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**DR. OSAMA ABI-MERSHED**

**THE RIF REPUBLIC AS A MODERN MOVEMENT: CREATING POWER IN THE  
COLONIAL CONTEXT**

**STUART PEEBLES**

**[SP553@GEORGETOWN.EDU](mailto:SP553@GEORGETOWN.EDU)**

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In July 1921, the Spanish colonial army, led by General Manuel Fernandez Silvestre, lost approximately 10,000 soldiers in a dramatic rout in the Rif Mountains at a place called Anual, “the greatest defeat suffered by a European power in an African colonial conflict in the twentieth century.”<sup>1</sup> General Silvestre lost his own life in the process, but the unlikely Rifi leader, a former judge and journalist named Mohammed Abd al-Karim al-Khattabi (AK), gained new prestige almost instantly. Both AK and his Spanish university-educated brother Mahammed (MAK) were products of and responses to the specific Spanish Moroccan colonial experience. How can we interpret their short-lived but significant Rif Republic in North African and colonial studies?

Perhaps one useful way is by thinking of the AK brothers as elements of modernity. Although the term ‘modernity’ is a problematic, Europe-focused one that often implies a one-way transmission of ‘progressive’ ideas, Chinese historian Mark Elvin offers a more productive definition: he proposes that we define modernity as the “ability to create power” and the “capacity to direct energy.”<sup>2</sup> Looking at AK and his state apparatus through the lens of Elvin’s modernity allows us to break away from simple nationalist-centered narratives of the Rif War. In this sense, the Rif Republic becomes an important movement in colonial history, not because it was an early form of Berber proto-nationalism or a foreshadowing of the Algerian Independence struggle, but because for a five year period the Rif state was able to create more power - economic, military, and ideological - than the troubled Spanish (and to a lesser extent French) state. From this vantage point, the Rifi leaders were more modern than the self-proclaimed creators of modernity, the Europeans.

AK and MAK became voluntary agents of modernity in the Rif as a product of their Spanish colonial background. For example, AK worked in the Bureau of Indigenous Affairs in Melilla, and MAK attended the Spanish University of the Mines in Madrid; their father was a respected and well-paid judge in the Spanish system. Thus, the AK family was able to observe from the inside how the Spanish state was able to create power through its economy, military, and ideology. At the same time, AK, in particular, was able to detect the inherent weakness of the Spanish system, the relative strength of the other European powers, and the opportunity to create his own power within Northern Morocco. The context of World War I and several Spanish colonial missteps provided the space to leverage this knowledge into execution. As historian James McDougall describes, “modernity was inherently colonial, the product of the uneven development of capitalist penetration, extraction, production and circulation right across the globe” (*italics embedded*).<sup>3</sup> By extension, the Rif Republic as a modern movement was a natural, if not inevitable, product of the colonial encounter.

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<sup>1</sup> Jose E. Alvarez, “From Empire to Republic: The Spanish Army, 1898- 1931,” in *A Military History of Modern Spain : From the Napoleonic Era to the International War on Terror*, edited by Wayne H. Bowen and José E. Alvarez (Westport, CT: Praeger Security International, 2007), p. 44.

<sup>2</sup>Mark Elvin, “A Working Definition of Modernity,” *Past and Present* (1986) Volume 113, Issue 1, pp. 209-213. These two quotes are from pages 210-211. Elvin suggests we break down this definition on three levels: 1) “power over other human beings,” 2) “practical power over nature,” and 3) “intellectual power over nature... the capacity for prediction.” For a critique of using the word ‘modernity,’ see Frederick Cooper, *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), Chapter 5.

<sup>3</sup> James McDougall, *History and the Culture of Nationalism in Algeria* (New York: Cambridge, 2006), p. 6.

## HISTORIOGRAPHY

The secondary literature on the Rif War and AK, in particular, is fairly extensive when compared to other topics in colonial North Africa. In the English language pantheon, there is C.R. Pennell's *A Country with a Government and a Flag*, which gives fairly comprehensive coverage of "the political, social, and economic history" of the period. Pennell has also written two fairly useful articles on the War that examine its implications for gender relations and ideology.<sup>4</sup> Laying the ethnographic groundwork for many of the subsequent studies, David Hart's hefty *Aith Waryaghar* still remains one of the principle English texts on Northern Moroccan society and culture.<sup>5</sup> Next in the order of significance for our study of the Rif is John R. McNeill's environmental approach entitled *Mountains of the Mediterranean World*, which proposes that environmental degradation in the Rif reached an unsustainable threshold in the twentieth century because of the region's chronic overpopulation and integration into global markets.<sup>6</sup> From the Spanish perspective, José E. Álvarez and Shannon E. Fleming conduct the lion's share of the English language literature and focus primarily on military and political aspects of the Spanish campaigns.<sup>7</sup> Lastly, there are other secondary sources worthy of mention but less useful to this study. In particular, we will not reference David S. Woolman's *Rebels in the Rif*, as it has been eclipsed by Pennell's work. Nor will we employ Rupert Furneaux's *Emir of the Rif*, as it tends to romanticize AK.<sup>8</sup>

Complementing the English works are a number of Arabic secondary sources that tackle the subject of the Rif Republic, the most recent being Salman Ismail's *Min al-Qabilah ila al-Ummah*.<sup>9</sup> Perhaps the most important one for this study, though, is from Ahmad al-Bu Ayyashi entitled *Harb al-Rif al-Tahririya wa marahil al-nidal*. This two volume history, published in 1974, served as the catalyst for our main primary source to write his memoir of the Rif War.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> C.R. Pennell, *A Country with a Government and a Flag: The Rif War in Morocco, 1921- 1926* (Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1986), p. 3. \_\_\_\_ "Women and Resistance to Colonialism in Morocco: The Rif 1916-1926," *The Journal of African History*, Volume 28, Number 1, 1987, pp. 107- 118. \_\_\_\_ , "Ideology and Practical Politics: A Case Study of the Rif War in Morocco, 1921-1926," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Volume 14, Number 1, February 1982, Pages 19-33. Also, an invaluable general reference is Pennell's *Morocco since 1830: A History* (New York: New York University Press, 2000). Think of Pennell as the workhorse historian of Morocco.

<sup>5</sup> David M. Hart, *The Aith Waryaghar of the Moroccan Rif: An Ethnography and History* (Tucson, Arizona: University of Arizona Press, 1976). The Aith Waryaghar is the tribe of AK that is confusingly referred to in many different ways. For the sake of this study we will call it the Beni Waryaghal.

<sup>6</sup> John R. McNeill, *The Mountains of the Mediterranean World: An Environmental History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

<sup>7</sup> Shannon E. Fleming and Ann K. Fleming, "Primo de Rivera and Spain's Moroccan Problem, 1923-27," *Journal of Contemporary History*, Volume 12, Number 1, January 1977, pp. 85-99. And José E. Álvarez, *The Betrothed of Death: The Spanish Foreign Legion during the Rif Rebellion, 1920-1927* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2001). Also Álvarez, "From Empire to Republic: The Spanish Army, 1898- 1931," in *A Military History of Modern Spain : From the Napoleonic Era to the International War on Terror*, edited by Wayne H. Bowen and José E. Alvarez (Westport, CT: Praeger Security International, 2007).

<sup>8</sup> David S. Woolman, *Rebels in the Rif: Abd El Krim and the Rif Rebellion* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1968) and Rupert Furneaux, *Abdel Krim: Emir of the Rif* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1967).

<sup>9</sup> Salman Ismail, *Min al-Qabilah ila al-Ummah* (Homs, Syria: Dar al-tawhidi lilnashr, 1998).

<sup>10</sup> Ahmad al-Bu Ayyashi, *Harb al-Rif al-Tahririya wa marahil al-nidal*, 2 volumes (Tangier: Nashr Abd al-Salam Gassus, 1974). I was unable to procure a copy of this text and the citation is from Pennell's *Government and Flag*, which uses al-Bu Ayyashi quite frequently.

