

From the Sharifian Army to the Soldiers of the Tricolor *Recruitment and Perceptions of Moroccan Troops during the Great War*

Jawad Elalami¹ Taoufiq Sakhkhane²

¹ PhD Candidate, Ibn Tofail University, Morocco.

¹ Professor at, Ibn Tofail University, Morocco.

Email 1 : jawad.elalami@uit.ac.ma

Email 2: sakhkhane@yahoo.fr

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Abstract

This article examines the fate of Moroccan colonial troops recruited by the French colonial authority in Morocco during the early years of the French Protectorate and the Great War. It highlights the transformation of Moroccan forces from soldiers in the Sharifian Army to colonial troops defending the French tricolor, revealing the multi-scalar impact of colonialism on Moroccan society in general and the military in particular. The Fez mutiny against French training officers in 1912, the anti-colonial insurgency in the Atlas Mountains, and the sudden ‘shift of allegiance’ and recruitment into the colonial army in the ‘pacified’ areas are manifestations of this multi-scalar impact. While the French presented this military shift of allegiance as an act of ‘volunteerism’ on the part of the natives, the process conceals various forms of coercion and economic hardship that were exacerbated during the Great War. The article concludes with an exploration of the European racialized forms of representation of colonial soldiers, despite their role and heavy sacrifices in the war.

Keywords: *Moroccan colonial troops, the Great War, shift of allegiance, European perceptions*

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Introduction

The Spanish military presence in the enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla in northern Morocco, the French conquest of Algeria in 1830, and the decline of the Moroccan central government rendered European colonial intervention in Morocco's political, economic, and military affairs a de facto reality with the beginning of the 20th century. The defeat of the Sharifian Army in the Battle of Isly (1844) against France and the Battle of Tetouan (1859) against Spain exacerbated the situation of a decaying Moroccan state. The archaic political system, the deteriorating economy, and the military anarchy that prevailed in Morocco in the second half of the nineteenth century rendered any reform attempts futile. As the imperial rivalry between European powers intensified at the beginning of the twentieth century, Morocco was an accessible territory. The fast-paced events that occurred between 1907, when France occupied Oujda, and 1912, when Morocco officially became a French protectorate, explain why and how the French army entered Fez—the capital of Morocco at that time—without a single shot.

The signing of the Protectorate Treaty opened the gates of Morocco to colonial exploitation just in time when France desperately needed Moroccan economic and human resources. Two years after Morocco officially became a French colony, the Great War broke out in Europe. The French Empire, including Morocco, had to contribute to the war effort by providing the metropole with the required economic and natural resources. However, France demanded not only the colonies' financial and natural resources but also their potential “reservoirs of men” to deploy them in its vast war fronts across Europe. Although the French conquest was still in its early stages in Morocco, thousands of young Moroccan youths were drafted into the French army and mobilized to the front lines in Europe .

The entanglement of Moroccan troops in World War I was a fundamental aspect of French colonialism in Morocco. However, despite the abundance of postcolonial scholarship on Morocco, the histories of colonial troops remain understudied and often overlooked. This article revisits the involvement of Moroccan soldiers in World War I, highlighting previously unexplored perspectives on their experiences during the global conflict. It first dwells on the

political, social, and military contexts that compelled Moroccan soldiers to switch allegiance and fight under the French tricolor. Second, it examines the French views on raising troops from the subdued territories and the methods French officers used to seduce native recruits, despite Morocco having been a French colony for only two years and most of its territories being outside French control. The article finally examines colonial troops' reception in Europe, exposing the intersection of colonialism, war and cultural stereotypes in the construction of racialized perceptions of the non-European during the Great War.

1 .The Sharifian army in the early months of the protectorate.

On March 30, 1912, Moroccan Sultan Abdel Hafid signed the Protectorate Treaty with France and Spain, marking the beginning of a new phase in Morocco's history under colonial rule. The treaty, however, didn't inaugurate colonial presence in Morocco. France had already occupied large parts of Eastern Morocco using its troops stationed in Algeria. In 1907, the French landed on the western shores of Morocco at the port of Casablanca and began encroaching through the Chaouia plains, moving east toward the capital, Fez. The French were trying to secure a line through Fez to link Oujda in the east with Casablanca in the west. Spain had already started adding a coastal strip to its presidios at Ceuta and Melilla in the north.

Amid these colonial encroachments, Abdel Hafid, the newly throned Sultan of Morocco, was facing massive troubles that were shattering the Moroccan state, threatening its sovereignty and stability. After two years of civil war, he dethroned his brother, Abdel-Aziz, and inherited a disintegrating state. However, his newly proclaimed power bore elements of its demise. Abdel Hafid dethroned his brother with the backing of the religious elites, the grand qaids of the Middle Atlas and Anti-Atlas, and the tribes that weren't content with his brother's rule. They declared him Sultan of Morocco with a conditional "bay'a," or "pledge of allegiance." According to its terms, they demanded that the new Sultan work for the benefit of the Moroccan community by fulfilling several conditions (Burke III, 1976; Julien, 2011; Miller, 2013; Pennell, 2000). First, he was required to "abrogate" the Act of Algeciras, accepted by his brother in 1905, which gave France the right to intervene in Morocco's political, financial, and military affairs. Second, he was tasked with doing his best to reunite a disintegrating state and

extricate Casablanca and Oujda from French occupation. Third, he was asked to cancel or reduce the unfair taxes that burdened both merchants in the city and farmers in the tribes. Fourth, he was required to repudiate all the foreign debts his dethroned brother had contracted. Finally, he was also required to revive the practice of true Islam and foster closer cooperation with other Muslim powers, especially the Ottoman Empire (Miller, 2013).

