Advancing towards the design of a GAR-SI Sahel professional code on the comparative study of two sociometric tests in the Spanish Civil Guard's Rapid Action Group and the Spanish Army's Special Operations Command

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1   Introduction

Codes of ethics are sets of duties and moral standards that are imposed on and guide the workers of a professional group in the exercise of their activity. They stipulate the values and principles that are assumed and that must guide those engaged in such a profession (López Guzmán and Aparisi Miralles, 1992, 169). These codes are relevant because they ensure the integrity and credibility of professions, and protect the people affected by them by guaranteeing respect for their individual rights and freedoms. They are, therefore, fundamental in any professional field, especially in those areas where decisions that affect people's lives are made, or where a public function is performed.

For members of the State Security Forces and Corps (FFCCSE, in Spanish from now on) and, above all, in special operations forces (SOF), codes of ethics become even more relevant, as these organizations play a fundamental role in the rights of citizens and their security (Tudela Poblete, 2008, 29). Values such as integrity, transparency, accountability and respect for human rights are indispensable in the professional contexts of security and defence, given the impact on society of the decisions taken in these fields.

For these forces, codes of ethics are indispensable. Not only to ensure that the agents of these organizations respect the integrity and dignity of people and that they always act responsibly and transparently (García-Guiu, 2016, 35), but also to foster the trust that society places in these institutions, as these codes are perceived as a guarantee of ethical and responsible action by their professionals.

1.1 *Justification*

All the above justifies the creation of a code of ethics for one of these units. Therefore, the aim of this MA thesis is to lay the foundations for the development of a specific code of ethics for the Rapid Action Groups – Surveillance and Intervention in the Sahel (GAR-SI Sahel, *Groupes d'Action Rapide – Surveillance et Intervention au Sahel* in French), a European project led by the Spanish Civil Guard.

With this development, the Spanish Civil Guard aims to ensure that the members of these units always act in accordance with the values and principles they represent.

Through the creation of units that replicate the Rapid Action Group (GAR) of the Spanish Civil Guard (Ávila Solana, 2020, 2; Rojo Esteban, 2017, 37–38), and in collaboration with the French National Gendarmerie, the Italian *Arma dei Carabinieri* and the Portuguese Republican National Guard, this European project focuses on supporting border control systems, information exchange, and training gendarmes specialised in the fight against terrorism and illegal immigration in Mauritania, Senegal, Niger, Niger, Mali, Burkina Faso and Chad.

Therefore, the future GAR-SI code of ethics represents a clear exemplification of the importance attributed to professional ethics in armed forces and serves as a true reflection of the values and commitment of the Civil Guard to citizen security, both domestically and internationally. This GAR-SI code of ethics will also contribute to fostering trust between institutions and society in the Sahel, where such trust is currently lacking (Díez Alcalde, 2015, 25; Sánchez Herráez, 2020, 18). The main factors contributing to the deterioration of this perception among the population are political instability, armed conflicts and economic precariousness in the region, among others (Losada Fernández, 2018, 3; Sidikou, 2019, 108; Brady *et al.*, 2022, 72;86). It is within this tumultuous environment,

characterised by instability, that the GAR-SI Sahel project is framed.

As previously mentioned, this research seeks to establish the groundwork for the future GAR-SI professional ethics, given its absence at the outset of this research. To this end, the following research question is formulated: *What personal attitudes and skills are needed in a GAR-SI operator?* The primary objective is to identify the values and principles that underpin the conduct of agents within SOF units in the exercise of their profession.

The objective at hand presents a considerable challenge, owing to the secretive nature of these units, and the additional complexity posed by the geographical remoteness of the Sahel. For this reason, it was deemed appropriate to first assess analogous Spanish units, thereby the discernment of the requisite attitudes expected from a SOF agent in broad terms, thereby bridging the gap associated with the specific attitudes of the GAR-SI components.

One of the main challenges when conducting research in Security Studies is access to the field (De Castro García & García Rodríguez, 2018). This difficulty was resolved thanks to timely authorizations from the corresponding military command. With their invaluable support, it was possible to access first-hand information from the GAR and the Special Operations Course (COE in Spanish), which gives access to the Special Operations Command (MOE in Spanish) of the Spanish Armed Forces (AF). Given the research topic, it was considered that it would be convenient to inquire about the sociometric test that performed in the access courses of both units, the afore-mentioned COE, and the Special Training Course (ADE in Spanish), which gives access to the GAR unit. Before addressing the main objective of the research, two intermediate research objectives (IO) related to GAR/ADE and to MOE/COE were considered appropriate. These are set out below.

RO-1. To verify that, indeed, human quality is a crucial factor in these elite units. This objective, expressed in the form of a research question, is the following: *Is human quality a central issue in the SOF of the G.A.R. and the M.O.E.?*

RO-2. To identify the values, attitudes and personal qualities most valued and most rejected in Spanish SOF. With this objective, the aim is to obtain a basis for a first approximation of what could be required in the GAR-SI units. In the form of a question it would be as follows: *What are the most valued and most rejected values, attitudes and personal qualities in the GAR and in the MOE units?*

Therefore, the three research questions (RQ) would be as follows:

RQ-1. *Is human quality a central issue in GAR and MOE SOF?*

RQ-2. *What are the values, attitudes and personal qualities most valued and most rejected in the GAR and in the MOE?*

RQ-3. *What values, attitudes and personal skills are needed in a GAR-SI operator?*

2 Theoretical framework

The professional ethics of the Civil Guard constitute one of its foundational pillars and stands as a key factor in the institution's endurance to the present day. As the Corps approaches its 180th anniversary, it is opportune to contemplate the values and ethical principles that govern it ensuring its continued existence.

With this pretext, we introduce the theoretical framework within which this study is placed, allowing for the contextualization of the research and substantiating its scientific validity through prior related studies. By reviewing the existing literature, this section examines the most pertinent contributions regarding police and military professional ethics, the values upheld withing the Civil Guard and the utilisation of sociometry in military contexts. The studies presented predominantly focus on the Spanish perspective. Scant information pertinent to the subject under examination, namely, knowledge regarding professional ethics within the gendarmeries of the Sahel or Africa, has been uncovered in the consulted literature. Consequently, all the information pertaining to this specific aspect has been acquired through meticulous field work, as presented in the empirical section of this paper.

To enhance the coherence of this document, this section will be presented in two distinct conceptual segments. The first one deals with values and professional ethics within police and military institutions, while the second segment concentrates on the application of sociometric tests within security and defence studies.

2.1 *Professional Ethics in the Civil Guard*

The Civil Guard boasts a long history of promoting and instilling values such as honour, duty and loyalty. Since its inception, it has remained steadfast in its commitment to safeguarding

Spanish society, cultivating a set of values that serve as a compass for the proper execution of its mission.

Given that these values serve as the bedrock of professional practice and are indispensable for ethical and morally responsible upright conduct among Corps members, they are intrinsically linked to the professional ethics of the Corps and are imparted to agents from the outset of their training.

At this point, it is pertinent to delineate key basic aspects of the concept of professional ethics. According to García Fernández (2002, 67), Ethics are concerned with a better world and 'attempts to go through new perspectives by proposing a community Ethics assumed by all the people involved in a work activity' (García Fernández, 2007, 67). Therefore, professional ethics are moral rules imposed on the people belonging to a professional group in the exercise of their activity, stipulating the values and principles they assume and which must guide those engaged in such profession (López Guzmán and Aparisi Miralles, 1992, 169). Expanding on the correlation between this concept and the profession of the civil guard, López Guzmán and Aparisi Miralles (1992) maintain that:

'All human activity must be in the service of man, of his inherent dignity, of his inalienable rights. It does not seem licit, therefore, to justify any human activity, no matter how laudable the results it achieves, if it does not tend to make man more man, if it degrades him. Science and, in short, all human endeavour must feel subject to certain insurmountable limits.' (López Guzmán & Aparisi Miralles, 1992, 163).

The significance of this quotation lies in its assertion that the profession of civil guards extends beyond mere technical competence and strict adherence to institutional mandates. The Civil Guard is an institution deeply committed to welfare of Spanish society, an institution for which *honour* is the main motto. For this reason, its members must integrate a series of exemplary

behaviours, not only while on duty, but also outside of it. In other words, it is not only a question of 'doing the job', but also of 'how' it should be performed. In fact, these ethical standards always apply, including the selection process, as established in the Code of Conduct of the Civil Guard.[1]

Furthermore, in addition to being a profession imbued with a significant social responsibility, it is also a profession of arms, thus necessitating guidelines for conduct on dual fronts.

On one hand, the specific behavioural guidelines pertaining to its law enforcement function are contemplated, characterised by eminent social responsibility and a sense of vocation, driven by reverence for human dignity (Herrera Verdugo, 2006, 1). On the other hand, the responsibilities and exemplary conduct expected in the realm of arms must also be considered, recognising that 'their knowledge and actions can produce many benefits if they are well used, and great evils if they are misused' (Zanchetta, 2007, 211). This underscores the fact that, internally, some of the principles and values guiding the conduct of the Civil Guard also find normative protection within the Royal Ordinances for the Spanish Armed Forces. Furthermore, it is expected that members of these armed forces exhibit 'a higher standard of morality than the rest of the citizens.' (Gallego Arce, 2021, 39).

Because of this dual police and military sign, studies that deal with the ethical issue from both perspectives have been reviewed. Some of these studies, the oldest, have analysed the 'unnecessary exaltation between the military and the religious' (Delgado Cobos, 1990, 163), while the more contemporary ones deal with the implication of artificial intelligence in professional

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[1] Royal Decree 176/2022, of 4 March, approving the Code of Conduct for Civil Guard personnel. Boletín Oficial del Estado, n. 55, of 4 March, 2022. <https://www.boe.es/eli/es/rd/2022/03/04/176>

ethics, studying the ethical dilemmas that this poses (Gallego Arce, 20, p. 163). (Gallego Arce, 2021).