The most easily accessed primary sources on the Rif War come from three contemporaries: Vincent Sheean, an American journalist who travelled through the Rif and met AK in 1925; Walter Harris, a British journalist who had lived in Tangier for many years and covered the peace negotiations from Oujda in 1926; and lastly, Arturo Barea, a Spanish soldier who served as a road-building engineer in the Rif from 1920- 21.<sup>11</sup> Barea first published his literary memoirs in three Spanish volumes, which were later translated by his wife into one large English volume. In addition, AK's memoirs are recorded in French by J. Roger-Mathieu, but, according to Pennell (my proxy because it is inaccessible to me), historians should use it cautiously because of its many inaccuracies.<sup>12</sup> Lastly, the usual litany of western media, such as the recently-established Time magazine, also carried snippets from the Rif conflict, most of which were reprints from Walter Harris's column in The Times.

Our key primary source from the Rifi perspective is a 78 year old judge from al-Hoceima named Muhammad Muhammad Amr al-Qadi who recorded his memories of the epic events in the Rif more than 50 years after they occurred.<sup>13</sup> His memoir is 289 pages divided into six chapters, the last of which is devoted to refuting the claims of the Moroccan historian mentioned above, al-Bu Ayyashi. Qadi's memoirs were prompted largely in part by the publication of this rival historical account five years earlier, a history that Amr al-Qadi polemically calls "a novel, unconcerned with the truth."<sup>14</sup> However, our interest with al-Qadi's memoir will be less about his historical bone to pick with al-Bu Ayyashi - a debate that mostly revolves around al-Qadi defending AK's legacy from the criticisms of Ayyashi - and more about how he remembers the events and their significance for creating power. In reality, Amr al-Qadi served at a moderate level during the war years: he guarded the taxes that AK's finance minister collected; he served as a small unit leader in several battles, and he helped to organize AK's civil administration. As the twenty year old first cousin of AK, Amr al-Qadi enjoyed privileged access to the leadership of the movement, which is helpful to our study. On the other hand, his insider status probably prevents him from offering or accepting any criticism, no matter how justified, of his venerated family members. It is unclear why no other historians, to my knowledge, have used this memoir before.

The philosophical French theorist Michel de Certeau may offer some valuable lessons as we think through how to interpret the potentially tricky waters of this primary source. De Certeau writes, "intelligibility is established through a relation with 'the other,'" and part of that 'other' is the past. At other times, de Certeau depicts history writing as the intersection of "Subject" and "Object," of 'us' and 'them.'<sup>15</sup> In other words, writing history (or in al-Qadi's case, writing down memories) is a process of separating ourselves from the past, while being

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<sup>11</sup> Vincent Sheean, *An American among the Riffi* (New York & London: The Century Company, 1926). Walter B. Harris, *France, Spain and the Rif* (New York: Longmans and Green, 1927). Arturo Barea, *The Forging of a Rebel*, translated from the Spanish by Ilsa Barea (New York: Reynal and Hitchcock, 1946).

<sup>12</sup> Abd al-Karim, *Memoires d'Abd el-Krim*, recueillis par J. Roger Mathieu (Paris: Librairie des Champs-Élysées, 1927).

<sup>13</sup> Muhammad Muhammad Amr al-Qadi, *Asad al-Rif Muhammad 'Abd al-Karim al-Khaṭṭābī: mudhakkirāt 'an Ḥarb al-Rif*. (Tetouan, Morocco: M.M. Amr, 1979).

<sup>14</sup> Amr al-Qadi, p. 266. Al-Qadi's entire last chapter is devoted to "correcting the mistakes" of Ayyashi's historical account.

<sup>15</sup> Michel de Certeau, *The Writing of History*, translated by Tom Conley (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), pp. 3 and 225-226.

unable to fully accomplish that break. Despite all of our attempts at objectivity, we cannot discount our own ever-present voice. Lastly, related to subjectivity, de Certeau gives us the tantalizing, and almost contradictory, idea that “the prejudices of history or of historians disappear when the situation to which they refer is modified.” De Certeau was referring to the secularization of French society, which allowed him to produce a better history of the former, more religious times.<sup>16</sup> By extension, Amr al-Qadi did not enjoy this luxury of being released from his prejudices when he wrote his memoir, as ‘the situation’ in Morocco had not been modified; the central Rif still suffered from many of the same ills of poverty, authoritarianism, and neglect from the central authorities in the 1970s as it had in the 1920s. Although it was not facing an armed European challenge, it faced a state that employed many of the same tools of colonialism to force its will on the region. With de Certeau’s guidance and these facts in mind, we will look critically at Amr al-Qadi as a source with no illusion of his objectivity.

### **PERIODIZATION AND SPATIALIZATION**

The span of time that historians conventionally call ‘the interwar period’ is absurd when you examine the Rif War. If you consider the other Berber uprisings in the Atlas mountains in the 1930s, the violent Italian conquests of Libya and Ethiopia, and the estimated 360,000 Spanish who died during its Civil War, the 1920s and 30s take on a much more sinister sheen indeed.<sup>17</sup> In fact, we might simply call it the ‘smaller war period’ to distinguish it from its two quantitatively significant bookends. In this study we will be mainly concentrating on the events that occurred from 1921 to 1926 in Spanish Morocco, but these limits are not concrete. We will jump outside of northern Morocco and beyond the 1920s to make comparisons when appropriate. Within Spanish Morocco, one could divide the region into the Rif, the Ghomara, or the Jibala (moving from east to west), but, for the sake of expediency, we will imprecisely call the entire area ‘the Rif,’ unless a more sophisticated designation is necessary. The following essay is organized into three main sections - economy, military, and ideology - that describe how AK created power in ways that approach ‘modernity.’ Of course, this thematic approach is a false split for the sake of building an argument; economic, military, and ideological aspects of the Rif Republic all interacted in a dynamic, overlapping fashion.

### **CREATING POWER THROUGH THE ECONOMY**

For a brief period, the Rif Republic was able to create more concentrated economic power through taxation, prisoner labor, and smuggling than Spanish authorities could bring to bear in Northern Morocco. AK changed not only the tribal tribute system but even the agricultural customs of Rifi farmers to maximize the available resources to pay its soldiers, purchase arms, and pursue the trappings of a ‘modern’ state. In addition, the unsuccessful Rifi state attempts to commodify its mining resources gives tantalizing clues into other possible outcomes of the Rif experiment with independence. How did the Rifi state exert its authority to shape the mountain agrarian economy and environment? How did these efforts create power? This section will grapple with AK’s economic interventionism and evaluate his goals and effectiveness in creating power and will briefly compare the Spanish colonial capacity to generate economic power.

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<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 33-34.

<sup>17</sup> Stanley G. Payne, *The Spanish Civil War* (New York: Cambridge, 2012), p. 245, for the casualty estimates.

The Rif economy in the 1920s was primarily based on agriculture and consequently dependent on water, terrain, and soil composition. Within a rural, agriculturally based economy such as the Rif, climate and topography matter more so than in an industrial one, so a brief discussion of the Rif as physical space may be helpful. The Rif and the Jibala, which we will consider here as one territorial unit because it was united under AK's rule in 1923, is a contiguous mountain chain running 400 km along the Mediterranean coast of Northern Morocco roughly from Tangier to Mellila. Winter rains bless the western portions of the Rif with more than 1000 mm of precipitation, which diminishes to 400 mm - considered to be the threshold of sustainable agriculture - as you move eastward through the region. However, these numbers vary greatly from year to year, and droughts are common.<sup>18</sup> The terrain is steep and rugged with peaks over 2,000 m in the west covered, in AK's time, with cedar, cork-oak, and Aleppo pine.<sup>19</sup> The central and eastern slopes, home of AK's Berber tribe the Beni Waryaghal, were lower and barer, looking like a "crumpled piece of brown paper" from the air.<sup>20</sup> However, this seemingly inhospitable place supported a surprising variety of economic activity.