The demands were too burdensome for Sultan Abdel Hafid to uphold. To secure his power, he made compromises that amounted to the rejection of the terms of bay'a that brought him to the throne. His primary concern was securing recognition from the European powers, as the banks holding Moroccan money and customs receipts were governed by the convention of Algeciras. Since the state's treasury was empty, the solution was to impose more taxes on the urban and tribal populations. This taxation policy was one of the main reasons behind the collapse of his brother Abdelaziz's rule. Aware of the dangers of his decisions, Abdelhafid set out to eliminate his powerful supporters. Abdelhafid crushed religious and tribal figures who would denounce his regressive policy with spectacular violence .

However, using excessive violence against his domestic rivals was more a weapon of weakness than of strength. Abdelhafid was unable to fulfill his supporters' expectations for economic, social, and political reforms. No jihad was declared to recover the occupied territories east, west, and north of the country. He instead solicited further loans from the European powers, who mandated that he acknowledge the Algeciras Treaty as a prerequisite. The French also demanded increased control over the Chaouia and Oujda regions and asked that the Makhzan pay the costs of the French occupation and administration of the two areas (Pennell, 2000). Left with no better choice, the Sultan accepted all the French accords. Things worsened as foreign loans continued to drain the Sharifian treasury. The country's financial autonomy collapsed as the French took control of all regular taxes and finances. The French also gradually seized control of Morocco's central and local administrations, dismissing any administrators with anti-French sentiments and replacing them with French staff or loyal Moroccan elites .

Ironically, on the eve of the Protectorate, Abdel Hafid's position was even worse than that of his brother, whom he dethroned in 1908. He soon faced tribal uprisings that were very similar to those he had led in 1905. Tribes from the Atlas Mountains, Cherarda, and other areas around the walled city of Fez formed a pan-tribal coalition that levied more than 6,000 rebels and set a siege on the city. The French decided to intervene under the pretext of saving the European community trapped in the city. They exerted heavy pressure on the Sultan to appeal to the French for military assistance to relieve the city and its European residents. Abdel Hafid wistfully signed an official letter requesting military support and handed it to the French, who took it as a passport for their troops to enter the city of Fez. A relief column arrived in Fez on May 21, 1911, and delivered the city from the last of its Berber attackers (Burke III, 1976). The capital, Fez, fell practically into the hands of the French.

While these events were unfolding, the French also extended their intrigue to control all pillars of the Moroccan state. The Sharifian Army was their final objective before the signing of the protectorate. In November 1910, with the Sultan's acquiescence, they began restructuring and retraining Moroccan troops. French military experts and collaborative Moroccan officers were put in charge (Porch, 1987). A few weeks after the arrival of the French forces in Fez to disband the tribes besieging the city, the Sultan handed over full control of the Sharifian Army to the French, who became responsible for its salary, discipline, and armament .

Having controlled the Sharifian army, all that remained for the French was to sign the treaty of protectorate. With both the Algerian and Tunisian models in mind, the French needed to determine the exact colonial policy in Morocco and the role the Makhzan would play in it. Two distinct colonial perspectives evolved in the months leading up to the signing of the Treaty of the Protectorate. The supporters of the first perspective advocated the "assimilation" method and sought to eliminate the Sultan and the Makhzan, as well as all traditional native political institutions. They called for establishing direct ties with the subdued population while using military force to push French colonialism farther into the hinterland of Morocco. For them, "association" or "indirect rule" was insufficient to build a long-term colonial project in Morocco and would merely preserve local tyrants in their positions. The core of this orientation was military action, as most of its

adherents were members of the army. The second perspective believed that the structures of the old Makhzan had to be preserved, and the country should be governed by its native elite and notables. Supporters of this orientation, including the Résident Général Louis-Hubert Lyeauty, believed that the French relief column, mobilized to take over Fez and liberate it from its tribal besiegers, acted in accordance with this policy by helping to restore the Sultan's authority. This perspective paradoxically shaped all military operations during the conquest of Morocco (Porch, 1987).

With Sultan Abdelhafid's signing of the Protectorate Treaty on March 30, 1912, widespread anger reached its highest levels among both urban and rural populations. Although the Sultan insisted that the treaty's signing be kept secret until he got a safe passage to the new capital, Rabat, its "shameful" accords were leaked out to the outraged inhabitants of Fez and the surrounding tribes a few days later. They considered the accords of the protectorate as an act of betrayal by the Sultan. The outraged population even believed that the French had the intention and plans to convert Morocco to Christianity by force (Porch, 1987). Agitated conversations in the streets of Fez openly voiced anti-French and anti-Sultan sentiments (Burke III, 1976).