Professional ethics studies on institutions closely associated with the Civil Guard, such as police forces, have also been reviewed. The majority of these studies focus on Latin American cases (Herrera Verdugo, 2006; Tudela Poblete, 2008, 2011), where codes are established to delineate ethical standards and accountability mechanisms aimed at thwarting corruption, abuse of power and other forms of misconduct (Tudela Poblete, 2008, 12–13, 2011, 129).

While most studies focus on the purpose or necessity of professional ethics, few delve into investigating the values underpinning the professional ethics framework governing the operations of security and defence units.

Values, conceived as positive attributes widely esteemed, serve not only as the foundation of these professions and a means to execute them, but primarily as an end in themselves. They constitute the bedrock of professions dedicated to public welfare and safety, as individuals in these professions are expected not only to have technical competence but also human qualities and a sense of duty. Consequently, a civil guard agent, military personnel or police officer may demonstrate proficiency in task execution; however, if such execution lacks fundamental values such as commitment, integrity, respect, fairness, confidentiality or impartiality, they risk diminishing their stand in the eyes of the public.

Failure to adhere to these principles among members of the Armed Forces jeopardises the respect, trust and credibility they command within the society they serve. Therefore, adherence to these professional ethics and principles contributes to the social legitimacy requisite for such professions (Requena Hidalgo, 2016, 5). Thus, the manner in which the Civil Guard interacts with the citizenry emerges as an pivotal concern and serves as a decisive factor in the 'social identification with it

(society) and, therefore, in its social legitimization.' (Vázquez Morales, 2019, 21–22; Guardia Civil, 2019, 115).

In relation to the issue of legitimacy, the 'Final Report of the President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing' stands out.[2] This report was commissioned by a working group established by Obama to reflect on the relationship between law enforcement agencies and society, with the aim of identifying areas for improvement to enhance effectiveness, in the light of the dwindling legitimacy and trust of the U.S. police force. Despite substantial differences between U.S. and Spanish police models, the report highlights numerous commonalities stemming from the essence of the profession and the imperative of social legitimacy.

The White House report delineated six pillars for the new policing model: (1) trust and legitimacy, (2) public policies that reflect the values of the community/society, (3) incorporation of technological advances and use of social networks, (4) police close to society and reduction of crime, (5) permanent education and training, and (6) safety and well-being of the police officer.

Many ideas proposed in the U.S. report, such as the notion that effective policing transcends the mere compliance and that values and ethics should govern officers' decision-making processes, closely align with principles established by the Duke of Ahumada, founder of the Civil Guard, 170 years earlier. From the inception of the Corps, Don Francisco Javier Girón y Ezpeleta–the II Duke of Ahumada–evinced a significant interest in instilling its members with a stringent disciplinary regime, surpassing that 'of other corps dedicated to the maintenance of public security' (García Carrero, 2021, 4).

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[2] Final Report of the President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing, 2015 <https://cops.usdoj.gov/pdf/taskforce/taskforce_finalreport.pdf>

Through the *Cartilla del guardia civil*, the Duke of Ahumada established the rules and principles that its members had to follow in the discharge of their duties. These norms and principles encompassed disciplinary requirements, organization, weapons, training protocols and best police practices, while also outlining personal attributes expected of agents. Additionally, it delineated guidelines for conduct in interactions with society, commitment to Homeland (including sacrifice) and interaction with fellow Corps members (fostering fellowship, setting an example, and demonstrating loyalty). Likewise, it highlighted deficiencies that could detract from the excellence of the Civil, such as aggressiveness or lack of hygiene. (Zanchetta, 2007, 215–216).

The vision of its founder was clear: to create an institution combining civilian service ethos with military organization, wherein agents would possess a solid 'moral and human formation, dignity and a sense of honour' (Filgaira Bueno, 2019, 32), thus emphasising the rigorous selection process and high standards of the institution (García Carrero, 2021, 4).

The II Duke of Ahumada's determination in drafting the *Cartilla* was crucial, particularly in aligning its contents with the values of Spanish society, thereby elucidating the continuity of the Corps. Requena Hidalgo posits that one component of social legitimacy in the armed forces lies in the existence of a moral alignment between society and the institution, whereby society perceives every decision, action and intervention of the Corps as emanating from shared values (Requena Hidalgo, 2016, 10–11). Similarly, Martínez Vázquez (2019) notes that the 'widespread perception of a job well done' and the enduring appreciation of a 'set of values that continue to be socially appreciated and worthy of admiration' contribute to the success and continuity of the institution (Martínez Vázquez, 2019, 15–16).

Others such as Lasén Paz (2003) or Parrilla Bañón (2004, 9) concur with Martínez Vázquez's assertion contending that the significance of a professional ethics code for the Civil

Guard lies in its internalization and incorporation into the corporate culture (Lasén Paz, 2003). They argue that the enduring success of a police force with such a lengthy history is partly attributed to its ability to embody the higher values of the community it serves.

It should be noted that, while the Civil Guard is an institution driven by a series of values specific to Spanish society, not all units exhibit these values with the same intensity. Apropos of this note, it is worth addressing the relationship between the values and specialization of the Civil Guard.

In 2014, Major General Ildefonso Hernández Gómez, whose last job assignment was the command of the Headquarters of Special and Reserve Units of the Civil Guard, addressed the XXV 'Duque de Ahumada' Seminar, with a lecture on the 'Specialization of the Corps as a tool for an efficient service'. He explained that, to face the mission assigned to the Civil Guard – citizen security – and as proof of the constant adaptation of the Corps, specific units were created to address the diversity of threats faced by Spanish society. One of such units is the Rural Action Unit (UAR), which has its educational arm housed in the Special Training Center (CAE), and its operational component in the Rapid Action Group (GAR).

The specificity of tasks that each new unit would face, result of this specialization, required a range of needs adapted to its function (Hernández Gómez, 2014, 79; Lasén Paz, 1997), resulting in members being over-qualified with respect to other units. For instance, in the case of the GAR, a special operations force, its over-qualification occurs because of the specific mission requirement and risks associated, as well as the environmental conditions, tactics, techniques and equipment, consequently, expecting and necessitating a distinct approach in conduct from their members (Lasén Paz, 1997). Since the tasks and mission are not entrusted to other units due to their dangerousness or specificity, it is expected that the mentality

with which the work is approached will be different. Thus, there may be certain values that are added or intensified with respect to the general values of the Corps, such as courage, sacrifice, temperance or fellowship, fostering a distinct group identity borne from shared, sometimes extreme, experiences among unit members (Bedia Castillo, 2014, 246; Lasén Paz, 1997).

Bedia Castillo (2014) makes an interesting contribution in this regard introducing the concepts of police culture and subculture, which applies to the Civil Guard and its specialised units. He posits that 'police culture is unique but not homogeneous because each organization has its own internal subcultures' (Bedia Castillo, 2014, 240). Accordingly, there exists a general culture of the Civil Guard, embodied in documents such as the *Cartilla*, the code of conduct or the UN Code of Conduct for Law Enforcement Officials.[3] Additionally, more specific codes, expressed in maxims or decalogues, applicable to the different Corps specialties (Lisbona Bañuelos et al., 2006). Within the units, these codes carry varying significance, and their absence can jeopardise group effectiveness and safety (Samper Lucerna, 2014). In the case of the GAR, for example, their adherence to the Code of Conduct of the Civil Guard is supplemented by the Decalogue *Mateo Istúriz*,[4] which underscores the superior values of their subculture.

These own codes, whether formal or informal, are intricately intertwined with the specialised training of each unit. This is because, alongside a 'recruitment tailored to the development of the unit's tasks', there exists training in the 'specific ethical features of the unit adapted to (its) function' (Lasén Paz, 1997, 116). The rationale is straightforward: if tasks

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[3] Code of Conduct for Law Enforcement Officials (United Nations) <https://www.unodc.org/pdf/compendium/compendium_2006_es_part_04_01.pdf>

[4] Mateo Istúriz Decalogue <https://uar-gar-cae.es/articulo/45>

undertaken by SOF like the GAR are not entrusted to more 'general' units within the institution, then the training of these units must be commensurate.

Consequently, during the training phase, individuals undergoing specialisation must acquire the attributes necessary to successfully navigate the preparation and subsequent deployment within the unit they are candidates to (Lasén Paz, 1997; Parrilla Bañón, 2004). At this stage, it is imperative that members undergo a solid training in professional ethics, committing themselves to the principles and values that govern their profession.

Indeed, it is precisely upon the competition of the period of training and incorporation of new agents into the group where the norms and group dynamics assume critical importance. While misconduct during training may serve a pedagogical purpose (Rizo Gómez, 2003), once the agent becomes an integral part of the group they have been trained for, transgressions assume a punitive character. As López Valencia and Quispe Gaibor elucidate, 'professional code norms are incomprehensible without the reference to the context or social group in which they are obligatory' and this obligation 'is circumscribed to that group, outside of which they lose their obligatory nature' (López Valencia and Quispe Gaibor, 2022, 30). In extreme cases, such transgressions could warrant dismissal.

This issue is linked to the latter segment of the theoretical framework, concerning the use of sociometric tests in elite units and peer nomination.