First, we will examine the internal economy of the Rif before AK in order to appreciate the significance of his changes. Rifis traditionally capitalized on their environment through raising cereals - mostly barley but also wheat and rye - grapes, almonds, and olives wherever possible on the moderate slopes and small valleys. In plains, such as the one surrounding the singularly fertile al-Husaima plain near Ajdir where AK was born and raised, Rifis also grew maize, figs, and walnuts. In his racially organized understanding, British journalist Walter Harris described the prototypical Rifi as "by nature a gardener," in contrast to the Arab as "a determined destroyer of trees," a phenomenon undoubtedly driven by environmental rather than ethnic imperatives.<sup>21</sup> Further to the more humid west, near Sheshuan and Tetuan, logging cedar timber and making charcoal from the hardwoods was also an important enterprise for the region. Throughout the Rif, its inhabitants leveraged the muscles of mules and donkeys, plus the meat, milk, and skin of cattle, goats, and sheep. Although they were primarily reliant on agriculture, not pastoralism, the Rif viewed their small herds as valuable and respected assets. The anthropologist Hart describes a "mutual insurance" system of protection against premature livestock death in the Rif, and that "theft of animals was as uncommon as murder was common."<sup>22</sup> Finally, a small number of fishermen in rowboats netted sardines around al-Husaima and elsewhere along the coast, selling them in the nearby markets.<sup>23</sup> Although the Rif internal economy was diverse, it was fundamentally poor and rarely had a surplus that the central authorities, be they from Fez or Madrid, could tax.

Of course, agriculture, logging, pastoralism, and fishing were not the only aspects of the Rifi economy prior to 1920; a considerable portion of its economic activity was externally-focused through local markets and labor migration, and, less legally, through smuggling and ransom. Each day of the week, other than the holy day of Friday, Rifis would hold different markets to trade their raw goods and small handicrafts- mainly textiles and pottery- for other raw goods and handicrafts, as well as finished products from industrial nations. Spanish soldier

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<sup>18</sup> Hart, pp. 20-25.

<sup>19</sup> Harris, p. 46.

<sup>20</sup> Ernest Gellner's phrase, as quoted in Hart, p. 28.

<sup>21</sup> Harris, p. 45.

<sup>22</sup> Hart, pp. 24, 33, 58, and 62.

<sup>23</sup> McNeill, pp. 48-49.

Arturo Barea, while buying sustenance for his unit near Sheshuan, recorded the texture and grit of one particular stall at an open-air market in the months preceding AK's uprising:

Kitchen papers in shrill reds and greens spread on the ground. Boxes with candles and Marseilles soap. A couple of burning oil lamps. Cartridges for hunting rifles of all calibers in a big heap. A basket of eggs. Five chickens tied to a pole. A rusty revolver with a broken hammer, six homeless cartridges beside it, their shells covered with verdigris, their leaden bullets dented and pounded out of *shape*. *A heap of sheep's wool* recently shorn and sticky with grease, and a heap of empty petrol drums. In the center, in the place of honor, a medley of pieces of metal: bits of spurs, cogwheels of watches, big needles for sewing straw mats, pincers with twisted jaws, and so on.<sup>24</sup>

From this source, we can see that the markets were an eclectic mix of Rifi and European goods, and that patrons included both Rifis and Spanish soldiers. Amr al-Qadi also notes the trade between Melilla and the markets of the Rif along the Nekur peninsula, a trade that would later become an important source of intelligence for the Rifi movement.<sup>25</sup> In addition to this petty trade, another external factor of the Rif economy since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century was seasonal labor migration to harvest the grapes and cereals of French Algerian colons around Oran.<sup>26</sup> Market trading and seasonal migration were the legal inputs to the Rif economy, but they were increasingly dwarfed by the extralegal aspects of arms smuggling, bribery, and hostage taking in the years leading up to AK and the Rif Republic.

The infamous Muhammad Ahmad al-Raisuli and AK's father (also named Abd al-Karim) provide prime examples of how extralegal capital from Europe and Fez flowed into the Rif before the time of AK's Republic. In the decade prior to the establishment of the Moroccan Protectorate in 1912, Raisuli, the colorful "sultan" of the Jibala - and eventual rival to AK - took an American named Ion Pericardis hostage, an enterprise that prompted US President Teddy Roosevelt to declare that he wanted "Pericardis alive or Raisuli dead."<sup>27</sup> The Moroccan Sultan was unable to accomplish the latter because of Raisuli's military and political strength in the Jibala, so he ended up paying him the equivalent of 70 thousand US dollars and granting him a governorship of the Jibala in order to secure Pericardis's release and avoid war with the US. Raisuli also reaped further windfalls in money and political capital from kidnapping high-profile British citizens from Tangier, such as Sir Henry Maclean and the previously mentioned Walter Harris.<sup>28</sup> After the establishment of the Protectorate, AK the elder was on the payroll of the Spanish, receiving a monthly stipend as a judge and jurist that was a form of bribery that theoretically secured his loyalty to Madrid. However, according to Amr al-Qadi's memoir, the notable AK the elder was simply "playing" the Spanish in order to gain education and jobs for his two sons (AK and MAK) and to "pave the way" for Rifis to buy foreign weapons using the money "gushing" from the Spanish each month.<sup>29</sup> AK's father not only received bribes from the Spanish to keep the peace, he was also involved in maneuverings with German and Spanish

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<sup>24</sup> Barea, p. 272.

<sup>25</sup> Amr al-Qadi, p. 138.

<sup>26</sup> McNeill, p. 213.

<sup>27</sup> Sheean, p. 285.

<sup>28</sup> Rosita Forbes, *The Sultan of the Mountains: The Life Story of Raisuli* (New York: Henry Holt, 1924), pp. 78- 89.

Also, Harris, pp. 93- 95.

<sup>29</sup> Al-Qadi, pp. 54-56.

mining companies to exploit the Rifi mineral wealth, which he thought would yield a lucrative amount of iron and lead ore.<sup>30</sup> Since AK the elder did not personally own a tremendous amount of land, perhaps the companies hoped to secure his blessing to safeguard their endeavors; the sources do not mention what, if any, payment AK the elder received from these capitalist overtures. Regardless, using Raisuli and AK the elder as our examples, we can see that external capital did flow into the Rif, sporadically before the Protectorate through large ransoms and regularly afterwards through Spanish government loyalty payments and potentially through contriving mineral schemes with both German and Spanish capitalists.

After AK's father died in 1920, AK assumed the leadership of the resistance movement and began to make economic changes to exploit the meager surpluses of the Rif more efficiently. For example, he encouraged the planting of potatoes, a previously neglected New World crop that could supply more calories to his subjects and soldiers.<sup>31</sup> In a sharp break from previous Rifi practices, he also began to leverage taxes on the people in order to finance his burgeoning expenses of paying soldiers (see next section), buying weapons, building roads, and purchasing automobiles. Walter Harris remarked on AK's taxation on the newly incorporated tribes in the north of the French Protectorate in 1923.<sup>32</sup> Amr al-Qadi also recounts his personal role assisting the Rifi finance minister in collecting the tax funds (al-zakawat).<sup>33</sup> The tax burden was initially heavy - 1500 pesetas from each tribe in March 1923 - but later slightly eased due to unrest and a "short revolt."<sup>34</sup> Despite AK's success in shifting agricultural practices and squeezing the impoverished tribes for taxes, this internal source of state revenue was a reflection of the Rifi internal economy, ultimately small and nearly impossible to maintain due to the physical realities of the Rif environment.

