's inaugural Brussels Conference in February 1927. Mattar's activities exemplify how the Rif War acted as a catalyzer for different activists. However, this transnational anti-colonialism entrenched Spanish colonial and intelligence officers' perceptions that Riffian rebels were part of a wider global struggle against Western imperialism. These misinterpretations, depicting the Riffians as part of a centralized international movement, were the base Spanish colonial generals used to conceptualize the conflict; as a threat to the survival of the Spanish state and Western civilization.

[131] AGA, 15, Box 265 (81/31/265). 'Dispatch from the Embassy in London to the Moroccan Office'. 5 November 1925.

4. ORIENTALIST EXPLANATIONS IN COLONIAL MINDS

4.1. INTELLIGENCE, CULTURAL REPRESENTATIONS, AND (MIS)PERCEPTIONS.

The guerrilla warfare deployed by the Riffians necessitated pre-emptive actions to control extensive territories that the Spanish colonial army, poorly organized and ill-equipped, was not ready to undertake. Between 1919 and 1927, colonial administration established until six different intelligence organisms. All worked independently from each other, resulting in a dynamic, according to Antonio Paniagua, of gathering disconnected information with a lack of coordination.[132] With few exceptions, information was neither interpreted nor systematized when it reached the decision-makers.[133] Besides, it could come from different sources and locations; from Spanish diplomats abroad, colonial officers, or indigenous collaborators in the Rif and be received at different locations depending on the domestic situation, at the Moroccan Office in Madrid, the Spanish Ministries, or directly to the High Commissioner Office in Tetouan.[134] Only in November 1925, a centralized information office was established with the foundation of the Combined Spanish-French Information Office.

The result was that a cacophony of information flowed to colonial officials, who characterized by a total lack of awareness of the economic, social, and political life in Northern Morocco, distorted the information interpreting it through the lens of orientalism and their cultural biases.[135] Understanding they were the only ones suitable to make sense of the information given their experience in the colonial territory and guided by stereotypical assumptions that denied the agency of tribal

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[132] Julian Antonio Paniagua Lopez, 'La intuición del análisis de redes de los militares españoles durante la guerra del Rif como método de lucha contra el contrabando de armas', *Revista Hispana para el análisis de las redes sociales,* 27/1, (2016): 1-14. A general explanation of the importance of intelligence services for colonial empires in the post-war context in Thomas Martin, *Empires of Intelligence: Security Services and Colonial Disorder after 1914.* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 2008).

[133] The exception would be the office of Servicios Especiales Reservados active between October 1924 and February 1926 and directed by Ricardo Ruiz de Orsatti.

[134] Juan Ramón Castillo Jímenez, *Los Servicios de información e inteligencia bajo el mando militar en el Protectorado Español de Marruecos (1909-1929).* (Ceuta: Instituto de Estudios Ceutíes, 2014).

[135] Despite its presence in Northern Morocco from the mid-19th century, the Spanish military ignored the characteristics of the population and the territories of the rural areas. It barely counted with reliable maps and information. The territorialization of the colonial state was carried out parallelly to the Riffian War. See Jonathan Wyrtzen, "Colonial War and the Production of Territorialized State Space in North Africa," in *Political Power and Social Theory*, *33,* (2017): 151-173.

peoples, Spanish colonial officers constructed a narrative in which "tribal Moors" could not have organized a rebellion with such an impact on international public opinion on their own. Based on these assumptions, they were more concerned on any display of transnational solidarity than in the Riffian resistance itself. In June 1925, for instance, the Spanish Consul of the city of Oujda reported to the Spanish High Commissioner, Primo de Rivera, on sporadic clashes between indigenous and French soldiers that had led to bigger demonstrations. The report admitted that, in the past, such an incident would have passed unnoticed, but with the "success of the rebels", the colonial administration had to be "careful".[136] In September 1924, a colonial officer remitted a leaflet from the newspaper "*El Porvenir",* edited in Tangier, in which it was assured that 80 rebels had entered Tangier and occupied a house. Two days after, the information had to be corrected because it was a rumor that originated from a French newspaper, with the correction admitting "the situation of tension and insecurity" could generate these types of errors.[137]