However, the initial violent reaction against the signing of the Protectorate Treaty didn't come from the frustrated civilians. It came from the Sharifian Army, which was garrisoned in the city and trained and disciplined by French instructors and officers. In addition to the frenzied atmosphere in the city, which negatively affected their temper, the Sharifian troops were vexed by the French officers' decision to implement military reforms that they considered unfair and humiliating. As noted above, the Sultan had signed over the control of the Sharifian Army to the French, who didn't dissolve it. They replaced Moroccan officers with French instructors and officers while keeping the rank and file of the army. The French instructors attempted to reorganize the troops by breaking with the archaic military system of the mehallas that prevailed in the pre-colonial Moroccan army. They enacted new military regulations. The system of military barracks was introduced in Morocco for the first time. The training was now performed daily. Soldiers received a small daily allowance to buy food or other necessities. In the past, the Sharifian army had no stable barracks. The soldiers spent their nights at home with their families if they lived close or in funduks,

mosques, and the streets of Fez when their homes were far away (Porch, 1987; Burke III, 1976). Furthermore, there was no regular payment for the army, and soldiers usually resorted to pillaging, looting, and theft to feed themselves and their families.

Amidst growing anti-French sentiment among Moroccan troops, French officers opted to implement poorly planned military reforms and severe regulations within a fortnight of the protectorate's signing. Among the new regulations that mainly provoked Moroccan troops were the following decisions: French, rather than Arabic, was to be used henceforth to provide military orders; Moroccan soldiers were supposed to carry knapsacks, which they considered a grave humiliation; and, most of all, a newly revised system of payment was introduced again. According to this system, soldiers would receive half of their salary in cash and the other half in kind (Porch, 1987).

Moroccan soldiers reacted to the new regulations with vehement words and gestures that quickly turned into an unstoppable "mutiny." French instructors and officers lost control over the outraged forces, which transformed into an unruly, violent mob. The mutineers first attacked their direct French officers and killed most of them; then, they pounced on the city's streets, killing any European they came across. The mutiny started on April 17, 1912, and lasted three days. French soldiers and civilians were besieged in their residences in the southern part of the walled city (Porch, 1987). Order was finally restored in the city on April 19, 1912, with the assistance of Moroccan units loyal to the French and heavy artillery that bombarded the mutineers' quarters. The French suffered heavy casualties; 53 officers and 13 civilians were killed. On the other side, well over six hundred Moroccan mutineers perished in the uprising and the mass executions (Burke III, 1976).

A direct consequence of the mutiny was the complete disbandment of the Sharifian Army. The mutiny taught the French a hard lesson: retaining the Sharifian troops was like holding a countdown bomb. Immediately after the bloody events, they decided to disband the remaining Sharifian troops. Most soldiers were killed, executed, deserted to join the uprising tribes, or returned to their homes around Fez. The few units that remained loyal to the French during the three days of the uprising were preserved and asked to apply for reenlistment

on an individual basis. This time, they were not in the Sharifian Army but in a newly created force called “Troupes Auxiliaires Marocaines,” serving solely the French tricolor (Gershovich, 2000). The colonial authority was aware that conquering the rest of Morocco would be economically and humanly costly. Creating a “French native army” composed of Moroccan soldiers would reduce the cost of the colonial adventure and spare many French lives. “Troupes Auxiliaires Marocaines” was the first officially organized native force enlisted in the French colonial army in Morocco after the signing of the Protectorate Treaty. However, native “irregular” units had already been raised from the occupied zones of Oujda in 1907 and Chaouia in 1908. They were mobilized apprehensively to fight alongside the French on various fronts against Moroccan anti-colonial resistance .

The dramatic events that occurred over the five years between the first landing of French troops on Moroccan soil in 1907 and the official signing of the Protectorate Treaty in 1912 are crucial to understanding the background of recruiting thousands of Moroccan colonial soldiers from the areas that were just subdued. The archaic structures in pre-colonial Morocco, the failure of political reforms, the French colonial policy and Lyautey’s touch, the nature of the Moroccan army before the arrival of the French and the military disarray that led to “the mutiny,” and the final disbandment of the regular Moroccan troops are essential clues to understand the French colonial authority’s precarious resort to “the human reservoir” in the colonies to man its armies both in the metropole and at home and the empire. It also helps understand why the subdued natives switched allegiance and joined the colonizer’s army as soon as their tribes and villages were often violently subdued.

2 .An army of natives in the service of the tricolor

When France formally colonized Morocco, it had already been recruiting troops from its African, Southeast Asian, and Caribbean colonies for decades. It used them to fight battles in their original countries against their fellow countrymen in areas that still held out against French colonial penetration. They were also displaced from their original environment to fight in other French colonial adventures in Africa and Asia, as was the case with West African units participating in the French landing in Casablanca in 1908. Every time France

embarked on a new colonial adventure, it mobilized native troops from around its empire. Thousands of native troops fought against France's enemies in Europe during the global conflicts of the 20th century. The use of "colored troops" against "white races" provoked endless debates since they first set foot on European soil .