AK leveraged a much more reliable source of capital by continuing past practices of extorting foreign governments through taking captives. After the victorious or disastrous battle of Anual (depending on one's colonialist or anti-colonialist sympathies), the Rifis took more than 500 Spanish prisoners.<sup>35</sup> Following a series of negotiations, AK ransomed these Spanish Prisoners of War for 4 million pesetas (roughly equivalent to 900 thousand US dollars in present day<sup>36</sup>), a huge windfall for his nascent state. AK also expanded upon this past practice by not only ransoming prisoners but also exploiting their labor in ways reminiscent of slavery. Slavery had been a persistent institution in Morocco for centuries but seems to have only played a small part in the economy of the Rif, as the market for slaves was mostly in urban areas where people

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<sup>30</sup> Amr al-Qadi mentions generic "mineral companies" connected to the elder AK on p. 56. Hart describes his contacts with the German Mannesman mining firm at Tetuan and with the "Bilbao industrialist" Horacio Echevarrieta on p. 371.

<sup>31</sup> Sheean, p. 172, and McNeill, p. 90, for the potato's benefits and spread to the Mediterranean.

<sup>32</sup> Harris, p. 197.

<sup>33</sup> Amr al-Qadi, p. 7.

<sup>34</sup> Pennell, *Government and a Flag*, p. 161. Pennell also mentions that the tax was initially 5 pesetas per person, but later reduced to 2.5 pesetas on p. 100. I find this number less useful because Pennell does not mention how often the tax was assessed on each person. For an idea of the purchasing power of a peseta, Barea, p. 272, mentions buying six dozen eggs with five pesetas.

<sup>35</sup> Alvarez, *Spanish Foreign Legion*, p. 44.

<sup>36</sup> Calculation based on an exchange rate of 60 pesetas/ 1 USD at the time, which equaled \$67,000 in 1923. For conversion to present day value, author utilized [www.measuringworth.com](http://www.measuringworth.com) accessed electronically on 7 December 2012. Value of ransom ranges from \$883,000 to \$11.8 million in present terms.

presumably had the wealth to own servants.<sup>37</sup> Sheean mentions that AK abolished slavery, but that it persisted in the central and western Rif “for those who are wealthy enough to have slaves,” certainly a small number of candidates.<sup>38</sup> AK largely supplanted this small and traditionally symbolic (in the sense of owning slaves as a mark of social status) slave trade with the economically significant slave labor of Spanish and French POWs. Harris’s and Sheean’s accounts differ over the way that AK treated his captives, but both agree that he exploited them for their labor in building roads and working in the fields.<sup>39</sup> I am inclined to support Harris’s bleaker depiction of prisoner conditions, as disease and famine became increasingly dire throughout the war for the common Riffi, which would suggest similar or worse conditions for the foreign soldiers.<sup>40</sup> Amr al-Qadi’s silence on the issue perhaps confirms my suspicion because he rarely misses an opportunity to recount a positive view of AK. Of course, whether in Andersonville in 1865 or mainland Japan in 1945, the mistreatment or, perhaps more often, the neglect of prisoners by collapsing states is probably the norm rather than the exception. Regardless of the moral implications, AK’s exploitation of prison labor for road construction had economic benefits by promoting easier trade, as well as providing related military benefits, e.g. speeding supply and troop movements, and ideological legitimacy. These few narrow tracks - most notably the one linking Ajdir to Targuist that was able to support an automobile - connected the different parts of the Rif in unprecedented ways, an impressive feat for such a topographically rugged and socially divided region.<sup>41</sup>

Not only did AK exploit the free labor of prisoners, he also attempted to continue his father’s scheme of tapping the (supposedly abundant) mineral resources of the Rif and realize the Rif’s industrial potential. In an interview with the American journalist Sheean in 1925, AK described his hopes that Americans would invest their capital in Riffi “mineral wealth” and expressed his “confidence in our industrial capacity.” To accomplish that end, AK and his brother MAK who was trained at Madrid’s school of mining, enlisted the aid of a German mercenary, Haj Aleman (née Joseph Klems of Dusseldorf), to categorize the so-called ‘mineral wealth’ through map-making of the entire territory.<sup>42</sup> We might think of this map-making exercise in James C. Scott’s terms of a “cadastral map as objective information for outsiders.”<sup>43</sup> One reason that AK and MAK needed to make such a map is that they were ultimately outsiders to the majority of the areas under their control because of the inherently “segmentary” nature of Rifi society that the anthropologist Hart observed.<sup>44</sup> Although AK and MAK were trying to “see like a state” in order to exploit the natural resources of their newly formed entity, they were

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<sup>37</sup> Daniel J. Schroeter, “Slave Markets and Slavery in Moroccan Urban Society,” *Slavery & Abolition: A Journal of Slave and Post-Slave Studies*, Volume 13, Issue 1, 1992, p. 1. The library does not have full access to this article, so I was only able to see the first page.

<sup>38</sup> Sheean, p. 142.

<sup>39</sup> Sheean, pp. 326- 329, gives a glossy account of the plight of Spanish POWs. Harris, pp. 296- 304, describes patently ill-treatment of the Spanish and French prisoners, including murder and willful neglect leading to famine and disease.

<sup>40</sup> Harris, p. 281-283, describes evidence of a drought in the winter of 1925-1926 that would have certainly exacerbated conditions for both Riffi and prisoner alike.

<sup>41</sup> Pennell, *Government and a Flag*, p. 141.

<sup>42</sup> Sheean, pp. 184- 185, 226, 240, and 276.

<sup>43</sup> James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1998), pp. 44-45.

<sup>44</sup> Hart, pp. 235- 278, describes the divisions with each tribe, clan, and local community.

ultimately constrained by the unattractive investment environment of facing two invading forces, as well as the unfortunate whims of geology: the only significant deposits of iron and lead were south of Melilla<sup>45</sup> in an area too close to the Spanish lines of defense. Thus, AK's plans to exploit his state's minerals to generate revenue were unsuccessful, but they were significant because they demonstrate the pervasiveness of the modern impulse to "'take in charge' the physical... resources of the nation and make them more productive."<sup>46</sup>

It is fairly easy to compare the economic resourcefulness of AK's burgeoning Rifi state with that of the Spanish government, as both were doing many of the same activities, such as building roads and making maps. Arturo Barea, an engineer in the Spanish Army, provides a ground floor window into the world of the Spanish colonial economy. Like the Rifi government's profit from external sources of capital, most of the Spanish colonial economy circulated through irregular, extralegal means as well. Barea recounts the systemic corruption within the Spanish ranks where officers would take a cut from the earnings of Noncommissioned officers (NCOs), and NCOs would in turn do the same to the soldiers, most of whom were peasant or proletariat conscripts.<sup>47</sup> In addition, large civil works projects, e.g. building the road from Tetuan to Sheshuan, provided the greatest opportunity for self-enrichment at the expense of the Spanish public coffers.<sup>48</sup> However, most of these illicit funds flowed into urban brothels and bars in Tetuan, Cueta, and Melilla, strengthening the urban economy of Northern Morocco at the expense of the Iberian Spanish taxpayer. Both the slow bleeding from corruption and the massive hemorrhage of state wealth due to military loss at Anual led to budget deficits of over 1.1 billion pesetas in 1921/22, an amount equal to half of the Spanish annual state revenue.<sup>49</sup> Rather than being an asset, the Northern Moroccan colony was a definite liability for the Spanish economy. Furthermore, Spanish attempts at map-making in the western Rif- for explicitly military purposes but also presumably to begin categorizing its economic potential and "see like a state"- were ineffective due to the poor security environment of the Rif.<sup>50</sup> On the other hand, Spain was able to extract some wealth from its mining operations in the vicinity of Melilla, a venture that ever eluded AK. After the beginning of WWI, Spanish mining at Melilla accelerated to support the German industrial war machine.<sup>51</sup> Thus, we can understand the Spanish ability to create economic power as comparatively less than AK's Rifi state in most areas with the notable exception of industrial mining. It is significant to note that AK was exploiting both the Spanish taxpayer through his policies of preying on colonial equipment and infrastructure and the Rifi one through his policy of relatively invasive taxation, while the Spanish were only able to capitalize on the former.

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<sup>45</sup> McNeill, pp. 240- 241, describes the iron and lead mines near Melilla that "operated especially between 1914 and 1930."