2.2 *Sociometrics in Security and Défence Units*

Despite historically prioritising the technological factor over the human factor in security and, particularly, defence studies, scientific production in military sociology has notably increased (Samper Lucerna, 2015). Through research in this field, it is

known that certain factors have a positive impact on the productivity and performance of security and defence units, thus enhancing their effectiveness and efficiency (Gan Pampols, 2010; Lasén Paz, 1997). Morale, cohesion or the type of leadership exercised are some of them, which are also associated with better coping mechanism stressful situations and adaptation to operational environments such as those in which the GAR and the MOE operate (Oliver *et al.*, 1999).

In this regard, numerous authors underscore the importance of these psychosocial variables for the 'creation, training, maintenance and proper functioning of modern security and defence units' (García-Guiu López, 2017; García-Guiu López et al., 2015; Galindo Ángel, 2013).

To assess the status of these variables and identify potential issues within units, there are qualitative techniques such as interviews and observation, as well as quantitative measures like rating scales, questionnaires and sociograms (Nuño Gallego, 1983). This second group, quantitative techniques, is understood from sociometry, whose father was Jacob Levy Moreno.

From an etymological point of view, it is easy to intuit that sociometry is a quantitative method for the study of social relations using various techniques that allow the measurement and study the dynamics and bonds. In the security and defence universe, where teamwork is crucial to the success of missions, understanding the structure and interpersonal relationships of units is of extraordinary interest.

Within sociometry there are two branches. First is research sociology, which allows the exploration of group dynamics. Secondly is the application of sociometric results, which will be the focus of the empirical part of this paper.

Among all the techniques of the sociometric collection, the sociometric test stands out as the fundamental instrument. Operationally, this test consists of the formulation of questions about the members of the group under study, asking the group

members themselves. This method of obtaining information is part of *peer evaluation* (DeKeppler & Labianca, 2016; Kennedy et al., 2005), and it examines the acceptance or rejection among the individuals of the group (González Álvarez & García-Bacete, 2010).

The total acceptances and rejections are represented graphically in a sociogram, which provides information on the general structure of the group. This composition of total acceptances and rejections allows us to know the degree of cohesion when acceptances are reciprocal (positive cohesion) or when rejections are reciprocal (negative cohesion) (González Álvarez & García-Bacete, 2010). It is also possible to study the evolution of the group by repeating the test at different points of time.

Other variables that the sociometric test and the sociogram allow to study are the so-called sociometric figures. From the results of this test, indices that determine the position of each subject within the group are extracted, such as social popularity and the degree of acceptance of each of the members, and sociometric figures such as leaders, marginalised individuals or indifferent individuals can be identified (Nuño Gallego, 1983). In the case where there are individuals who are isolated or not chosen by any member (indifferent individuals), sociometry makes it possible to detect problems of social maladjustment, in which urgent action is needed, given that the ultimate goal of these techniques is individual and group well-being.

As for the main issues studied by means of sociometry in what is known as military sociology, we find leadership, morale and cohesion, since all of them are interrelated and influence their performance, besides being extremely useful for recruitment and team and binomial formation (Motowidlo & Borman, 1978). In this field of research the great academic contribution of the journal *Armed Forces and Society* should be highlighted.

In the late 1990s, a study and a meta-analysis of 40 studies on military personnel were published, demonstrating the relationship between cohesion and individual satisfaction, as well as between cohesion and group performance (Lucius & Kuhnert, 1997; Oliver *et al.*, 1999). The direct and positive influence that cohesion has on the performance of military units, and its advantages for training in security and defence organisations has been a recurring theme. Siebold, along the Finnish scholars Mikel Salo and Risto Sinkko, and Spanish researcher Carlos García-Guiu are probably the most prominent authors, yet not the only ones (Bartone et al., 2002; García-Guiu López, 2017; García-Guiu López et al., 2015; King, 2021; Lucius & Kuhnert, 1997; McClure & Broughton, 2000; Motowidlo & Borman, 1978; Salo, 2006). In 2007, Siebold conducted a review of the standard model of military group cohesion, and five years later, the Finnish scholars edited a monograph for the *Military Sociological Society of Finland* devoted to the impact and characteristics of cohesion in military units (Salo & Sinkko, 2012).

The importance attributed to morale in military units necessitates that this topic has also constituted an important body of research within the academic community (Galindo Ángel, 2013; García-Guiui López, 2017; Nuño Gallego, 1983; Pastor Álvarez et al., 2019). However, undoubtedly, the current rising trend is the study of military leadership through sociometrics (García-Guiu López, 2017, 2020; García-Guiu López *et al.*, 2015; Kennedy *et al.*, 2005; Uhl *et al.,* 2015). In fact, sociometric tests used in police and military settings have shown that peer ratings are a reliable predictor of leadership potential and identification of informal leaders (Petersen et al., 1964), which is key to enhance their influence in the unit if this influence is considered positive or to counteract it otherwise (Nuño Gallego, 1983).

Another group of scholars have focused their research on the study of the most valued variables when nominating

peers in the sociometric test. Gan Pampols (2010) establishes that, from his experience, they are human quality, aptitude and willingness to work in a team, solidity of character and survival spirit, in that order (Gan Pampols, 2010). For others, the reference factors when choosing partners are leadership ability, the ability or intelligence to perform a certain task, friendship or mutual affection, and popularity(Petersen, Komorita and Quay, 1964, 78-79; Salo, 2006, 2). In contrast, other studies on peer selection in armed forces point to technical competence: 'often, a technically skilled peer is preferred over a peer to whom one experiences an affective attraction but who is less skilled at the job' (Fernández, 1978, 55).

However, it is not to be expected that the motivations of choice in elite units of the Civil Guard (a gendarmerie force) and the armed forces are the same, since while both require maximum efficiency, determination and teamwork, they are governed by different morals and ethics (Lisbona Bañuelos *et al.*, 2006).

In recent years the Psychology Service of the General Directorate of the Civil Guard has undertaken research to elucidate what are the 'professional values, virtues, and guiding principles that should adorn the Civil Guard' (Parrilla Bañón, 2004, 22). In pursuit of this aim, an investigation was carried out on the Interpersonal Values Test (Parrilla Bañón, 2004, 25–28), which defined a series of factors, namely, constancy/tenacity, enthusiasm/cooperation, integrity, coherence, competence, self-confidence, self-esteem, self-demand/discipline and professional attitude, defined by the scales of altruism, discipline, responsibility, austerity, initiative and self-limitation. From this questionnaire, a series of profiles were developed for predicting work adjustment. However, these studies have been eminently oriented towards personnel selection processes and the preparation of job descriptions.

The absence of conclusive studies linking the non-integration of these codes and values that govern the Civil

Guard and the armed forces with rejections in sociometric tests has prompted the selection of the sociometric test to investigate the issue.

In these tests, conducted in training courses, the respondent student, positioned as an equal and loyal member of his combat unit, 'validly judges the ease or difficulty with which an individual is adapting to the rules and regulations of the new system' (Nelson & Berry, 1965, 254). Through responses in the sociometric test, an internal control mechanism is activated, ensuring compliance with the norms and values that characterise the group in order to avoid deviant behaviour and preserve group stability (Siebold, 2007; Forsyth, 2009). As in other environments where sociometry is applied, in addressing maladaptation issues, the responsible individual is tasked with intervening to enhance the group climate (González Álvarez & García-Bacete, 2010). The problem arises when rejected individuals lack values that are central to the institution and the unit.

Research indicates that sociometric differentiation favours individuals with socially attractive qualities, but sociometric status also depends on the degree to which the individual's attributes match the qualities valued by the group (Salo, 2006; Forsyth, 2009). Therefore, if the future GAR or MOE graduating class includes individuals who do not integrate well into the group, their peers will nominate them negatively. This implies that the sociometric status of rejected individuals indicates a focus of dysfunction within the group, and suggests that in elite units, the sociometric test has acquired a 'self-regulatory' and internal control function aimed at achieving its purpose while upholding the unit's values. This function was not initially envisaged in sociometry, as interventions based sociometric research typically aim to assist those who do not fit in, rather than expel them. This new function of the sociometric test, has therefore earned, in police-military circles, the nickname of *daggerometer*.

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3   Methodology

3.1   *Research Design*

In scientific research, selecting the most appropriate method to apprehend reality is imperative (Cadena Iñiguez et al., 2017). Therefore, employing a mixed approach was deemed pertinent (Hernández Sampieri et al., 1991). Predominantly qualitative in nature, this study delves into the enforceable values in SOF units, but a quantitative approach is also added for analysing and computing the relative importance of participant's responses.

3.2   *Participants*

As qualitative research does not aim for population inferences from the sampled group (Plummer-D'Amato, 2008), informants were not chosen randomly but rather deliberately and intentionally, 'according to criteria or attributes established by the researchers' (De Castro García & García Rodríguez, 2018, 88). Given the indispensable nature of the group acceptance of professional ethics (Herrera Verdugo, 2006, 3), and the significance of identifying individuals capable of contributing the most relevant information to the research process (De Castro García & García Rodríguez, 2018), the sample comprised:

- all the candidates enrolled in the ADE course (27 people),

- all the candidates enrolled the COE course (28 people),

- the Commander Psychologist of the UAR,

- the Lieutenant Psychologist of the COE, and

- the six GAR-SI unit commanders.

The composition of the GAR-SI unit commanders was as follows: one commander from Mauritania, one from Senegal,

one from Niger, one from Mali and two from Burkina Faso, with no Chadian representation in the sample. The selection of these GAR-SI commanders was also influenced by the opportunity to meet them physically during their visit to the city of Logroño, where the of GAR's headquarters is found, in February 2023.