Although the first non-French units in the French army can be traced back to the 17th century during the first phase of French imperialism under the "ancien régime," they weren't recruited and deployed on a large scale until the final years of the nineteenth century (Fogarty, 2008). French colonial administrators worked under the utilitarian principle that conquering large parts of the world and building an empire required "the collaboration" of indigenous populations. The colonial adventure would fail without them due to its high cost in men and resources. Ronald Robinson's article on the workings of European imperialism perfectly frames this imperial orientation: "If an empire could not be had on the cheap, it was not worth having at all." The financial sinew and the military and administrative muscle of imperialism were drawn through the mediation of indigenous elites from the invaded countries themselves" (Robinson, 1972, p. 120). Colonial advocates sought not only to reduce the costs of the colonial venture but also to spare the lives of Frenchmen who might perish in battles by integrating the natives into the colonial projects. The colonial authority had to incorporate all the subdued indigenous populations into its apparatus. The native elite was going to rule and administer the colonized territories under French supervision. At the same time, the subaltern majority would do the hard work of building and fighting for the empire, rather than the metropolitan workers and troops (Stovall, 1993).

Colonial expertise calculated that the French army would recruit two indigenous soldiers for the cost of one metropolitan soldier (Fogarty, 2008). French troops, exposed to harsh environments within hostile territories in Africa and Southeast Asia, witnessed a frightening death toll. The number of French soldiers who died due to tropical climates and diseases was significantly greater than the number who died in battle (Fogarty, 2008). Colonial adventures thousands of miles from the homeland disposed of French lives and provoked angry reactions from the French public, which politicians found difficult to handle. On the other hand, locally raised native troops had better immunity to local conditions and diseases.

Their knowledge of local geographies and cultures saved the French a great deal of effort in scouting and patrolling territories outside French influence.

A new challenge loomed for France at the beginning of the twentieth century. The political and military rivalry between European colonial powers over the division of colonies was intensifying. This rivalry between France and Germany led to an intense arms race between the two imperial powers. Germany presented a significant political, military, and demographic challenge for France, which had to keep most of its army within the metropolitan borders. The French believed that a war with Germany was inevitable. France's decreased birth rate affected the recruitment of sufficient metropolitan troops. Germany's rapidly growing population, larger army, and increased military power heightened French fears about France's future as a leading power in Europe (Fogarty, 2008). The French faced a twofold dilemma. First, they had to keep the majority of their troops in the homeland, ready for the impending war against Germany. Second, they had to send sufficient troops overseas to maintain their positions in the vast parts of the empire or continue their colonial conquest, as in the case of Morocco .

In this historical context, the idea of "la force noire" appeared. A massive black military force could be raised from the French African colonies to be deployed in Europe during the upcoming global conflict. The promoters of the idea viewed it as the only way to match Germany's military power. One strong advocate of the idea was Charles Mangin, a French officer with a long colonial experience in West Africa. In 1910, he published a book titled *La Force Noire* (Mangin, 1910), in which he campaigned for recruiting native troops from Africa to overcome the shortage of metropolitan troops and alleviate the demographic deficit with Germany. He lobbied for the deployment of African troops in their original country, in other colonies, and mostly in the metropole. On the ground, what he called for was already being applied on various colonial war fronts. In 1908, for example, the "Senegalese Tirailleurs" participated in the French landing in Casablanca and the conquest of the Chaouia Plains west of Morocco. They were also deployed in other parts of the French empire, such as Algeria, Indochina, and the Levant.

Charles Mangin was aware of the idea that the recruitment of African troops to serve under the French tricolor in the colonies and Europe was revolutionary,

given the prevailing European views of the indigenous people as savage races. To convince his political and military superiors as well as the public opinion in France, he used pseudo-scientific and historical arguments derived from colonial ethnography and anthropology about non-European races. He structured the book in a manner that served his campaign in favor of a French army of native warriors .

The book was divided into four chapters, which he titled as “books.” In “Book One,” entitled “Le Dépeuplement de la France,” he responded to the fears of the French about the demographic deficiency and its impact on France’s rivalry with Germany. He argued that West Africa was “an inexhaustible reservoir of men” who were ready to “volunteer” in the French army and provide a force of 100,000 soldiers per year or more. However, given the demographic statistics about West Africa and the reluctance of its people to recruit in the colonial army, it was pure fantasy to raise such a number of soldiers per year (Fogarty, 2008). In “Book Two,” titled “La Force Noire dans l’Histoire,” he resorted to history to provide examples of the successful deployment of African troops. Ancient Egypt, Islamic empires, and the more recent empires of the Middle Ages all recruited African troops for their capabilities in soldiery, though they belonged to “inferior” and “savage” races. In “Book three,” titled “Les Sénégalais,” he turned to the pseudo-scientific racist theories provided by colonial anthropology to convince his readers of the fighting qualities of the African troops. He argued that African soldiers possessed “the warrior’s instincts” that remained compelling in “primitive races.” Those instincts were the main reason they survived despite harsh climates and high mortality rates. Using biological terminology, he argued that African troops were the outcome of a “severe natural selection.” Their “less developed” nervous system in comparison to Europeans provided them with a greater pain tolerance and a higher willingness to shed blood on the battlefield.