<sup>46</sup> Scott, p. 51.

<sup>47</sup> Barea, pp. 274- 279.

<sup>48</sup> Barea, p. 234.

<sup>49</sup> Joseph Harrison, *The Spanish Economy in the Twentieth Century* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1985), pp. 43, 49. This ratio of annual debt to income is roughly analogous to the present US budget woes. The author was unable to find a satisfactory historical Gross Domestic Product for Spain in this period, which is generally considered to be a better yardstick for measuring public debt.

<sup>50</sup> Barea, pp. 280- 284. Barea's assignment was to make a topographic map of the region around 'Beni-Aros' near Sheshuan.

<sup>51</sup> McNeill, pp. 240- 241, describes the mines "producing as much as 800,000 metric tons of iron ore per year."

## CREATING POWER THROUGH THE MILITARY

Closely tied to his ability to capitalize on the Rif economy, AK's overt military success enabled him to create and monopolize power. In particular, MAK's expertise in employing the weapons and methods of modern warfare - machine guns, artillery, conscription, and systematized training - enabled the Riffis to wage a long-term, violent conflict that was too costly for the Spanish, and eventually the French, to fight alone. How can we interpret MAK's military power as a movement of modernity? The following section will trace the technological and mobilizing aspects of AK's military force projection, along with a brief comparison with Spanish colonial forces.

Before we begin our examination of the fascinating technological dimension of the Rifi conflict, it might be helpful to elaborate on the connections between technology, modernity, and warfare. Philip Curtin describes modernity as a form of high consumption and high production "trying to achieve the promise implicit in the technology of the industrial age."<sup>52</sup> One of the first dark manifestations of this 'modern' urge to mechanize came with the advent of industrial warfare during the Great War. Munitions and weapons were produced on an unprecedented scale and subsequently consumed by the largest armies that had ever been assembled to face each other. This industrial carnage "forced European intellectuals to question the very foundations upon which their thought and value systems had been built: the conviction that they were the most rational of all beings, in control of themselves, of other peoples, and of all creation."<sup>53</sup> Although some European intellectuals might have drawn these uncomfortable conclusions about the perils of technical modernism,<sup>54</sup> European militaries drew the exact opposite lesson: the best course of action was to develop better and more efficient technology for killing other humans. By extension, the connection between technology, modernity, and warfare is an important one for the colonial context as well, for it scratches through the civilizing rational surface of colonial rhetoric to expose the underlying motivation of modernity: power.

The most insidious technological advancement of the Great War that extended into the Rif conflict was the use of chemical weapons. The German company IG Farben in partnership with the chemist Fritz Haber<sup>55</sup> had developed lethal chlorine gas for use at Ypres against the French forces in 1915.<sup>56</sup> The gas was transported in giant metal vats, and the spouts were opened when the wind conditions were favorably blowing toward the French trenches. A German writer and soldier who observed that first chemical attack noted presciently:

The effects of the successful gas attack were horrible. I am not pleased with the idea of poisoning men. Of course, the entire world will rage about it first and then imitate us.

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<sup>52</sup> Philip Curtin, *The World and the West: The European Challenge and the Overseas Response in the Age of Empire* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. xiii.

<sup>53</sup> Michael Adas, *Machines as the Measure of Men: Science, Technology, and Ideologies of Western Dominance* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1989), p. 372.

<sup>54</sup> Adas, pp. 374- 387, dissects the dissonance caused by the Great War on thinkers such as Sigmund Freud, Georges Duhamel, and George Orwell.

<sup>55</sup> Famous for the Haber-Bosch process of synthetic nitrogen fixing, which largely enabled industrial agriculture as well as explosives production in nitrate-poor Germany.

<sup>56</sup> John Keegan, *The First World War* (London: Hutchinson, 1998), pp. 214- 215.

All the dead lie on their backs, with clenched fists; the whole field is yellow. They say that Ypres must fall now.<sup>57</sup>

Soon the Allied forces did imitate the Germans, developing chlorine and eventually mustard gas weapons that were employed in 1918. After the Treaty of Versailles, the German poison gas inventory was set to be dismantled and its capacity for such production destroyed, but key leaders within the German military establishment came up with an ingenious solution to the Versailles hamstringing: outsource German production to Spain. Under the tutelage of German artillery and aviation advisors, factories in Madrid and Melilla began to produce aerial mustard gas bombs in 1923 to help Spain conquer the Rif, an unprecedented delivery method for the noxious substance.<sup>58</sup> Thus, chemical warfare entered the Rif when Germany, the epitome of European modernity, shifted its military research and development wing to its willing disciples, the Spanish.

From analyzing the metropolitan state sources, it would be easy for us to conclude that the Spanish use of chemical weapons on the impoverished Rifis was just another case of lopsided European domination, typical of the actions of the colonizer against the colonized in a war of subjugation. However, the reality is much more complex and interesting. Amr al-Qadi has several recollections of Spanish chemical warfare in the Rif, as well as a significant recounting of Rifi chemical weapons use against the Spanish. His narrative of this indigenous improvisation begins by describing the activities of AK's research and development laboratory (*al-m'amel*), headed by a certain Mohamed al-Temsamani. Before the war, al-Temsamani gained metallurgical skills working at a Spanish iron refinery near Melilla. At the beginning of the conflict, he initially pitched in for his tribal comrades by assembling weapon systems from components that his Rifi compatriots procured from the black market, but, as the war continued, his technical capacity and ambition grew. Amr al-Qadi recounts how Temsamani began enlisting other Rifis with technical experience to help him repair artillery cannon with their accompanying shells, along with machine guns and rifles. This developing technological capacity culminated with experiments in re-engineering the many Spanish aerially-delivered poison bombs that failed to explode. First, the Rifis tried a low-tech approach: they extracted the poisonous material from the bombs (mustard 'gas' at room temperature is a viscous liquid, so this is theoretically possible) and inserted it clandestinely into the Spanish water and food supply. However, since much of the Spanish-occupied areas were lands that the Rifis hoped to eventually reclaim, this tactic was only usable on the margins (*'ala al-hamish*) of the Spanish front.<sup>59</sup> Neither Amr al-Qadi nor the secondary sources mention the results, but, as mustard 'gas' is generally insoluble in water,<sup>60</sup> this tactic was probably ineffective in diminishing the Spanish fighting force. Nonetheless, it certainly would have boosted morale among the Riffi fighters.

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<sup>57</sup> German writer Rudolf Binding quoted in William Van der Kloot, "April 1915: Five Future Nobel Prize-Winners Inaugurate Weapons of Mass Destruction and the Academic-Industrial-Military Complex," *Notes and Records of the Royal Society of London*, Volume 58, Number 2, May 2004, p. 152.

<sup>58</sup> Albert Presas I. Puig, "Technoscientific Synergies between Germany and Spain in the Twentieth Century: Continuity amid Radical Change," *Technology and Culture*, Volume 51, Number 1, January 2010, pp. 84- 86.

<sup>59</sup> Amr al-Qadi, pp. 207- 209.

<sup>60</sup> The interaction of sulfur mustard with water is a complex process and depends on many factors. See Nancy B. Munro et alia, "The Sources, Fate, and Toxicity of Chemical Warfare Agent Degradation," *Environmental Health Perspectives*, Volume 107, Number 12, December 1999, p. 935.