The problem was understanding how the "rural, ignorant and uncivilized" Riffians could have organized a modern state.[138] These perceptions were present especially among the Africanist generals', who regarded themselves as experts on "the Riffian psychology". These orientalists' misconceptions about the nature of the Berber tribes were contrary to the level of organization displayed by the rebellion. For instance, in a confidential letter issuing instructions to the information service, the General Commander of Melilla, Castro Girona, who was regarded as a person with profound knowledge of the Riffian society, pointed that Abdelkrim's prestige depended on his promises that he would defeat the Christians noting that "the special psychology of Berber tribes, with volatile ideas, would make them incline towards the most powerful leader".[139]

With this mindset, Spanish colonial generals credited rumors that circulated in the press about the presence of foreign agents who advised Abdelkrim's army. Looking frenetically for foreign support, any anti-colonial activities were likely connected with the Riffian rebellion. In March 1925, for instance, intelligence

[136] AGA, 15, Box 23, (81/31/23). 'Report of the Spanish consul in Ouxda'. 11 June 1925.
[137] AGA, 15, Box 265, (81/31/265). 'Dispatch number 182'.
[138] AGA, 15, Box 1221, (81/34/1221). 'Dispatch to the High Commissioner Office'. August 1927.
[139] AGA, 15, Box 1223, (81/34/1223). 'Political letters of the Melilla General Commander'. December 1926.

reports informed on "nationalistic" demonstrations of "Tunisian merchants" that were supporting the Riffians attached as proof leaflets of the newspaper *L'Echo de Oran*.[140] Months later, in October, the Central Office from Madrid issued a petition to the Spanish Consul in Tunis to report regularly on the state of public opinion.[141]

Cultural representations about oriental peoples that depicted them as incapable of organizing, chaotic, and prompted to violence made Spanish colonial officialdom take for granted that the Riffian rebels were being aided by elusive forces, with their centers in Russia, Turkey, Germany, or Britain. Vincent Sheean even remembered: "the press in Europe had been full of stories about German advisers in Abdelkrim's armies".[142] These beliefs were particularly present among Spanish Africanist officers, even altering their perceptions of European states such as Britain. In November 1925, in a confidential letter informing the state of the public opinion in Germany to the High Commissioner Office, at that time held by General Jose Sanjurjo Scannell, the Spanish consul in Munich informed that the local press was "defaming" Spain and the French military and attributed the supposed campaign to British officers. He finished his report stressing that he had observed an extensive favorable opinion towards Abdelkrim in Germany, who was considered a "patriot".[143]

These concerns were present even after Abdelkrim had officially surrendered in May 1926. In September 1926, in a correspondence between General Francisco Gomez-Jordana Sousa, at that time member of the Military Directorate presided by Primo de Rivera, and the High Commissioner Sanjurjo, the latter communicated the petition of a British consortium to explore the Rif recommending to deny the request given that Spanish colonial administration had "difficulties to control British citizens".[144]

Orientalist explanations constructed by anxious colonial minds thus tended to exaggerate the material capacities of the Riffian rebels based on

[140] AGA, 15, Box 23, (81/31/23).'Confidences about the rebellion'. 9 December 1924.
[141] *Ibid.*
[142] Vincent Sheean, *Personal History,* 106.
[143] AGA, 15. Box 265 (81/31/265). 'Report by the Spanish Consul informing on the state of opinion in the region'. 14th November 1925.
[144] AGA, 15, Box 662, (81/31/662). 'Political letters of the Melilla General Commander'.

misinterpretations of transnational anti-colonial solidarities and cultural representations of the "moor". In the case of Africanist military officers of the second generation, that became proof that the Riffians were part of a conspiracy between a Communist-Islamic alliance in a similar process that British agents explained the "Eastern unrest in Arabia".[145]

4.2. AN ISLAMIC-BOLSHEVIK CONSPIRACY

Theories that embedded the Riffian rebellion in a much larger plot to destabilize the Western World by fanatic Muslims with the support of Bolshevik Russia radicalized general's military rhetoric from 1924. The Spanish King, Alfonso XIII, in an interview with a French military attaché on 15th June 1925, expressed that they should use the most violent means with "no regard for humanitarian considerations" and that "use of gases could safe many Spanish and French lives".[146] To support his argument, he stated that the Riffian offensive was no more than "a test of the general insurrection of the whole Muslim world incited by Moscow and the international Jewry".[147]