Moreover, belonging to Africa, which had been “a vast battlefield” for centuries, made them excellent soldiers due to their natural inclination. They had a great capacity to carry heavy loads over long distances owing to centuries of portage and migration. Finally, in “book four,” Mangin provided methods for recruiting, organizing, and mobilizing African troops. He also recommended taking certain precautions with these troops, including limiting their interaction with French civilians. Mangin, however, reassured that the patriarchal nature of their societies

endowed them with a sense of discipline and respect for hierarchy, thereby facilitating their compliance with orders from their French superiors.

In addition to the methods and precautions for dealing with African troops, Mangin had specific roles for them to play in the upcoming war against Germany. For him, they would be especially valuable as “shock troops,” as they possessed precisely the qualities demanded in the long modern struggles: “rusticity, endurance, tenacity, the instinct for combat, the absence of nervousness, and an incomparable power of shock.” (Mangin, 1910, p. 343, author’s translation).

Finally, dealing with the ethical concerns regarding the recruitment of Africans to fight outside their native environments, Mangin paradoxically argued that the formation of “la force noire” served as compensation for the blood and energy France invested during the long and difficult struggle to establish “la paix française” and abolish slavery in Africa. For him, recruiting African soldiers and deploying them on European soil under the banners of the French army was the most significant achievement of France’s “civilizing mission” and the uplifting of the primitive Africans. Therefore, “the French nation “has the right to call upon all of its children for its defense, even upon its adoptive children, without any distinction of race” (Mangin, 1910, p. 350, author’s translation).

Nevertheless, despite Mangin’s relentless campaign, the deployment of African troops in Europe sparked heated debates in France and across Europe. However, the debates were more concerned with the potential harm to the pride of the European civilization and white races than with the moral and ethical implications of exploiting native people in wars that were not theirs. According to the antagonists of the idea of a native army, those troops constituted more of a peril than an advantage. They called attention to the adverse effects that the deployment of African soldiers might have on European troops and civilians and their fellow compatriots when they returned to their countries.

Although Mangin’s ideas sparked contentious debates in France and Europe, they were widely implemented at the outbreak of World War I. As France was in desperate need of troops and supplies for the European front lines, French colonial administrators launched an unprecedented recruitment campaign across the French Empire. The recruitment methods differed from one area to another. They varied from “volunteerism” to “forced conscription.” In West Africa, for example,

the French recruitment officers depended heavily upon the slave trade, which was still a common practice in the late nineteenth century. They used a system known as “rachat” (repurchase) in which French officers paid a bonus to the master to purchase the slaves’ freedom. Formerly enslaved people were to serve in the French army for up to 12 years in return for their purchased freedom (Echenberg, 1991). The improved living conditions of former slaves, their regularly increasing pay, and colorful uniforms lured more “volunteers” to join the colonial army. Other regions of the French empire employed similar enticing strategies to promote “volunteerism”.

As the Great War approached, the recruitment of native troops in the colonies became more systematic. In 1912, the French parliament passed various acts that allowed conscription from all French colonies, except for Morocco, which had a different colonial status. According to the Protectorate Treaty, Morocco was not officially a French colony but a sovereign state under French protection. Conscription, therefore, required a special decree from the Sultan. With heavy casualties among French metropolitan and colonial troops at the outbreak of the Great War, conscription, rather than volunteerism, became the major method of recruitment. Intensive and sometimes forced conscription was undertaken in West Africa, Algeria, Madagascar, and Indochina .

The natives didn’t always welcome compulsory conscription as colonial propaganda claimed. Reactions varied from one area to another and often included hiding from recruitment officers in the mountains, desertion, and, in some cases, armed resistance (Echenberg, 1991). In West Africa, for example, more than 15,000 men avoided compulsory conscription by hiding in the bushes. In other cases, West Africans resorted to armed uprisings to resist forced conscription into the French army, as the metropole requested more recruits to replace the large number of casualties from the battles between 1915 and 1917. The rebellion in Western Volta in 1915 was one example of armed resistance to conscription. Similar adverse reactions were also reported in Algeria and Tunisia, where natives refused to serve in the French army during the European war. Various rebellions took place between 1916 and 1917 (Koller, 2008). Some natives, especially those from the middle classes, avoided conscription, as they considered it dangerous, contrary to their religious principles, or detrimental to their class affiliations (Fogarty, 2008).