The second Rifi delivery method for these re-engineered chemical weapons had more visible results. Towards the end of the war, if we are to believe Amr al-Qadi, the Rifi savant al-Temsamani devised a slightly less environmentally damaging technique of giving the Spanish a taste of their own medicine. He would insert the poisonous material into the shells of 75mm French-manufactured cannon - recovered from one of the many battlefield routs in the early part of the war – and fire it on the Spanish static positions. After test-firing a poison-filled shell in an isolated locale and observing its withering effect on the unsuspecting vegetation, al-Temsamani received the go-ahead from AK and manufactured more than 100 artillery shells of this type. Amr al-Qadi reports that these shells were used on one of the “main enemy positions called Ashfracan” one morning, catching the Spanish by surprise.<sup>61</sup> The lethal effects were few, although many of the Spanish soldiers became sick and lost their eyesight (a common side effect of mustard gas that usually subsides in a few weeks, the most famous sufferer of this malady being Adolf Hitler during the Great War<sup>62</sup>). Perhaps even more satisfactorily in the eyes of the animal-conscious Rifis, all of the Spanish horses and mules died. According to Amr al-Qadi, after this bombardment with mustard gas, the Spanish forces ceased dropping “poisonous bombs” on the Rifis.<sup>63</sup>

How should we view these claims by Amr al-Qadi that the Rifis re-engineered Spanish chemical weapons, employed them using French cannons, and successfully changed Spanish strategy in the Rif War? None of the English secondary literature mentions it, but, then again, none of the English works use al-Qadi as a source. I find his first two claims plausible for a few reasons. First, using mustard gas in artillery shells had been done before, both by the Germans and the Allies in the Great War; it was possible. Next, Sheean mentions the presence of four German artillerymen, perhaps deserters from the Spanish Foreign Legion, who advised the Rifi forces.<sup>64</sup> Perhaps al-Temsamani picked up the technique, or at least the idea, from them. Lastly, Amr al-Qadi’s memories of chemical warfare line up with the effects of mustard gas in other conflicts. It was never very lethal but served more as a form of aerosolized barbed wire, to deny an area to one’s enemy or to drive him away from his artillery cannon.<sup>65</sup> In a separate incident, al-Qadi also describes how Spanish use of “poisonous gasses” drove the Rifi fighters away from their outposts around Melilla.<sup>66</sup> On the other hand, al-Qadi’s last claim - that the Rifi employment of mustard gas artillery inspired the Spanish to cease their chemical weapons campaign - seems unlikely. None of the other sources who use Spanish army archives, specifically Pennell, Alvarez, and Fleming, have recorded any evidence of such a dramatic shift in tactics. It is more likely that this incident occurred so late in the war that the operational situation simply called for different methods.

Besides the use of chemical weapons, AK and his forces also leveraged other technology to create military power. For example, AK installed a telephone system to communicate with his commanders and civil courts throughout the region. In our present age of unmanned surveillance drones and tactical satellite radios, this communications system might seem crude. However, by

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<sup>61</sup> Amr al-Qadi, pp. 210-211. The author was unable to locate Ashfracan on any map, but it could have been a local name for a different village or the name of a specific mountain within the Rif.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, and Van Der Kloot, p. 158.

<sup>63</sup> Amr al-Qadi, p. 210.

<sup>64</sup> Sheean, pp. 146-147.

<sup>65</sup> Van der Kloot, p. 158.

<sup>66</sup> Amr al-Qadi, pp. 142-144.

comparison, the Russian Second Army during the Great War - certainly not the most modern force but a 'European' force nonetheless - had only 25 telephones for a force more than 15 times the size of AK's army.<sup>67</sup> In a similar manner to the development of his weapons lab, the Rifi telephone system began with procuring telephones through the black market, as well as stealing the telephone wire from the Spanish-controlled areas. Once the Rifis had obtained enough hardware, AK had a Spanish prisoner of war teach the Rifis how to assemble and operate the equipment.<sup>68</sup> Ultimately, the telephone system enabled AK to strengthen his control over both the military and civil affairs of the nascent state, while simultaneously disrupting the Spanish lines of communication.

Not only did AK create power through military technology, he also mobilized his society for warfare in unprecedented ways. Since the French Revolutionary days of the *levee en masse*, preparations for war had become more and more intrusive, involving increasingly large swaths of heretofore untapped human resources. The Rifi state maintained this trend. For example, AK began to include women in the intelligence, logistics, and medical support mechanisms of his military, a dramatic shift for a society with traditionally strict separation of the sexes.<sup>69</sup> Preceding Rosie the Riveter by two decades, the average Rifi woman took on a greater burden of the workload around the home as well as in the Rifi government-financed bakeries and fields.<sup>70</sup> This is not to say that women became equal to men through the exigencies of war, but that AK's state intruded into a traditionally closed off space in order to create more power.

In a related but slightly different phenomenon, the Spanish army also broadened its mobilization to meet the challenges of warfare in Northern Morocco. In 1920, Spanish Lieutenant Colonel José Millán Astray formed a new unit of the Spanish army, the Tercio de Extranjeros, loosely modeled on the French Foreign Legion and designed "to fight the rebellious 'natives' of the protectorate."<sup>71</sup> The deputy commander of the new unit, Major Francisco Franco, helped recruit and train the maiden volunteers for the Spanish Foreign Legion in a village called Dar Riffien, four miles outside of Cueta.<sup>72</sup> Like the French Foreign Legion's Algerian beginnings in 1832, the creation of the Spanish Legion was inextricably linked to colonialism. Inherent in the institution of colonialism was the need to create a separate legal (and usually territorial) space,<sup>73</sup> so it made sense to create a separate unit made up of 'foreigners' to secure such a space. In addition, the creation of both the Spanish and French Legions had as much to do with metropolitan motivations as pacifying the periphery. By using foreign volunteers and not national peasant conscripts, states could pursue their colonial ambitions

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<sup>67</sup> Keegan, pp. 153 and 176. I estimate 112,000 for the Russian Second Army, based off 500 men per battalion, 16 battalions per division, and 14 divisions in the Army. For figures on AK's army, Pennell's *Government and Flag*, p. 132, estimates 6 to 7 thousand regular troops, augmented at times by a various number of *ad hoc* irregular formations called *harakas*.

<sup>68</sup> Amr al-Qadi, p. 155.

<sup>69</sup> C.R. Pennell, "Women and Resistance to Colonialism in Morocco: The Rif 1916- 1926," *The Journal of African History*, Volume 28, Number 1, 1987, pp. 113- 116.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 112.

<sup>71</sup> Alvarez, *The Spanish Foreign Legion*, pp. 14- 16.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 19- 21. Most of the volunteers were actually Spaniards but also included "three Chinese, a Japanese, a Russian prince, a German, an Austrian, an Italian, two Frenchmen, four Portuguese, a Maltese, a Belgian... and an African American... from New York."

<sup>73</sup> HIST 864 classroom discussion on 14 November 2012.

abroad without fear of negative political consequences at home due to excessive casualties.<sup>74</sup> Thus, at the same time that AK was dipping his mobilization net deeper into Rifi society, the Spanish were doing much the same thing on an international level.

In the end, the technological advances and mobilizing movements on both sides were indecisive, but the comprehensive Spanish and French aerial bombing campaigns may have slowly impoverished the Rifis by preventing them from laboring in their fields. However, this air campaign of gradual attrition was not an uncontested enterprise. As Amr al-Qadi points out in his introduction, he himself helped to “ambush” a French airplane, bringing it down in flames, although both pilots escaped.<sup>75</sup> Despite the incredible amount of ordnance that the Spanish dropped on the Rifi territory,<sup>76</sup> their bombing efforts were generally predictable, allowing the Rifis to take cover in air raid shelters inside caves and cliffs.<sup>77</sup> Nonetheless, the sheer volume and persistence of the European bombing over the course of several years interfered with planting and harvesting in the agriculturally-dependent region and killed much of the Rifi livestock. By January 1926, famine in the Rif, exacerbated by drought, caused a large-scale exodus of noncombatants from the Rifi- to the Spanish-controlled area.<sup>78</sup> Thus, AK’s window of modern military power was closed after five years of extensive warfare but only with considerable expenditures on the parts of the Spanish and French compounded by the unforgiving Rif environment.