Essentialist assumptions that an "uncivilized people" could not have spawned such a wave of transnational solidarity and that Abdelkrim was a "mere rural and fanatical rebel" were the base to construct this imagined alliance between Muslims and the USSR.[148] The result was that Africanist generals perceived any display of anti-colonial and religious solidarity with the Rif Republic as a dangerous phenomenon that would result in the penetration of Pan-Islamic agents and subversive elements in the Protectorate and later in Spain. Based on this, the Spanish administration dedicated a vast number of resources to establish a network of informers across their consulates and embassies in Europe and Muslim countries looking for any signs of subversion coming from the exterior. In 1925, for instance, a Spanish colonel sent a report from the city of Larache to the office in Tetouan reporting that he "had news" that Ukrainian and Russian volunteers were being recruited across Poland and East Germany to

[145] Priya Sitia, *Spies in Arabia,* Chapter 6.
[146] Quoted in Sebastian Balfour, *Deadly Embrace,* 225.
[147] *Ibid., 225.*
[148] AGA, 15, Box 81, (81/34/1223). 'Political letters of Melilla General Commander'. December 1926.

fight in the Rif and that Abdelkrim had formed a special force of foreign fighters with technical and medical formation.[149] Similarly, in September 1924, a dispatch from Madrid issued to the Spanish High Commissioner, at that time Primo de Rivera, assured that "reliable sources from Constantinople" indicated the shipment of 1.7000 Mauser guns, machine guns, and ammunition to the Rif from Turkey and that it was coordinated by three Turkish officers named "Toofich, Nuri, and Sodah".[150]

This conspiracy theory was constructed through orientalist prejudices that saw Islamic peoples as a monolithic culture, confusing terms as Pan-Islamism, Nationalism, or Arabism and denying the agency of Riffians. General Mola, for instance, referring to the Riffian resistance, wrote: "there are in Morocco points of nationalism, better to say, of pan-Islamism, that are fostered by European agents and fanatical intellectual indigenous".[151] In 1927, for instance, a dispatch informed on "important Wahhabi activities in Rabat and Fez". As proof, the report attached a pamphlet signed by a Turkish poet, Suleyman Nazif Bey, titled "the Implacable Truth". The text exalted the figure of Abdelkrim in nationalistic terms: "In a country of slaves, a man named Abdelkrim resisted the Spanish empire with a handful of primitive men". He continued attacking the Sultan and the tribal chiefs: "they are not the Spanish and French who defeated Abdelkrim, but the infamous sons of Morocco and the tribes of Algeria and Tunis (…)". Finally, the Riffian Uprising was woven into a Moroccan national fight: "until the apparition of Abdelkrim the mountains of the Rif were lands without history, he could not hold the lands but gave him history".[152] Far from supporting Wahhabi or Islamic activities, the pamphlet described the rebellion in nationalistic-secular terms attacking the religious elites and the sultan. Suleyman Nazif had been a member of the Young Turks and opposed Sultan Abdul Hamid II and his pan-Islamic agenda. Yet, colonial officers saw an example of Islamic propaganda that sponsored fundamentalist religious movements as Wahabism.

[149] AGA, 15, Box 1221, (81/34/1221). 'Correspondence of Larache from to the central office'. August 1925.
[150] AGA, 15, Box 127, (81/31/127). 'Dispatch from Madrid to the High Commissioner in Tetuan'. 5 September 1924.
[151] Emilio Mola quoted in Daniel Macias, 'La conspiración turco-comunista', 11.
[152] AGA, 15, Box 660, (81/34/660).

No Russian or Turkish agent was ever found. Still, these perceptions shaped the collective mentality of Spanish colonial generals that assumed a nationalistic extreme-right discourse viewing themselves as the ultimate defenders of civilized Europe against the hidden forces of Muslims and Communists.[153] General Franco, later the Spanish dictator and by that time one of the most prominent Africanist officials, was convinced of the presence of Communist agents in the Rif and also General Gómez-Jordana, who would be the High Commissioner between 1928 and 1931.[154] This discourse would be very similar that the one constructed by the Francoist regime to legitimize the coup d'etat against the Republican government in 1936, arguing it was to save Spain from a Jewish-Communist conspiracy.