3.3 Data Collection

To acquire the data essential for addressing the research questions, various instruments were utilised. This necessitated two visits (November 2022 and February 2023) to Civil Guard barracks in La Rioja (10th Zone of the Civil Guard). During these visits, different facilities of interest related to the subject of the research were visited, holding unstructured, semi-structured and structured interviews with various GAR agents and commanders. Noteworthy observations from these visits were recorded. Face-to-face interviews were also held with key informants: the UAR Commander Psychologist, several GAR officers (some of whom had participated in the GAR-SI Sahel project), and the six GAR-SI chiefs. The latter also engaged in a focus group and answered a written questionnaire. The purpose of these interviews was to gain insight into their experiences and knowledge in relation to the subject of study. Additionally, two questionnaires administered via Google Forms were utilised. The first questionnaire was completed by the students of the ADE and COE courses, while the second was provided to the GAR-SI chiefs, to whom I extend my gratitude for their collaboration.

3.4 Data Analysis

Upon data collection through interviews and questionnaires, an analysis was conducted. Initially, a categorical classification of the information was performed. It is noteworthy that while the nature of this research is eminently qualitative, a subsequent phase involved processing the data using Microsoft Excel. This

facilitated the calculation of response frequencies to the questionnaires and provided more concise information regarding the relative importance of each of value indicated by the participants.

Given that the nature of qualitative research is emergent and flexible (Taylor and Bogdan, 1984), the data analysis phase in this study was concurrent with the categorical classification of information. To execute this process, an inductive approach was employed, allowing the data to guide the classification process into categories (Anguera, 1986). Three general categories were established: (1) personality, (2) professional aspects, and (3) aspects transversal to the profession. Category (2), on professional aspects, is further divided into three subcategories: (2.1) unit, (2.2) task, (2.3) profession. In addition, both the personality category (1) and the subcategories (2.1), (2.2) and (2.3) are again subdivided into negative and positive aspects.

Data from questionnaires completed by ADE and COE courses students were categorised accordingly, and frequencies were subsequently calculated. For GAR-SI units, a slightly different procedure was adopted to order the values, attitudes, and aptitudes of the code of professional ethics. This involved considering two aspects of the mentioned items - their relevance and importance - and calculating the product of the two aspects. This mathematical operation facilitated the ranking of GAR-SI values based on their importance. Relevance was assumed to be 100%, representing the percentage of subjects who deemed the item relevant, as all items were obtained through consensus in the discussion group. Importance was determined by summing the ranks assigned to each item by subjects via the questionnaire. Therefore, if relevance is 100%, the product of relevance and importance (relevance × importance) equals importance. Consequently, the item with the lowest sum was deemed the most important and occupied the first position, while the item with the highest sum was considered least important and ranked last (27th).

4   Empirical part

This section describes the practical application of what was explained in the methodological section, developing the procedure followed during the fieldwork, which has allowed us to obtain the information necessary to answer each of the questions posed above.

4.1   RQ-1: Is human quality a central issue in the GAR and MOE special operations forces?

The objective associated with this research question is to confirm that, in practice, human quality does indeed play a pivotal role in the GAR and MOE units. To address the research question associated with this objective – *Is human quality a central issue in the GAR and MOE SOF?* – key informant interviews and questionnaires were utilised, both in-person and online.

Drawing upon the information collected in the theoretical framework concerning the close relationship between the values of these units and the corresponding access courses, it was deemed appropriate to approach the inquiry by examining these courses. These access programs are the ADE course for the GAR and the COE for the MOE. The former spans four months and takes place entirely in Logroño (Spain). The latter takes place at the *Military School of Mountain and Special Operations* (*Escuela Militar de Montaña y Operaciones Especiales*, EMMOE in Spanish) in Jaca (Aragón, Spain) and extends over a period of ten months.

The training programmes that give access to these units are typically designed to cultivate and assess the competencies and skills necessary to carry out the unit's missions, given that the associated specialization requires a comprehensive and diverse training. This training encompasses performance scenarios, tasks to be undertaken and the techniques, tactics,

procedures and handling of materials pertinent to their operations. Moreover, its requirements are also reflective of the conduct expected from its members (Lasén Paz, 1997). Consequently, access to the group is contingent not only upon the aptitude of the candidates but also their attitude. Sociometric tests are employed to evaluate this psychosocial requisite block in both courses. Hence, the sociometric test has been deemed a valid instrument upon which to focus a portion of the research, as it enables the examination of intergroup relations through queries pertaining to acceptance and rejection vis-à-vis other group members.

Given the inherent challenge of entering elite units as a civilian, authorization was sought from the relevant command. Subsequently, once authorization was obtained, the fieldwork commenced with two semi-structured interviews featuring two key informants, namely the COE lieutenant psychologist and the ADE course commander psychologist. These interviews facilitated the acquisition of pertinent information and insights into both broad and specific aspects of the subject under investigation.

To determine the degree of association between professional ethics and the sociometric tests in SOF, the Commander Psychologist of the ADE course made a notable contribution by highlighting a crucial aspect in the interview: the context in which this test is conducted - the access course. Both the ADE course and the COE are selective programs where candidates compete against each other to maintain their position and progress to the course's completion. A preliminary screening based on their professional profile is conducted prior to admission, and once admitted, 'competencies are assessed (by peers) daily and in various situations' as they compete to retain their place within the course, as pointed out by the Commander Psychologist points out.

This sociometric test serves to practically determine which individuals, despite passing the initial screening, have

failed to demonstrate the values, attitudes, and aptitudes required by the unit in their daily practice or in challenging situations. The unit requires individuals with high emotional stability, resilience, perseverance, and leadership qualities. Consequently, the test enables the identification the best candidates in an updated manner. In this regard, the Commander Psychologist emphasises that two equally essential aspects are observed during the course and through the test: firstly, who previously possesses a greater number of competencies, and in what intensity, and secondly, who maintains constancy, commitment, and the highest motivation to demonstrate these competencies, and if necessary, to acquire them.

Recognising that the perspective of the group itself brings us closest to the real state of the matter, alongside key informant interviews with the psychologists in charge, the survey method was also employed to gather information directly from the course participants.

To this end, the two groups of students were asked the following questions: *What relationship exists between, or to what extent do you think it influences, the non-observance of the GAR decalogue (Mateo Istúriz) with the nominations in the sociometric test?* to the students of the ADE course, and *What relationship do you think exists between the negative nominations in the sociometric tests and the non-observance of the values of the Armed Forces and the Royal Ordinances?* to the participants of the COE. If the respondents consider the absence of their core values as a reason for rejection, then the significance of human quality and the professional ethics factor in these specific units can be affirmed. The resulting data was then analysed.

Approximately 85% of the responses to this question, from both MOE and GAR candidates, indicate a strong correlation between negative nominations and non-compliance with the respective codes of ethics. Further insight into this result can be gleaned from specific responses, such as one stating

a 'total link' (u.t. C. 9), because 'you want to go with the best company to the war and the best company is, after all, a person who brings together our values and takes them to excellence in any situation, a committed and integral person' (u.t. C.1). Many have pointed out that there is a total relationship, 'being (these codes) the fundamental standards for any military unit to function' (u.t. G.4), to the point that 'people who do not exhibit such values in their behaviour have a high probability of being negatively nominated, and a person who struggles in technique but has a great attitude will never be negatively nominated' (u.t. C. 7) (u.t. C. 16).

Among those who believe that there is a clear relationship, many emphasised the idea that these codes constitute the archetype of an individual working in SOF, to the extent that lacking such values hinders efficient work 'the GAR decalogue after all is a description of how the GAR officer should be able to integrate properly into the unit and be able to contribute his best to it. For this reason, anyone who does not comply with the requirements of the decalogue, is nominated by the rest of the colleagues in the *daggerometer*' (u.t. G.26), or that 'if the person does not align with the commitment to give their best, as the decalogue demands, he is to be nominated for not continuing the course' (u.t. G.20). Candidates emphasise that such is the influence of these values on negative nominations that some even 'hide certain features of their way of being' (u.t. G.11) for the purpose avoiding nomination, highlighting the importance of attitude in this type of units.

Others, in line with this perspective consider that there is a relationship, but argue that 'the importance of, for example, discipline or fellowship varies from conventional units to special operations' (u.t. C.25), which refers us to the idea of police subcultures discussed by Bedia Castillo (2014).

Some respondents note that, although values and codes of ethics are norms to be internalised, for the purposes of negative nominations it is important 'to look at more items' (u.t.

G.19) because although these constitute 'a summary of the main values' (u.t. G. 27) and 'a good guide' (u.t. C.3), there are other values, personality traits and issues to consider in conjunction with them.

One participant considers that, even if there is a close relationship. 'when answering the questionnaire you do not think about whether or not the nominees comply with the decalogue, but in the observed facts' (u.t. G. 23), and others expand on that by noting that it is in the manner in which those facts are carried out where 'the fulfilment or not of the traits is revealed, by observing certain values like not leaving a companion abandoned and being sincere, because if they are not fulfilled they are clear indicators that such person should not be in the unit' (u.t. G.22).

Another interesting observation is from a COE student who points out that for negative nominations, non-compliance with the unit's values in particular, and the values of the Spanish Armed Forces or Civil Guard in general, 'has some weight, but has never been a decisive factor; however, for positive nominations I did take them more into account' (u.t. C. 22). In this sense, it has also been pointed out that, although such codes are necessary, there are other factors that are considered 'more important when working in an SO unit, such as self-confidence, optimism, or empathy' (u.t. C. 28).

Other participants point to the subjective nature of these exemplary codes (u.t. C.11), noting that they based their negative nominations more on a 'bad relationship or lack of personal affinity' (u.t. C. 12), and even that 'it is not a question of professional codes, but of one's professional spirit, since the slack person will always be slack, military or not' (u.t. C. 21). However, those who dismiss the relationship between the sociometric test and the values required for the unit are the fewest.