3 .Moroccan colonial soldiers’ saga with the French army

In Morocco, recruiting native troops was carried out in accordance with Mangin’s philosophy of a native army. However, different recruiting methods were adopted. As previously stated, the French Protectorate in Morocco introduced a new colonial policy that implemented an advanced form of indirect rule, preserving the local political structures. Therefore, although Morocco was, by all definitions, a French colony, it formally remained a sovereign state with the Sultan as the highest authority. All decrees required his symbolic seal. In this sense, compulsory conscription in a sovereign state would undermine the image the colonial authority marketed of Morocco as a sovereign state. To find a way to raise the native troops that the metropolitan desperately needed while maintaining the marketed myth of Morocco as an independent state. The way around was to use “volunteerism” instead of conscription to attract potential recruits from the “pacified” territories.

Colonial officers of the Bureau des Affaires Indigènes, as well as collaborative local qai’ds and tribal chiefs, played crucial roles in enticing recruits to join the colonial army. They often recommended potential veterans, directing French officers to popular sites such as the weekly souks, where large numbers of people could be contacted and persuaded to join the colonial army (Gershovich, 2000; Maghraoui, 2004; Maxwell, 2000). In addition to the effective role of those intermediaries, there was indeed a form of agency that explains why native populations, including those subdued just a few weeks or even days ago, found it in their interest to join the colonizer’s army and participate in its battles, even against their own tribes. Although they were placed in an inferior position compared to the French troops, most indigenous soldiers perceived the colonial military order as more egalitarian than the social hierarchies present in their hometowns and villages. Joining the colonial army was a means for colonial soldiers to escape their miserable social conditions, which got even worse after colonial subjugation.

It was hardly surprising, then, that as soon as “dissident” tribes were “pacified,” native warriors switched sides, seeking recruitment into the army they were fighting against. At times, anti-French local leaders and tribal notables indirectly facilitated the work of recruiting officers as natives joined the French to escape

their tyranny. Lyautey's policy, which prioritized "seduction" over "destruction" in dealing with armed resistance, employed a strategy known in French military circles as the *tâche d'huile*, or "the oil-stain strategy." This strategy was based on attracting natives, even if they were on the other side of the frontline. By implementing various services, such as field medical services, telegraph lines, roadways, railways, and markets on the borders of dissident territories, hostile populations were attracted to "the benefits" of French colonialism, making their switch of allegiance easier (Gershovich, 2004). However, what the French won from this strategy was more than switching allegiance. The territories that pledged loyalty to the French were crucial for sustaining French colonial expansion in the still unconquered areas. Troops raised from those areas were cheaper, and their attrition in battles wouldn't agitate the metropolitan public opinion that was sensitive to any loss of French conscripts.

The locally recruited troops played an eminent role in maintaining the French conquest of Morocco. A brief comparison of casualty figures among French and Moroccan troops during the battles of "pacification" shows that Moroccan troops suffered the highest proportion of casualties. For example, reports on the military operations in the region of Tadla in 1923 estimated the total number of killed and wounded troops at 231, eighty-four percent of whom were Moroccan soldiers (Gershovich, 2004). In all the battles that took place in southern Morocco, the Atlas Mountains, and later in the Rif against Abdelkrim's forces, it appeared that the largest numbers of casualties were among Moroccan troops, not the French metropolitan forces. Local native troops, recruited from recently subdued areas, played a crucial role in maintaining the French colonial enterprise in Morocco during the war years.

Moroccan troops became famous not for the decisive roles they played in the conquest of their country, but for fighting for France during World War I in Europe. As irregular troops who were theoretically volunteers in the French army, Moroccan soldiers received inferior treatment compared to both the French metropolitan army and the native troops conscripted from Algeria and Tunisia (Gershovich, 1994). After their heroic performance during the initial battles of the Great War, a legislative initiative was introduced to address the inequity and equalize their service conditions with those of other troops from North Africa. The initiative was "frozen" following Lyautey's intervention. The latter deemed

the step inappropriate and embarrassing to the Sultan, given Morocco's official neutrality in the Great War (Gershovich, 1994). During his residency in Morocco, Lyautey consistently resisted the imposition of mandatory military service on the native population.

Whether recruitment was via compulsory conscription as in Algeria and Tunisia or through "volunteerism" as in Morocco, both methods often involved tactics of pressure and coercion on the part of indigenous populations. The term "volunteerism" overshadowed multiple overlapping forms of intimidation, especially in periods of crisis when France was in great need of troops. The Great War, World War II, and the wars of decolonization witnessed the most severe forms of coercion and intimidation against the natives, largely due to France's significant troop shortages. The number of Moroccan soldiers recruited in the first two years of the Great War suggested that coercive methods, not "volunteerism," were in use. Although a significant part of the Moroccan hinterland was still outside the scope of French colonization during World War I, and the Sharifian army had just been disbanded after the "mutiny" of Fez, colonial authority succeeded in recruiting about 70,000 soldiers: 34,000 of them served in the regular French units, and the other 36,000 as laborers in weaponry factories (Gershovich, 2000). The recruitment of such a large number in this short period wouldn't be accomplished without economic inducements and physical coercion exercised by the Bureau des Affaires Indigènes and its collaborators from the native notables.