### CREATING POWER THROUGH IDEOLOGY

Inextricably linked to his economic innovation and military success, AK was able to project a powerful ideology that legitimized himself and his companions as the Rif state in the eyes of its disparate tribal leaders, while beginning to gain credibility on the international scene. For a time, the Rif Republic was able to create more ideological power than the Spanish through the use of instrumentalized language that stressed Islamic rhetoric within its borders and Wilsonian rhetoric outside them. Perhaps it might be useful to think of this ideological leveraging in a broader materialist sense as well; Raymond Harris points out that “means of communication are themselves means of production.”<sup>79</sup> How did AK and his state employ these means of communication to build legitimacy within the Rif? How did he captivate the attention of the international community without losing credibility with the Rifi citizens? This section will explore these different avenues of Rifi ideology and communication and evaluate their effectiveness in creating power.

Before we dive headlong into analyzing AK’s ideology through al-Qadi’s memoir, it may be helpful to discuss some of the problems historians encounter when looking at the history of

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<sup>74</sup> Juan Picasso Gonzalez is quoted in Alvarez, *Spanish Foreign Legion*, p. 8: “the casualties in such formations did not have any repercussions on Spanish morale...”

<sup>75</sup> Amr al-Qadi, p. 6.

<sup>76</sup> Daniel R. Headrick, *Power Over Peoples: Technology, Environments, and Western Imperialism, 1400 to the Present* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), p. 323, records that, for one month alone, the Spanish “dropped 3,000 mustard gas bombs, 8,000 150 kg TNT bombs, and 2,000 incendiary bombs on the town of Anjera alone.”

<sup>77</sup> Sheean, p. 81, observed that the Spanish bombing campaign was “a curious sort of comic-opera affair.”

<sup>78</sup> Pennell, *Government and Flag*, p. 210, as well as Pennell, “Women and Resistance,” p. 116.

<sup>79</sup> Raymond Williams, “Means of Communication as Means of Production,” in *Problems in Materialism and Culture: Selected Essays* (London: Verso, 1980), p. 50.

ideas. First, we might take the idea recorded for us by some literate, motivated (one does not write without motivation) person from the past (DeCerteau's 'other') and consider it at face value, a common mistake. To combat this tendency, we must site the idea within the historic and geographic context of the material. For an example from the US empire, Thomas Jefferson's ideas of liberal republican democracy were closely tied to his conception of the citizen as a yeoman farmer, which was inextricable from the material fact of America's vast expanses of lightly-settled land. His idea played out in a US policy of financing exploration of the Western river basins of North America in order to collect data on the natural resources of his planned "empire of liberty."<sup>80</sup> To understand the Jeffersonian ideal apart from this context of time and space would be a mistake. The second mistake that historians often make when examining ideology is assuming that an idea had influence without situating it within a network. To evaluate whether an idea gained traction, we must establish "webs of significance" with other literate contemporaries.<sup>81</sup> For an example closer to our Rif, the ideas of the Algerian Islamic reformer Abd al-Hamid Ben Badis (1889- 1940) did not float into thin air but resonated with a group of ulema who later formed an association that shaped the debate over Algerian independence.<sup>82</sup> The historian James McDougall successfully demonstrates the significance of Ben Badis's ideology by tracing its influence on his peers and disciples. In summary, anytime that we approach the history of an idea we must situate it properly within time, place, and human relationships.

With these common fallacies in mind, we return to the case of AK's ideas and the means that he used to communicate them. The anthropologist Hart describes Moroccan society as being divided along three axes of 'Arab-Berber,' 'urban-tribal,' and 'government-dissidence';<sup>83</sup> we might think of AK as an individual who was able to operate between those three axes. AK was born in 1883 in a small town called Ajdir along the al-Husayma bay from which the territory of the Berber Beni Waryaghal spiraled outwards for perhaps 30 miles. As a member of the Beni Waryaghal, the most populous tribe of the Rif, AK certainly had Berber credibility. Amr al-Qadi hints at this Berberness in his account of the first major council that AK held with the local tribal elders in February 1921 after his father's death but before the dramatic victory at Anual in July:

The great leader al-Khattabi (AK's family name) began to deliver a speech **in the Rifi language** to all the attendees, outlining the objectives of colonialism and reminding them of *Andalusia's history* in which the Spanish drove out its people, stole their money, their bounty, their religion and, lastly, expelled them from their nation. He encouraged them to fight the advance of the Spanish who were determined to rape the bounty of the land, while enslaving its people.<sup>84</sup> (emphasis added)

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<sup>80</sup> Jared Orsi, "An Empire and Ecology of Liberty," in *Zebulon Pike, Thomas Jefferson, and the Opening of the American West*, edited by Matthew L. Harris and Jay H. Buckley (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 2012), pp. 140- 141. For a discussion of how Jefferson planned to divide the North American West into 100 square mile blocks, see Scott, pp. 49- 51.

<sup>81</sup> Professor Osama Abi-Mershed, HIST 864 classroom discussion, 3 October 2012.

<sup>82</sup> McDougall, pp. 12-14. McDougall's chapter 3 "The doctors of new religion" describes how the AUMA shaped the debate.

<sup>83</sup> Hart, pp. 5-6.

<sup>84</sup> Amr al-Qadi, p. 94. Author translation.

At first glance this quote from al-Qadi appears firmly in line with typical anti-colonial rhetoric, but what is interesting about it is the instrumental use of language. AK was a Berber by birth, could speak the language of his people with ease, yet he also had outsider, educated credentials. He knew about history - particularly that of Islamic Andalusia - because twenty years earlier he had been educated at al-Qarawiyyin University, a prestigious institution in Fez that had influenced such notable scholars as the 14<sup>th</sup> century historian Ibn Khaldun.<sup>85</sup> Thus, we can see evidence that AK began to exploit both his Berber-ness and his Arab intellectualism in a single speech, six months prior to any military legitimacy or spoils of war would lend him credibility.

Leftist cultural historian Raymond Williams speaks of a need to broaden our view of such interactions as the one that took place between AK and the tribal leaders in February 1921. He describes communication, both mass media and “ordinary, everyday language,” as “means of social production” that grew in scope and scale “within the generally extended communicative character of modern societies and between modern societies” during the twentieth century.<sup>86</sup> These interesting but vague proposals from Williams beg a couple questions from our AK case: What kind of society did AK hope to produce with his “common, everyday language” speech to the Rifis? How was this modern, in any sense? After all, have people not been giving speeches in common language for years?

Historian Pennell proposes an answer to the first question: AK’s Islamically tinged ideology was not necessarily a Salafist movement but a product of political exigencies.<sup>87</sup> Amr al-Qadi begs to differ, remembering AK’s reign as “not like a king or a sultan” but of “a different kind,” the kind of natural leadership that the Prophet Muhammad exhibited towards Khalid ibn al-Walid after the Battle of Muta.<sup>88</sup> Although al-Qadi here is obviously trying to fend off arguments (like mine) that claim AK was somewhat of a despot, he is clearly employing Salafi language and references, language that AK himself used, in order to reclaim “the hero’s” (al-batal) legacy. Of course, we cannot conflate al-Qadi’s ideas with AK’s, but AK did institute actual policies, such as instituting the sharia, that gave tangibility to such Salafist rhetoric.<sup>89</sup> AK’s employed a network of religiously motivated informants in each village who monitored their village mates for any moral infractions of the sharia. This mechanism also doubled as an internal security apparatus that could alert AK to elements of dissension just as easily as reporting those not praying the requisite five times a day.<sup>90</sup> Ultimately, I disagree with both Pennell and al-Qadi; AK’s Islamic rhetoric was neither a simple response to domestic political demands nor was it an outflow of some inner beneficence and supernatural charisma. It was a way to produce and maintain power in the Rif.

Salafism was a tremendously attractive means of producing power. Less than two years after AK surrendered to French forces in 1926, Hassan al-Banna, a contemporary of our source

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<sup>85</sup> Amr al-Qadi, p. 89. For Ibn Khaldun in Fez and al-Qarawiyyin, see Allen James Fromherz, *Ibn Khaldun, Life and Times* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), p. 5.