The analysis of the data indicates that 85.18% of the ADE course respondents considered that there is a relationship,

and a very close relationship at that. In the case of the candidates for Special Operations Command (COE in Spanish) participants, the percentage is practically identical, 85.71%.

4.2 RQ-2: What are the most valued and most rejected values, attitudes and personal qualities in the GAR and in the MOE?

Considering that the training and the formation of military units serve as means for transmitting and reinforcing their values, the courses that provide access to these were chosen as the focal point for investigating the issue. In addition to that, it is primarily the unit members themselves who uphold and adhere to the professional ethics code. Therefore, to address this second research question, candidates in these courses were surveyed with a questionnaire based on these sociometric tests.

The questionnaires were designed specifically for the evaluation of relevant aspects of the sociometric test and included the following questions: *What are the qualities you value most in a GAR/MOE officer when working with them?; What are the most compelling reasons that would lead you to negatively nominate a fellow candidate in the sociometric test during the course?, and What are the reasons that actually led you to nominate a fellow candidate in the sociometric test during the course?*

To provide better understanding of the nature of the sociometric tests conducted in the GAR and MOE access courses,[5] and to contextualise the findings obtained in this study, it has been deemed convenient to explain their format before presenting the results.

4.2.1. The sociometric test in the ADE and COE courses

The sociometric test used in the ADE course is composed of 34 items: 25 nominative questions, five open questions asking to

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[5] These courses are the ADE course to access GAR and COE to access MOE.

justify the previous nomination, two sociometric perception questions and two questions unrelated to the sociometric nature and associated with the evaluation of the course.

The nominative questions prompt candidates to indicate which members of the group they select and which they reject in a given scenario. Up to question 22, the nominative questions appear in both their positive and negative versions. As an example, two of them are reproduced literally to understand what the positive and negative questions refer to: Who are the three classmates in your class with whom you like to work the most? (positive nomination) and Who are the three classmates in your class with whom you like to work the least? (negative nomination). Presenting questions in both positive and negative forms aims to extract more information about the positions held by the different members of the group, since a positive non-nomination is not synonymous with a negative perception. A positive non-nomination does not necessarily imply rejection; rather, it may indicate neutrality, lesser popularity, or even isolation from the group.

Additionally, the first four nominative questions and question number 31 are followed by an open-ended question soliciting an explanation for their preference or rejection in the preceding question. This provides further insights into the relationships within the studied group.

Following competition of the test, the information is 'processed and analysed globally' as indicated in the questionnaire's preface. The sociometric data are then scrutinised using descriptive statistics or more advanced statistical methods such as path diagrams, factor diagrams or cluster analysis (Forsyth, 2009). However, the most visually intuitive method of data analysis is graphical representation through the construction of a sociogram, facilitating the identification of intragroup relationships and basic sociometric figures (isolated, popular, rejected).

The sociometric figures or indexes derived from the test responses are categorised into three types: socially positive, socially negative, and neutral. Positive sociometric indexes for the ADE course encompass popularity, leadership, conflict resolution, coordination, effective transmission of orders, and empathy. Negative indexes include lack of fellowship, aggressiveness, poor communication skills, superiority complex, and attention-seeking behaviour. The neutral index comprises the sociometric index of non-leadership

Regarding the time dimension, the sociometric test in the ADE course is administered only once, at a juncture when mutual acquaintance among members is established, both during leisure time and in simulated scenarios reflecting challenges future GAR members will encounter.

The sociometric test utilised in the COE comprises six questions organised in pairs, with each pair featuring one question in the positive and the same question in the negative form. These questions, all nominative in nature, are: *Who would you choose as a partner?*; *Who would you not choose as a partner?; Who would you choose as a leader?*; *Who would you not choose as a leader?*; *Who would you choose as part of your team?*; and *Who would you not choose as part of your team?*

While the researcher could personally analyse the sociometric test for the ADE course, this was not possible for the COE test. In the latter case, the Lieutenant Psychologist provided all pertinent information during a semi-structured interview. The Lieutenant Psychologist highlighted that the recent addition of a requirement to justify answers served a dual purpose. Firstly, akin to the ADE course, it aimed to identify candidates possessing the requisite skills and attitudes for effective special operations command. Secondly, it facilitated the profiling of trainees.

The distinguishing feature between the two tests lies in their second purpose. While the GAR's test primarily determines candidates' suitability for course continuation, the COE test also

serves to profile course members and optimise workflow through more appropriate patrol and binomial configurations. This enhanced utilization of information is enabled by the presence of a dedicated psychologist for the COE course, a professional figure not exclusively available in the ADE course.

Aligned with previous studies highlighting the limitation of evaluating courses solely through instructors and supervisors (Kennedy et al., 2005), the Lieutenant Psychologist underscored the significance of peer assessment in the COE test due to the 'internal dynamics of the group that are alien to the teachers and psychologist'. Unlike the ADE course, where only test results are considered, peer assessment in the COE serves as the 'ultimate confirmation' of suspicions held by course instructors and psychologists. Importantly, the decision to terminate the COE course is not solely based on sociometric test outcomes but is weighed alongside other pertinent data. Thus, abandonment of the course can only occur due to serious injury necessitating medical leave, self-request, or failure to meet academic standards or to demonstrate professionalism. While sociometric test results are considered, expulsion based solely on peer assessment is precluded by the COE's structured system.

However, the Lieutenant Psychologist pointed out that normally the results of the sociometric test and the global performance evaluation correlate positively and significantly, with a poor perception by colleagues coinciding with lack of professionalism in the performance in the course. This suggests a strong relationship between personal quality and technical quality.

Regarding the construction of sociometric indicators from test data, no information was provided during the interview. However, insights into the temporal dimension of the test were gleaned from another key informant, a member of the GAR who had undergone COE training. Cross-training exercises between the two groups allowed for the revelation, during a visit to CAE's course, that MOE candidates undertake

the test three times during the ten-month course. These assessments are strategically timed after significant milestones to ensure that students have relevant experiences on which to base their evaluations (Toumbeva *et al.*, 2021). Specifically, the first assessment occurs one month after commencement, providing a baseline for group evolution. Subsequent tests coincide with the completion of extreme scenario performances, allowing for a comprehensive assessment of fellowship and unit attitudes. Specifically, the second test takes place at the end of the Technical Combat Instruction, one of the most physically and psychologically demanding periods of the course. The third and final questionnaire takes place in April after the *evasion and escape* test, followed by a 72-hour survival test, allowing for a comprehensive assessment of fellowship and unit attitudes.

4.2.2. Professional ethics in the GAR/ADE course

To answer the second research question, the current graduating class of the ADE course was asked to respond three questions: *What are the qualities you value most in a GAR officer when working with him?*; *What are the most compelling reasons that would lead you to negatively nominate a fellow student in the sociometric test during the course?*; and *What are the reasons that actually led you to nominate a fellow student in the sociometric test during the course?* The questionnaire containing these questions was conducted online and responses were administered via Google Forms, facilitating the collection of responses

The findings suggest that, according to the surveyed sample, the most frequent cited desirable qualities for a GAR agent were humility, empathy, and sincerity, all of them with a frequency of 7.14%. Other personality traits such as a positive attitude, maturity, responsibility, transmitting confidence, or 'being sharp' were rated by 3.57%. The same proportion of respondents (3.57%) rated serenity as very positive. Although mentioned less frequently in the survey, serenity was also noted

as a positive quality, also at 3.57%. Interestingly, it was during face-to-face interviews with GAR members where serenity was repeatedly highlighted.

On the negative side, aspects of personality that respondents identified as potentially causing rejection or expulsion from the access course included lack of humility, lack of responsibility, insincerity and egocentrism, all with a frequency of 3.57%. A negative attitude and irresponsibility within the unit were noted by 7.14% of respondents. Additionally, arrogance and introversion received a higher score, 14.28%.

In the professional aspects category, fellowship stood out as the most prominent trait of a GAR agent, with 64.28% rating it positively and 50% rating its absence negatively. Brotherhood was highlighted as the next most relevant trait (14.28%), followed by loyalty and teamwork at 10.71% and 7.14% respectively. Undesirable behaviours regarding unity included selfishness, non-solidarity, and self-interest (28.57%), individualism (21.42%) with expressions such as not wanting to 'stick together' (u.t. G.12), followed by bad manners and gestures with colleagues (14.28%). Finally, with a frequency of 7.14%, the lack of responsibility appears, with expressions such as that of respondent 23 (u.t. G.23), who indicates his rejection of those who do not 'pitch in' when the situation requires it.

Regarding attitudes towards tasks (2.2.), the capacity for suffering, sacrifice, and selflessness for the collective good was rated most highly (35.71%), followed by willingness to work and professionalism (17.85% each). Initiative and proactivity were mentioned by 10.71% of respondents, while efficiency and accuracy were each mentioned by 7.14%. Organization, interest, and problem-solving ability appeared with a frequency of 3.57%, but the latter was mentioned repeatedly in the face-to-face interviews. From the information obtained in these interviews, we should also add other elements mentioned such as self-control, overexposure to failure, psychological resistance, and change management.

Attitudes such as laziness (17.85%), lack of aptitude (7.14%), and wanting to play with an advantage over others and not wanting to assume the consequences (3.57%), were considered undesirable.

In the category of attitudes and values transversal to the profession (2.3), respect (3.57%), availability (7.14%), and commitment (10.71%) were noted positively. Empathy and analytical capacity were also highlighted during interviews. Additionally, respondent 4 (u.t. G.4) emphasised a 'fervent love for the homeland' which, according to him, would elevate all other qualities to their maximum level.

The results obtained from the analysis of these data are presented in order in Table 1 (page 56), under the heading Results.