The contribution of Moroccan soldiers was decisive in several major battles of the Great War, including the Marne (1914), Verdun (1916), and the Danube (1918), where they captured an entire German regiment (Mrini, 1997). As Moroccan units were recruited on a voluntary basis, no exact numbers of their wartime casualties are available. Abdelhak Mrini estimated the number of Moroccan soldiers killed to be about 2,500. However, he provided no numbers of the wounded or the prisoners of war (Mrini, 1997). Moshe Gershovich, with deeper archival research, estimates the number of Moroccan soldiers killed to be 9,000, the wounded 17,000, and the prisoners 4,500 (Gershovich, 2000). After the war, the majority of Moroccan troops remained outside Morocco, as Lyautey was convinced that their return to Morocco might jeopardize France's colonial presence in the country. Only 20,000 soldiers returned; the others remained scattered in various parts of

the world, including Turkey and the Levant, but mainly in France and Germany. Their presence in Germany was subject to intense racist German propaganda, and they were finally withdrawn in 1925 (Clayton, 1988) .

4 .Colonial soldiers in Europe: ‘savage warriors’ among ‘civilized white races’.

Despite the stories of bravery, sacrifices, and the heavy casualties in their ranks, the presence of colonial soldiers in Europe proliferated rich cultural tropes and images in European narratives of the Great War. The images generated about colonial soldiers evolved in different ways depending on which side of the frontline they emerged from. In their war experience, colonial soldiers encountered unexpected scenes. They encountered or lived among culturally different social groups that they had never seen in their native towns and villages. Some of them were comrades-in-arms, some were their enemies on the other side of the front, some were their superiors, others were their captives or captors, and some were just civilians whose curiosity drew them to stare at those exotic soldiers who had set foot in Europe for the first time in history .

Two primary forms of cultural representation regarding colonial soldiers prevailed. The first was promoted by Germany, against whom those troops were fighting, and the second was promoted by France, which recruited them and brought them to fight on its side. The German representation of colonial soldiers developed along racist pre-war images of the colonized people in Africa and Asia. German propaganda disseminated those distorted images about African troops in order to influence public opinion inside Germany about the rightfulness of the German cause in declaring war against France and its allies. For the German promoters of the stereotypical images of African soldiers, France had committed a “shameful” crime in using those “savage” troops against the “white races” in Europe. Derogatory jargon was used to describe colonial soldiers, and Expressions such as “barbarians of the world,” “army of niggers,” “primitive beasts,” “apes,” and much more racialized language that negated those troops’ humanity and qualities as regular military forces were evoked when they were referred to .

In this context, colonial troops fighting on the French side were deliberately associated with horrible stories of war atrocities. For example, Moroccan soldiers

were widely believed to have the habit of mutilating the bodies of their enemies on the battlefield. They were reported to have gouged the eyes and cut off the ears, noses, and heads of wounded or captured German soldiers using Moroccan-made daggers and knives (Amt Auswärtiges, 1915) .

German propaganda also evoked images of “innocent German women” being violated by colonial troops to dramatize further their unwelcome presence among Europeans and nations that were still neutral in the war. Putting these women in reach of “these savages” will expose them to the “animal passions” of these “wild beasts.” Using the claimed accounts of German women taken as prisoners, German propaganda recounts how women prisoners were raped by “black soldiers” while being transported on board a train:

Each of the black soldiers selected one of the women prisoners and demanded the use of her sexually. One of them demanded this of me, but I refused with determination. Thereupon he tried to throw me down and force me. He had already exposed his sexual parts, but he did not succeed in forcing me. He therefore called a second black soldier; and when I resisted them both the first one gave me a deep wound with his bayonet, from which the blood ran down. Of the other blacks probably every one succeeded in ravishing one of the prisoners before the eyes of the whole car, despite her resistance (Amt Auswärtiges, 1915).

In this piece of propaganda that was directed at Western neutral nations and white people to convince them to denounce France and Britain’s use of “black” Africans and Indians in the European theater of war, the articulation of white European women in the discussion on colonial troops was the most dramatic argument trying to win their sympathy and denouncement of France and Britain’ military policies. Presenting colonial troops as committing acts of collective rape would undoubtedly serve this end because of the psychological, religious, and cultural impact.

Another recurrent theme in German popular representation of the French colonial troops was their alleged impact on the future of racial hierarchy and the supremacy of “the white races.” German anti-colonial troops propaganda suggests that if the “savage warriors” were trained to use modern European arms and war tactics and were brought to Europe to witness the vulnerability of “the white nations” during their conflicts, they would permanently lose respect for their

European masters. They would return to their colonized nations when the war was over and turn their weapons against their colonial masters (Amt Auswärtiges, 1915).

Following the German propaganda campaign on the French and British “employment of colored tribes in wars between civilized nations,” colonial soldiers were labelled with all sorts of racist expressions that not only negated their quality as regular military forces but also dehumanized them, treating them as animals or beasts. They were described as “Senegalese negroes,” “black North Africans,” “barbarians,” and “wild beasts” with “animal passions” who mutilated the bodies of their enemies, cut their heads, gouged their eyes, and cut their ears to wear them as war trophies, and collectively raped innocent women. Employing such troops with such “savagery and cruelty” was marked as “a disgrace to the methods of warfare of the twentieth century” (Amt Auswärtiges, 1915).