<sup>86</sup> Raymond Williams, “Means of Communication as Means of Production,” in *Problems in Materialism and Culture: Selected Essays* (London: Verso, 1980), pp. 51-53.

<sup>87</sup> C.R. Pennell, “Ideology and Practical Politics: A Case Study of the Rif War in Morocco, 1921- 1926,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Volume 14, Number 1, February 1982, p. 30.

<sup>88</sup> Amr al-Qadi, p. 74.

<sup>89</sup> Pennell, “Ideology,” pp. 25-26.

<sup>90</sup> Pennell, *Government and a Flag*, pp. 145- 146.

Amr al-Qadi, would found the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt using similar reformist language. This is not to say that events in the Rif shaped the distant affairs in Egypt, but AK's appeal enjoyed a certain level of portability. Historian McDougall describes how, in 1928, French forces seized more than 1600 prints of a dramatic illustrated poster depicting AK's rout of the Spanish in Algeria; "the prints had been made in Algiers, from an illustration executed in Cairo, on a plate manufactured in Dresden." Within the poster, the Rifi forces are riding horses, wielding long, curved swords, and carrying a green flag with the shahada emblazed across it,<sup>91</sup> a depiction more suited for a 7<sup>th</sup> century Arabian attack than the much more prosaic Rifi battleground. Thus, AK's Salafi rhetoric, coupled with his military success against a colonial power, also found a willing audience beyond the confines of the Rif.

In addition to his use of instrumentalized Islamic language to create ideological power within the Rif and North Africa, AK captivated the Western international community with his Wilsonian rhetoric. AK welcomed visits from foreign journalists, such as the American Sheean, because it gave him increased visibility. In his interview with Sheean, AK spoke of "national sovereignty" for the Rif people and downplayed any pan-Islamic aspirations, although he spoke in Berber and used one of his Francophone administrators to interpret.<sup>92</sup> Sheean's interview with AK's more cosmopolitan brother MAK dazzled the American even more because of the Rifi's fluent Castilian Spanish and rational outlook towards foreign affairs.<sup>93</sup> Perhaps even more telling is Amr al-Qadi's record of the Rifi Foreign Minister's letter to the Spanish, outlining the principles of the Rif government, "which was based on modern (asriya) principles and civil laws."<sup>94</sup> This use of language may have been incongruous with the enactment of the sharia currently taking place within the Rifi domestic realm, but it was instrumental in creating diplomatic space for the nascent Rifi state. It is fairly easy to find evidence that this Rifi Wilsonian rhetoric was building momentum, or at least garnering attention, on the international stage. Despite the overwhelmingly isolationist attitudes among Americans during this period, the American weekly newsmagazine *Time* decided to feature AK on its cover in August 1925.<sup>95</sup> Perhaps the best evidence of AK's ultimate success in building international and Islamic legitimacy is that the French were politically unwilling to imprison or execute him after his surrender in May 1926. They shipped him, his wives and children, and his extended family off to the tropical island of Reunion in the Indian Ocean,<sup>96</sup> certainly not a bad 'exile' for someone accustomed to the harsh Rif environs.

## CONCLUSION

The late Africanist historian Philip D. Curtin used the 1920s Northern Moroccan conflict as an example of how the proliferation of modern weapons made Western domination increasingly difficult, but he concluded that, "in retrospect, the Rif War can be seen as relatively

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<sup>91</sup> McDougall, pp. 57-58.

<sup>92</sup> Sheean, pp. 173- 177.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 233- 241.

<sup>94</sup> Amr al-Qadi, p. 147.

<sup>95</sup> Cover: "Abd-el-Krim," *Time*, 17 August 1925, accessed electronically at <http://www.time.com/time/covers/0,16641,19250817,00.html> on 17 November 2012.

<sup>96</sup> Pennell, *Government and a Flag*, p. 216. AK would later escape to Egypt in 1947 while transiting the Suez Canal. He died in February 1963.

unimportant in itself.”<sup>97</sup> I fundamentally disagree with Curtin’s hasty conclusion because the Rif conflict has significant implications for the study of colonialism in North Africa and elsewhere. First, in a similar vein to House and MacMaster’s Paris 1961,<sup>98</sup> the Rif conflict shows that the separate legal space and violent exploitation of the colony impinged upon the metropole in unintended and often disastrous ways. In a direct manner, Spanish involvement in the Rif caused the overthrow of the Spanish constitutional government and led to the installation of the military dictator Primo de Rivera in Madrid in September 1923.<sup>99</sup> In an indirect manner, the Spanish military experience in the Rif - both the atrocities and the unappreciated hardships - sowed the seeds that would later sprout into the Spanish Civil War, visiting horrific violence on the Iberian peninsula. Walter Harris’s description of the indiscriminate bombing of Sheshuan in 1925 bears a striking resemblance to Pablo Picasso’s *Guernica*.<sup>100</sup> It also seems a peculiar coincidence that Francisco Franco, who cut his teeth fighting Rifis in Morocco with the Foreign Legion, would eventually dominate the Spanish internecine conflict and rule Spain as a dictator until 1975. This is a connection that deserves further research from colonial scholars, and any book entitled *Madrid 1936* has a promising future.

Second, examining the Rif War’s role in the development of chemical warfare has important implications for how we understand the dissemination of deadly technology. A decade after the surrender of AK, the Italians would employ mustard gas on a much wider scale in their war to dominate the Ethiopians. As the Ethiopian emperor later described,

Vaporizers for mustard gas were attached to their planes, so that they could disperse a fine, deadly poisonous gas over wide areas. From the end of January 1936, soldiers, women, children, cattle, rivers, lakes, and fields were drenched with this never ending rain of death<sup>101</sup>.

Thus, the Italians must have taken the aerial sulfuric mustard tactic from the Spanish colonial playbook and improved upon it. It would be significant to see if the Ethiopians co-opted this form of warfare, as our Rifi example suggests. Four decades after the Rif conflict, American forces would forego the direct chemical warfare campaign on colonial people and focus instead on eliminating their environment through the aerial application of the defoliant Agent Orange. There is ample room for more research into these surprising connections between the Spanish Rif and other colonial uses of chemical warfare, as well as into the forms of autochthonous contestation of this insidious and persistent threat to man and nature.

Lastly, studying the Rif conflict from an economic and ideological standpoint throws a wrench into the works of nationalist narratives of heroic and idealistic leaders in the anti-colonial struggle. As my colleague Laura Guffman pointed out, “nationalism is just another form of

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<sup>97</sup> Philip D. Curtin, *The World and the West: The European Challenge and the Overseas Response in the Age of Empire* (New York: Cambridge, 2000), pp. 203- 205.

<sup>98</sup> Jim House and Neil MacMaster, *Paris 1961: Algerians, State Terror, and Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

<sup>99</sup> Susana Sueiro Seoane, “Spanish Colonialism during Primo de Rivera’s Dictatorship,” in *Spain and the Mediterranean since 1898*, edited by Raanan Rein (Portland, Oregon: Frank Cass, 1999), pp. 48- 51.

<sup>100</sup> Walter Harris, p. 300.

<sup>101</sup> Ethiopian emperor Haile Selassie, as quoted in Daniel R. Headrick, *Power Over Peoples: Technology, Environments, and Western Imperialism, 1400 to the Present* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), pp. 326- 327.

colonialism.”<sup>102</sup> Most of the economic and ideological reforms of AK and his regime were not installed to bring about a dramatic increase in the quality of life for the average Riffi peasant. On the contrary, these reforms were designed to increase state power by extracting more resources and wielding more authority. The distinctly modern aspect of these changes lay in their quantitative and systematizing nature. Whereas regimes before had attempted to create power in the Rif through similar methods, their institutions were simply not up to the task. This essay has argued that the institutional acumen of AK and his state made this movement different, and, for a few years at least, made it more powerful than its Spanish counterpart.

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<sup>102</sup> Laura Guffman, HIST 864 classroom discussion, 7 November 2012.

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