4.2.3. *Professional ethics in the MOE/COE*

In order to obtain the same type of information on the COE as for the ADE course, the survey was again chosen as the data collection instrument. In this case, after a preliminary review, the COE commander accepted the administration of the questionnaire to the current COE participants in Jaca (Aragón, Spain) after having reviewed the questions. It was the Lieutenant Psychologist of that course who distributed the questionnaire and forwarded the scanned responses to the researcher.

This questionnaire asked the same type of questions as the one sent to the ADE course: What are the qualities you value most in a male MOE when working with them?; What are the most important reasons that would lead you to negatively nominate a colleague in the sociometric test during the COE?; and What are the reasons that have really led you to nominate a partner in the sociometric test during the COE course?

As in the previous case, categorization was simultaneous with data analysis. In this case, the following categories were established: (1) personality traits (subdivided into positive and

negative), (2) professional attitudes, which were subdivided into attitudes towards the unit (2.1.) and attitudes towards the task (2.2.), and both subcategories were further subdivided into negative and positive aspects, and, finally, (3) command qualities, given the objective of the COE.

Referring to the first category, the most desirable personality traits in this special operations command is humility, mentioned in 17.24% of instances; 'having a heart', with a frequency of 13.79%; and courage, with a frequency of 10.34%. Next, in order of frequency, are optimism, empathy, and sincerity, all mentioned in 6.89% of instances. Finally, and with a frequency of 3.44%, they indicated as positive the closeness, maturity, self-confidence, mental toughness and integrity. As rejected personality traits, selfishness stands out above all others, with a prevalence of 37.93%, followed by lack of honesty and humility (13.79%), poor stress management (3.44%), lack of integrity (3.44%) and indecisiveness (3.44%).

The second category, concerning professional aspects, is subdivided into two subcategories: attitudes towards the unit (2.1.) and attitudes towards the task (2.2.). However, one aspect was consistently noted, with a frequency of 27.58%, which applies to both subcategories, and that is loyalty, both to the mission and to the unit. Focusing solely on the unity subcategory (2.1.), fellowship emerges prominently, both positively (41.37%) and negatively (37.93%). As desirable attitudes aligned with fellowship, respondents highlighted sacrifice for the common good on 31.03% of occasions, along with commitment (13.79%). Apart from the absence of fellowship, the findings indicate that neither the inability to collaborate flexibly with others (10.34%) nor the creation of uncomfortable situations within the team (10.34%) are desired traits within the unit.

In terms of task-related aspects, technical preparation and possession of knowledge emerged as the most frequently mentioned, with a frequency of 31.03%. This was followed by professionalism, with a frequency of 17.24%. Additionally, dis-

cipline and initiative were mentioned as important for task success, each with a frequency of 6.89%. Further aspects such as adaptability, organization, and efficiency were also highlighted, each with a frequency of 3.44%. Among the negative attitudes towards task performance, respondents commonly cited laziness and lack of aptitude, both at a frequency of 17.24%. Lack of determination (13.79%), and lack of professionalism (10.34%) were also identified as undesirable traits for task performance, along with contempt (6.89%) and complaints (3.44%).

Moving on to the third and final category, which focuses on the traits desirable or undesirable for a special operations commander (in contrast with an agent) (3). The most frequently cited positive traits were determination and the ability to transmit confidence, both with a frequency of 20.68%. Following closely were serenity or the ability to remain calm in stressful situations, decisive decision-making under stress, and possessing 'an attitude', all with a frequency of 13.79%. Additionally, respondents indicated conviction in one's own orders, exemplarity, capacity for self-criticism, being demanding with the unit, mental toughness, and speed and certainty in decision-making, each with a frequency of 3.44%. On the negative side, respondents pointed to a lack of leadership qualities (24.13%), followed by lack of maturity, lack of commitment, and failure to inspire confidence, all mentioned at a frequency of 6.89%. Lastly, undesirable traits for a SOF commander include favouritism towards some subordinates, lack of leadership, and, notably for this study, 'lack of values', each with a frequency of 3.44%. These data are presented in Table 2 (page 57), within the Results section, for clarity and organization.

4.3   RQ-3: *What personal attitudes and skills are needed in a GAR-SI agent?*

Identifying the personal values, attitudes and aptitudes of a GAR-SI operator is not only the last research question, but also

the main objective of this work. This endeavour will allow us to establish the groundwork for a code of ethics tailored to the reality of the GAR-SI Sahel project.

Building upon the findings of sections 4.1. and 4.2., which explored the fundamental values and qualities of the Spanish Civil Guard and the Spanish Armed Forces, an attempt has been made to amalgamate those crucial values and qualities essential for the performance of special operations work, both from the police/gendarmerie (GAR) and military (MOE) perspectives. The GAR's values serve as a reference because this unit is the progenitor of the GAR-SI units, while those of the MOE are considered due to the military nature of many operations carried out in the Sahel. However, it is worth noting that the results of sections 4.1. and 4.2. are linked to the Spanish/European culture.

Attempting to develop a code of professional ethics for elite African gendarmeries based solely on extrapolation from Spanish or European results would be misguided. While it provides valuable insights into how SOF agents should conduct themselves, it is imperative to consider cultural aspects, as they are the true motivators for gendarmes and imbue institutional missions with meaning.

In this regard, Rafael Sánchez Ortega notes in the introduction to the Spanish monograph 'Issues in Military Ethics' (*Cuestiones sobre Ética Militar*) that 'military ethics is not different or alien to that of the culture and society to which its armed forces' belong, that 'the values of the profession [...] emanate from national values, they are immersed in them and to them they must adapt' and that these values 'must be like the light that illuminates and guides military values' (Sánchez-Ortega *et al.*, 2020, 10). Indeed, the values guiding gendarmeries' actions are closely intertwined with the values of the societies they serve, as the raison d'être of a gendarmerie is the security and protection of the interests of that society. Therefore, an appropriate code of ethics for the GAR-SI Sahel must

necessarily be rooted in the very culture that the GAR-SI units will serve.

If the values guiding the actions of a gendarmerie must be in line with the expectations and needs of the society it protects, and if 'being aware that a police [gendarmerie] model is needed immediately implies meditating on what police [gendarmerie] we want' (Ambos *et al.*, 2003, 3), then what the local actors consider must be taken into account for the code of ethics to be useful and adapted to their context. Considering the local perspective is therefore synonymous with greater precision in the elaboration of this code and synonymous with increased autonomy of the units, especially regarding the selection of appropriate personnel. It is also another milestone of success in this European project. Given this necessity and taking advantage of the GAR-SI project meeting in Logroño (Spain) at the beginning of 2023, a discussion group was held on 20 February with the six GAR-SI commanders attending the meeting.

The present research problematises a human issue and tries to understand the elements that take place in the sociocultural reality of SOF in the Sahel (Quintana Peña and Montgomery, 2006). The problematisation of this issue refers us directly to the note made by De Castro and García (2018, 80): 'qualitative research facilitates understanding in relation to cultural patterns'. This was considered with what was established by Robinson (1999), who points out that the focus group can be useful to identify cultural values and group norms. Thus, it was agreed that this technique would be ideal for the topic of study.

The group dynamics of the focus group are considered extremely interesting for cultural knowledge, as they stimulate reactions to the responses of other participants and the justification of one's own points of view (Hernández Sampieri et al., 1991; Mena Manrique and Méndez Pineda, 2009; Plummer-D'Amato, 2008). This would offer a broad view of the situation and values in the Sahel, much more enriching compared to other individual techniques.

Initially, the results obtained in sections 4.1. and 4.2. were intended to form the basis for guiding the focus group. However, it was concluded that this could condition the participants' responses or limit the information they could provide. As established by qualitative methodology, the subject is the source of knowledge (Mena Manrique and Méndez Pineda, 2009), so it was deemed more enriching to begin this focus group with a brainstorm (Martínez Vento *et al.,* 2014). During the focus group, the GAR-SI commanders mentioned different values, qualities, or personal traits that they considered crucial for the good performance of the tasks faced by a GAR-SI operator. In this way, it was possible to establish a shared vision of the essence of the GAR-SI operator in terms of attitude and personal competencies. The values, qualities, and traits that the GAR-SI commanders considered relevant were noted during the focus group.

At the point of information saturation (Morse, 1995), the focus group was closed, and a list of the values, qualities and traits mentioned was drawn up, resulting in a total of 27 items. Then, we proceeded to the next phase, in which the same participants answered a physical questionnaire, prepared based on the information generated in the focus group. The questions contained in this questionnaire were hierarchical, aiming to delve deeper into the issue. Participants had to prioritise the list according to the individual importance they personally attached to each of the twenty-seven items obtained through the focus group.

Data analysis was carried out on the same afternoon, following the procedure indicated in section 3.4 (data analysis). The results obtained for the third and final research question, which corresponds to the values, attitudes, and skills desirable for GAR-SI operators, are presented in Table 3 (page 58-59). It displays the items mentioned by the GAR-SI commanders in the first column, the sum of the orders assigned in the questionnaire in the second column, and the corresponding order after

analysing all the data in the third column (for better presentation, the items are already sorted in order of importance).

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5   Results

The general objective of this research is to identify the key values essential for the effectiveness of GAR-SI Sahel units, with the intention of establishing a foundational code of professional ethics. Three research questions were formulated, and data were gathered from various sources, including 27 participants from the ADE course (GAR candidates), multiple GAR officers, 28 COE participants (MOE candidates), six GAR-SI Sahel commanders, and the psychologists associated with both courses, one from the military and one from the civil guard.