Affected by this highly racialized repertoire, most narratives written about colonial troops henceforth borrow from this repertoire to provide racialized accounts of the presence of colonial troops in Europe. Recurrent vocabulary in these narratives about colonial soldiers includes depictions of colonial soldiers’ presence in Europe as a “chaos of colors and religions,” “devils,” “inhuman savages,” “dead human scum of the wilderness,” “Africans stabbing in devilish ecstasy,” or “riffraff of all colors.” Other terms used included “African exhibition,” “ethnological show of uncivilized bands and hordes,” “black flood,” “dark mud,” and “black shame” (Koller, 2014). These harmful tropes continued to shape Western representations long after the Great War .

These racialized representations undoubtedly contributed to the widespread massacres of colonial troops during the German army’s invasion of France and Belgium in the first two years of World War II. Colonial units stationed on the French and Belgian borders with Germany were ordered not to leave their positions, despite the German army’s overwhelming military superiority. When German troops confronted these helpless units, they surely still held in mind vivid racialized images of the “savage” soldiers circulated during the First World War and the French occupation of the Rhine and Ruhr provinces after the Versailles treaty. The summer of 1940 was a tragic moment in the history of colonial troops with France. German soldiers cold-bloodedly murdered and abused thousands of

colonial troops. “Colored” French troops were often separated from their “white” comrades-in-arms to be subjected to inhuman treatment. There were many reported incidents of mass executions of African prisoners of war, sometimes up to one at a time. One group of captured African prisoners was executed on the field with machine guns and cannons from tanks (Scheck, 2008).

While German images of colonial soldiers were xenophobic and extremely racialized, France and its allies’ images of these troops weren’t much different from those of the Germans, even though those soldiers were fighting on their side. Similar to the images that prevailed in German popular culture, the representation of African troops in French, British, and American cultures drew on racialized terminology that was also used by German propaganda. On their arrival in France at the outbreak of the First World War, African troops were portrayed as “demons noirs who would carry over the Rhine with their bayonets the revenge of civilization against modern [German] barbarism” (Koller, 2014, p. 132). A large portion of the French society shared images of colonial soldiers as “bloodthirsty savages,” “head choppers,” and “rapists” who should not be garrisoned on French metropolitan territories. To counter such negative stereotypes and reassure the “frightened” public, the French authorities began promoting a new “positive” image of the colonial soldier. The African was reintroduced in this new mode of representation as a “grand enfant” who belonged to “races jeunes,” or young races, who were loyal and obedient to their “white masters” because of the latter’s intellectual and technological supremacy. Therefore, they were a danger neither to the “white populations” in the metropole nor to the “race hierarchy” in the colonial space (Fell, 2014).

The stereotypical constructions about colonial troops mobilized in Europe during the Great War contain various cultural and racial tropes familiar in nineteenth-century Eurocentric discourses and colonial representations of the non-European peoples and cultures. The distorted jargon and images used to portray indigenous troops can be easily traced to pseudo-scientific studies, ethnographic work, travel accounts, and literary narratives written in various historical and geographical contexts. Still, they found relevance in the European racialized perceptions of Moroccan and other colonial troops fighting in Europe .

Conclusion

The entanglement of Moroccan troops in the Great War highlights the colonial relations of power that governed the multi-scalar relationship between France and its imperial subjects, particularly in the context of colonial recruitment of native soldiers. Although they were victims of the colonial situation, Moroccan troops played a crucial role in fostering the French overseas empire and the French military efforts during the war in Europe. Their recruitment involved various forms of intimidation, manipulation, and economic temptations, revealing the larger colonial contexts that sought to devote indigenous populations to expanding the empire and mitigating the impact of intra-European wars. The French heavily relied on coercive methods to secure sufficient human supplies for its wars, despite promoting the idea of “volunteerism,” as was the case with Moroccan recruited troops.

The political and social contexts in Morocco, including the weakened central government, the disbanding of the Sharifian Army, and the breakdown of local power structures, allowed for an unprecedented popular encounter between the native populations and the colonial authority. The recruitment of Moroccan veterans into the French army indeed revealed the overarching colonial strategy of exploiting local contexts, social hierarchies, and political instabilities to fulfill its objectives. However, the mutiny of Fez, in addition to the continuous rural uprisings, exposed the deep tensions within this policy, as it uncovered the fragile allegiance of colonial troops to the French cause in Morocco.

The presence of Moroccan soldiers in Europe, while essential to France’s military campaign, also revealed the profoundly racialized and dehumanizing portrayals that characterized colonial military service. The biased treatment and racialized perceptions of these soldiers in both French and German propaganda exemplify the entrenched racial hierarchies that endured despite their involvement in the war. These cultural depictions not only influenced public perceptions of colonial troops but also established the foundation for the ongoing distortion of these soldiers’ roles in the post-war period.

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