In sum, essentialist and oriental assumptions nourished misinterpretations of anti-colonial transnational solidarities, altering the sense-making of colonial officials. Mainly, they tended to amplify the material capacities of the Riffians, seeing anti-colonial transnationalism as a centralized plan rather than a contingent product of the global anti-colonial milieu. Ultimately, these beliefs contributed to conform an Other in the collective mentality of Spanish Africanist generals that saw the hidden hand of Moscow and Ankara threatening the Spanish Protectorate and Spain. Orientalist perceptions would have a long-term imprint on them. As the Dictator Francisco Franco would state in his memoirs, "Without Africa, I barely can explain myself, nor my brothers in arms".[155] Indeed, their misperceptions of foreign and domestic politics cannot be untied without the impact of the Rif War.

[153] Queipo de Llano, "Nuestro propósito", *Revista de las Tropas Coloniales,* 1/1, (1924). Available in http://hemerotecadigital.bne.es/issue.vm?id=0004278728&search=&lang=en.
[154] Daniel Macias, 'La conspiración turco-comunista', 5.
[155] Xavier Casals Meseguer, "Franco "El Africano"." *Journal of Spanish Cultural Studies, 7/ 3,* (2006): 207–24.

5. CONCLUSIONS

This thesis began with the question of how did the Rif rebellion connect with networks of transnational anti-colonial activism. To offer an answer, it contextualized the Rif War vis-à-vis its global anti-colonial context. It seems transnational connections existed, but the formation of transnational anti-colonialism was rather a contingent result, product of a worldwide anti-colonial milieu that attempted to reconceptualize the post-war global order, than a centralized network formed by the Riffians. In this sense, the propaganda campaign for achieving international recognition put the Rif War at the center of anti-colonial solidarity with individuals like John Arnall or Hassan Mattar taking direct action to promote anti-imperial politics. Through intelligence reports from the Spanish administration, the thesis has traced some of their activities and stressed that they had different motives, materialistic in the case of Arnall, or ideological reasons in the case of Mattar.

These differences bring forth the second part of the question and the most important: how did Spanish government officials interpret these connections? To answer this part, the thesis has relied on Orientalism as an analytical framework to show what cultural assumptions were underlying colonial officials' beliefs regarding the participation of foreign agents in the conflict. Indeed, a careful analysis of their private correspondence and the intelligence reports reveals that cultural biases that depicted the Muslim Berbers as tribal, fanatic, volatile, and isolated peoples that could never organize modern guerrilla warfare fostered these misperceptions. Through orientalist eyes, colonial generals made sense of the emergence of transnational anti-colonial support that came in the form of solidarity, mainly from the press, exaggerating the capacity of these networks and misperceiving their nature. What they sought as a professional network of foreign Bolshevik and Pan-Islamic agents were individuals guided by ideals of anti-colonialism and the prospect of benefits. Yet, the belief foreign advisers were present among the Riffian army, and that controlled the rebellion is still taken for granted in some scholarly literature.[156]

[156] Antonio Paniagua, 'La intuición del análisis de redes de los militares españoles', 2.

Most importantly, the thesis has tried to assess how misperceptions of transnational anti-colonial networks reinforced a collective mentality among the second generation of Spanish Africanist Generals, like Francisco Franco, Mola, or Queipo de Llano, who became strong advocators for violent military action in response against the Riffian rebels that they believe were part of a civilizational clash between the forces of international Communism and Pan-Islamism against the civilized Christians.

Ultimately, the approach has tried to prove the usefulness of Orientalism to improve our historical comprehension. On the one hand, it reveals a particular space of agency for the Riffian resistance that had been barely explored yet. It was not only a nationalistic struggle for independence or a religious jihad but an attempt to become part of the international society. Transnational solidarities that merged religious, socialist, and liberal ideologies had a real impact shaping the identity of colonized peoples and their struggles. On the other hand, it shows how cultural prejudices and stereotypes about the nature of Arabs and Muslims reproduced by Spanish intelligence and colonial officers can alter our historical comprehension. Essentialist explanations that depicted the conflict as a civilizational clash between Muslim and Western peoples, the *Reconquista* as the Spanish colonial military termed the advancement towards the Rif, are still reproduced nowadays when explaining international politics and recent history. Thus, Orientalism as an analytical framework can contribute to deepen our comprehension of political history, particularly regarding about the role of intelligence and transnational mobilization in shaping military cultures and political perceptions. Last but not least, it shows that information contained in the colonial archives must be approached and examined with caution as it can be marked by the distorting lens of orientalism.

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