For the first research question (RQ-1), which investigates whether human quality is a central issue in the SOF units of the GAR and the MOE, the data analysis revealed that 85.18% of ADE course respondents affirmed the existence of a close relationship. Similarly, a nearly identical percentage of 85.71% was observed among COE participants.

The second research question (RQ-2) was: *What are the most valued and most rejected values, attitudes and personal qualities in the GAR and the MOE?* It sought to identify the values, attitudes and personal qualities most valued and most rejected in Spanish SOF Thanks to the responses of 27 participants of the ADE course and 28 participants of the COE, and by means of the survey technique, it was possible to answer this question. The results for the GAR/ADE are shown in Table 1 and for the MOE/COE in Table 2. Each of the tables shows the items rated positively and the items rated negatively, indicating the frequency (%) with which each item is repeated in the responses to the questionnaire.

Table 1. Desired and not desired qualities in a GAR officer

Desired qualities in a GAR officer	%	Non desired qualities in a GAR officer	%
Fellowship	64.28	Lack of fellowship	50.00
Ability to suffer, sacrifice	35.71	Selfishness, pursuit of self-interest	28.57
Willingness to work	17.85	Individualism	21.42
Professionalism	17.85	Idleness	17.85
Brotherhood	14.28	Introversion	14.28
Loyalty	10.71	Arrogance	14.28
Initiative, proactivity	10.71	Bad manners with peers	14.28
Commitment	10.71	Negative attitude	7.14
Humility	7.14	Lack of responsibility	7.14
Sincerity	7.14	Lack of aptitude	7.14
Teamwork	7.14	Egocentrism	3.57
Efficacy	7.14	Lack of sincerity	3.57
Positive attitude	3.57	Lack of humility	3.57
Being smart	3.57	Lack of interest	3.57
Self confidence	3.57	Not assuming the consequences	3.57
Maturity	3.57	Wanting to play with advantage	3.57
Being a good person	3.57		
Responsibility	3.57		
Serenity	3.57		
Problem-solving capacity	3.57		
Interest	3.57		
Organization	3.57		
Respect	3.57		
Fervent love of homeland	3.57		

Source: author

Table 2. Desired and not desired qualities in a MOE officer

Desired qualities in a MOE	%	Non desired qualities in a MOE	%
Fellowship	41.37	Selfishness	37.93
Sacrifice	31.03	Lack of fellowship	37.93
Technical preparation	31.03	Lack of attitude	24.12
Loyalty to the team and the mission	27.58	Lack of aptitude	17.24
Ability to transmit confidence	24.12	Idleness	17.24
Determination	20.68	Lack of honesty	13.79
Humility	17.24	Lack of determination	13.79
Professionalism	17.24	Not working flexibly with others	10.34
Having a heart	13.79	Creating uncomfortable situations	10.34
Commitment	13.79	Lack of professionalism	10.34
Serenity	13.79	Indecisiveness	6.89
Problem-solving capacity under stress	13.79	Lack of commitment	6.89
Having an attitude	13.79	Disregarding orders	6.89
Courage	10.34	Lack of maturity	6.89
Optimism	6.89	Not being able to convey confidence	6.89
Empathy	6.89	Poor stress management	6.89
Sincerity	6.89	Lack of integrity	6.89
Discipline	6.89	Exercising favouritism	3.44
Initiative	6.89	Complaining	3.44
Organization	6.89	Lack of leadership	3.44
Exemplarity	6.89	Lack of values	3.44
Proximity	3.44		
Maturity	3.44		

Desired qualities in a MOE	%	Non desired qualities in a MOE	%
Self-confidence	3.44		
Mental toughness	3.44		
Integrity	3.44		
Adaptability	3.44		
Efficacy	3.44		
Speed and certainty in decision-making	3.44		
Capacity for self-criticism	3.44		

Source: author

In response to RQ-3, *What personal attitudes and skills are needed in a GAR-SI operator?* the results of the focus group and the survey on the attitudes, skills and personal qualities mentioned by the participants were as follows (Table 3):

Table 3. Values, attitudes and aptitudes desired for GAR-SI agents

	SUM	ORDER (↓ sum = ↑ importance)
Discipline	13	1
Availability	18	2
Voluntariness	38	3
Open-minded	48	4
Loyalty	50	5
Analytical skills	53	6
Willingness to work	54	7

	SUM	ORDER (↓ sum = ↑ importance)
Physical and mental health, and good health	57	8
Professionalism	68	9
Commitment	77	10
Team spirited	81	11
Knowledge of techniques	82	12
Assumption of responsibility	84	13
Trust	85	14
Spirit of service	88	15
Initiative	89	16
Resilience, adaptability	92	17
Equipment	92	18
Intelligence	92	19
Sacrifice	92	20
Patience	98	21
Youth	106	22
Autonomy	107	23
Knowledge of the culture	114	24
Conviction	115	25
Correct physical appearance	121	26
Brotherhood	128	27

Source: author

6   Discussion

The results obtained in this research show the high calibre, both in terms of human and professional attributes, demanded from the members of two Spanish special operations forces.

With over 85% of affirmative answers to the opening query of the fieldwork, *Is human quality a central issue in the SOF of the GAR and the MOE?*, a significant implication arises, reaffirming the necessity for the researcher to delineate a code of professional ethics for the gendarmeries involved in the GAR-SI Sahel project.

This finding is intricately linked to the second research question, concerning the values, attitudes and essential qualities within the GAR and the MOE units. he outcomes of this phase delineate those values, attitudes, and aptitudes that constitute an integral component of this human quality and should govern the actions of the agents, both on and off duty. The outcomes of this phase delineate those values, attitudes, and aptitudes that constitute an integral component of this human quality and should govern the actions of the agents, both on and off duty.

It is important to note that the results presented in Tables 1 and 2 are not representative of all members of the Spanish Armed Forces, nor of the entire Civil Guard. Although these values are manifested within these institutions to varying degrees, the relative importance of these values pertains to a limited sample (only two SOFs) of the Spanish population comprising these two institutions.

To facilitate comparison between units, the top eight recurring items have been considered as the threshold in Tables 1 and 2, as frequencies decline rapidly beyond the eighth item. Notably, fellowship and the ability to endure emerged as the two most mentioned values for both GAR and MOE. These findings align with research by Bedia Castillo (2014, 246), suggesting that

agents in elite units, due to shared extreme experiences, develop certain values such as sacrifice, temperance, or fellowship, which may be intensified compared to other subcultures. Another noteworthy observation arises from the analysis of MOE data, particularly concerning the technical training of its members. A disparity between the units under study is evident, likely attributed to the distinct nature of their institutional missions. While the GAR, despite its military organisation, maintains a police nature and thus emphasises issues related to public safety, the MOE, as a military unit, prioritises technical aspects, warfare, and defence. Such divergence is reflected in the questions of their sociometric tests, with ADE course questions leaning towards the social while those of the COE course are more inclined towards technical proficiency and efficiency, as observed in section 4.2.1. However, this does not imply that professionalism and other technical aspects are undervalued in the GAR. In fact, professionalism, determination, and willingness to work rank prominently among both groups, consistent with prior scientific literature such as the work of Lisbona Buñuelos *et al.* (2006), which highlights the demand for maximum determination and efficiency in both units despite potentially differing professional ethics codes.

Nonetheless, a limitation emerges when comparing the samples used to address this second research question. This limitation stems from the disparate durations of the access courses (ten months for the COE and four months for the ADE course). While completion of the COE course prepares them adequately and technically qualifies them to be a commander, completion of the ADE course merely signifies entry into the GAR unit, where further training occurs. Consequently, this lack of harmonisation between course programmes complicates the comparison of technical aspects of respective professional ethics.

The data collected for the second research question offer valuable insights into the values and attitudes both desired and rejected by GAR and MOE agents amongst their peers.

Considering the formulation of a GAR-SI professional ethics code, it was deemed more expedient to primarily focus on those values and attitudes considered desirable, specifically the first eight items, as frequencies notably decline beyond the ninth item. However, given that the questionnaire featured open-ended questions, informants could mention multiple items, resulting in the total frequencies for each table exceeding 100%. While this provides valuable information, it also limits the practical utility of the data. Consequently, among the eight items in each condensed list, I paired together those qualities that I deemed to be the most closely related in meaning. The outcomes of this transformation for both GAR and MOE are as follows:

Table 4. Frequency of mentions of qualities in a GAR agent.

Qualities	Frequency	Proportion
Companionship	64.28%	35.30%
Sacrifice	35.71%	19.61%
Willingness to work	17.85%	9.80%
Professionalism	17.85%	9.80%
Brotherhood	14.28%	7.84%
Loyalty	10.71%	5.88%
Initiative, proactivity	10.71%	5.88%
Commitment	10.71%	5.88%
Total	**182.10%**	**100.00%**

Source: author

Summarising the results in the chart, the 'ideal GAR agent' would consist of 43% companionship and brotherhood, 25% loyalty and sacrifice, 20% professionalism and willingness to work, and 12% initiative and commitment.

Table 5. Frequency of mentions of qualities in a MOE.

Qualities	Frequency	Proportion
Companionship	41.37%	19.67%
Sacrifice	31.03%	14.67 %
Technical preparation	31.03%	14.76%
Loyalty (team and mission)	27.58%	13.12%
Conveying trust	24.12%	11.47%
Determination	20.68%	9.83%
Humility	17.24%	8.20%
Professionalism	17.24%	8.20%
Total	**210.29%**	**100.00%**

Source: author

Summarising the results in the chart, the 'ideal MOE agent' would be composed of 28% companionship and humility, 28% loyalty and sacrifice, 23% professionalism and technical preparation, and 21% determination and a capacity of conveying trust.

This not only provides simpler information, but also enables the identification of the 'ideal agent' for each specific unit. Understanding the highest values of each of these units, according to the sample, serves as a valid reference since the information originates from the group itself.

Moreover, delineating this perfect agent and understanding the proportions in which each value is esteemed by the group is a powerful tool in at least three areas. The first of these is training. Understanding these values helps pinpoint the professional competences required, thereby allowing for the optimization of training programs and guiding instructors on what they should convey.

This first element is closely linked to the second: the forging of the unit's identity. The transmission and reinforcement of values allow for guiding the agents in the performance of their profession, thus enabling the identification of expectations and desired behaviours, thereby shaping the identity of the respective police and military subcultures. This, in turn, brings the agents closer to personal and professional excellence.

Thirdly, the evaluation of candidates in training programs and access courses. Understanding the proportions of traits within the ideal agent provides a tremendously useful indicator for assessing the integration of these principles into candidate behaviour.

Therefore, the development of this profile of the ideal GAR and MOE agents ultimately translates into an improvement in operational efficiency of the units, which could equally apply to the GAR-SI Sahel project in the future.

Regarding the third research question, the direction of the fieldwork shifted slightly. During the fieldwork, it was deemed more appropriate not to influence, with the results of the GAR and the MOE, the development of the focus group comprised by the GAR-SI commanders. However, the analysis of the data shows many similarities between the Spanish and Sahelian cases (see Table 3).

Among the values obtained for the GAR-SI, one particular value stands out: 'Resilience, adaptive capacity'. Although it appears in seventeenth place in Table 3, it was notably emphasised during the discussion group, as was the eighth item, 'Physical, mental strength and good health'. The mental component, stress management and the ability to remain calm in extreme situations are vital in these units given the situation in the Sahel. For this reason, the GAR-SI commanders placed particular emphasis on these items, even though they do not appear at the top of the list in terms of relative importance.

It is important to note that this happened due to the small sample size, so any outlier can significantly influence the result.

Another striking issue is that Table 3 includes many elements outlined in the *Cartilla del guardia civil*, such as maintaining a correct physical appearance and good health, discipline, cooperation and another crucial aspect, typical of the institution and of the police profession: analytical capacity. The GAR-SI commanders also emphasised the knowledge of techniques, similar to the results of the COE. Undoubtedly, alongside the strong military presence in the political landscape of these countries, the significant insecurity situation in the Sahel region contributes to the prominence of military elements among the values and principles of the gendarmeries. This duality confirms the success of the two-pronged approach proposed for the research, which integrates both police and military aspects for the GAR-SI.

While the findings for GAR-SI agents align with previous literature on military values and the results presented in Tables 1 and 2, a major limitation arises from the small sample size (six individuals). The mere access to these six elite Sahelian unit commanders is an accomplishment worth noting. However, reliance on a small sample size may lead to biased or unrepresentative results, even with a non-random sampling method, as statistics become more sensitive to variations. For instance, in the case of the item 'Resilience, adaptive capacity', five out of the six African respondents emphasised its importance significantly. However, the sixth respondent ranked it very low, resulting in a modification of the sum, positioning this item in a manner that does not accurately reflect the sample.

In summary, the findings of this research indicate that values are considered highly significant for active soldiers and civil guardsmen of the Spanish Armed Forces, with certain values standing out more prominently depending on the tasks assumed by members (commanders or agents) in elite units like the GAR or the MOE.

This research on police and military values, both in Spain and in the Sahel, holds significant scientific value. First, it substantially contributes to the existing scientific literature by enhancing understanding of desirable values, skills and attitudes in the realm of SOF. Moreover, it underscores the centrality of values and ethical standards in the context of security and defence. By emphasising the pivotal role of human quality in every action and decision made within these units, this research may inspire further exploration in this direction, enriching the field of military sociology.

However, the practical applicability of this research is where its true value lies. It is imperative for GAR-SI headquarters to comprehend and consider the most critical values for their gendarmes, along with how to foster them through unit culture and training. Gendarmes themselves must grasp what is expected of them upon joining a GAR-SI unit and understand how the values outlined in their code of ethics should guide their behaviour both on and off duty.

7   Conclusions

The objective of this master's thesis was to establish the groundwork for a professional ethics code for the units of the GAR-SI Sahel project. To achieve this, three research questions were formulated, structured as consecutive phases culminating in the goal. These three research questions are outlined below:

- **RQ-1:** *Is human quality a central issue in RAG and SOF?*

- **RQ-2:** *What are the most valued and most rejected values, attitudes and personal qualities in the GAR and MOE?*

- **RQ-3:** *What values, attitudes and personal qualities are needed in a GAR-SI operator?*

Through various research techniques and data collection tools, both qualitative and quantitative, the above RQ-1, RQ-2 and RQ-3 were answered. The findings of this study indicate that values and personal excellence are a fundamental element in the GAR and MOE special operations forces (RQ-1), as well as in the units created within the framework of the GAR-SI Sahel project (RQ-3).

In the Spanish context (RQ-2, Table 1 and Table 2), it is evident that fellowship, capacity for suffering and sacrifice, willingness to work, determination, professionalism, brotherhood, humility, loyalty, proactivity, commitment, and technical preparation (particularly emphasised in the military unit MOE) are paramount. These values form the core essence of both SOF and are decisive for membership, with the risk of expulsion looming for those who fail to integrate them into their behaviour.

In the African context (RQ-3, Table 3), the values, aptitudes, and attitudes identified as most crucial by the GAR-SI chiefs include discipline, availability, willingness, openness,

loyalty, analytical skills, willingness to work, physical and mental strength, good health, professionalism, and commitment.

Despite cultural and contextual disparities, the study's findings reveal a striking similarity in the values embraced by GAR (Table 1), MOE (Table 2), and GAR-SI (Table 3) SOF. This discovery holds significant potential implications for interoperability and the execution of joint operations among SO units across different nations.

Moreover, identifying the predominant values within SOF is invaluable for the courses that provide access to them for several reasons. Firstly, understanding military values enables students to cultivate a robust professional ethic, positively influencing decision-making within the units. Secondly, for trainers, awareness of these values aids in developing the requisite professional competencies, reinforcing values, and facilitating a more precise evaluation of candidates in access courses. This knowledge not only shapes the identity and culture of the unit but also ensures the personal and professional excellence of successive generations of gendarmes and soldiers. Thirdly, and in alignment with the preceding points, comprehension of these values assists students in grasping the unit's mission and how they can contribute to it. Consequently, this research has the potential to enhance the training programs of these units, thereby bolstering their operational efficiency and fulfilling the professional commitment of their personnel to society.

In terms of achieving the goal of this study – laying the groundwork for the development of a GAR-SI code of conduct – the results have surpassed initial expectations. The outcomes of this research have already yielded tangible outcomes, culminating in the creation of the official code of ethics for GAR-SI units (*Doctrine Unités GAR-SI Sahel, Code déontologique*), although it has yet to be publicly released.

This research has shed light on the significance of considering values, attitudes, and aptitudes within three distinct

security and defence operations units, while also acknowledging the remarkable parallels among SOF units across different Spanish institutions (Civil Guard and armed forces), as well as across various geographical regions (Europe and the Sahel).

As we delve into the findings outlined in the sixth section of this master's thesis – Discussion – we envisage new avenues for future research. While this study has focused on three SOF, there exist further similar units warranting further investigation to deepen our comprehension of the subject. Consequently, this study serves as a precursor to the researcher's prospective PhD, wherein she intends to examine additional SOF at the national level such as the Naval Special Warfare Force (FNGE) of the Spanish Navy and the Parachute Sapper Squadron (EZAPAC) of the Spanish Air Force.

Expanding the scope of this research will allow for a broader and more comparative understanding of professional ethics in SOF, thereby suggesting potential avenues for investigating the values practiced in other units of this nature, both domestically (Spanish) and internationally. This will enable us to discern whether respective professional ethics vary across different military contexts and cultures.

In light of the above, it can be concluded that the present research has provided a satisfactory response to the general objective and the three research questions posed, notwithstanding the small sample size in answering the third question (RQ-3). Nonetheless, the accomplishments are significant, and the formulation of the official GAR-SI code of professional ethics based on the findings of this research is a testament to this. By extending this research to other analogous units, we can attain a deeper and more widely applicable perspective on the harmony, or lack thereof, of professional ethics in various special operations forces.

8   Bibliography

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[Reverse of back cover]

This chapter explores the foundation of a professional ethics code for the GAR-SI Sahel units, a unique challenge given the clandestine nature of these Special Operations Forces (SOF) and the complex environment of the Sahel region. Through a comparative study of sociometric tests within Spain's elite units—the Guardia Civil's Rapid Action Group (GAR) and the Army's Special Operations Command (MOE)—the research uncovers a powerful convergence of core values like sacrifice, brotherhood, discipline, loyalty, and professionalism.

These values not only form the backbone of SOF operations but also underscore what makes European military ethics distinctive. The findings reveal how a deep commitment to these shared principles enhances unit cohesion, operational effectiveness, and ethical integrity, ensuring that our forces remain both formidable and principled.

The study's practical impact is evident in its direct influence on the formulation of the GAR-SI code of ethics, which plays a crucial role in upholding the highest ethical standards in some of the most challenging environments: the Sahel. The results underscore how values transcend cultural and geographical boundaries, revealing striking similarities between European and African units. This chapter is a vital contribution to understanding how military ethics can be effectively adapted and applied in diverse, high-stakes contexts like the Sahel, ultimately shaping decision-making, fostering unit cohesion, and ensuring excellence across different cultural and operational landscapes.

This thesis has been awarded the second prize of the year 2022 in EuroISME's annual contest for the best student's thesis. For information about the contest, please visit www.euroisme.eu.